

Coping with Challenging Situations

A Process for Coping with Challenging Situations in 9 Steps

1. Recognize that there are two separate parts to a challenging situation: first, is the problem itself. Second, is your reaction to the problem. Separate these in your mind.
2. Acknowledge and identify what you are feeling and thinking in reaction to the problem.
3. Bring non-judgmental awareness to the feeling or reaction you are having. Don't try to explain it or make it go away. Just recognize it, breathe, and sit with the emotion. Notice what happens with the feeling as you accept it and allow it to be there. Bringing mindful attention to your emotions will influence how they are resolved.
4. Try to become aware of the source(s) of your reaction. Does your reaction stem from fear, guilt, loss, shame? What are the thoughts going through your mind? Are they accurate? Are your feelings telling you to do things that might make things worse rather than better? Are your feelings affecting your judgment and your ability to see the problem clearly? Ask these questions of yourself with curiosity, as if you were a reporter doing an investigation. Try to avoid judgements about the feelings you are having. Instead, bring compassion and acceptance to your feelings.
5. Now try to separate the problem from your emotions about the problem. Can you see your emotional state as separate from the problem? If you can see the situation clearly, you will be able to resolve it more effectively.
6. If your emotions are influencing your ability to see the problem clearly, go back to the previous steps until the feelings settle.
7. Break down the problem into manageable parts. Create an action plan. If there is nothing you can do to resolve the problem, then really do nothing. Doing nothing is sometimes as appropriate a response as doing something.
8. Bring mindful awareness to your emotions again. Does the action (or non-action) plan help calm your emotions? Can you do anything else to help calm your emotions—taking a walk, cooking, athletics, or other activities you enjoy?
9. When you feel calm and centered, consider your action (or non-action) plan again. Decide to either follow through with it or revise it. By acting mindfully when you can, whether it results in doing or non-doing, you will calm your mind, strengthen your spirit, and come to some form of peace and resolution.

Following the process described above, describe a challenging situation you want to learn to cope with more effectively, and work through the steps as outlined:

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Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Step 4:

Step 5:

Step 6:

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Step 7:

Step 8:

Step 9:
