



Coping skills

We all react to stress or problems in different ways. The things that people do to manage or deal with stress or problems are called coping strategies. There is no wrong or right way of coping but some ways are healthier than others. People who cope effectively with stress have a whole range of different coping strategies that they use for different situations. If you feel that you are stressed more often than not and could use some extra ideas about how to cope, see our tips in 'Coping strategies when you have a new baby.'

For instance you may feel stressed because you don't have the money for a parking fine. There are many different ways to cope but to simplify things, we can classify coping into 4 main styles which we all use at different times throughout our lives.

EMOTION FOCUSED COPING STYLE

Emotion focused coping is about expressing and regulating emotions to relieve distress. Calming yourself down about the parking fine by doing things like deep breathing, telling a friend what's happening, walking or using positive self-talk. Usually this coping style is used in situations where there is a high level of uncertainty and the person can't see many options to solve or fix the issue/situation. It is important to work out how you really feel about things so paying attention to emotions is good – but you also have to get onto making things better.

PROBLEM SOLVING FOCUSED STYLE

A problem solving coping style (also known as adaptive coping) can help us feel more in control. This type of coping includes strategies for gathering information, making decisions, planning, and resolving conflict. It is usually directed at acquiring resources to help deal with the underlying problem, like offering to do some casual work for a friend's business or borrowing from a relative to pay the parking fine. So this coping style can help people feel better and focus more on a positive outcome. It can also help them forget negative aspects of life for a while, as they actively work on solutions.

AVOIDANCE FOCUSED STYLE

An avoidance coping style (also known as maladaptive coping) is associated with negative emotions, meaning that you give up trying to solve the problem and just avoid it. It is unfortunately a common way people deal with stress, some people ignore parking fines until they increase in cost and become a legal issue. This is not considered an effective coping style because it prevents someone from trying to solve their problems and blocks people's awareness that the situation may change for the better. People who are avoidance focused generally avoid getting help and possibly ignore things that may be able to help them feel better.

RUMINATING FOCUSED

Ruminative coping has been characterised as persistent, repetitive and passive focus on negative emotions and symptoms. When we ruminate we tend to sit and constantly think over the issue like worrying so much about a parking fine that you don't sleep. Many people ruminate on an issue before adopting another focus to move through their issue, which is not always considered a bad thing, as some individuals may need extra processing time. When prolonged, a ruminating focus is generally related to complicated and chronic situations like illness and grief.

Whatever your preferred style – the key to improving, is to get out of your comfort zone and try some new coping strategies. Change will not come from doing the same thing over and over, try something new and see what happens.