

Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms can also be described as 'survival skills'. They are strategies that people use in order to deal with stresses, pain, and natural changes that we experience in life.

Coping mechanisms are learned behavioural patterns used to cope. We learn from others ways to manage our stresses. There are negative coping mechanisms and positive coping mechanisms. Many people use their coping mechanisms to benefit them in a positive way. However, we are not always able to cope with the difficulties that we face.

We experience a range of emotions throughout our lives, some good, some not so good. Our behaviours are usually a result of how we handle our emotions. If we are able handle our emotions positively, our behaviour will likely be positive. If we do not handle our emotions in a positive way, our behaviour will likely be negative.

Different Responses To Situations:

- **mental responses** - (aggressive thoughts "I can't do this" "I'm worthless")
- **emotional responses** - (fear, anger, sadness, fright)
- **physical responses** - (heart beats faster, stomach pain, headaches)
- **behavioural responses** - (drinking, overeating, isolating self, self harm)

It is important to be able to recognize our emotions before we can manage them. We can learn to become aware of our emotions, acknowledge what is happening within ourselves, and to learn to think and plan before we act.

Coping Mechanisms continued

There are a variety of coping mechanisms that we may use day to day. If we become aware of the negative coping mechanisms that we use (ways that do more harm than good), we can begin to learn and explore more positive ways to manage our lives (ways that benefit our lives).

Negative Coping Mechanisms	Positive Coping Mechanism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violence and abuse (attacking physically, verbally, mentally, spiritually) • acting out (misbehave on purpose) • being passive (not trying to cope, always in situation where he/she is the victim) • addictions (alcohol, drugs, solvents, medications, gambling, etc) • minimizing (things are not that bad) • rationalizing (he/she did not know better) • denial (there is no problem) • repression (forgetting) • developing a 'false self' (behaving like someone who you are not) • disassociate self from situation (spacing out, thinking not feeling) • controlling behaviour • becoming a work-a-holic (stay busy to avoid feeling) • running away (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually) • self harm, suicide attempts • isolating self and withdrawal • lying, blaming others (irresponsible) • manipulating • depression • not communicating • low expectations (of self and others) • fantasizing (escape into a 'perfect' world) • being compulsive (too much of anything: eating, drinking, gambling) • creating crisis • overly helpful (helps others over self) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grounding skills (stay focused, use all five senses) • manage stress • manage anger (deep breathing) • get to know self • seek support from friends and family • communication (talk about our feelings) • physical activity (healthy sexual relationships) • healthy eating habits • healthy sleeping habits • hobbies (beadwork) and sports • enjoying nature (walks, getting fresh air, connect with Mother Earth) • seek out an Elders, spiritual leader • learn patience • respect others (their choices, we can not change anybody) • learn acceptance • learn forgiveness • crying, laughing, yelling in a safe place • trust • read, expand your knowledge • be open-minded • journal (write things down, doodle) • chopping wood, fishing, 'get away' • spend quality time with family, partner • positive self talk • meditate, smudge, prayer • setting goals • cooking/baking/cleaning • visit a mental health worker/community worker • delegate responsibility • make time for self • build or create something • become involved in community events • watch movies, listen to music • play with pet • visualize (imagine)