**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Radical Acceptance**

 Increasing your ability to cope with stress starts with the way you see the situation, or your attitude. You’re going to need something called radical acceptance. This is a new way of looking at your life where we work to take away the need to blame others for our own pain. Often, when a person is overwhelmed, his or her first reaction is to get upset and blame others for causing the discomfort. Unfortunately, no matter who you blame for your pain it will still exist and you will continue to suffer. Getting angry or upset over a situation also stops you from seeing what is really happening, or “being blinded by rage”.

 You can change these situations, but only by working to accept it for what it is without blaming others. This doesn’t mean you have to agree with what is happening, it just means that you try to be okay with the situation in a calm manner. To help you use radical acceptance, it’s helpful to use coping statements to remind yourself. Check the statements that you would be willing to use to remind yourself to accept the present moment.

* “This is the way it has to be and I can’t change it”
* “All the events have led up to now”
* “It’s no use fighting the past”
* “Fighting the past only stops me from seeing the present”
* “The present is the only moment I have control over”
* “It’s a waste of time to fight what’s already occurred”
* “This moment is exactly as it should be, given what’s happened before it”
* “This moment is the result of tons of other decisions”
* “The situation is bad, but I’ll be okay”
* “I’m not happy with how things worked out, but it is what it is”
* “I can always look forward to something else and not focus on the bad”
* Other ideas:

What situations will you need to use these statements:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Self Destructive Behaviors**

 Have you ever been really upset and you decided to cut yourself, have you ever hit yourself as a way to deal with stress, have you ever burned yourself, have you ever stopped eating? These behaviors are self-destructive by nature, and while they may be used to try to distract from pain they end up creating unhealthy habits. Here are some safer actions that you can use to distract yourself. Check the ones you are willing to do, and then add any healthy non-harming behaviors you can think of:

* Hold an ice cube in one hand and squeeze it until your hand goes numb.
* Write on yourself in red felt-tip marker instead of cutting.
* Snap a rubber band on your wrist each time you feel like hurting yourself
* Dig your fingernails into your arm without breaking the skin
* Draw faces of people you hate on balloons and then pop them
* Write letters to people you don’t like, or to people who have hurt you. Tell them what they did to you and tell them why this hurt you. Then throw the letters away or rip it up into pieces
* Throw foam balls, rolled up socks, or pillows against the wall as hard as you can.
* Scream as loud as you can into a pillow.
* Give yourself permission to cry. Sometimes people do other things instead of crying because they’re afraid they won’t be able to stop. This never happens. In fact, the truth is that crying can make you feel better because it releases stress hormones.
* Other healthy, non-harming ideas:

What situations will you need to use these ideas:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Distract Yourself with Activities**

 Check the ones you are willing to do, and then add other activities that you think are helpful in difficult situations:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Talk to a friend on the phone
* Go out and visit a friend
* Invite a friend to your house
* Organize a party
* Exercise
* Lift weights
* Do yoga, tai chi, or Pilates
* Stretch your muscles
* Go for a long walk outside
* Go outside and watch the clouds
* Go for a jog
* Go swimming
* Go hiking
* Do something exciting like rock climbing
* Go to a local playground and join a game
* Get a massage
* Get out of your house, even if you just sit outside
* Go for a drive, or for a ride on public transportation
* Plan a trip to a place you’ve never been
* Sleep, or take a nap
* Eat something good for you
* Eat your favorite ice cream
* Cook your favorite meal
* Go out to eat
* Drink tea, coffee, or hot chocolate
 | * Go outside and play with your pet
* Take a dog for a walk
* Go outside and watch the birds
* Find something funny to do or watch
* Go see a movie
* Watch T.V.
* Listen to music
* Find a new band that you like
* Play a board game
* Play video games
* Go online to your favorite website
* Go shopping
* Go to a library
* Pray or meditate
* Call a family member you haven’t spoken to in a while
* Sing
* Play a musical instrument
* Take a bubble bath or shower
* Work on a car, truck, or motorcycle
* Write in a journal
* Make a list of ten things that you’re good at
* Draw a picture
* Paint a picture
* Write a story
* Make a list of ten things to do before you die
 |

Other ideas:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Distract Yourself with by Paying Attention to Someone Else**

Another great way to distract yourself from pain is to put your attention on someone else. Here are some examples. Check the ones you’re willing to do, then add activities you can think of:

* **Do something for someone else.** Call a friend and ask if they need help. Ask your parents, grandparents, or siblings if you can help them with something. Call up someone you know and offer to take them to lunch. Go outside and give money to a needy person. Go to a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter and volunteer. Plan to participate in activities with others.
* **Take your attention off yourself.** Go to a store, park, or coffee shop and just watch people. Watch what they do. Observe how they dress. Listen to conversations. Count the number of people you see.
* **Think of someone you care about.** Keep a picture of them in your wallet or purse. This could be a husband, wife, parent, boyfriend, girlfriend, child, or friend. It can also be someone you admire such as a role model, religious figure, athlete, or movie star. When you feel stressed, take out the picture and imagine a healing, peaceful conversation you would have with that person. What would they say to you that would help you feel better? Imagine them saying those words.
* Other ideas:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Distract Your Thoughts**

 The human brain is an amazing thought-producing machine. It turns out millions off thoughts every day. Most of the time, this makes our lives much easier. Unfortunately, sometimes we can’t fully control what our brain thinks about and there is a tendency for thoughts to run wild. Painful memories cannot be forgotten, and the more we try the worse we may feel. Instead of trying to forget, try to distract thoughts with other memories or images. Here are some examples. Check the ones you’re willing to do and add any activities you think of:

* Remember events from your past that were pleasant, fun, or exciting. Try to remember as many details as possible about these happy memories. What did you do? Who were you with? What was the weather like?
* Look outside at the world around you. Observe the flowers, trees, sky, and landscape as closely as you can. Observe any animals around. Listen to the sounds they make.
* Imagine yourself as a hero or heroine. What would you do as a hero? Who would you help? Why would you help them? How would you do it? What would people say to you?
* Imagine yourself getting praise from someone whose opinion matters to you. What did you do to deserve this? What does this person say to you? Why does this person’s opinion matter to you?
* Imagine having a million dollars. What would you do with the money? What would you spend it on? Who would you give money to? Where would you go?
* Keep a copy of your favorite song, poem, saying, or prayer with you. When you feel stressed, pull it out and read it to yourself. Imagine the words calming and soothing you.
* Imagine yourself in a land made entirely of your favorite candy, ice cream, or other desert. What is everything made out of? What would you eat? Who would be there with you?
* Imagine going on a huge rollercoaster. What does it feel like as you climb up the first big hill? What does it feel like as you go down that first hill? How fast are you going? What does the wind feel like as you move through the turns?
* Other ideas:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – Distract Yourself by Counting**

 Counting is an easy skill that can really keep your mind busy and help you focus on something other than your pain. Here are some examples. Check the ones you’re willing to do, and add any activities you can think of:

* **Count your breaths.** Sit in a comfortable chair, put one hand on your belly, and take slow, long breaths. Imagine breathing into your stomach instead of your lungs Feel your belly expand like a balloon with each inhalation. Start counting your breaths.
* **Count anything else around you.** If you’re too distracted by your emotions, simply count the sounds that you’re hearing. This will take your attention outside of yourself. You can also try counting the number of cars that are passing by, the number of sensations that you’re feeling, or anything else you can put a number on.
* **Count or subtract by increments of seven.** For example, start with one hundred and subtract seven. Now take that answer and subtract seven more. Keep going. This activity will really distract you from your emotions because it requires extra attention and concentration.
* Other counting ideas:

**Identifying Positive Coping Strategies – 5 Senses**

 The activities in this section will help you relax. Included here are some simple relaxation and soothing activities that utilize your five senses. These activities are meant to bring you a small amount of peace when things feel stressful. If one of these activities doesn’t help, or makes things worse, don’t do that activity and try something else. Each one of us is different in this regard. Some things work well for one person, but not for another. As you explore the list think about what works well for you and take note of that.

**Smell**

* Burn scented candles in your room or house. Find a scent that is pleasing to you.
* Wear scented oils, perfume, or cologne that you like. Focus on this making you feel happy, confident, or attractive.
* Cut out perfumed cards from magazines and carry them with you.
* Go someplace where the scent is pleasing, such as a bakery or restaurant.
* Bake your own food that has a pleasant smell, such as chocolate chip cookies.
* Lie down in your local park and smell the grass and outdoor smells.
* Buy fresh-cut flowers or seek our flowers in your neighborhood
* Hug someone whose smell makes you feel calm
* Other ideas:

**Vision**

* Go through magazines and books to cut out pictures that you like. Make a collage and hang them on your wall, or keep them with you.
* Find a place that is soothing for you to look at, like a park or a museum. You can also find a picture of a place that’s soothing for you to look at.
* Go to a bookstore and find a collection of photographs or paintings that you find relaxing.
* Draw or paint your own picture that’s pleasing to you
* Carry a picture or photograph of someone you love, or someone you admire
* Take some time to watch fish swim in a fish tank
* Watch the movement in a lava lamp
* Other ideas:

**Hearing**

* Listen to soothing music. This can be anything that works for you. It might be music with singing, or it can be instrumental. Go online to i-tunes or youtube and listen to different artists.
* Listen to books on tape. Many public libraries will let you borrow books on tape. In some cases, you don’t even have to listen to the storyline. Sometimes just listening to the sound of someone talking can be relaxing. Keep some of these recordings with you in your car or loaded on a portable device.
* Turn on the television just to listen. Find a show that’s boring. Sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes to just listen. Make sure the volume isn’t too loud.
* Listen to a talk show on the radio. Try to find something that is gentle, not something exciting and loud.
* Open your window and listen to the sounds outside. If you live in a place without relaxing sounds you can go to a local area to find it.
* Listen to recordings of nature sounds.
* Listen to a white noise machine
* Listen to the sound of a personal water fountain
* Listen to the recordings of a relaxation exercise, such as guided imagery and meditation
* Listen to the sound of rushing or trickling water
* Other ideas:

**Taste**

* Enjoy your favorite meal. Eat it slowly so you can enjoy the taste.
* Carry mints, suckers, gum, or other candy that you can eat when you feel upset.
* Eat a soothing food such as ice cream, pudding, chocolate, or something else that makes you feel good.
* Drink something soothing, such as tea, coffee, or hot chocolate. Practice drinking it slowly so you can enjoy the way it tastes.
* Suck on an ice cube or an ice pop, especially if you’re feeling really warm.
* Buy a piece of ripe and juicy fresh fruit and eat it slowly.
* Other ideas:

**Touch**

* Carry something soft or velvety in your pocket, like a cloth, to touch when you feel upset.
* Take a hot or cold shower.
* Take a warm bubble bath or a bath with scented oils.
* Get a massage.
* Play with a pet.
* Wear your most comfortable clothes, like your favorite t-shirt, sweat pants, or hoodie.
* Move a slinky from hand to hand focusing on what it feels like. Notice if it is hot or cold, and what each ridge of the slinky feels like.
* Cover yourself with a soft blanket
* Cover yourself with several blankets for a weighted sensation
* Squeeze a stress ball
* Pop bubble wrap
* Play the game bop-it
* Other ideas: