

## Coping Strategies Printable List

### 1. Situational stories.

**What are they?** Situational stories are written to help you understand certain social situations by breaking them down into parts:

- 1) A description of the location or situation
- 2) What you are feeling and doing
- 3) What others are feeling and doing
- 4) A description of how you should appropriately respond in that situation
- 5) A reason / rationale behind why it is important to respond in that way

These stories can be about anything that makes you feel confused, stressed, anxious, scared, angry, sad, hyper, bored, irritated, etc...

**Why?** Basically, these stories can help you understand how to appropriately respond in certain situations.

**How?** These stories should be created with the **direct guidance and instruction** of a parent, teacher, mentor, coach, or therapist:

- Stories to understand social situations
- Coping comics
- Thought stories

### 2. JobTIPS Coping Story Cards.

**What are they?** We have created a set of Coping Story Cards for you. These are brief stories about particular work-related situations that might cause you to feel sad, confused, scared, anxious, or angry.

**Why?** These can help you better understand and cope with certain situations.

**How?** Use the printable Coping Story Cards to help you deal with potentially stressful work situations.

### 3. Thoughts and feelings organizers.

**What are they?** These are printable graphic organizers (charts, diagrams, lists, etc.) and worksheets.

**Why?** They allow you to visually organize and label your thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. These can help reduce your confusion, anxiety, or anger in certain situations. These can also help you make decisions about how to respond and then help you evaluate your own responses.

**How?** The strategies should be created with guidance and instruction of a parent, teacher, mentor, coach, or therapist.

We have created several organizers for you:

- I'm about to EXPLODE! (with pictures)
- I'm about to EXPLODE! (no pictures)
- Volcano scale – My Triggers Worksheet
- Anxiety Thermometer
- Anxiety Thermometer – Triggers Worksheet
- Anxiety Thermometer – Coping Strategies Worksheet
- Anger Thermometer
- Anger Thermometer – Triggers Worksheet
- Anger Thermometer – Coping Strategies Worksheet
- Decision-Making Guide
- Take 5 T-chart

#### 4. Deep breathing exercises.

This strategy requires practice ahead of time! Learn and practice this strategy when you are calm.

**What are they?** Deep breathing for relaxation means that you take slow, deep breaths in and out several times. This seems easy, but it can take a while to get the hang of it. However, it is a very effective strategy.

**Why?** Not only does deep breathing calm your body, but it also makes your mind focus on something else. Instead of thinking about what upsets you, you concentrate on your breathing.

**How long?** These exercises could last anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes. Keep in mind that when you are at work, you may not be able to take a 30 minute break. Set a timer for however long you have to remind yourself when your break is over. You can set a timer on your watch, cell phone, or computer.

**Where?** You will need a quiet and perhaps private place to do these exercises. You might do these exercises at your desk, in a restroom, in your car, outside, or in the break room.

**How?** There are several hand outs that can help teach you how to do deep breathing. Look at all of them and choose the one that works the best for you:

- Tips to Deep Breathing – everyone should review this first!
- Smell the flower, blow out the candles
- Just Breathe Card Set



#### 5. Muscle tension and release exercises.

This strategy requires practice ahead of time! Learn and practice this strategy when you are calm.

**What are they?** Muscle tension and release exercises mean that you tense muscles in your body and then slowly release the tension. You usually do one body part at a time and move through the different parts of your body. For example, you might tense and relax your shoulders, then left arm, then right arm, and so on, throughout your body.

**Why?** Not only does muscle relaxation calm your body, but it also makes your mind focus on something else. Instead of thinking about what upsets you, you concentrate on your muscles.

**How long?** These exercises could last anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes. Keep in mind that when you are at work, you may not be able to take a 30 minute break. Set a timer (on your watch, computer, or cell phone, for example) for however long you are going to do these exercises- maybe 5-10 minutes. This way you will have a reminder to get back to work.

**Where?** You will need a quiet and perhaps private place to do these exercises. You might do these exercises at your desk, in a restroom, in your car, outside, or in the break room.

