

Coping Strategies

Blue Knot Foundation fact sheet about coping strategies for people who have experienced complex trauma

What are coping strategies?

- Trauma can make it hard for us to cope.
- We need to find ways to cope. These ways are called coping strategies.
- We use coping strategies more when we have experienced a lot of trauma.

What do coping strategies do?

- We use our coping strategies to help us manage strong feelings.
- Our strategies protect us at first because they help us cope. But they often do not help us later on.
- Some strategies are not healthy. They can cause health problems. When this happens we need to find other ways to cope.
- We need to respect our coping strategies. They helped us survive.
- People use different coping strategies. They can reduce the pain we feel.

What are some coping strategies?

- Examples of coping strategies are:
 - drinking a lot of alcohol
 - taking drugs
 - hurting our body.
- Some of us get very angry and hurt other people. Some of us stop talking to or seeing other people.

What can happen with coping strategies?

- Sometimes our coping strategies cause problems. They can cause problems for us. They can also cause problems for the people around us.
- We are not trying to be difficult. We are trying to make the pain go away.
- Coping strategies are often automatic. We can't control them.
- Some coping strategies can hurt us over time.
- Children use coping strategies to stop the pain of abuse. It is normal to want to feel better. As the child gets older they can still use the same coping strategies.

What can you do?

- It is important to understand what coping strategies do.
- Do not try to take coping strategies away until you have new ways to cope.
- The arousal level when we can manage our feelings is called the 'window of tolerance'. Trauma can make our 'window of tolerance' small.
- We can all learn to make our 'window of tolerance' bigger.
- When we make our 'window of tolerance' bigger we cope better. We can manage our strong feelings.
- We can learn new coping strategies which do not harm us. Good support can help.

If you or someone you support lives with disability and experiences of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation OR is affected by the Disability Royal Commission, you can call the **National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 458** between 9am and 6pm AEST Monday to Friday and between 9am and 5pm AEST Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

If you or someone you support has experiences of childhood trauma or is considering the National Redress Scheme, you can call the **Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service on 1300 657 380** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Sunday AEST.