**Healthy Coping Mechanisms**

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Everyone, whether they realize it or not, is deeply affected by mental health.

People deal with mental health in different ways through coping mechanisms, strategies that can be used to deal with stress or anxiety. The difference between healthy and unhealthy mechanisms is enormous. Unfortunately, it is common for people, specifically adolescents, to deal with their mental health through unhealthy coping mechanisms without awareness of their consequences.

Common unhealthy coping mechanisms that we see today with teenagers are the use of alcohol, drugs, overeating, self harm and other harmful behaviours. Multiple studies have shown that, while these unhealthy mechanisms relieve stress in the short term, they have a profoundly negative impact on well-being in the long term. As a result, they hinder rather than aid the stability of one’s mental health, making them counterproductive. They also affect one’s physical health, significantly increasing the risk of chronic illnesses including heart disease and cancer.

Along with healthy mechanisms, it is also very important to use flexible coping mechanisms. Flexibility in coping mechanisms entails the ability to change and adapt coping strategies over time and across different conditions. This is important because it allows individuals to replace ineffective coping mechanisms with more effective ones. It also allows individuals to swap their unhealthy coping mechanisms for healthier ones.

Coping mechanisms can also be categorized into emotion focused or problem focused. When feeling stressed, people may feel that they either need to change the situation they are in or they need to use better coping mechanisms. Problem based coping mechanisms come into play when one feels like they need to change their situation. This could include removing something stressful from their life, such as a toxic relationship. The kinds of coping mechanisms that you are probably most used to hearing about fall in the category of emotion-based methods, where they aim to take care of your feelings. Emotion-focused coping entails controlling one’s emotions in order to allow them to preserve through their current circumstances. Examples of emotion focused coping include mindfulness/meditation, journaling, exercising, or even watching a movie.

New research signals a major change in the landscape of coping mechanisms. There are both proactive and retroactive strategies when it comes to approaching coping mechanisms. In the vast majority of situations, people use retroactive strategies where they use coping mechanisms to deal with something that has already happened to them. However, new studies on coping mechanisms suggest that proactive strategies might be the way to go. One of these new studies from 2019 showed that individuals who engaged with proactive coping were better able to deal with changes they encountered after an upsetting event. The impacts of proactive mechanisms also go way beyond just mental health, another study revealed that those who engage in proactive coping are better equipped to manage their Type 2 Diabetes.

Overall, there are many ways in which any kind of coping mechanisms can be effective. They can soothe you, temporarily distract you, or boost your resilience and tolerance levels with stress. They can also change your mood entirely. If you are devastated after a horrible test grade, meeting your friends for a comedy movie could flip your mood by giving you joy.

I used to partake in unhealthy and inflexible coping mechanisms, thinking I was helping myself while I was actually hurting. However, I have broken through and have moved onto healthy coping mechanisms that help me and boost my mood.

I hope this article reaches those that need a way to deal with their mental health problems. I also hope that if you partake in bad coping mechanisms, that you can break through them as well. It is important to know that you are not alone in this battle, and should reach out to others if you need help.

Here is a list of healthy coping mechanisms and I hope that they can help you. Try to see if you can replace any of your unhealthy coping mechanisms with healthy ones from this list. I know it may be tough to change your ways, but it is important to change for the better, and for the people you love.

* Meditate
* Color
* Cook a meal
* Do yoga
* Draw
* Garden
* Give yourself a pep talk
* Go for a walk
* Engage in a hobby
* Exercise
* Listen to music
* List the things you feel grateful for
* Look at pictures to remind you of the people, places, and things that bring joy
* Picture your “happy place”
* Play with a pet
* Read a book
* Squeeze a stress ball
* Spend time in nature
* Take a bath
* Take care of your body in a way that makes you feel good (paint your nails, do your hair, put on a face mask)Use a relaxation app
* Use aromatherapy
* Use progressive muscle relaxation
* Write in a journal