



Coping with Stress

About This Kit

Most people cope with too much stress by either *avoiding* the situation or *approaching* the problem. "Avoiders" wish the problem would go away or try to withdraw from it. "Approachers" may worry and fret, but try to get the situation resolved as soon as possible.

Neither of these styles is right or wrong. There are advantages and disadvantages of each style. Probably a mix of avoiding and approaching stress is best. Choosing a response that is appropriate for the situation is the goal. Knowing how you are likely to respond to stress can help you identify the best ways to relieve and manage stress in your life. In this kit you will:

- Step 1.** Consider your style of coping with stress
- Step 2.** Learn appropriate ways to avoid, alter, or adapt in stressful situations
- Step 3.** Develop a Personal Stress Management Contract

Step 1

Consider Your Style of Coping with Stress

Researchers have found that people usually fall into two basic categories of reaction to stress: Avoiders and Approachers. Both styles can help to reduce stress levels. Which are you? Do you know others who exhibit each style?

Avoiders

- Want to get away from it all
- Block out stress
- Withdraw
- Hope it will go away

Approachers

- Ask questions to know as much as possible
- Worry and fret
- Get upset in situations they can't control
- Work hard and drive on

Below are some advantages and disadvantages of each style. Add in other advantages and disadvantages from your personal experiences.

Avoiders

Advantages

- Many situations are resolved on their own.
- Avoidance may work well for stressful events of short duration.
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Disadvantages

- Some stressful situations can't be ignored.
- Avoiders are sometimes unprepared to deal with a major crisis.
- Avoiders are often unaware of their physical symptoms of stress.
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Approachers

Advantages

- Taking action helps the individual feel in control.
- Approachers may handle stress better over the long haul.
- Approachers are usually aware of their physical symptoms of stress.
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Disadvantages

- Approachers may get upset and angry in difficult situations.
- The "work hard and drive on" style can lead to burn out for the individual and people who live or work with him or her.
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Stress Management Tips for:

Avoiders

- Meditation, reading, hobbies, taking a long walk or a hot bath are effective stress relievers for you.
- Learn to recognize your body's physical reaction to stress.
- Seek special help – counseling or a support group – during times of major crisis.

Approachers

- Participate in exercise that requires concentration, such as tennis, rather than walking or swimming, which allows you to replay your worries.
- Use problem-solving techniques that help you control your thoughts.

Step 2

Learn Appropriate Ways to Avoid, Alter, or Adapt in Stressful Situations

In any stressful situation, there are three alternative courses of action: Avoid, Alter, or Adapt. A goal of stress management is to use an action that is appropriate for the situation.

Avoid

Not all the stresses in life can be avoided, but you should recognize your options and *do what you can to avoid needless stress*. You may be able to decrease how often you must deal with many stress-producing situations.

Can you:

- Avoid noisy places?
- Avoid hot or cold temperatures?
- Avoid unnecessary changes (make a decision and stick with it)?
- Avoid someone who constantly aggravates you?
- Leave for work or home earlier to avoid traffic?
- Walk away from a stressful situation (and come back with a clear mind)?
- Avoid discussing a particular topic?

List at least one stressor in your life you could avoid.

1.

List at least one stressor in your life you cannot avoid.

1.

Alter

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, *maybe you can alter or change it in some way to create a more positive outcome*. Altering a situation will require advance planning. Try to anticipate stress in advance and be prepared with your solution.

Can you:

- Wear earplugs or headphones to block noise?
- Dress appropriately to deal with extreme temperatures?
- Alter your route to avoid traffic?
- Alter your goals to be more realistic?
- Set up a schedule to manage time better?
- Ask someone to change their behavior or action?
- Delegate authority and responsibility to others when possible?

- Learn to say "no"?
- Match the task to the time available to complete it?
- Be sure you get accurate information?
- List priorities?
- Break down tasks into smaller steps?
- Plan something interesting to do?
- Establish routines?
- Develop trusting relationships?

List at least one stressor in your life you could alter.

1.

List at least one stressor in your life you cannot alter.

1.

Adapt

If you can't avoid or alter the situation, then you may need to adapt how you think, feel, or act. The change may need to come from within you. Adapting to stressful situations and learning to deal with them as best you can may be a better response than making significant changes in your life.

Can you change your thinking?

- Forgive a mistake
- Apologize for a mistake
- Talk to yourself ("I can remain calm")
- Be less competitive with yourself and others
- Think of stress as an opportunity or challenge
- Think of the positive things in your life
- Consider if it is worth the worry (Is this worth getting upset over?)
- Consider if it will be important in the future (How important will this be in a year, five years?)
- Look at the "big picture"
- Be less of a perfectionist

Can you change your feelings?

- Practice relaxation techniques
- Use visualization to create a positive outcome
- Exercise to reduce stress
- Laugh or sing
- Share your feelings openly

Can you change your actions?

- Seek information
- Count to 10
- Learn new skills to reduce stress caused by lack of ability
- Slow down and do one thing at a time
- Talk to someone you trust about your problem
- Work on a hobby
- Don't make matters worse by smoking, drinking too much, or overeating

List at least one stressor in your life that you can adapt to.

1.

Step 3

Develop a Personal Stress Management Contract

You have learned how you typically respond to stress, as well as new ways to deal with stress. If there is a stressor in your life that you would like to try to cope with more effectively, this Personal Stress Management Contract can be helpful to you.

A personal contract is an effective tool for making changes in your life. A contract has these features:

- *It's a written document.* You make a commitment to yourself to fulfill the contract by a certain date.
- *The goal or purpose of the contract is very specific.* You will know if you have achieved your stated goal to your satisfaction.
- *There is a reward specified in advance.* The reward should be something significant that will motivate you to work toward your goal.
- *Another person is involved in the contract.* You should ask someone for their support and signature.

Personal Stress Management Contract

My Stressor: _____

Goal: By _____,
(date)

I, _____, *will avoid / alter / adapt* my stressor as follows:
(your name) (circle one)

How I know that I have achieved my goal: _____

When I have achieved my goal, I will reward myself as follows: _____

The type of support I need from others is: _____

I will involve _____ *in my plan.*
(who)

Your Signature

*Signature of
Witness*

Date _____

Date _____

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Before Your Next Visit

In the time between your visits with your mentor, you should read and complete your educational kits. Use this sheet to record your work. Think of this as “homework.”

- Are you an “avoider” or “approacher”?

When dealing with stressful situations, I tend to be an _____.

- List at least one stressor in your life you could avoid.

1.

- List at least one stressor in your life you cannot avoid.

1.

- List at least one stressor in your life you could alter.

1.

- List at least one stressor in your life you cannot alter.

1.

- List at least one stressor in your life you can adapt to.

1.

- Use the Personal Stress Management Contract to work on one stressor that is important to you.

Write any questions for your mentor here.

