



# COPING SKILLS

How to challenge your thinking to better cope with stress.

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## What are coping skills?

Coping skills are a tool to help us understand why we react to certain stressful situations in the way we do. Coping skills support us to have more control over the way we react and respond.

### Why are coping skills important for parents with Postnatal Depression?

As a parent we face a range of stressful situations and as a person experiencing depression, we are more likely to have a negative response.

Stress is a part of life, but when we are unable to cope with it, stress can become harmful and affect the way we cope with life and the way we parent our children.

Developing coping skills will help us to understand the stressful situations we face and reduce the unhelpful thoughts and negative feelings.

## What is a stressful situation?

A stressful situation is any occurrence that interrupts the otherwise typical flow of our days and prompts a strong emotional response.

A stressful situation might be something that happens often, like getting your children ready and out the door in the morning. Or it might be a once-in-a-lifetime event, like a car accident.

## What am I feeling?

Sometimes it's hard to know exactly what we're feeling. Taking the time to identify our feelings and give them a name is a key step to developing coping skills.

### Words that describe feelings:

- Angry
- Ashamed
- Tense
- Annoyed
- Unhappy
- Jealous
- Anxious
- Uneasy
- Enraged
- Happy
- Exhilarated
- Irritated
- Joyful
- Excited
- Frightened
- Panicky
- Frustrated
- Scared
- Flat
- Tired
- Nervous
- Cheerful
- Sad

## How our feelings work



When we encounter a stressful situation, our feelings arise out of our *thoughts* about that situation, not the situation itself. Often these thoughts are so automatic and happen so fast, that we aren't aware of them.

For example, when we are driving and we skid on ice or gravel, the resulting fear and tension is not because of the skid itself, but because our brain thinks "we're going to crash and get hurt". These thoughts cause the fear. In that moment, we typically don't register those thoughts, just the emotional and physical response.

Our automatic thoughts play an important part in our emotional wellbeing. Being aware of our thoughts is the first step towards feeling better.

## Unhelpful thinking

When we experience an unhelpful emotion like anger or anxiety, it is often preceded by unhelpful thoughts. There are 10 common unhelpful thinking styles and being able to identify these in ourselves can help us to challenge an unhelpful thought.

A brief overview of these are found on the next page.

## Challenging unhelpful thinking

Ask yourself:

- Is this true?
- Where is the evidence that supports this?
- Is there any evidence that disproves this thought?
- Are there facts I'm ignoring or I've overlooked?
- What other explanations could there be?
- How realistic are my thoughts?
- How might someone else view the situation?
- What might someone else say?
- Realistically, what is the likelihood of this happening?
- Is it helpful for me to think this way?
- If I weren't depressed, how might I view the situation differently?

**All or nothing thinking**

- We see things in black and white only. E.g. When we are not perfect at something we think we must be a failure.

**Overgeneralisation**

- We take a single negative event and extrapolate a never-ending pattern of defeat. E.g. When our children misbehave we think that they are *always* misbehaving.

**Mental filter**

- We filter out the positive and focus just on the negative. E.g. We think that a fight in the car on the way home *ruins* the otherwise enjoyable day.

**Jumping to conclusions**

- We come to a negative interpretation of a situation even when there is no real evidence to support this. E.g. Our boss asks to see us and we immediately think we're in trouble or about to be fired.

**Catastrophising**

- We blow things out of proportion and view the situation as awful even when the reality of the problem is small. E.g. We yell at our child once and think that we're a terrible parent in all ways.

**Emotional reasoning**

- We assume that our negative feelings reflect the way things really are. E.g. Our partner is quiet one evening and we think it's because they don't love us anymore. We don't consider the other reasons.

**Should statements**

- We tell ourselves that we *should* or *must* do something. This puts unnecessary pressure on us. E.g. We *should* be making the beds every day. If we don't manage this one day we feel angry or defeated.

**Labelling and mislabelling**

- We label ourselves and others. E.g. we label ourselves as bad parents and only pay attention to the evidence that supports this.

**Personalisation**

- We blame ourselves for everything that goes wrong. E.g. Our children get hurt and we blame ourselves for not watching them closer or teaching them better.

**Magnification and minimisation**

- We magnify the positive attributes of others and minimise our own. E.g. We see other parents as capable but when we do something great ourselves we explain it away as a fluke or an accident.

