

Healthy coping strategies

There are lots of different ways that we can cope with difficult thoughts, feeling and situations. Here we've listed a wide range of ideas suggested by young people. Everyone is different, so what works for one person might not work for another. You'll probably have further ideas you could add to these lists.

Some of these ideas will feel like a perfect fit, whilst others will seem ridiculous to you, it's just about seeing what works for YOU, we're all different. These ideas have all been suggested by people who've self-harmed in the past, so they worked for someone!

Venting BIG feelings

Sometimes our feelings become too much for us to bear. These ideas are all ones designed to help vent anger, frustration or other extreme feelings:

- Go somewhere quiet and scream
- Punch a punch bag
- Make a ball out of play dough and smash it
- Hurl lumps of ice at the ground and watch them smash
- Smash a watermelon
- Hammer nails into wood
- Play squash
- Tear up a magazine
- Write down what made you feel angry and scribble it out until the paper is worn through
- Dance like nobody is watching
- Play music loudly
- Bang drums or other percussion instruments
- Run up hill
- Write a letter to the person who has made you angry, venting your frustration (but don't send it)
- Cry
- Cut up an old piece of material
- Tear up cardboard
- Have a pillow fight with a wall
- Stamp your feet
- Snap sticks in half
- Sing very loudly

When feeling down or alone

These are ideas which might help someone when their mood is low – if they feel alone or deeply sad:

- Look at photographs of friends and family
- Think of the best day ever
- Tell someone about the best day ever
- Talk to someone trustworthy
- Call a helpline or use an online forum
- Listen to soothing music
- Take a walk in the garden, notice each tree and flower and try to learn their names
- Walk a dog
- Go to the park and swing, listen to the laughter of children playing
- Reread a favourite childhood book
- Watch silly videos of cats on YouTube
- Listen to a 'feel good' playlist of songs

Ideas for distraction

These are ideas designed to remove the focus from difficult thoughts and feeling to something more manageable:

- Watch something light-hearted on TV
- Go for a walk
- Call a friend for a chat
- Have a shower
- Do a jigsaw
- Find something beginning with every letter of the alphabet
- Write a letter or an email
- Read a book
- Sleep
- Learn the words to a new song
- Practice a musical instrument
- Curl up on a bean bag and watch the world go by
- Play a computer game
- Practice a new skill (e.g. speaking a language, juggling)
- Bake
- Sew or knit
- Build a card house or line of cards then knock it down
- Look for pictures in the clouds
- Do some cleaning
- Work in the garden, dead-head some flowers or do some weeding
- Fly a kite
- Watch out for birds and try to identify the different types
- Skim stones – how many bounces can you do?
- Write a blog post or journal entry

Ideas to give a feeling of control

Sometimes the world can feel out of control. Here are some non-harmful ways of gaining control and order for a few minutes:

- Put your books in height, alphabetical or colour order
- Plan your diary for the next week, build in rest or fun breaks
- Build something intricate like an Airfix or Lego model
- Paint by numbers
- Read a kids' 'choose your own adventure' book making all the 'wrong' choices
- Make bread from scratch
- Give your bedroom a facelift by shifting the furniture around
- Give your room a deep clean

Ideas working through confusing thoughts and feelings

These ideas can help people to start thinking a little more straight and begin to understand ourselves and what is going on around us:

- Write a poem called 'I don't understand'
- Paint a big, abstract, picture using poster paints
- Write down all the questions in your head
- Stop and work backwards through the last hour trying to answer the question 'what made me feel this way?'
- Express confused feelings through music

Ideas that won't be noticed in busy situations

Here are a few ideas that can help people manage difficult feelings without anyone even noticing:

- Scream silently in your head
- Imagine yourself in your favourite place with your favourite people
- Become aware of every part of your body in turn, think about your toes, then your ankles then your knees etc
- Breathe deeply and slowly, counting to five with each inhalation and each exhalation
- Recite a fact about each other person in the room in your head
- If you're amongst strangers, pick one and imagine what they did last Friday