

Coping **STRATEGIES**

Journey to Wellness

A workbook to unpack your harmful
& unhelpful coping strategies & find
new healthy ways to calm!

WHERE DO UNHELPFUL COPING STRATEGIES COME FROM?

Unhealthy and unhelpful coping strategies are not something to be ashamed of or to beat yourself up over. They probably came to exist initially in order to protect you. At the time, a protective part of you was trying to help you regulate overwhelming emotions or to deal with difficult thoughts or an intense and stressful environment.

Often in these moments our resources and abilities become hijacked and we are flooded by stress hormones. Our brains may try to shut the painful experience out, numb it, distract from it or push it away. This is where we may develop a distracting, sensory soothing but ultimately unhelpful coping strategy.

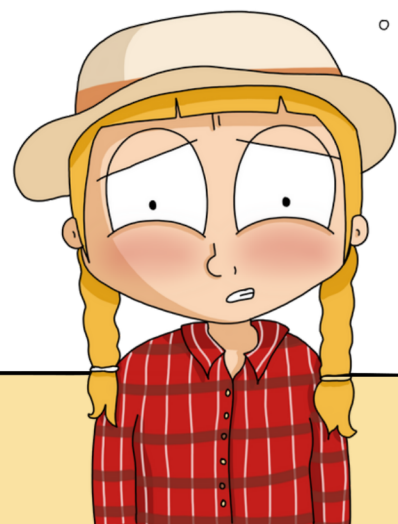
Other times, in order to protect us, our nervous system shuts down and dissociates – we feel like we are not present in our bodies or environments. Unhealthy coping strategies can form out of an attempt to bring ourselves back, to end the dissociative episode. To feel something.

Examples of these strategies are things like skin picking, cutting, emotional over-eating, drinking/substance taking, hair picking, under-eating, impulsive spending, too much device time (aka doom scrolling or binge watching), sleeping too much etc.

Often we carry shame, regret, embarrassment, anger or sadness around these strategies. We wonder what is wrong with us and we try to hide them away in the shadows – the exiled parts of ourselves. The parts that are trying to protect us, but are ultimately harming us. But abandoning or shunning these behaviours and parts of ourselves doesn't help.

What does help is bringing these parts of ourselves into the light with compassion and with curiosity. Witnessing them for what they are trying to do for us and then gently but firmly taking back our power, stepping into the drivers seat and finding ways to comfort these parts of ourselves that need healing while kindly introducing new, alternative and more healthy strategies to use in place of the old.

This resource aims to help you unpack your unhealthy coping strategies with curiosity and compassion and to provide you with some examples of healthy strategies that match up to the underlying need.



UNPACK YOUR UNHELPFUL COPING STRATEGIES

Fill out your answers to these questions. Do this slowly and with plenty of gentle self-compassion. If anything feels triggering or too much, walk away, take some time out, make a cup of tea, regulate yourself and try again later or with the help of a support person.

What is/are the unhealthy coping strategy/strategies that I engage in?

Before I feel the urge to engage in this strategy, what is happening? I.e. what triggers this urge? (What is going on beforehand? Who are you around? What are you feeling? What are you thinking? What situation/environment are you in? What are you noticing in your body?)

What am I feeling as I engage in the strategy? (What do I feel in my body? What emotions are present? What do I think about?)

How do I feel after I have engaged in the strategy? (What do I feel in my body? What emotions do I experience? What do I think about?)

Who is effected by my use of this strategy? How?

When did I start using this strategy?

Are there times where I feel the urge but do not go ahead with the strategy? (If so, what is different about these time? Why do I stop? What gets in the way?)

What are the advantages of engaging with this strategy?

What are the disadvantages?

On a scale of 0-10 how motivated am I to stop this strategy? (0 = not at all, 10 - extremely motivated)



0

10

What would I like to do instead of this strategy?

What would be the disadvantages of stopping this strategy? What are my worries?

What might get in the way of me being able to stop this strategy?

