

## ***COPING STYLES Rx.***

### ***“Prescription for Keeping on Track Using Your Coping Style”***

Here is some information you will find very useful to consider as you reflect upon your preferred or typical coping style/s.

#### **Coping Styles**

As you deal with challenges and issues in your life, considering how you alleviate your own psychological stress is critical to your well-being, quality of life and ultimate recovery. People use a variety of ways when attempting to avoid, or cope with, their difficulties. Some strategies and mindsets are clearly more helpful than others (e.g., using alcohol = **un**helpful & **un**healthy; fighting spirit = helpful & healthy).

To initially make sense of a challenge in your life, it is helpful to go through a process of appraisal, by answering these questions:

1. How much of a threat is this problem situation to you? (view of diagnosis)
2. What can be done about it? Can I exert any control? (perceived control)
3. What is the likely outcome & how certain can I be about it? (view of prognosis)

According to how you answer these questions...

...you could see the threat as potentially being overcome, or not...or you could indeed deny that any threat even exists,

...you may have a belief as to whether or not you, or anyone else, can control or alter the problem situation.

The final answer will be dependent on how you answer the first two. If the problem represents a challenge which you can meet, you will feel quite *optimistic*. If it is seen as a major difficulty that you can't impact, you may feel somewhat *helpless*. Some would simply ask – “*Is this a challenge or a threat?*”

*The patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with these appraisals represent the **style of coping** which you have developed.*

At the core of each coping style is a mindset that selects, filters, and interprets information about the problem. You will respond to the above three questions differently depending on your mindset, and your coping style will vary accordingly. For example, a person with a *fighting spirit* will attend to the more optimistic facts about what can be done, while a *helpless/hopeless* person will ignore those facts and concentrate on any negative information available.

## ***The Five Coping Styles***

1. Fighting Spirit,
2. Avoidance or Denial,
3. Fatalism,
4. Helplessness & Hopelessness,
5. Anxious Preoccupation.

### **Fighting Spirit: (PROBABLY THE MOST USEFUL STYLE TO ADOPT)**

Person sees the problem as a challenge and has a positive attitude toward the outcome. They engage in various behaviours where they take an active role in their recovery and make an effort to live as normal a quality life as possible.

*Diagnosis*- seen as a challenge,

*Control*- individual exerts some control over the stress,

*Prognosis*- seen as optimistic.

### **Avoidance or Denial: (POSSIBLY HAS SOME USEFULNESS AT TIMES)**

Person denies the impact of the challenge and behaves to minimise the impact of the problem.

*Diagnosis*- seen as minimal,

*Control*- issue of control is irrelevant,

*Prognosis*- seen as good.

### **Fatalism: (LIMITED USEFULNESS)**

Person has an attitude of passive acceptance and any active strategies towards fighting for themselves is absent.

*Diagnosis*- seen as a relatively minor threat,

*Control*- believes no control can be exerted over the situation,

*Prognosis*- sees the outcome of a lack of control must be accepted with tranquillity.

### **Helplessness & Hopelessness: (LIMITED USEFULNESS)**

Person is overwhelmed and strategies for fighting are absent, and there may also be a reduction in normal functioning.

*Diagnosis*- seen as a major threat or loss,

*Control*- believes no control can be exerted over the situation,

*Prognosis*- inevitable negative outcome is experienced as if it has already occurred.

### **Anxious Preoccupation: (LIMITED USEFULNESS)**

Anxiety is the predominant emotion in this coping style. The person is compulsively searching for reassurance, much time is spent worrying about the problem, and any hint of it is immediately identified as a negative sign.

*Diagnosis*- represents a major threat,

*Control*- uncertainty for the possibility of exerting control over the situation,

*Prognosis*- uncertainty over the future.

As seen from the above explanations, when dealing with problems it is critical to become more aware of your own coping style (or combination of styles), appraise how useful it is going to be for you (& possibly others around you) to use, and make adjustments to your behaviour and thinking accordingly. Although directly changing emotions and bodily feelings is very difficult, they **will** change as you actively **choose** to take more control over your own thoughts and actions. (*Adapted from: Moorey, Greer, Watson et al*)

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