

## Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

# Coping Mechanisms and When They Become Harmful

*After experiencing stressful situations, many people turn to coping mechanisms to distract themselves. There are both positive and negative coping mechanisms. Understanding the difference and choosing positive, adaptive strategies is vital for developing healthy habits and relieving long term stress.*

### Difference between adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms

- **Adaptive** coping mechanisms are positive, healthy, and reduce short term and long-term stress
  - Examples of adaptive coping mechanisms include meditation, going for a walk, doing a hobby you enjoy, connecting and seeking support from friends and family, and talking to a counselor or mental health professional
- **Maladaptive** coping mechanisms are negative and harmful, involve avoiding problems and stressors, and are often unhealthy
  - Examples of maladaptive coping mechanisms include drinking excessive amounts of caffeine or alcohol, excessive sleep, chaotic eating habits, and compulsive spending
- *Although maladaptive mechanisms may reduce immediate stress, these strategies can cause future stressors and long physical and mental health concerns*

### Is my coping mechanism positive/adaptive?

- My coping mechanism is beneficial/neutral to my health
- My coping mechanism involves self-reflection or talking to others about my stressors/challenges
- My coping mechanism does **not** get in the way of my regular daily activities

*Both positive and negative coping mechanisms can become harmful and turn into an addiction. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, "Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease... people with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences."*

### Is my coping mechanism harmful or addictive?

- My coping mechanism is always on my mind, and it is hard to focus on other things
- I do not find joy in hobbies that used to interest me
- My coping mechanism is harmful to my health or will become destructive if I continue the behavior

### Additional resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National helpline 1-800-662-4357