

How to Personalize your Coping Skills



Written by

Haleigh Schaefer, LMSW



Do you ever feel upset when you are going through something and you're immediately told:

Just breathe! maybe you should do meditation!

Although those responses come from a well-meaning place, someone listing coping skills and relaxation techniques can feel invalidating when you're overwhelmed with emotion.

Coping mechanisms (actions) like meditation and relaxation techniques can actually distract us from the problem at hand and can even give us the narrative that how we currently feel is not okay.

There is no right or wrong action to take when we are struggling. We are all doing our best to stay afloat and deal with the chaos of life at any given moment.

Actions themselves aren't as important as the reasons behind why we do them.

Although there is a time and place for actions that distract us, if these are the only actions we take without knowing it, we can feel like we are in a constant loop.

Instead of giving you a list of techniques to relax you in a time of overwhelm, I have adapted a strategy to help each individual personalize their actions to avoid staying caught in a loop and instead move forward toward a more fulfilled life.

-Haleigh





How will this guide help?

This guide will answer questions like...

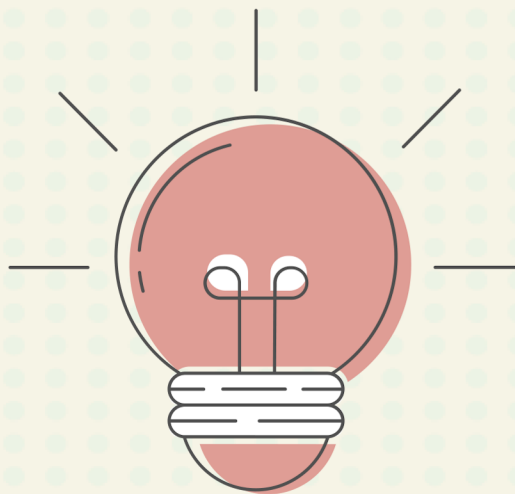
- What is a coping skill (action) and why is personalization important?
- What actions (coping skills) can help me right now (short-term)?
- What actions (coping skills) can help me in the future (long-term)?
- How do I apply these actions (coping skills)?

By the end, you'll be able to...

- Understand more about the action you are choosing and why
- Choose to change your coping skills (actions), if it serves you.

Note:

As you go through this, please refrain from judging any actions you take, even if you deem them “ineffective.” All actions we take are just there to try to help us. We need a balanced combination of both “effective” and “ineffective” actions to live a more balanced and fulfilled life.



Now, to help you understand what I am talking about, let's go through some definitions!



Definitions



Coping Skills



actions/ behaviors we do to help relieve our uncomfortable thoughts/ feelings/ emotions/ physical sensations. These actions can be effective or ineffective in truly relieving whatever feelings you're struggling with.

Effective Actions



usually are actions that feel uncomfortable when we start it, but leads to us feeling proud, accomplished, and more fulfilled. These are usually actions that are harder to choose, have delayed gratification, and are usually mindful and intentional. These are also called

Step Actions >>>>> Taking the steps is a bit uncomfortable at first, but ultimately makes us feel like we are challenging ourselves and moving forward.

Ineffective Actions



usually are actions that feel comfortable when you first start it, but eventually brings us back to that same feeling of uncomfortability. These are usually actions that are easier to choose, have instant gratification, and are usually impulsive, mindless, or "autopilot" actions. I call these actions

Carousel Actions >>>>> Getting on the carousel is fun and easy, and sometimes feels like we are gaining traction, but it really is taking us in circles and isn't moving us forward in the ways we want.



LET'S RECAP!



Effective Actions = Steps

Ineffective Actions = Carousel

*How do you know if you're choosing
the steps or the carousel?*

The only way to determine if our actions are effective (Steps) or ineffective (Carousel) is to be aware of why we are doing these actions.

This is referred to as **INTENTION**

We need to understand the intentions behind the actions we do. to understand if they are distracting us (Carousel) or if they are actually getting us to face our struggles with kindness and compassion (Steps).



*Now that we have gone through some
definitions, let's try to personalize your
coping strategies to work for you.*

Coping Skills Guide



Step 1 Identify the underlying uncomfortable thought(s), feeling(s), or emotion(s) that you're struggling with right now.

Step 2 Write a list of a few things that you already do that help you manage your emotions
Example: sleeping, going to the gym, watching tv, journaling, etc.

Step 3 Add things you may want to do in the future to that existing list

Step 4 Use the Worksheet on the following page to compare your reasons for choosing that action to determine if it is either a "steps" action or a "carousel" action.

Step 5 Review the actions written to ensure they are in the correct column (steps or Carousel)

- consider...*
- Intention: why am I doing this?
 - Am I doing this to ignore and avoid the underlying/ uncomfortable thought/ feeling, or am I facing it with self compassion, attempting to conquer it, or challenging myself to grow?

Important Notes



Note 1 **Any action can be taking the steps or the carousel.**

Example: Sleeping is a Steps action when your body is tired and needs to rest. However, sleeping can be a carousel action if you're napping to avoid the pile of dishes in the sink or the feelings you're not ready to sit with.

Note 2 **We NEED both the steps AND the carousel**

Balance is key. Neither is good or bad. The carousel is necessary sometimes when we are too tired to take the stairs. But remaining on the carousel for too long and going in circles will make you feel sick. If we do too much of either one, we risk either burning out or staying stagnant without growing into the person you truly are.

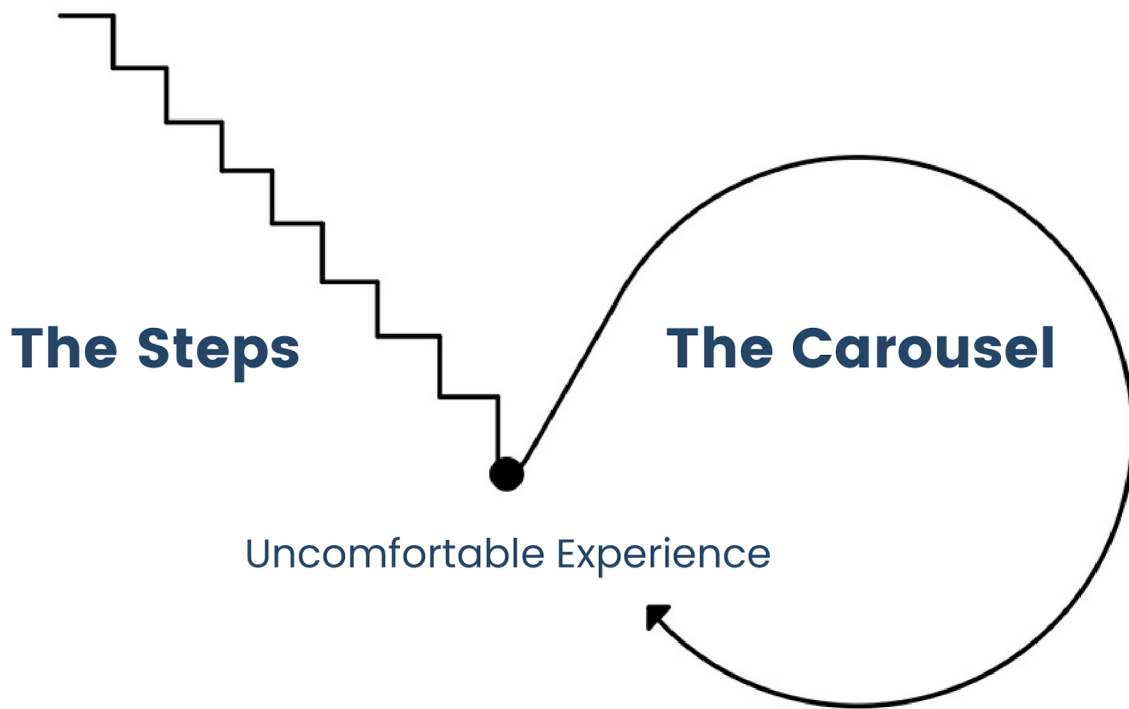
The Steps

- Can be challenging at first, but makes us feel proud and relieved when completed
- Usually Delayed gratification
- "Mindful action"
- Usually caring for a need (what you need to do for yourself, not necessarily what you want to do)

The Carousel

- The action feels fun at first, but once the action is over, the uncomfortable experience comes back
- Usually instant gratification
- "Mindless" action
- Usually avoiding a need (not what you need to do but more of what you want to do)

PERSONALIZING COPING SKILLS



The Steps

The Carousel

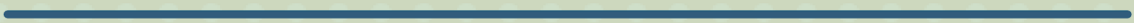
--	--



I hope this guide helps to look at the things you do in your own life to help you personalize the actions you choose to cope with things that don't feel good.



Stop trying to control how you feel, and instead take control of what you do.

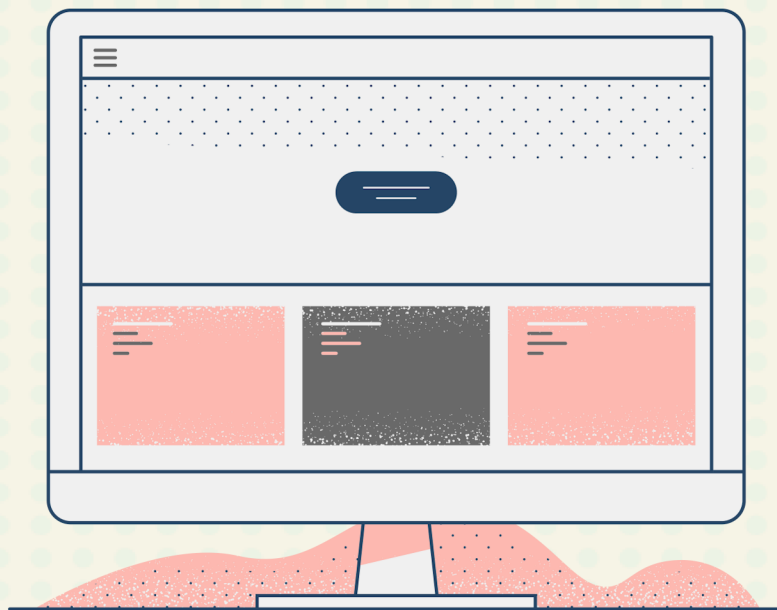


Russ Harris





Subscribe to our weekly newsletter!



Join our mailing list to receive the latest
information about our practice, upcoming
events and updates!

sign up now



www.healinghartwellness.com

