

Influence...

MY COPING STRATEGIES

Definition

When we face difficulties, problems to resolve, or stress, we have different ways to deal with it, but we generally react according to 3 big types of coping strategies. Usually, the coping strategy we choose to adopt should depend on the situation itself, but the truth is, we are predisposed to choose a particular coping strategy because of our habits, our personality traits, and the social norms we are governed by. Some prefer problem-focused coping strategies, i.e. strategies that are based on crisis management or problem resolution. Others prefer to manage and regulate their emotions first, to later deal with the stressful situation. The problem with this strategy is that focusing on emotions without learning how to effectively regulate them leads to an overflow of emotion that becomes detrimental to the situation. Another strategy is seeking social support, i.e. directly asking for help, for resources or advice to apply concrete solutions to the problem.

Our society over-values problem-focused coping strategies, which is often focused on showing a calm exterior (not necessarily a reflection of how we feel inside!) and on identifying all the elements of a problem. This way of facing problems is often confused with a strong, conscientious, and calm personality as well as intelligence which is completely unrelated to the coping strategy adopted. In certain situations, emotion-focused coping, which allows the individual to lull their emotions and to actively manage their emotions, is more appropriate. Therefore, before reacting in a particular situation, ask yourself if the strategy you're choosing first is the best for said situation. We say 'first' because it is possible to adopt multiple strategies in one situation by alternating them, i.e. manage the emotions first and then find a solution to the problem.



No matter what, it is important to remember that there isn't one strategy that is better than the other. There are strategies that are more or less adapted to a given situation; we should first learn to pay attention to and recognize our coping strategies to be conscious of what works for us under stress or when faced with a problem.

How to find the best coping strategy?

Focus on your flexibility by varying your coping strategies.

It is useful to diversify your coping strategies to be ready to face any situation effectively and to test out new ways of coping in order to establish if they are good for you or not.

Adopting problem-focused coping strategies:

You could:

- Make a list of the pros and cons to solving the problem, and a list of the resources you dispose of to reach your ends.
- Write down your problem and what you get from solving it or from not doing anything about it. You could also write it in the form of a diagram or bullet points.
- Try to change the situation by changing a deadline, changing the problem, getting another person involved, etc.
- Restructure the problem on a cognitive level, look for information and solutions on the internet, from your close ones or even competent colleagues in your field.





Adopting emotion-focused coping strategies:

You could:

- Take care of yourself by prioritizing moments of relaxation and self-care, or just moments that allow you to put some distance between yourself and the problem, to breathe and recharge.
- Fantasize! Make anything and everything possible through your imagination to decrease the mental load and the internal tension.
- Go through an emotional withdrawal either by letting out some cries or laughs, or by sleeping.
- Practice mindfulness to process your emotions and to have a clearer mind and spirit.
- Unpack your emotions with someone (or a group of people) to let out your emotional tension and to find the motivation to act.



Seeking social support:

You could:

- Join a support group that tackles the problem that you're facing to directly find solutions.
- Ask for help from a professional and follow their advice.
- Seek someone's compassion and understanding.



Note that the scientific literature on the link between coping strategies and agency show that agency is better developed when the coping strategy **is focused on the problem** while an emotion-focused approach tends to decrease agency, but this is often the case when individuals focus on one strategy only. This does not mean that emotion-focused coping strategies are detrimental; it only becomes so when it is the only strategy that is adopted or when it is misused.