



# Navigating Stress: Coping Mechanisms for Youth

Coping mechanisms are strategies that can help people manage stress, reduce anxiety, and uncomfortable emotions.

They can be characterized as:

## **Adaptive coping strategies –**

Making changes that reduce stress and promote resilience and well-being.



## **Maladaptive coping strategies –**

Provide short-term relief without solving the underlying problem.



Maladaptive coping strategies can often worsen stress and anxiety over time, leading to negative long-term mental and physical health consequences.

Examples of maladaptive coping include:

- Aggressive outbursts
- Social isolation
- Excessive screen time
- Obsessing over problems
- Binge eating
- Substance use

## **The risks of using substances to cope:**

Young people may turn to alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and opioids to cope with stress, anxiety, or depression. While these substances may provide temporary relief, they can lead to serious health issues and an increased risk of developing a substance use disorder.

- **Alcohol:** Alcohol can exacerbate anxiety and depression over time, leading to dependency and other health issues.
- **Nicotine (Tobacco/Vaping):** Vaping can lead to nicotine dependency, respiratory problems, and increased anxiety.
- **Cannabis:** Cannabis use can impair cognitive function, increase anxiety, and contribute to psychological disorders.
- **Opioids:** Opioid misuse can lead to overdose and severe health consequences in both the short and long term.



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Adaptive strategies can be behavioural, cognitive, emotional, or active.

## Behavioural

Actions taken to reduce stress through physical activities and healthy lifestyle choices.



## Emotional

Methods that are used to help manage emotions and improve mood.



## Cognitive

Techniques that involve changing thought patterns to manage stress and anxiety.



**It's never too late to start developing healthy coping skills in kids.**

**Adaptive coping strategies can effectively manage a young person's stress and improve their overall well-being. These techniques focus on positive, proactive actions that can help youth adapt to stressful situations and maintain long-term mental and physical health.**

- Listening to calming music
- Talking to a trusted peer
- Journaling
- Maintaining a regular sleep schedule
- Balanced diet
- Physical exercise

## Promoting Adaptive Coping in Youth

Parents can promote their child's use of adaptive coping strategies to cope with stress and other challenges by:

- Enhancing family support
- Positive role modelling
- Encouraging positive peer relationships
- Educating about substance use risks
- Supporting a child's school and community engagement

Discover strategies to have open and honest conversations with youth about the effects of early drug use at [drugfreekidscanada.org](http://drugfreekidscanada.org)

