Create Your Own Coping Skills

Participant Workbook | The Coping Skill Design Challenge

Our starting idea: A healthy coping skill helps us manage stress, difficult feelings, cravings, or urges without creating additional harm or long-term problems. It should support our well-being and ability to function.

Five questions to test your idea

1. Safety and long-term consequences — Does it avoid injury, unsafe substance use, harm to others, and consequences that make life harder later?

2. Managing rather than escaping — Does it help me tolerate an emotion, respond to an urge, or take a useful next step? A short break is fine when I return to what matters.

3. Supports well-being and functioning — Is it realistic for my health, finances, relationships, responsibilities, and recovery goals?

4. Appropriate for the situation — Can I use it where I am, with the time, privacy, and resources I actually have?

5. Flexible and repeatable — Can I adjust it if it does not work? What is my backup strategy or person to contact?

Examples: What would you change?

Example A: “I avoid everyone for a week whenever I feel overwhelmed.” What might help immediately? What might create problems later?

_____

_____

Example B: “I go for a ten-minute walk, notice what I feel, and contact someone if the urge stays strong.” What criteria does this meet?

_____

_____

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Design your own coping skill

Step 1 — Choose a situation

What feeling, stressor, craving, or urge do you want to manage? (You can invent a fictional example.)

_____

_____

_____

Step 2 — Give your skill a name

_____

_____

Step 3 — Describe the steps

What will you do first, next, and last? How long will it take? What will you need?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step 4 — Test it against the criteria

1. Safety and long-term consequences — Yes / Not yet / Unsure

My reason or change: _____

2. Managing rather than escaping — Yes / Not yet / Unsure

My reason or change: _____

3. Supports well-being and functioning — Yes / Not yet / Unsure

My reason or change: _____

4. Appropriate for the situation — Yes / Not yet / Unsure

My reason or change: _____

5. Flexible and repeatable — Yes / Not yet / Unsure

My reason or change: _____

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Revise, Practice, and Plan

Step 5 — Improve your strategy

What would make it safer, more practical, or more useful over time?

_____

_____

_____

Step 6 — Try a brief version (optional)

Before: How strong is the feeling or urge (0–10)? ____ After: ____

What did you notice? The number does not need to decrease for the practice to be useful.

_____

_____

_____

Step 7 — Make it flexible

A two-minute version of my skill:

_____

_____

A backup strategy if it does not help:

_____

_____

Someone or somewhere I can turn for support:

_____

_____

Step 8 — My next opportunity

When might I try this? What would remind me?

_____

_____

Group reflection (sharing is optional)

• What makes your skill different from simply avoiding the problem?

_____

• What might work well for someone else but not for you?

_____

• What is one sign that you should seek additional support?

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Reminder

Healthy coping is flexible, personal, and not always immediately comfortable. It is okay to rest, take a short break, and ask for help. Skills can support treatment but do not replace medical care or emergency help. If you are in immediate danger, call emergency services; in the U.S., 988 offers crisis support.

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