

Stress Strategies

There are learning strategies and skills aimed at eliminating or modifying the sources of stress in our lives.

COPING LADDER*

1. Eliminate the Problem at the Source.

Strategies that eliminate the stressor or demand by *direct action*. The action has an impact on people, situations, or the environment. For example, if your job tasks conflict with each other, attempt to negotiate a permanent solution with your supervisor or co-workers.

2. Change Your Appraisal of the Problem.

Approaches that change the way you *perceive* the stressor, without directly affecting it or avoiding the problem. In other words, you *think* about the situation differently. If your job task conflicts cannot be eliminated, determine the proper overall job priorities and resign yourself to the fact that the situation cannot be perfect.

3. Manage the Stress Responses.

Techniques for coping with the symptoms of stress, without directly changing the stressful characteristics of the situation, or the way you think about the problem. For example, when conflicts between job tasks produce stress, control the stress symptoms through stress-reducing breathing techniques. Improving your diet, schedule, exercise program, and other aspects of your lifestyle are other methods for reducing stress symptoms.

4. Counterproductive and Avoidance Strategies.

Activities that may *reduce* stress in the short run but create new problems (and new stress) in the long run. Counterproductive actions fail to address the environment and the personal causes and effects of stress. For example, if you cope with task conflicts by ignoring the problem and drinking to relieve the tension, you could end up with *two* problems: the unchanged job conflict and the effects of a drinking problem.

**The higher you stay on the ladder, the better you cope with stress.*

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Problem Exploration Questions

It is helpful to ask yourself the following questions when exploring a problem situation:

- ⊙ Have I given myself time to consider all aspects of the problem?
- ⊙ Who owns this problem? Does it really belong to me?
- ⊙ Is there a new way to define the problem which might help?
- ⊙ Do I need to gather any more information?
- ⊙ How do my values influence my thoughts about this problem?
- ⊙ Can I break down the problem into smaller problems?
- ⊙ Is this a high priority problem? Which problem is most important to look at first?

Problem Exploration Resolution Techniques

- ⊙ Discuss problem with family or friend.
- ⊙ Spend time thinking about the problem alone.
- ⊙ Write about the problem in a notebook.

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