

Coping Skills Definition (“Mediating” Skills)

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Coping Skills are healthy thoughts (cognitions) combined with healthy responses (behaviors) over time until they have become habitual (automated).

In other words, good coping skills are rational beliefs acted upon consistently, so that when faced with a stressor (challenge) the individual makes healthy decisions accompanied by appropriate actions and, over time, by balanced emotions. Remember that positive feelings lag behind good decisions and behaviors, but for most people engaged in a well-designed cognitive-behavioral plan* emotional balance is eventually achieved.

When irrational or unhealthy beliefs are identified (by use of "McGee's ABC Assessment" form) and rational or healthy beliefs and behaviors replace them through practice and repetition ("My ABC Stress Management Plan" form) these become new coping skills, replacing in time the negative emotional stress responses of hostility, anxiety or depression (or a combination of these) with appropriate healthy emotions. Many people achieve a sense of calm, peace and a degree of serenity by choosing to develop good coping skills.

Example: Sharon (pseudonym or made up name) habitually enters a room full of people with a great deal of anxiety. Through a cognitive assessment of her conscious and non-conscious irrational thoughts she discovers beliefs she holds that make anxiety a predictable response to a group encounter. She chooses to engage in restructuring of these beliefs accompanied by behaviors that are consistent with her new beliefs. Through consistent rehearsal, using a well-organized plan, she practices her new thinking and acting responses over weeks, and eventually months, ignoring the tendency to feel disconnected emotionally (sometimes called dissonance) from this new pattern of healthy thinking and acting. And, in time, the emotions begin to catch up with her healthy new thinking/acting, resulting in a calmness and confidence as she encounters groups.

Caution: Old thought/behavior/feelings patterns are deeply imbedded in our brains by virtue of neuropathways active over a lifetime. While the above changes are experienced by many we must not be discouraged when we find ourselves reverting or "backsliding" into an old familiar negative response. My thirty-plus years of clinical experience reveals that these "regressions" are most often experienced when we are suffering from emotional or physical fatigue, or when there is a medical imbalance in our bodies, such as an illness or fever, or some imbalance medically or chemically induced.

*Plan example: "ABCs of Stress® Management"

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