**How?** Check out our visual aids for help:

- Muscle Relaxation Card Set
- Muscle Relaxation Visual Guide



6. Visualization / Imagery exercises.

This strategy requires practice ahead of time! Learn and practice this strategy when you are calm.

**What are they?** Visualization or imagery means that you picture something pleasant or relaxing in your head. You mentally picture something that makes you happy to calm yourself.

**Why?** Visualization can help you to shift your focus away from whatever is upsetting you.

**How long?** This strategy could last anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes. Keep in mind that when you are at work, you may not be able to take a 30 minute break.

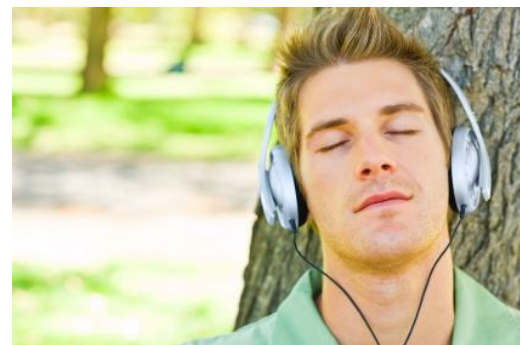
**Where?** You will need a quiet and perhaps private place to do these exercises. You might do these exercises at your desk, in a restroom, in your car, outside, or in the break room.

**How?** Check out our visual aids for help:

- Quick Visualization Guide
- Visualize This Card Set

7. Listen to music, podcasts, or audio books with headphones. Make sure your supervisor allows you to use headphones at the workplace.

8. Use earplugs or headphones to block out sound. Your headphones don't have to be on or playing music, but just there to block out some of the noise around you. Larger head phones seem to work the best.



9. Squeeze a stress ball or hand grip.

**Why?** Squeezing a stress ball can help you release or “vent” your stress in a healthy way. It also helps shift your focus away from what is upsetting you.

**How?** There are many ways to use stress balls when you feel tense. You could:

- Hold a stress ball in each hand and squeeze 20 times.
- Hold a stress ball in your left hand, squeeze 10 times, then hold the stress ball in your right hand and squeeze 10 times.
- Set a timer for 1 minute. Squeeze the stress ball during that minute.
- Set a timer for 30 seconds. Squeeze the stress ball with your right hand. Then set the timer for 30 seconds and squeeze the stress ball with your left hand.



10. Exercise

**Why?** Exercise can help you to “burn off” some extra stress and frustration. It also helps you shift your focus away from whatever is upsetting you. And, exercise is good for your overall physical and mental health!

**How?** Here are some things to try:

- Walk up and down the staircase for 10 minutes. Or, walk up and down the staircase 5 times.
- Take a short walk around the building / work area.
- Use small hand weights (keep them in your desk drawer or work bag).

- Do jumping jacks.
- Do push-ups.
- Do a combination of these exercises. Use the Visual Exercise Guide as an example.

11. Stretching exercises.

**Why?** Stretching your muscles could make you feel calm and relaxed. It also lets you take a short break from whatever you are doing.

**Where?** Be careful not to stretch in front of customers. That would look unprofessional! You could stretch in your office space or work area, in the break room, or outside.

**How?** It may help to have a stretching routine to follow. Use the Visual Stretching Guide as an example.



12. Count slowly up to 10 (or 20, 50, 100), or count slowly down to one.

**Why?** Counting can help shift your focus away from whatever is making you upset. Counting can make you feel more calm and relaxed.

**How?** You might count quietly, or you might count in your head. You could even write down your numbers on paper if you would prefer.

13. Talk to a friend (in person, by phone, text, or email).

- Make sure you are allowed to make *brief* personal calls or send personal emails from work.
- Phone calls should be no longer than 5 to 10 minutes.
- Keep a short list of the phone numbers or email addresses of people you want to contact if you are upset. That way, you can reach them easily if needed.



