

NEWSLETTER

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Let Us Relax, Distract, and Cope

Life happens; good, bad, and ugly so it is important that you are armed with skills to manage and maintain your mental health. If you master these three skills – it will be the most positive thing you can do for yourself in promoting self-care. Unfortunately, they are often not fully understood and misused so let us review, shall we?

Relaxation skills should do exactly what it says, relax you. For optimal wellness and self-care, it's best to practice this skill consistently. After performing you should feel peaceful, calm and have a quiet mind. Individuals will have their own unique idea of what relaxes them and there are no rules, just ensure that the goal is to have a quiet mind in the end. While this may be the easiest skill of the three, the next can be a little tricky.

A distraction skill is meant to do exactly what it says – distract you – but only temporarily. When used properly, the distraction skill will allow you to set aside an experience in the "temporary file" of your brain until you can cope with it later. This allows you to move forward in the moment and perform the tasks at hand without disturbance. Unfortunately, this is the skill that is too often misunderstood and misused. If an individual is “distracting” to avoid, bury, or try to forget about their thoughts, feelings, and emotions it is eventually going to wreak havoc in the brain often presenting itself in the form of stress or anxiety. Correctly used, the distraction skill is the perfect complement to the most important skill of the three – coping.

Everyone in the family, regardless of age, should develop these skills, as they will remain valuable throughout their lives.

I like to call it “data dumping.” Coping skills require that you to be honest in expressing your thoughts, feelings and emotions and emptying your brain of them all. Journaling, talking aloud, creating a song or piece of artwork that expresses your emotions, thoughts and feelings are good examples of how to cope. No matter the means you may choose it is imperative that when utilizing this skill, that you focus on your thoughts, your feelings, and your emotions. This is not the time to solve a problem or be concerned about another’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions – it is all about you and what you are experiencing. Problem solving and dealing with others can come later when your brain is clear-headed.

SCENARIO

Your boss comes into your office 15 minutes before a big meeting and expresses anger that the department did not meet income expectations. You attempt to discuss his concerns, but he ignores you and promptly exits your office. You cannot allow your emotions to impact your performance in the meeting so you...

- ▶ **Relaxation:** Take three deep breaths (in through nose, out through mouth) to calm your entire system.
- ▶ **Distraction:** Write down on paper a quick note to yourself “I am so mad right now I could just slap him. He is an idiot, will not listen and behaved like a child – I will cope with this later.” You put the slip of paper in your pocket and return focus to the important meeting.
- ▶ **Coping:** When you arrive home take your dog, and the slip of paper, for a walk. While walking you can tell your dog about the incident, you can honestly express your thoughts, feelings, and emotions - talk until you have nothing else to say and your brain is empty. Take a deep breath and move forward with nightly routine. You can begin processing the problem with a clear mind tomorrow.



As a therapist I utilize these skills every day. Because of these skills I am emotionally healthy for all my clients. I have a dog and her name is Latte. Latte is a good listener; she knows all my secrets and she's not a gossip.