

Cope ahead with difficult situations

Coping ahead helps us increase our positive emotions by preventing or lessening the impact of difficult situations through practicing or “rehearsing” mentally. With this worksheet, you can learn how to cope ahead so you can respond skillfully in challenging moments. We’ve provided an example on these 2 pages and the next 2 are blank.

1 Think through problem situations

Consider an upcoming or likely situation that will make you feel very emotional, threatened, or tempted to act on urges that would be unhelpful to you in the long run. Check the facts if you need to (would the situation be the problem, or your emotions about the situation?), then describe the problem in detail.

My aunt and uncle are tough to spend time with. They frequently call me and my siblings names, criticize how we look and act, and try to provoke fights. They say they’re “joking,” but their words are hurtful and disrespectful. However, it’s important to me to see my grandparents and other family members at an upcoming family reunion, so skipping the event to avoid them is not a good choice.

What emotions or urges would make dealing with this problem difficult?

Sometimes I feel the urge to cry or scream - both of which give them all the more reason to call me names. I’ve felt frustrated, hurt, resentful, and sad in past situations with them.

2 Plan your response

How could you best respond to this problem? Consider problem-solving, mindfulness, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness skills. Be specific and detailed.

If they get close to me, I can avoid them. If I can’t avoid them, I can use the DEAR MAN skill and say, “When you call me names like that, it’s insulting, and I don’t want to be around you. Stop calling me that.” Then be a broken record. I’ll need to stay confident and calm - almost like they’re kids acting out.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*



3 Imagine the situation

Imagine being in the situation, right now, as vividly as possible. Where are you? Who is there? What would you see, hear, and touch? How might you feel emotionally? What body sensations would you feel? You are welcome to write about it below, but it's most important to imagine *being* in the situation in real time.

I'm walking into the family reunion with my siblings. We spot my aunt and uncle across the room and casually walk towards my grandparents instead. While we're in conversation with them, my aunt and uncle shout at us from across the room as they walk up. I can feel my heart start to beat faster and the urge to clench my fists. They greet us with offensive names and comment on how we look, clearly trying to provoke us. My grandparents pretend they didn't hear.

4 Visualize success

Now imagine coping effectively. What would you feel, think, do, and say? How would you say it? If new problems come up, rehearse how you would respond. For an extra boost, rehearse how you would respond to the worst, most feared version of the situation. You are welcome to write about it below, but it's most important to imagine *being* in the situation in real time.

Even though I feel agitated and nervous, I keep my tone neutral and say, "Don't call us names like that. I really don't want to spend time around you when you do that." I keep this up even when they tell everyone around how we "can't take a joke." When they continue, I say, "You've told this 'joke' so many times over the years. Everyone's heard it. It's getting old." I keep being a broken record and appearing so calm and bored with their behavior that they wander off.

5 Relaxation

Finally, purposely engage in a relaxation exercise or activity. You might try progressive muscle relaxation, stretching, diaphragmatic breathing, using a mantra, taking a walk, etc.

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Cope Ahead

DBT: Emotion Regulation Skills

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What emotions or urges would make dealing with this problem difficult?

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How could you best respond to this problem? Consider problem-solving, mindfulness, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness skills. Be specific and detailed.

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To see the other parts of the ABC PLEASE skill, check out our [handout](#).

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

Search our collection of therapy worksheets by mental health topic, therapy modality, or demographic group. Our free, psychologist-developed worksheets make therapy exercises understandable and relevant to daily life. Find worksheets for help with ADHD, anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, and other common mental health challenges.