What would be the benefit to me of stopping this straggly?

Why do I want to stop/ what is my motivation to find other ways to cope?

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

In order to replace the old unhealthy coping strategy with a new one we need to get clear on the need that is being met – Questions 2 and 4 probably helped you to identify this in some way.

Below there are some common needs/reasons you might be engaging in this unhealthy strategy.

Have a look through the list and see if anything stands out:

YOU FEEL EMPTY, OR UNREAL (THE STRATEGY HELPS YOU TO FEEL SOMETHING AGAIN)

YOU FEEL GUILTY OR YOU WANT TO PUNISH YOURSELF

YOU'RE ANGRY OR FRUSTRATED

YOU FEEL SAD, UPSET OR DEPRESSED

YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED

YOU FEEL ANXIOUS, UNBEARABLY TENSE OR FEARFUL

YOU'RE TRYING TO EXPRESS OR COPE WITH OVERWHELMING EMOTIONS

If your reason isn't listed here, not to worry! These are just some examples, you can add in your own or just try the strategies ahead and see which ones work best for you.

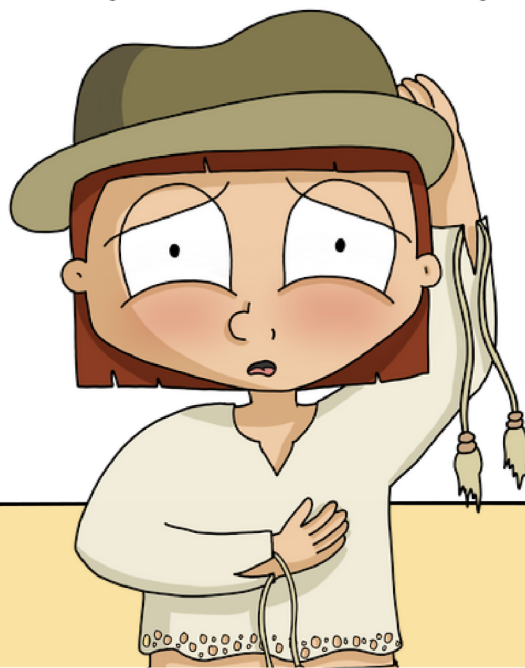
Next we'll look at a range of alternative healthy coping strategies that match up to each of the triggers above.

I encourage you to get curious in your exploration of these – try one a few times, recording how you feel before and after engaging with it.

Some of them may work beautifully well and you can add those to your toolkit.

Others you may not connect with and they won't feel right for you or they won't be effective for you – that's fine. Everyone is different and it's important to tailor a toolkit of resources that works for you.

Also, don't get stuck on only trying the strategies listed under the need that corresponds to yours – if you're anxious you might love tools from the anger category and so on. Mix and match. Experiment.



UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

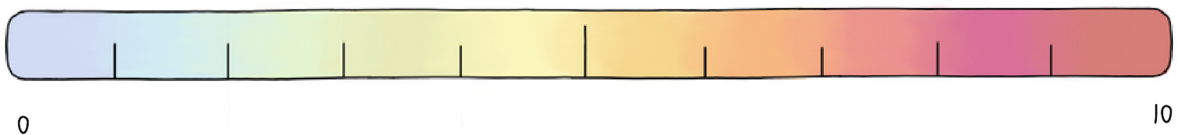
Before you try a strategy you might like to do a written self-check. Something like this:

What has triggered the need to use this coping strategy? (What feelings, thoughts, situation etc am I in?)

How strong is my urge to engage in my old unhelpful strategy? (0 = very low/no urge, 10 = extremely high urge)

What am I noticing in my body?

