

A scenic view of a beach framed by two trees. The background shows a blue sky with light clouds, a line of green trees, a blue body of water, and a sandy beach. The text is overlaid on this scene.

# **Coping Strategies**

by  
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**7 Ways  
to Help Build  
Resilience!**

*Coping Strategies*

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# **Contents**

## **Foreword**

Page 1

## **Strategy 1**

### **Relaxing with Slow Music**

Page 2

## **Strategy 2**

### **Preparing Your Mind and Body to Rest**

Page 3

## **Strategy 3**

### **Picturing the Future You Want**

Page 5

## **Strategy 4**

### **Improving Self-Care**

Page 7

## **Strategy 5**

### **Refocusing on The Positive**

Page 10

## **Strategy 6**

### **Forgiving**

Page 13

## **Strategy 7**

### **Finding Supportive Others**

Page 18

## **Conclusion**

Page 20

## **Afterword**

Page 21

# Foreword

How do you take care of yourself emotionally when you find yourself feeling frustrated, upset, or distressed? A common solution is to talk with a counselor.

In addition, there are **coping strategies** that you can learn and practice at home. If you are already in counseling, coping strategies may help you to better care for your emotional wellbeing in between counseling sessions, and after you complete counseling.

Perhaps you have already mastered some coping strategies and found them useful. I hope that you may find additional help in the following pages.

Deborah J. Armstrong, Psy.D.

# Strategy 1

## Relaxing with Slow Music

When a person listens to music that is **60 beats per minute** (60 bpm), the person's heart rate begins to synchronize to the beat of the music, one beat per second. This is a **resting heart rate**.

You can test this for yourself by setting aside some quiet time, putting on music that is 60 bpm, listening for five minutes to allow your heart rate to adjust to the rhythm of the music, then taking your pulse.

As a person's heart rate slows, **blood pressure decreases, breathing slows, and brain waves enter an alpha pattern associated with relaxation**, which may then facilitate falling sleep. This is the concept behind a slow lullaby, and the time-honored practice of singing a baby to sleep. Research suggests that in some cases music may be as powerful as medication.

You may find that you relax more deeply if you lie down instead of sitting while you listen. Some people find that slow music facilitates a transition to sleep.

### Caution

Do not use slow music to relax while driving or operating machinery.

## Strategy 2

### Preparing Your Mind and Body to Rest

Preparing your mind and body to rest may facilitate sleep. Adequate rest correlates with improved cognitive function and task performance.

#### **What steps can I take to prepare my mind and body to rest?**

A first step toward preparing your mind and body to rest is to remove distractions from your environment. You may want to turn your phone off at night, or silence the ringer, so that your rest is not interrupted by it. If there is a television or music going in the background, you may want to turn it off so that it doesn't compete with your plan to prepare to rest. An exception would be slow music that might facilitate relaxation.

Calm your mind by focusing on things that are positive:

What happened today that you are happy about?

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What did you accomplish today that you are thankful to have done?

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What happened today that you might like to handle differently another time?

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See that event as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Consider learning and practicing a relaxation exercise as part of your preparation to sleep.

## Strategy 3

### Picturing the Future That You Want

You can picture the future that you want. You can create a video of the future that you desire in your mind.

For example, let your mind go forward to a time and a task that you need to accomplish later today or tomorrow. What outcome do you want? What do you want to see happen?

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How do you want to be feeling in your body while you do this task?

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What do you need to do now to position yourself for that outcome later?

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How would you feel if you were accomplishing that task in the way that you desire to accomplish it?

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Now picture yourself handling that task in the way that you would like to handle it. What would you be thinking if you were accomplishing that task in the way that you would like to accomplish it?

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What name would you give to your video?

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Look back over your answers. Run the video in your mind from beginning to end. Add music and sound effects and special effects if you want.

You may replay this video in your mind multiple times during the day as you prepare to complete the task. Let yourself bask in the prospect of performing this task in a way that you feel proud of.

# Strategy 4

## Improving Self-Care

**What am I already doing to help care for myself?**

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**What more can I do to promote a good outcome?**

