

Coping Thoughts: Definition and Purpose

Concept Review

Coping thoughts are positive, realistic statements or phrases that individuals use to manage and counteract negative, distressing, or overwhelming thoughts and emotions during stressful situations¹³¹⁰. These thoughts serve as a form of self-talk, helping to reframe unhelpful or irrational thinking patterns and promote emotional resilience¹⁷.

How Coping Thoughts Work

- **Replacement of Negative Thoughts:** Coping thoughts are used to replace automatic negative thoughts with more balanced, truthful, and supportive statements. For example, instead of thinking "I can't take this anymore," a coping thought might be "This is uncomfortable, but I can handle it if I take slow and deep breaths"¹⁵.
- **Self-Encouragement:** These statements act as internal encouragement, reminding individuals of their strengths, past successes, and ability to handle distress⁵.
- **Grounding and Present Focus:** Coping thoughts often help ground individuals in the present moment, reducing the tendency to catastrophize or become overwhelmed by emotions¹.

Examples of Coping Thoughts

- "Stop and breathe; I can do this."
- "This, too, will pass."
- "I have done this before, and I can do it again."
- "These are just feelings; they will go away."
- "I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction."
- "Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe."
- "Thoughts are just thoughts—they are not necessarily true or factual."
- "I can use my coping skills and get through this"⁵¹⁷.

When and How to Use Coping Thoughts

- **During Moments of Distress:** Coping thoughts are especially useful when feeling anxious, angry, overwhelmed, or sad¹¹⁰.
- **Repetition and Practice:** Saying coping statements out loud or silently, and repeating them like a mantra, can help reinforce their calming effect¹⁷.
- **Written Reminders:** Writing down coping thoughts on cards and carrying them can serve as reminders during challenging times⁵.

Why Coping Thoughts Are Effective

- They help break cycles of negative thinking and reduce emotional intensity.

- Over time, practicing coping thoughts can retrain the brain to default to healthier, more adaptive responses to stress⁷.
- They foster a sense of control and self-efficacy, even in difficult situations¹.

Summary

Coping thoughts are short, positive, and realistic statements used to manage stress, anxiety, and negative emotions by replacing unhelpful thoughts, providing encouragement, and grounding individuals in the present moment. Regular use and practice of coping thoughts can improve emotional resilience and overall mental wellness¹⁵¹⁰.

Citations:

1. <https://www.missionwv.org/teen-resources/2024/1/8/mental-wellness-coping-statements>
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6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coping>
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