

# Coping Skills: How We Develop Them

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*My interpretation* of Albert Bandera's Social Cognitive Theory is that coping skills are formed

1. by the way the individual's brain processes or interprets stimuli (triggers or stressors) and the resulting "beliefs" that are formed by this process over time. There are people whose brains are genetically better equipped than others to do this and those whose interpretive processes and capacity to form rational conclusions from this process are more limited than others.
2. by observing and imitating behaviors of parents or other significant people in our lives particularly during childhood development. Obviously, the earlier in development and the greater length of exposure to successful coping experiences of others the better opportunity the individual has to develop these skills.
3. by the capacity or ability an individual possesses (which would vary with intelligence, length of exposure and observation of successful outcomes) within themselves to set specific goals and carry through with actions directed at these goals.

More on# 3: In one of my favorite books on the personality, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*, Robert A. Emmons, research psychologist at the University of California, Davis, cites researcher E. Klinger who refers to goals as "the linchpin of psychological organization." Klinger calls goal striving as "the imperative of purpose"-that we are wired for purposeful living-that life is a continuous stream of goal pursuits. He believes that goal striving is a fundamental feature of all living organisms, and that without goals we would cease to exist. Emmons then draws this conclusion from Klinger's research: [brackets are my comments]

*"Thus, cognitive and affective processes [the C and A of the ABCs of Stress®] have a specifiable set of functions that enable organisms to process environmental and internal information[# 1 above] and to respond emotionally [the A of ABCs] in ways that promote problem solving and goal attainment [stress management]."*

4. by our capacity to analyze ourselves and choose to change. We are not born with coping skills but with the capacity to develop them as a means of surviving and thriving. Those individuals capable of objectivity [requiring an adequate sense of self], those able to gain self insight from an assessment of their strengths and limitations [i.e., the Birkman Method®] and make choices [requiring a sense of empowerment and control over their destiny] about the future are thereby capable of making decisions and acting on them.

I would agree that these four processes are at the heart of coping skill development although most coping individuals [people who have found a degree of balance in their lives] have never stopped to consider how they built them. The cognitive-behavioral process used by the ABCs of Stress® enables a person to gain the necessary insight into his/her irrational belief system that keeps one stuck in negative emotions [the A of the ABCs] and nonproductive behaviors [B].

Once the insight into the non-conscious belief system is acquired they are ready to make decisions for change. These decisions are supported by a research-based process using "My ABC Stress Management Plan."

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