Build Your Own Scenario

The Coping Challenge | Participant Activity Packet

An interactive team activity for coping skills, practical problem-solving, and collaborative decision-making.

Your mission

Create an original, realistic situation involving a difficult decision. Identify the central problem, select and rank ten useful coping resources, and exchange your scenario with another team. Explain your reasoning rather than trying to find one universally correct answer.

Suggested topics

Topic	Example challenge
Substance use	Unexpected exposure to substances at a gathering
Emotional regulation	Strong feelings during a disagreement
Depression	Low motivation and increasing isolation
Anxiety	Uncertainty before an important appointment
BPD-related coping	Fear of abandonment after a disagreement
Anger management	Responding to perceived disrespect
Healthy relationships	Setting boundaries or communicating needs
Stress or grief	Multiple setbacks or a difficult anniversary

Activity steps

1. Read the completed example. 2. Create a 15–20 sentence scenario with at least two obstacles. 3. Identify the central challenge. 4. Choose and rank ten resources. 5. Exchange scenarios and propose a safe action plan. 6. Discuss differences and reflect.

Group boundaries: Use fictional characters and avoid identifying personal information or graphic details. Seek facilitator support if the discussion becomes distressing.

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Completed Example: The Unexpected Change

Topic: Anxiety and emotional regulation

Jordan has been working hard to manage anxiety and improve emotional regulation. For several weeks, Jordan has been preparing for an important job interview. The interview represents an opportunity to become more financially independent and establish a stable routine. On the morning of the interview, Jordan receives an email explaining that the appointment has been moved to a different location. The new location is unfamiliar and approximately forty minutes away. Jordan begins worrying about arriving late and making a poor impression. While preparing to leave, Jordan realizes that the car has a flat tire. Frustration quickly turns into panic. Jordan starts thinking, “Nothing ever works out for me,” and considers canceling the interview altogether. A friend offers to help arrange transportation, but Jordan feels embarrassed about needing assistance. Jordan begins pacing, breathing rapidly, and imagining everything that could go wrong. The interview begins in ninety minutes. Jordan has enough time to explore alternative transportation, but the anxiety is making it difficult to think clearly.

The challenge

How can Jordan manage the emotional response, evaluate available options, and make a decision that supports personal goals?

Central problem

Jordan is experiencing heightened anxiety following unexpected setbacks. The immediate challenge is to manage distress sufficiently to make practical decisions about transportation and the interview.

Example coping toolbox

Rank	Resource	Why it may help
1	Contact the interviewer	Ask about timing flexibility
2	Accept trusted help	Arrange practical assistance
3	Problem-solving checklist	Identify alternatives and next steps
4	Slow breathing	Support calmer decision-making
5	Grounding technique	Refocus attention on the present
6	Supportive self-talk	Challenge all-or-nothing thinking
7	Review personal goals	Reconnect with motivation
8	Brief mindfulness	Notice thoughts without reacting
9	Write down concerns	Separate controllable from uncontrollable

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Rank	Resource	Why it may help
10	Calming music	Provide comfort while planning

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Example: Action Plan and Reflection

Action plan

Jordan could first contact the interviewer to explain the transportation problem, then accept the friend’s assistance while considering other transportation options. If anxiety interferes with decisions, Jordan could try slow breathing or grounding. If travel remains impossible, Jordan could ask to reschedule.

Example reflection

Greatest challenge: Managing anxiety while making a time-sensitive decision.

Three most important resources: Contacting the interviewer, accepting help, and using structured problem-solving.

Possible impulsive response: Canceling immediately without considering available solutions.

Main takeaway: Emotional coping and practical problem-solving can work together. These rankings are illustrative, not universally correct.

Now create your own scenario

Follow the same structure: describe the context, introduce complications, end with a decision, identify the problem, rank ten resources, and develop a response.

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Worksheet 1: Create Your Scenario

Team: _____ Topic: _____

Scenario title: _____

Write approximately 15–20 sentences. Include a character, background, thoughts and emotions, at least two obstacles, and a decision the character must make.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Central problem

What is the primary challenge?

_____
_____

What makes the situation more difficult?

_____
_____

What might happen if the character responds impulsively or avoids the problem?

_____
_____

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Worksheet 2: The Coping Toolbox

Team: _____ Scenario: _____

Choose ten coping strategies, resources, or supports. Rank them from 1 (most useful) to 10 (least useful) for your specific scenario. Each rank should be used once.

Rank	Resource or strategy	Why it may help
1	_____	_____
2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____
4	_____	_____
5	_____	_____
6	_____	_____
7	_____	_____
8	_____	_____
9	_____	_____
10	_____	_____

Explain your choices

Why did you select the top three?

_____
_____
_____

Why was the last resource ranked lowest? Could its usefulness change?

_____
_____
_____

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Worksheet 3: The Scenario Exchange

Responding team: _____

Scenario title: _____ Created by: _____

Understand the challenge

What is the central problem?

_____
_____
_____

What are the main risks or obstacles?

_____
_____
_____

Develop your response

First action: _____

Second action: _____

Third action: _____

Why did you choose these actions?

_____
_____
_____

Alternative plan

What could the character do if the first approach fails?

_____
_____
_____

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Worksheet 4: Reflection and Group Discussion

Team: _____ Date: _____

Which coping strategies did both teams identify?

_____
_____
_____

Which strategies differed, and why?

_____
_____
_____

Did either team overlook an important safety or practical consideration?

_____
_____
_____

What changed in your thinking after hearing another team’s approach?

_____
_____
_____

Which scenario would you like to revisit in a future group, and why?

_____
_____
_____

Our team’s main takeaway:

_____
_____
_____

Optional scenario vote: _____

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