

Something about...

Coping Strategies

This is just a quick introduction to get you started and to get you thinking about the strategies you may be using most often. We need to challenge our interpretation of our reality and this is not an easy task, but it is helpful and the intention of this short podcast is to introduce you to some of the coping strategies which you may be using to deflect or face your reality and give you a sense of security. Ultimately that is why we use coping strategies - it helps us to deal with the challenges we face. Several coping strategies have been identified, but here I want to focus on the least and most beneficial in my experience and own research as well as other researchers' findings.

One of the very common coping strategies people use is called avoidance coping, the opposite of 'Deal With It'. I have spent many years researching avoidance coping strategies specifically because it interests me and aligns well with the 'Deal With It' principles I have been developing over the years. In essence employing avoidance coping means you are not dealing with something you should be dealing with. It could be conflict avoidance, emotional avoidance or just general avoidance. You avoid dealing with things, people, challenges, thoughts, emotions, etc. Although it may seem to help you - and it may, in fact, be helping you in the short-term - the research results, including my own research and experience, show that it simply is not beneficial in the longer term.

People may avoid dealing with things for different reasons. For example, if you have to deal with victims in an accident it is beneficial to not focus on your immediate negative thoughts and emotions, but rather to get on with the task of helping them and saving them. However, if you have not dealt with those emotions, thoughts, etc and still continue to have negative feelings, thoughts, memories, etc long after the event you are most likely not being proactive and this could have negative health consequences, both physically and psychologically. If you need to find help to deal with it, you should do what you need to. Get the help you need

to help build your repertoire of coping strategies. Avoidance coping leads to a limited and limiting repertoire of coping strategies and when it is the only strategy you use to deal with challenges in life it becomes maladaptive avoidance coping, which by name tells us that it is not good for you. My own research and experience has also shown that maladaptive avoidance is not beneficial.

On the other hand, one of the most beneficial coping strategies I have heard of and seen over the years is detached coping. The work done by Professor Derek Roger produced consistent results in both laboratory and natural settings. Professor Roger started the work in a world renowned stress research unit at the University of York in the United Kingdom about 30 years ago and continued the work when he moved to New Zealand and while he was Adjunct Professor at the University of Canterbury. The positive impact of detached coping can be seen in both psychological and physical health outcomes.

Detached coping may initially sound like a cold and clinical view of the world and that one separates oneself from the events in our lives. But in reality detached coping means seeing things for what they are. Seeing things in perspective and not allowing emotions to cloud your judgment. A molehill is just a molehill and we need not make a mountain out of it. I have also collected my own data some years ago and the results showed a similar positive impact in working adults as well as students from various ethnic backgrounds. It is also what we call a 'stable factor' in that it replicates in various samples regardless of ethnicity, age or gender.

So in summary, avoidance is sometimes beneficial and could help you survive short-term dangerous or challenging and life-threatening circumstances, however, in the longer term and especially when avoidance is the only coping strategy used, it has deleterious effects and it doesn't lead to personal growth. Detached coping, on the other hand, means that you see things for what they are and as they are. Seeing things as they are means you can prepare for it better. In other words, preparing to climb a mountain when you only need to get over a molehill is a tremendous waste of resources and energy. Similarly preparing to climb over a molehill when you should be preparing to climb a mountain would mean that you go into the situation unprepared and that could also have negative consequences.

I hope this summary of avoidance and detached coping will help you to start thinking about the coping strategies you have been using up until now and to reflect on a better way of responding to challenges. There is always room for improvement and we should all keep practicing and developing our coping skills. Developing coping strategies must be a deliberate activity. You need to, like anything else you would like to accomplish, prioritize it, schedule it and do it. Keep going. You are far more resilient than you might think you are and if you need to find some help to get you over the line, please do so. There are many experts all over the world, even where you live, who could help you. Be sure to listen to or look at more of the material on our site and get in touch if you have questions or would like to book a session.

