**Assessing and Improving Coping Tools**

Think about the things you do when you are stressed or otherwise have difficult emotions. What are the things you then do with those feelings? Here is a step-by-step guide to evaluating them to find the ones that fit best.

Step 1. Does what you do harm you? If it does, you need to replace it with other options.

Step 2. Evaluate which of the following categories the coping option best fits, and act accordingly:

Category 1 – just feel like doing it: I feel like doing it when I am stressed/have difficult feelings, but it does not make me feel any better while doing it or afterwards. **Avoid these ways of coping tools**

Category 2 – just helps while doing it: I feel better while doing it, but the stress/difficult feelings come back immediately or almost right away when I stop. **Reserve these ways of coping for stress that goes away by itself in a relatively short time (e.g., get over an illness, pain following surgery, or a migraine). Otherwise, avoid these when it comes to relieving stress as they tend to become psychologically addictive and consume a lot of time.**

Category 3 – feel better afterwards: You may or may not feel like doing these things when stressed/having difficult feelings, but you realize that you usually feel a lot better after you are done, and the effect lasts for several hours or longer. **This is the category where you need most of your immediate tools to be.**

Category 4 – general upkeep: These tools may or may not help you when you feel stressed/have difficult feelings, but doing these in general helps you not get as stressed/have as many difficult feelings (e.g., do something creative regularly/hobby, go to bed at a good schedule, exercise regularly).

Step 3. Do I have enough tools? As a rule of thumb – in order to do well over time staying stable in our choices and emotions, we need **8-10 different coping tools** that we do on a regular basis (categories 3 and 4). **Create a go-to list of coping tools that work for you.**

Step 4. If you don’t have a solid list of 8-10 good coping tools, you should explore new ones. Choose activities to try that you have not done or rarely done (e.g., bowling, pool, leather-working, meditation, prayer, breathing exercises, yoga). **Do each activity you try a few times. Each time rate your stress/difficult feeling before doing it and after doing it.** Note that how you feel while doing it is not as important.

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| Date: | Coping/Stress Relief Activity | Feeling of Stress  Before (0-10) | Feeling of Stress  After (0-10) |
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**Worksheet**

1. *List things you sometimes do when you are stressed or have a difficult feeling. Then identify what category it fits in.*

Activity Category

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2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
13. *How many are you doing (see your list above) that are category 3 or 4?*
14. *What are things I don’t do or rarely do but that I can try out to see how it works.*
15. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
16. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
17. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
18. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
19. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_