



Developing a Better Understanding

DEVELOPING COPING SKILLS IN RECOVERY

Coping skills are “any characteristic or behavioral pattern that enhances a person’s adaptation.” In other words, coping skills help someone stay healthy when they are faced with stressful circumstances. Coping involves adjusting to unusual demands or stressors that require giving a greater effort and using greater energy than what’s needed in the daily routines of life. Over time this can contribute to elevated levels of stress-related hormones and to a potential mental illness or relapse. Stressors that require coping may be acute, like moving to a new home or experiencing the onset of financial problems. Learning positive coping skills in recovery is extremely important to staying in recovery. Learning these important mechanisms can not only help to prevent relapse but also assist in maintaining the commitment to a healthier lifestyle. Some common coping mechanisms may challenge someone to: lower their expectations, ask others for help or assistance, take responsibility for the situation, engage in problem solving, maintain emotionally supportive relationships, maintain emotional composure or, alternatively, expressing distressing emotions. They can also be prompted to challenge previously held beliefs, directly attempt to change the source of stress and distance themselves from the source of stress. Unhealthy coping skills are generally utilized to escape the problem or to temporarily relieve feelings. While in recovery, individuals may find that a substance use is not the only unhealthy coping mechanism used to handle life challenges or stressors. Unhealthy coping skills are a sure fire way to sabotage recovery efforts. Examples of unhealthy coping skills include negative self talk, denial, risky behaviors, violence, isolation, self harm, and even to much or too little sleep.

How to Get Help Building Coping Skills in Recovery

When looking to acquire coping skills for recovery, it’s important to evaluate the programs offered at a treatment facility. It’s important to find a program that provides individualized treatment plans to address each person’s specific challenges, strengths, and goals. This personalized approach ensures that the individual receives the support and coping skills training tailored to the situation. Family therapy sessions can help to develop coping skills as they help improve communication, rebuild relationships, and provide a supportive environment. Building coping skills also comes from classes in treatment that focus on practical tools, strategies, and information to enhance the ability to cope with certain triggers and setbacks.

When going through traumatic moments in life, it’s important to use the skills learned to find healthy outlets for stress and anxiety. These behaviors would constitute as coping skills. They help manage the most challenging moments of life, including the loss of loved ones, financial difficulties, relationship break-ups, and more. Everyone faces challenging moments. Luckily, most find a way to get through these difficult moments and make peace with the outcome. When recovering from addiction or a mental illness, however, the mental, emotional, and physical ability to cope with stress and grief may be lower than normal. This is especially true if there’s a reliance on drugs or alcohol as a way to manage unpleasant emotions in the past. This is why developing coping skills while in recovery is so important. Re-learning how to deal with life’s tough times without substances or self-harm is critical for long-term recovery.

It is also vital to get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet, and continue to focus on problem-solving skills in order to keep up the motivation to remain in recovery. A healthy body can provide a strong base for a healthy mind, and by eating a balanced diet and sticking to a structured sleep schedule, recovery can be fostered.

8 Healthy Coping Skills to Practice in Recovery

Be Honest

If someone is feeling anxious or depressed, it's okay to be open about it, accept it, and own it. Trying to avoid feelings can result in feeling worse.

Practice Gratitude and Keep A Daily Journal

When in recovery, it's important to remember what to be grateful for. Keeping a list each day of thoughts, reflection, and what brings them joy can bring someone happiness and make recovery easier.

Practice Meditation

Mindfulness meditation increases self-awareness. It aids in making better choices each day to react appropriately and anxiety and stress will decrease, as will the potential for relapse.

Surround Oneself with A Support System

Having friends and family who support recovery is essential. Individuals who have personal and meaningful connections can offer support and insight.

Learn To Relax

High-stress situations are inevitable, whether at work, school, or home. One of the best ways to decompress is to learn how to relax in any situation. Yoga can also help relax the mind while strengthening the body.

Eat Right and Exercise Regularly

What the body consumes has an incredible effect on a person's mental health, which is why it's important to eat healthy, nutrient-rich foods. Exercising can also release endorphins to the brain, and this promotes a good feeling. It also adds structure to the day, and having a routine is key to staying in recovery.

Do Activities The Bring Enjoyment

Throwing oneself in an activity that brings them joy and helps others can give someone a sense of accomplishment. When an individual is fully engaged in something, they're not thinking about relapsing. Keeping busy in recovery can help to see what's most important in life.

Recognize The H.A.L.T. Symptoms

One technique that can prevent relapse is HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired). When a craving or negative emotion comes on it is important to be aware if any of these feelings are present.

A coping mechanism is used as a method of dealing with unhappiness, stress, or other potential issues. It is whatever a person does to handle negative emotions or problems. Learning positive coping skills for recovery begins with recognizing how all aspects of life can benefit from these tools. It's not limited to drinking or drug use habits. It relates to how to communicate with people, how well to care for oneself, and whether to maintain clear boundaries with others or not, and more. Coping skills can help build resilience. This capacity to recover from setbacks or adversities is important in a long-term recovery process where the need to adapt and persist is more vital than ever. Coping skills practice increases self-awareness, allows for better recognition of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This self-awareness enables an individual to identify trends, emotional triggers, and early warning signs of relapse. Also, coping skills improve problem-solving abilities, helping to tackle obstacles constructively and healthily rather than using alternative means to avoid problems. To begin a long-term lifestyle change, coping skills can become habitual and integral parts of daily life and promote overall well-being. Remaining vigilant, patient, and committed to recovery is important. Continuing to attend support group meetings, counseling, therapy sessions, and participate in programs foster healthy habits to those in recovery. The coping mechanisms taught in a treatment program can become second nature over time, proving essential to a sustained recovery.

Sources:

The Cleveland Clinic
National Institutes of Health

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety & Depression Association of America

Hanley Foundation