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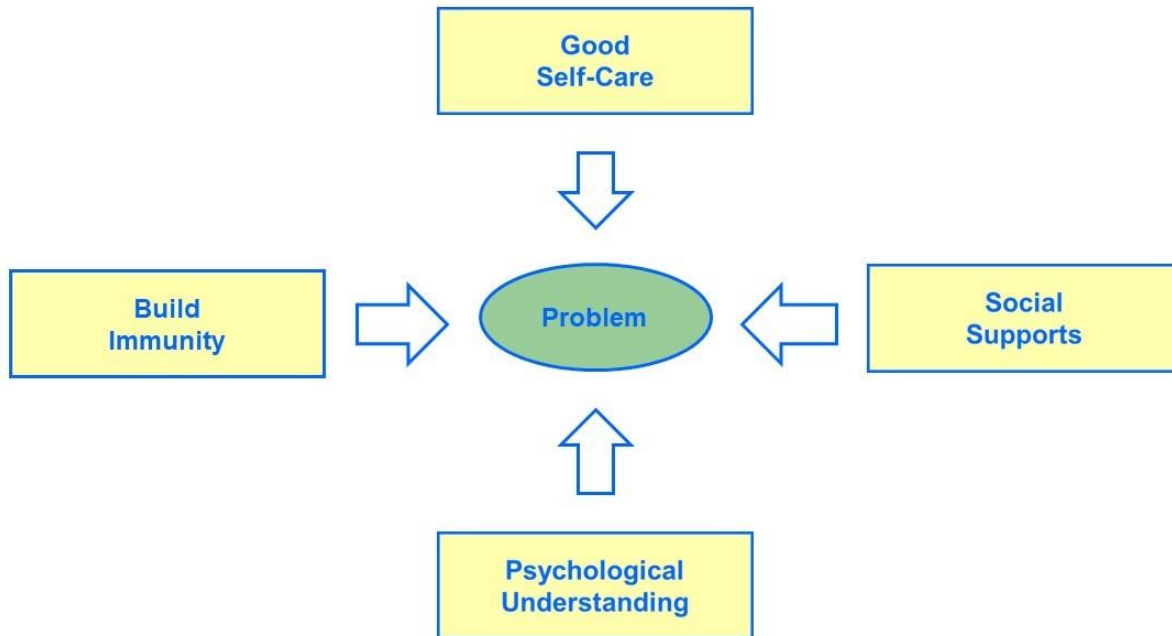
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# Multimodal Treatment

I move more effectively toward wholeness as I bring multiple resources to bear on a problem. These resources may be natural or supernatural.



## I exercise Good Self-Care.

1. I eat foods that are good for me at the proper time and in proper amounts.
2. I hydrate. I keep pure water with me.
3. I rest. Even as I go about my day, I rest inside. I operate from a place of rest inside me.
4. I move. I walk. I bike. I dance through the day.
5. I read uplifting material. I watch uplifting videos.

## **I treasure my Social Supports.**

1. I stay in touch with trusted friends by phone, by email, and in person.
2. I benefit from regular participation in a group with others who value me and who have my best interests at heart.
3. I am part of something that is bigger than me. I do something every day to benefit others in need.

## **I develop my Psychological Understanding.**

1. I monitor my thinking. I focus on things that are lovely and good. I identify and evict self-sabotaging thoughts. I replace them with thoughts that move me forward toward my goals.
2. I choose behaviors that move me forward toward my goals. I celebrate my successes.

## **I build my Immunity.**

1. I educate myself about wholistic approaches to health, including natural supplements.
2. I am willing to take medicine, if indicated.

# Strategy 5

## Refocusing on The Positive

Some people have found themselves preoccupied with a past event long after it is over. They have spent time ruminating that could be more fruitfully spent on other things.

### How can I stop overthinking?

The first step is to identify negative thoughts. Negative thoughts most often fall into four categories:

1. Negative thoughts about the self, leading to feeling down on the self, or to self-condemnation.
2. Negative thoughts about others, which can lead to blaming.
3. Negative thoughts about the world in general, which can be demotivating.
4. Negative thoughts about the future.

The second step is to challenge the negative thought. In what ways is the negative thought not true, or not entirely true?

(A counseling approach that has a good track record of helping people learn to challenge negative thoughts is Cognitive Processing Therapy, also known as CPT. For more information on CPT, you may visit [www.drdeboraharmstrong.com/cpt](http://www.drdeboraharmstrong.com/cpt).)

The third step is to identify a more constructive thought and refocus on the more constructive thought. In other words, you replace the negative thought with a constructive thought. This is the most effective way to stop unwanted thoughts from returning, as you fill your mind with thoughts that promote wholeness and more effective decision-making.

Examples of constructive thoughts include:

- I can take the next step toward who I want to be.
- I can ask for and receive help.

## **Refocusing on the Positive**

Everyone has challenges. These challenges may range from a childhood trauma to a difficult conversation yesterday with a friend, family member, or coworker.

The impact of the event itself may be compounded by subsequent overthinking, or ruminating. The initial impact of the event is made worse if negative beliefs about the self, negative beliefs about others, or negative beliefs about the future, have come to feel true following the event.

The growth opportunity that comes with each challenge is to identify and overcome those negative, and not entirely accurate, beliefs. (To learn more about evidence-based psychotherapy approaches to overcoming the impact of trauma, you may visit [drdeboraharmstrong.com/emdr](http://drdeboraharmstrong.com/emdr) and [drdeboraharmstrong.com/cpt](http://drdeboraharmstrong.com/cpt).)

Meanwhile, at home, you can practice shifting your focus away from the negative. This strategy is a combination of thought-stopping, and refocusing on something that is positive and uplifting.

# Strategy 6

## Forgiving

### What is Forgiveness? Does Forgiveness Mean That I Have to Get Hurt All Over Again?

#### Forgiveness is *not*...

- Forgiveness does *not* mean putting ourselves back in the same situation with a person who is unrepentant to get hurt all over again. Even the Apostle Paul advised people to be cautious toward Alexander the coppersmith, who had done Paul “much harm.”
- Forgiveness is *not* the same as reconciliation.

Reconciliation can happen when the other person repents, acknowledges that their behavior caused harm, and stops engaging in the harmful behavior.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, can be extended unilaterally, even if the offending person doesn't want or receive the forgiveness offered.



## **Forgiveness is...**

- cancelling the debt the other person owes us. I do not require them to make amends.
- recognizing that the other person has a free will. I do not require them to be kind to me or even to acknowledge that they did wrong. However, if they persist in harming me, I may implement consequences and remove myself from them.

## **Why do we forgive?**

- Because it hurts us if we don't forgive. Holding onto anger and mentally rehearsing the wrong done imprisons a person in an unhealthy thought matrix.
- Because unforgiveness robs me if I allow it. Unforgiveness is like taking out a loan at exorbitant interest and making daily payments of interest and never seeing the principal go down. Every minute that a person spends ruminating on the evil that was done to them is forfeited. Those minutes can add up to an hour, or a year, or a lifetime of lost opportunities.

## **What about confrontation?**

Sometimes we need to find a kind and loving way to let a person who hurt us know that a behavior hurt, so that they have the opportunity to try a new behavior and grow.

## **How Can I Forgive?**

### **First, Get Current on My Own Stuff**

I've been forgiven much myself. If I have hurt someone, I need to:

1. Admit it.
2. Apologize.
3. Ask forgiveness.

Am I current on all the things that I myself need to confess and apologize and ask forgiveness for?

## **Second, Consider Dropping It**

If it is a petty offense against me, I have the ability to just drop it. I can choose to ignore it.

## **Third, Avoid Paybacks**

Even if it's a BIG and deliberate offense against me, if I try to pay it back, I have already lost. If I descend to the adversary's level, no one wins.

## **Should I Confront?**

How do I decide if the situation requires me to confront the one opposing me?

1. Was the intensity of my reaction greater than the situation warranted? For example, did the situation remind me of something that I went through years ago that has never been resolved? Am I more irritable than usual because I haven't had enough sleep?
2. How confident am I that my perception of this situation is accurate?
3. On a scale from zero to 10, where zero is not essential at all, and 10 is the most important that I can imagine, how essential is it to me to confront this? Am I willing to lose the relationship over this?

4. Is the offense out of character, or have I observed a pattern of behaving that has been interfering with the harmony that I desire in this relationship?
5. Have I thought about what stressors the other person may currently be going through? Is it possible that the other person has a history of trauma?
6. If I take no action, how likely is it that the offense will recur and hurt others?

## Reference

The section, How Can I Forgive?, was adapted from a message on forgiveness given by Pastor George Bowen of Converge Church, Moorestown, New Jersey, on October 18, 2015.

## **Strategy 7**

### **Finding Supportive Others**

**Who has been supportive of my goals?**

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**What interactions with others  
have I found encouraging and uplifting?**

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# Finding Supportive Others

Healthy communication stimulates the mind and protects against cognitive deterioration. You may already engage in some of the following social activities. If not, you may consider:

- Walking and talking with a friend or neighbor.
- Inviting friends or family to dinner.
- Connecting by phone or video chat with supportive others.
- Joining a chat group that is focused on your particular area of interest.
- Joining a book club.
- Signing up for an interactive online class.

List below other ideas that come to mind:

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# Conclusion

I am grateful for your desire to deal more effectively with life's challenges. Thank you for considering the strategies within these pages. I hope you found something here that was useful to you.

I wonder what in this book you found the most helpful. I would welcome your feedback. Please feel free to call me at 856-993-2814 to let me know what you found helpful, or if there is anything that you would change to make this book more useful to you and others.

# Afterword

There's more.

A FREE course on **Coping Strategies**, including spiritual strategies to help overcome challenges, is available online at [www.HisWordHealsToday.net](http://www.HisWordHealsToday.net).

Would you like to move Beyond Coping? To enroll in the self-paced, online course, **Beyond Coping**, including 6 audio sessions, and teaching on both psychological and spiritual resources, visit:

<https://HisWordHealsToday.net/courses>.