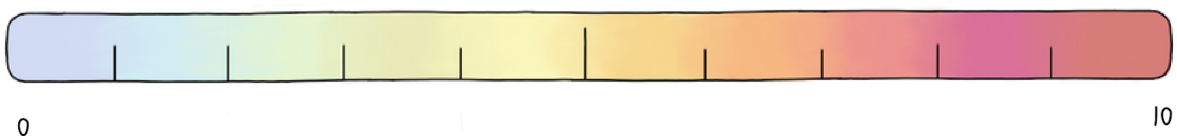
How high on a scale of 0 -10 is my level of distress/dissociation? (0 = no distress or fully present, 10 = extremely distressed or very checked-out/dissociated)



Now go ahead and try out one or several of the helpful coping strategies. Then write out your answers to these questions:

What am I noticing in my body now?

How high on a scale of 1 -10 is my level of distress/dissociation? (1 = no distress or fully present, 10 = extremely distressed or very checked-out/dissociated)



**CHANGE OFTEN FEELS
UNCOMFORTABLE. THAT
DISCOMFORT IS A SIGN OF
GROWTH. KEEP GOING!**

HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Here are the strategies paired with the need you are trying to fill. During each of these state present to the experience, tune in to your senses and notice what is happening, use your breath as your anchor.

You feel empty, or unreal (the strategy helps you to feel something again). Try:

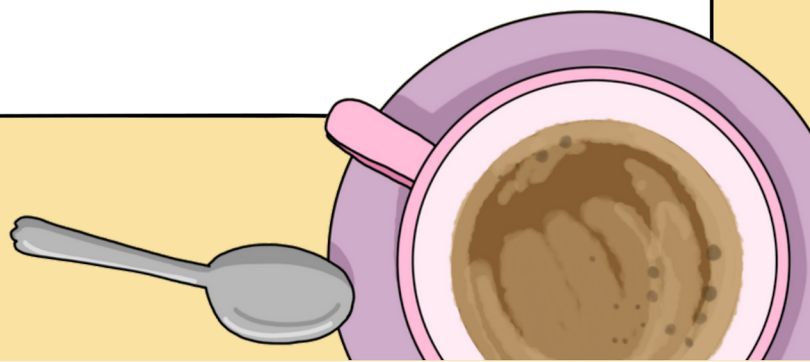
- Biting a lemon
- Holding a cube of ice in your hand
- Holding ice in your mouth or chewing ice
- Focus on just one thing (i.e. a candle or flower) and notice all the sensory details, the way it looks, feels, smells, sounds etc
- Take a cool bath or try a cold shower
- Drunk your face in cold water
- Interact with a safe person
- Put your hand/finger in frozen food (ice cream or bag of peas)
- Focus on your breathing
- Sit in a toe sit and notice the sensations
- Body pats - use your hands to pat down your arms, chest, legs etc
- Body squeezes - use your hands to squeeze your arms from shoulder to wrist and your legs

Go to the grounding or somatic section in the Journey to Wellness members library and try some tools

You feel guilty or you want to punish yourself. Try:

- Draw on yourself with a pen (if related to cutting/picking)
- Paint some PVA glue on your hand/arm/leg and pick off when dry (if related to picking)
- List 10 good things about yourself. If that's too hard list 5. If that's too hard list 1. If that's too hard get in touch with a safe person and ask them to help you.
- Do something nice for someone
- Do something nice for yourself
- 'Punish' by not allowing yourself to engage in unhealthy strategy
- Write a forgiveness letter to yourself

Listen to the 'Past Self Healing' meditation in my library or some of the others tools in the self-doubt section



You're angry or frustrated. Try:

- Squeeze or chew ice
- Rip up/slash paper
- Write down your angers and safely burn the paper or rip it up – Punch a pillow
- Throw a pillow repeatedly into the floor
- Play music and dance
- Run or walk
- Cry
- Try a cold shower
- Vent to a safe person
- Go somewhere no one can hear you and yell/scream
- Scream into a pillow
- Practice a yoga class
- Do a workout
- Punch the air
- Jump and shake your body



Take the Anger and Rage masterclass inside membership, listen to the 'Foot Stomp' meditation guide in somatic practice section of library

You feel sad, upset or depressed. Try:

