

Coping Strategies

"Most people are about as happy as they make their minds up to be."
Abraham Lincoln

- A. Stress management is a decision-making process.** When we are feeling the effects of a stressful lifestyle, we have three major ways we could deal with that stress:
- **Alter it**
 - **Avoid it or**
 - **Accept it by**
 - building our resistance or**
 - changing our perception**
- * All three of these approaches can be effective coping techniques. The trick is choosing the proper approach for the situation at hand and the person involved.
- * **Alter** which implies **removing the source of stress** by changing something. Problem-solving, direct communication, organizing, planning and time management are common techniques for altering.
- * **Avoid** which implies **removing oneself from the stressful situation** or figuring out how not to get there in the first place!
- * **Accept** which involves **equipping oneself physically and mentally for stress**.
- * **b** stands for **building resistance**. People can increase their capacity to tolerate stress **physically** through proper diet, regular aerobic exercise and systematic relaxation techniques. Relaxation and exercise provide the double bonus of releasing stored up tension as well! **Mental** resistance is bolstered through positive affirmation, taking time for mental health, and getting clear about goals/values/priorities. **Social** resistance is strengthened by building and maintaining support systems, investing in relationships, clear communication and intimacy. **Spiritual** resistance is especially important in times of high stress. Meditation, prayer, worship, faith and commitment strengthen people.
- * **c** stands for **change**
One way to Accept stress is to **change the way you perceive the situation** or yourself. Changing unrealistic expectations and irrational beliefs such as *"I should succeed at everything I try,"* or *"it would be awful if my spouse were angry with me,"* is a good

start. Building self-esteem and cultivating a positive attitude help as well.

Redefining the situation in a less stress-provoking way is always an option-when people play "isn't it funny" or "isn't it grand" instead of "isn't it awful," their stress resistance increases.

- * **Stress is a product of our interaction with the world.** Our environment provides us with many challenges, changes and demands. None of these are, by themselves, stressful.
- * **Our beliefs about the world and ourselves, our feelings, and our assessment or our coping resources act as a perceptual filter** through which we view the world. It is our very own perceptual filter that triggers a stress reaction.

EVENT A	PERCEPTUAL FILTER B	RESPONSE C
Pressures	Past experience	Psychophysical stress response
Demands	Expectations	Burnout
Changes	Evaluation	Effective coping mechanism
Challenges	Beliefs	

Some slight common errors of thinking are:

- **Black-or-white thinking:** Any performance short of perfection is a total failure.
- **Over generalization:** Seeing one negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- **Disqualifying the positive:** Rejecting positive experiences by insisting they "don't count."
- **Catastrophizing:** Exaggerating the importance of errors or problems.
- **"Should" statements:** Trying to motivate yourself to improve with "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts."
- **Self-labeling:** An extreme form of over generalization; instead of saying "I made a mistake," the person attaches a negative label, i.e., "I am a loser."
- **Personalization:** Blaming yourself inappropriately as the cause of a negative event.
- **Reflect on the things that you say about an event** just after something difficult or stressful takes place, and think about how realistic and helpful it is for you to come to such conclusions.

RULES TO PROMOTE RATIONAL THINKING

- * It doesn't do anything to me.**
- * Everything is exactly the way it should be.**
- * All humans are fallible creatures.**
- * It takes two to have a conflict.**
- * The original cause is lost in antiquity.**
- * We feel the way we think.**