14. Write in a journal.

**What?** You can write down almost anything in this journal—it is for your eyes only (private).

**Why?** Your journal can be a place where you “vent” about what is bothering you. Some people find it helpful to write down what is bothering them. It might help you process the situation, and it could calm you down.

**Where?** You can write in your journal in your work area, at a desk, in the break room, or outside. Keep your journal in a safe place, such as your bag, locker, or desk drawer.

15. Draw.

**What?** You do not have to be a great artist to draw. Draw whatever you want. You can scribble “angry” lines on a page, or draw a real picture. It is up to you!

**Why?** Drawing can help you “vent” or release your emotions on paper.

**Where?** You can draw in your work area, at a desk, in the break room, or outside. If you do not want others to see your drawings, keep them in a safe place, such as your bag, locker, or desk drawer.

16. Engage in a hobby.

**What?** Puzzles, word searches, reading, surfing the internet, or playing computer games (on a handheld device such as a PSP or phone) are some examples of hobbies.

**Why?** Engaging in a hobby takes your mind off what is bothering you. It puts you in a better mood because you are doing something enjoyable. It also gives you a short break from work, and everybody needs to take breaks sometimes.

**Where?** You could do this at your desk or in your work area, in the break room, or outside.

17. Make lists.

**What?** Some people like to make “to do” lists or grocery lists. Others might enjoy making a list of facts, numbers, names, dates, or places that are particularly interesting to them.

**Why?** Some people feel a sense of calm and control when they can make lists.



18. Get organized.

**Why?** Some people feel a sense of calm and control when they can take a few minutes to organize their things.

**How?** Here are some things you might do to get organized:

- Sort tools, pens, paper clips, pencils
- Put papers in correct binders, folders, notebooks
- Delete old emails; put important emails in folders
- Organize word documents and spreadsheets into folders on computer
- Clean out wallet or purse
- Clean out work bag
- Delete old phone contacts
- Fill in your calendar or planner with important dates

19. Create a self-calming statement or mantra.

**What?** A self-calming statement or mantra is something you say to yourself to make yourself feeling better.

**Why?** It is a way to soothe yourself.

**How?** Some ideas of self-calming statements include:

- “Everybody makes mistakes. It is OK.”
- “Things change. Change is OK.”
- “I can handle this.”
- “Everything will be all right.”
- “I can do this. It is not my job to worry.”

Your statement should be individualized to you. Whatever makes YOU feel better, should be your mantra. Saying the statement over and over to yourself can make you feel better. Even better, print out your self-calming statement and carry it in your wallet or tape it to the inside of your desk drawer. Read your statement to yourself when you feel upset. You could also write your mantra on your calendar or schedule. That way you can read it frequently throughout the day.



20. Engage in repetitive behaviors—but make a plan and follow the “rules.”

Most people engage in some repetitive behavior such as nail biting, pencil tapping, cleaning, or listening to a favorite song repeatedly.

However, some repetitive behaviors are less “socially acceptable” than others. These less socially acceptable behaviors might include pacing, rocking, flapping, scripting, or making odd noises. They are considered less socially acceptable because most people don’t do them. That means you could stand out or look different when doing these behaviors. Some people call these repetitive behaviors “perseverative” or “self-stimulatory” (“stimming”).

**It is ok if you need to do a repetitive behavior, just be aware that there are certain social “norms” (rules) to follow:**

- 1) When you are at work, you should avoid displaying these repetitive behaviors in front of supervisors, co-workers, or customers. Other people might think these behaviors are strange, rude, or frightening.
- 2) Schedule a specific time and a specific private place to engage in a repetitive behavior. In most cases, you should schedule this to happen at home only.
- 3) Place a limit on the length of time you have to engage in the behavior. Use a watch or timer to monitor this.
- 4) Place a limit on the frequency (how often) of the repetitive behavior.

**Make a contract or plan, and stick to it!**

**Get help** from someone who knows you (i.e. parent, teacher, mentor, coach, therapist). This plan only works if you “buy in.” This means that you need to participate in the development of the contract and agree to the terms of the contract.

We have also included a **blank form** for you to use to develop your own contract.