- Take a soothing bath
- Read
- Watch a movie
- Journal about your experience/emotions
- Draw or paint
- Have a good cry
- Sing
- Place music, maybe dance
- Talk to a safe person
- Think about a happy memory
- Surround yourself with calming objects (essential oils, candles, plants, pillows, pets etc)
- Give yourself a massage
- Try some gentle yoga

Listen to the Happy Place meditation in the library or try any of the guided tools in the Low Mood section

You feel overwhelmed. Try:

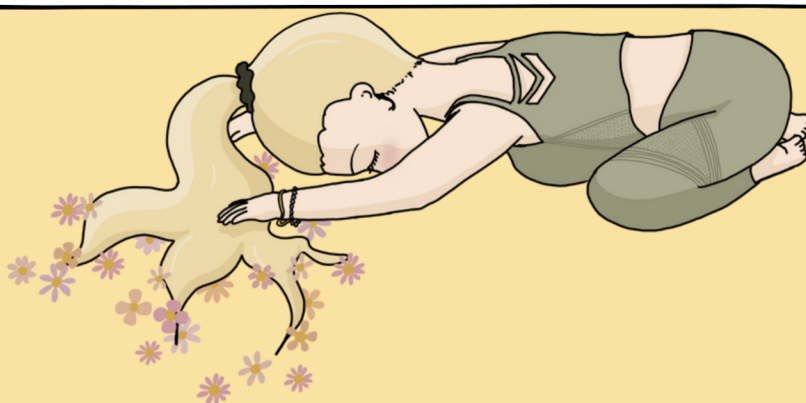
- Do a brain dump
- Write a list of your thoughts
- Write a to-do list
- Come into Childs pose for a while with your forehead on the floor or on your hands
- Talk to a safe person
- Think about just ONE thing you could do that might be helpful
- Take a gentle warm shower or bath
- Focus on just one things (like a candle, a movie, a song)
- Focus on just one sense (i.e. go into a dimly lit room and just notice what you can hear)
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath
- Try a weighted blanket or put pillows over yourself

Try some of the practices in the 'for overwhelm' section of the library

You feel anxious, unbearably tense or fearful . Try:

- Put something cold on the back of your neck
- Put a cold cloth over your face
- Write out a worry list
- Talk to a safe person
- Try a yoga practice
- Go for a walk
- Shake you limbs
- Try rocking side to side
- Come into Childs pose
- Breathe into the tense areas of your body and relax your muscles
- Try a deep belly breathing practice, lengthening out your exhale
- Body pats - use your hands to pat down your arms, chest, legs etc
- Body squeezes - use your hands to squeeze your arms from shoulder to wrist and your legs
- Drink a cold glass of water slowly
- Suck on a sour or strong flavoured lolly

Try some of the practices in the anxiety section of the library



You're trying to express or cope with overwhelming emotions. Try:

- Try a brain dump or stream of conscious journaling
- Sit quietly and scan each part of your body, noticing sensations without judgement
- Try to name your emotion(s)
- Try to identify where in your body you feel your emotion(s)
- Breathe into the stuck or tense areas of your body
- Write down single words that describe your current experience
- Talk to a safe person

Try some practices from the overwhelm section of the library



Here are 3 strategies that are universal and worth trying:

1. Urge surfing - ride out the urge to engage in your old unhealthy coping strategy. If you can either just sit with the urge and witness it, or distract yourself if you have to, you will often find that the intensity of the urge subsides - even after 15 minutes you are likely to notice a decrease. Often we act immediately on impulses and urges to engage in an unhealthy strategy, so taking a pause so surf that urge and wait until the wave passes is an effective strategy.
2. Breath work - engage in a breath practice. Sit with your breath as your anchor to the present and mindfully observe your experience.
3. Mindfulness - Can you become aware of your urges, emotions, thoughts and body sensations without judgement? Can you sit and allow whatever is there just to be, even if only for 30 seconds. Mindfulness allows us to become the observer, the witness, to our experience, rather than to be overcome by it.