Developing positive coping strategies

Working out the right coping strategies to help you handle different situations can be tough, but it's worth it. Find out more about different coping strategies, including how to put them into practice, and tips for what to do when they don't work.

Why positive coping strategies are useful.

Positive coping strategies are any actions you take to manage and reduce stress in your life, in a way that isn't going to be harmful or detrimental in the long term. People who use positive strategies are not only better able to tackle challenges and bounce back from tough times, but they are also much happier.

Finding the right coping strategies.

Pretty much any coping strategy which isn't going to be harmful or ineffective in the long term is worth a try. However, you will probably find that some strategies work better for you than others in terms of how well they reduce stress and help you manage. It's also worth noting that some strategies will work better or worse depending on the particular event / situation.

To find the best coping strategies for you, list the types of situations that you find difficult to manage. Pick a few ways to reduce stress (listed below). When the stressful situations arise, try out one of your strategies. Keep notes on how it went – things that worked, or didn't. You'll soon work out which strategies work well for you, and which situations favour certain strategies over others. Keeping tabs by writing things down will also help you make using positive coping strategies a habit.

A mega list of coping strategies

Turn to someone you trust. It can be a relief to share your thoughts with someone else, and it can be good to work through problems with the help of another person.

Write it all down. Keeping a notebook handy for you to scribble your thoughts in whenever you feel like it can be a great way of expressing yourself. You may find it helpful to write about what is worrying you, or express yourself in a more creative way.

Set aside regular time for yourself. Even if it's just ten minutes of 'you' time, taking some space for yourself where you turn off your phone, spend time alone, exercise, meditate, or listen to music can really prepare you for tackling stress or challenges.

Positive coping strategies can help with...

› *Temporary stress relief*

› *Long term stress relief*

› *Tackling challenges*

› *Increasing confidence*

› *Increasing motivation*

Take action...

› *Take comfort in the fact that there's no right way to cope*

› *Read first-hand experiences of coping*

› *Add more coping strategies to your toolkit*

Walk away. Work out which situations you are likely to get most stressed out by. If you feel like you're getting too angry, end the conversation, take some space, and don't resume talking until you are calm and ready.

Overcome negative patterns of thinking through self–talk. Self–talk can help you see things from a more positive perspective and give a huge boost to your confidence. Check out ecouch for more info.

Reduce your load. Sometimes you just have to accept that you can't do everything. Keep track of your schedule and how you feel each day, and working out your optimal level of activity. You should be busy, entertained, and challenged, without feeling overwhelmed.

Consider the big picture. When you're going through a stressful situation, ask yourself these two questions. 'How important is this?' and 'will it matter in the long run?' If you realise it doesn't, it's probably not worth getting too stressed out by.

Learn to forgive. Move on from hurt, regret and anger. Whether you are angry at yourself or someone else, it doesn't help you to hold on to negative feelings like resentment.

Hone your communication skills. If you know how to communicate a problem well, it will help prevent conflict from escalating, and could help solve the cause of the stress in the first place.

Build your optimism. Optimism involves learning to think positively about the future – even when things go wrong. That's not to say you pretend that everything is fine when it isn't. Instead, it's about looking objectively at a situation, making a conscious decision to focus on the good. It can be hard to do, but if you practice, you're likely to get better.
› *Learn how to set goals*
› *Relax, man. Relaxation is a great way to refocus your thoughts, particularly when things are becoming a bit overwhelming.*
› *Build your gratitude. Take some of your focus away from the negative things, and take 5 minutes each day to identify 3 things which you are thankful about.*

If you need something stronger

You don't have to work this stuff out on your own. Counsellors are great at helping build and develop coping skills. They also can be good to talk to if you prefer not to talk to friends or family, or if your problems are making it hard to carry on with day to day stuff.