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## Stress and Coping Mechanisms

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Coping mechanisms are ways to which external or internal stress is managed, adapted to or acted upon. Susan Folkman and Richard Lazarus define coping as "*constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing*".

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## Defining Coping Mechanisms

Psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman <sup>[1]</sup> scientifically defined coping as the sum of cognitive and behavioural efforts, which are constantly changing, that aim to handle particular demands, whether internal or external, that are viewed as taxing or demanding. Simply put, coping is an activity we do to seek and apply solutions to stressful situations or problems that emerge because of our stressors. Actually, the term "coping" is more associated with "reactive coping", because in general, we see coping as a response to a stressor. On the other hand, there's also what we call "proactive coping", wherein the coping response is aimed at preventing a possible encounter with a future stressor.

While coping mechanisms <sup>[2]</sup> are brought about by a person's conscious minds, it doesn't mean that all of them bring about positive coping; there are some types of coping mechanisms which are maladaptive. Other psychologists say that maladaptive coping is also synonymous to "non-coping", since a person who responds to a stressor using a coping mechanism but isn't able to positively ward off the stressor or solve the stressful situation

hasn't coped with the stress at all.

## Types of Coping Strategies

Over the years, psychologists and researchers have identified about 400 to 600 coping strategies, and yet there are so many other potential coping strategies that are still under research. Because of this, the classifications of coping strategies vary from textbook to textbook.

One of the recognized groupings of coping strategies is that which was written in the psychology textbook by Weiten, which includes the appraisal-focused or adaptive cognitive, the problem-focused or adaptive behavioural, and the emotion-focused.

1. the appraisal-focused strategies are those coping mechanisms which involve the change of mindset or a revision of thoughts. Denial is the most common coping mechanism under this category.
2. the problem-focused strategies are those that modify the behaviour of the person. A good example of this is learning how to cook a family dinner upon knowing that your spouse's family would come over your house this weekend.
3. the emotion-focused strategies include the alteration of one's emotions to tolerate or eliminate the stress. Examples include distraction, meditation, and relaxation techniques.

Many psychologists also contributed in the study of coping mechanisms by grouping mechanisms or strategies according to their manifestations and purposes. In general, here are the general classifications of coping mechanisms:

- **Defense** - the unconscious ways of coping stress. Examples: reaction formation, regression
- **Adaptive** - tolerates the stress. Examples: altruism, symbolization
- **Avoidance** - keeps self away from the stress. Examples: denial, dissociation, fantasy, passive aggression, reaction formation.
- **Attack** - diverts one's consciousness to a person or group of individuals other than the stressor or the stressful situation. Examples: displacement, emotionality, projection.
- **Behavioral** - modifies the way we act in order to minimize or eradicate the stress. Examples: compensation, sublimation, undoing.
- **Cognitive** - alters the way we think so that stress is reduced or removed. Examples: compartmentalization, intellectualization, rationalization, repression, suppression.
- **Self-harm** - intends to harm self as a response to stress. Examples: introjection, self-harming
- **Conversion** - changes one thought, behaviour or emotion into another. Example: somatisation.

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### Links

[1] <https://explorable.com/stress-and-cognitive-appraisal>

[2] <http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/coping/coping.htm>