

Separating Positive and Negative Coping Strategies for Grief

Objective

To identify the positive and negative ways you are coping with grief and to determine ways to change negative coping strategies.

You Should Know

Life changes after a significant loss - you might be deeply sad, empty, afraid, hopeless, exhausted, or angry - among many feelings. It can be challenging to figure out how to cope. You might fall into negative or harmful habits when you are grieving. And when you are in the middle of experiencing painful feelings, it is hard to make healthy choices. Most of us default to whatever is nearest or easiest.

“Grief is a normal human emotion, so how can it be ‘negative’ to grieve?” you might ask. The fact is, we all cope with loss differently. Perhaps you are using strategies that you think are helpful or effective that are actually causing problems for you. If you are able to step back, even in your time of grief, and gain some perspective on your individual responses and reactions, then you can make better choices for your healing process.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify some ways you are coping with your loss, and to find alternative strategies for the ones that may be causing problems in your life.

What to Do

How would you describe your current coping strategies? Be honest with yourself.

Now look at this list of some “positive” coping strategies. Put a checkmark next to the ones that you are currently using.

- Cry when you feel sad, not stifling your tears.
- Feel and express all of your emotions—sadness, anger, fear, etc.
- Let the feelings flow through you as they arise, like waves on a shoreline.
- Accept the loss of your loved one, not denying the reality.
- Talk to people about your loss (e.g., family, friends, spiritual community, bereavement group).
- Seek help from a mental health professional for support and guidance.
- Honor your lost loved one through sharing memories, rituals, ceremonies, or writing about them.
- Be self-compassionate when you feel your feelings, whatever they are, and whenever they arise, and for however long they last.
- Use the **TEARS** model, adapted here by psychologist Christina Hibbert, PsyD: **T**alking, **E**xercise, **A**rtistic Expression, **R**ecording Your Experiences, and **S**obbing.
- Do deep breathing, yoga, meditation, or relaxation exercises.
- Other:

The next list identifies some common “negative” coping strategies. Put a checkmark next to the ones that you are currently using.

- Sleeping a lot.
- Overworking (workaholism).
- Over- or undereating.
- Drinking too much.
- Using drugs.

___ Gambling.

___ Watching TV or playing video games excessively.

___ Distracting yourself from your feelings (running away from them).

___ Spending excessive time on the Internet or social media.

___ Withdrawing from social activities.

___ Avoiding talking to others who might be reaching out to you.

___ Obsessing or ruminating constantly about your lost loved one.

___ Needing to be around mementos and reminders of your lost loved one, or, by contrast, strongly avoiding any reminders.

___ Other:

Reflections on This Exercise

Which of the “positive” coping mechanisms are helping you in your healing process? Which ones that you are not using are you willing to try?

2. Which of the “negative” coping mechanisms are causing you the most difficulty? Which are you willing to work on to change? How?

In what other ways can you make choices to change your negative coping strategies? Be creative. Talk with a helpful friend or counselor if you need support or input.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
