

THE COSTS OF YOUR COPING STRATEGIES

In *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook*, authors McKay, Wood, and Brantley (2007) present an exercise that is designed to bring awareness to the costs of your unhelpful coping strategies. I have adapted their exercise here.

Before we get started, look back at your responses to the exercise “Identifying Your Behavioral Reactions.”

Now, with that in mind, identify your unhelpful coping behaviors and their resulting costs from the list that follows. Write them down. I have included an “other” category in the list; use it to write down any additional behaviors and costs that are relevant to you.

Unhelpful Coping Behaviors	Costs
Blaming, criticizing, challenging, or being resistant toward others	Loss of friendships, romantic relationships, and family; people avoid you; you hurt the feelings of others; other:
Appearing to be compliant but actually rebelling by procrastinating, complaining, being tardy, or performing poorly	Putting up with unhealthy relationships; causing problems at work; other:
Controlling others as a way to get what you want	Alienating people; hurting people; other:
Trying to impress others and get attention	Missing out on real connections with people; alienating others; other:
Using manipulation, exploitation, and seduction to get what you want	Ruining relationships, creating a climate of distrust; alienating people; other:
Isolating oneself; withdrawing socially; disconnecting from others	Missing out on enjoyable experiences and good things; feeling depressed, alone, and lonely; other:

Appearing independent and self-reliant; engaging in solitary activities such as reading, watching TV, or using the computer	Spending more time alone; feeling more depressed, disconnected, and alone; other:
Seeking excitement or distraction through compulsive shopping, sex, gambling, risk taking, or physical activity	Money problems; health problems; relationship problems; feelings of shame; death; other:
Using drugs, alcohol, food, or excessive self-stimulation to numb out	Coping with an addiction; loss of money, relationship problems; health consequences; other:
Escaping through dissociation, denial, fantasy, or other internal forms of withdrawal	Feelings of loneliness, shame, and depression; other:
Relying too much on others; giving in; behaving passively; avoiding conflict; trying to please others	Overburdening relationships with your needs; not getting your needs met; other:

This exercise can be powerful. Sometimes we don't realize the costs of our unhelpful behaviors until we see them in black and white. It becomes clear very quickly that the behaviors you engage in when you're experiencing intolerable emotional pain are not only unhelpful but destructive. These behaviors are a quick trip from pain to suffering. Remember: avoiding our pain with unhelpful responses can be a quick distraction—but only temporarily.