



Coping Card Sort

Fact Sheet

What is the Coping Card Sort?

The Coping Card Sort is an activity designed to help you identify ways in which you cope. In other words, it helps you understand how you respond to stress. We can respond to stress in positive ways or we can respond to stress in ways that are hurtful to ourselves or those around us. The goal of this activity is to identify ways you can find healing through positive coping strategies.

This card sort activity is made up of three parts including a pre-activity reflection, the card sort activity, and then a post-activity reflection to help identify positive coping skills.

Part one asks you about a recent stressful event or situation. Take care of yourself and take your time. You are not obligated to share details of this stressful event, but rather reflect individually on what happened and how you responded to what happened.

Next, you will sort cards to help you identify your most often used coping skills. After this activity you will be asked another set of questions to help you reflect on what you've learned about your go-to response to stress. You will end with setting new goals to develop positive coping skills.

Coping Strategies Help You Practice Self-Care

Self-care is a key element that drives us toward healing and better physical and mental health. While we cannot take away life stressors, we can certainly learn to take care of ourselves in a compassionate and non-judgmental way. As we learn how to practice self-care, we are more informed about what we can do to maintain good mental health and emotional well-being. Coping plays a major role in practicing self-care as we identify better ways to maintain overall well-being.

Self-care looks different for everyone. It might be reading a good book to relax, practicing meditation, or talking a walk. It might also include giving your body the physical care it needs, like getting proper sleep, drinking plenty of water, or exercising. These are all great examples of healthy coping skills—they help us relax and process our feelings during challenging times. Practicing self-care on a regular basis can even help us move through future challenges with greater ease.

What can I expect from my care team?

Your care team is here for you, every step of the way. We will go through this activity with you as you begin to define what your coping skills are and set goals to develop new coping skills. We promise to offer our collaboration, care, honor, flexibility, value, and dignity.

- **Collaboration.** We are here to support you, so it is helpful to understand you and your experiences. We will work together, guiding you through this journey to healing and health.
- **Care.** Free from-judgment, even if we don't agree with you.
- **Honor.** We respect your individual goals, even if they're different from what we hope for you.
- **Flexibility.** We aren't directive. We won't tell you what to do, but we will recommend or advise.
- **Value.** We appreciate your perspective. We will engage in activities that help us better understand your life and experience in your words. This includes the Coping Card Sort.
- **Dignity.** We will work to preserve your self-respect and self-esteem.

Coping Card Sort Activity

Please Note: The Coping Card Sort Activity is meant to be completed by an individual alone or by the provider with the individual present or on the phone. If you are the provider, you may skip questions, ask additional follow-up questions, or use the activity in any way that best fits the needs of the individual.

Coping Card Sort Pre-Activity

Think of a time in the past day or two when you were faced with a situation that made you feel worried, stressed, upset, overwhelmed, let down, or annoyed.

Reflect on the events and actions that followed that situation and answer the following questions.

1. What did you feel immediately after or during?
2. How long did you have those feelings?
3. What did you do in response to that stressful situation?

Thank you for your response.

Coping Basics

What is Coping? Coping is an action or thought process you use to deal with stressful situations or difficult demands. We call these coping skills or mechanisms. Coping skills can be internal, like how we process something inside our heart or brain. Coping skills can also be external, so something we do or say. There are positive, helpful ways of coping and there are negative, harmful ways of coping.

Why Should I Identify Coping Skills? Identifying coping skills can help us understand why we respond to situations the way we do. Beginning to identify how we deal with stress is the first step in making positive changes to behavior that may be hurtful to ourselves or others.

