

Tips for Coping With Difficult Emotions



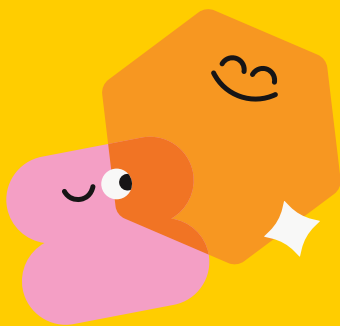
This resource touches on substance use and other addictions. Please know that this is not a substitute for any form of treatment. If you are concerned about your substance use, please speak with your doctor or mental health provider to get connected to care.

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We all use different coping methods when we're experiencing stress or low mood. Many people may rely on unhealthy behaviors—such as alcohol misuse, binge eating, gambling, or drugs—to achieve pleasure or happiness. Our brains track what is pleasurable, and they work really hard to make us seek those feelings again. When we engage in certain activities, there are temporary surges in our brain's chemistry that not only make us feel level, but momentarily elevated. Those who have relied on addictive unhealthy behaviors that feel rewarding will admittedly have a tough time stopping or managing them. If you find yourself struggling with certain behaviors, here are some actions you can take as a first step to overcoming those habits. **The first step is to identify your midline and bottom-line behaviors**

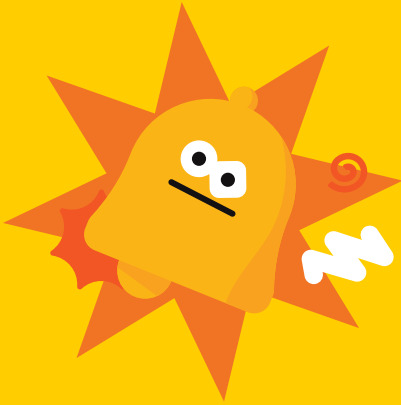
Midline behaviors.

These are behaviors or actions that are considered warning signs. This happens when a particular circumstance triggers an unhealthy coping method, before the point of no return



For example, if you're utilizing food as a substance (such as engaging in binge-eating) some midline behaviors might be overworking yourself to the point of stress so you turn to food even when you're not hungry (rather than taking healthy breaks before you reach the point of being overworked), or staying up late so that you can justify having a midnight snack (rather than establishing a sleep routine that doesn't involve snacking). You may find yourself not trying to turn away from giving in to those temptations, or even lying to others and being more secretive about your eating habits. An important step in identifying midline behaviors is understanding the circumstances under which you might be more vulnerable.

Bottom-line behaviors.



These are behaviors or actions that are past the warning sign stage, that, once engaged in, can lead to worsening or self-destructive consequences. You've entered a phase of needing active management and awareness of those behaviors, such as justifying the use of the substance and ignoring other activities that can help you overcome cravings.

For example, using food once again, this could mean completely disregarding other options for self-soothing that don't include food, like raiding your kitchen cabinets rather than going for a walk to destress. You could be filling your grocery cart with more food than you need to make that accessible in your home and convincing yourself that you're making the right choice.

Once you've acknowledged and identified what those behaviors are, the next step is to discover activities and establish routines that are healthy and encourage you to move in the opposite direction.

1

Create a list with activities that naturally increase your dopamine and serotonin levels (happiness and mood-regulating hormones).

Try to be specific and list as many as possible. This could include going outdoors and soaking up the sun, being active like hiking, playing a sports game, or gardening, and meditating. When you find yourself wanting to use your coping mechanism, turn to this list instead and pick an activity. This helps because often, in times of stress or temptation, our minds tend to "forget" what other activities we might enjoy that do not include our go-to mechanism. By having a list readily available, you can actively remind yourself of the other, healthier options you have.

2

Prioritize your overall well-being to build resiliency and encourage healthy habits

Pay attention to the essential pillars of health: exercise, diet, sleep. By getting sufficient exercise and sleep and ensuring that we're eating healthily and nutritiously, we're able to better prepare our bodies and minds for overcoming challenges as they come.

3

Get professional support.

If you find yourself struggling to overcome these challenges on your own, a sponsor or support group that can actively help you overcome your addiction can be helpful. This could be connecting with SAMHSA, finding a local AA, or joining an eating disorder support group.

4

Create realistic goals and be compassionate with yourself.

Remember that breaking habits, unhealthy or not, is always a tough thing to do. A Headspace coach can help you create new goals and habits and hold you accountable to them, while ensuring you're practicing self-compassion.





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