Coping Strategies

- **Acceptance:** Accepting the fact that the stressful event has occurred and is real.
- **Active Coping:** A stress management strategy in which a person directly works to control a stressor through appropriately targeted behavior, embracing responsibility for resolving the situation using one's available internal resources
- **Behavioral Disengagement:** The tendency of individuals to give in or reduce their efforts in difficult situations.
- **Denial:** The person has decided there is no stressor, and therefore there is no need to change behavior, perception, or emotional response.
- **Focus on Venting of Emotions:** A person fully expressing their feelings or emotions. Can have positive or negative mental and psychological effects.
- **Humor:** An emotion-focused coping strategy which uses humor to change the meaning of a situation. Humor allows a person to view the situation from an alternative perspective and reappraise it as less threatening and more of an opportunity or challenge. It can be a reaction to lessen feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, frustration and pain.
- **Mental Disengagement:** Disengagement reflects the motivation to direct attention and effort toward the goal of alleviating negative emotions.
- **Planning:** Planning is considered an adaptive coping strategy, where individuals are focused on problem-solving.
- **Positive Reinterpretation and Growth:** Positive reinterpretation and growth is growing as a person as a result of the experience and seeing events in a positive light.
- **Religious Coping:** Religious coping encompasses religiously framed cognitive, emotional, or behavioral response to stress.
- **Restraint:** Refraining from acting to resolve a stressful situation.
- **Substance Use:** The use of substances (alcohol or drugs) as a way to numb feelings of anxiety, stress, fear, or pain.
- **Suppression of Competing Activities:** Putting aside other activities not connected to the problem in order to better deal with it.
- **Use of Emotional Social Support:** Believing that others understand your needs and will try to help you, and therefore seeking a person that acts as a confidant.
- **Use of Instrumental Social Support:** Believing that others understand your needs and will try to help you, and therefore seeking help or assistance in a tangible and/or physical way.

Coping Card Sort Printable Cards *(print and cut out cards)*

I get used to the idea and accept that this has happened and that it can't be changed A1	I laugh about the situation H1	I hold off doing anything about it until the time is right R2
I learn to live with it A1	I make fun of or joke about the situation H1	I make sure not to make matters worse by acting too soon R2
I concentrate my efforts and take action to try to do something about the problem A2	I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things. M1	I use alcohol or drugs to make myself feel better and think less about it S1
I do what has to be done to get around the problem, one step at a time A2	I sleep more than usual M1	I try to lose myself for a while by drinking alcohol or taking drugs S1
I admit to myself that I can't deal with it and quit trying. I give up trying to reach my goal. B1	I try to come up with a strategy or plan of action about what to do P1	I focus on dealing with this problem, and if necessary, let other things slide a little S2
I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem B1	I think hard about how I might best handle the problem and what steps to take P1	I put aside other activities in order to concentrate on this S2
I refuse to believe that it has happened D1	I try to grow as a person and learn something as a result of the experience P2	I get sympathy and understanding from someone U1
I pretend that it hasn't really happened and say to myself "this isn't real" D1	I look for something good in what is happening P2	I talk to someone about how I feel U1
I get upset and find myself expressing those feelings a lot F1	I put my trust in God and seek His help R1	I talk to someone to find out more about the situation U2
I get upset and am really aware of it. F1	I try to find comfort in my religion R1	I try to get advice from someone about what to do U2

Categories for Card Sorting *(print and sort cards onto space provided)*

I Usually Do not Do This at All	
I Usually Do This a Little Bit	
I Usually Do This a Medium Amount	
I Usually Do This a Lot	

Sort Results

Review the coping statements you identified as “I Usually Do This A Lot”. These are your Dominant Coping Skills. In the bottom right corner is a code. The cart below allows you to see the Coping Category for each card in the dominant coping skills pile based on the assigned code.

A1	Acceptance	P2	Positive reinterpretation and growth
A2	Active Coping	R1	Religious Coping
B1	Behavioral disengagement	R2	Restraint
D1	Denial	S1	Substance Use
F1	Focus on venting of emotions	S2	Suppression of competing activities
H1	Humor	U1	Use of emotional social support
M1	Mental disengagement	U2	Use of instrumental Social Support
P1	Planning		

Coping Card Sort Post-Activity

Q1 Which of your dominant coping skills do you think are uplifting or help you feel more at peace?
Q2 Which of your dominant coping skills do you think cause harm to yourself or others?
Q3 Describe how you view yourself when you practice your dominant coping skills. Do you feel proud of yourself? Do you feel disappointed or shame? Describe these feelings to the right.

Think Back. The next few questions ask you to think back to the situation you reflected on at the beginning of this activity.

Q4 How are your dominant coping skills similar or different than the coping skills you reflected on in the pre-activity?

Q5 What are three negative or harmful coping skills you would like to work to change or do less often?

Q6 What are three positive coping skills you would like to develop more or do more often?

Q7 How could you use these positive coping skills in the future to respond to the stressful situation we reflected on in the pre-activity?