

Building Resilient Youth: Coping Strategies for Rehab Professionals

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Learning Outcomes

- List signs of stress, emotional distress, and maladaptive coping in youth during rehabilitation sessions
- Define developmental and age-appropriate coping mechanisms, including emotional regulation, problem-solving, and resilience-building
- Recall age-appropriate coping strategies for youth to utilize within the rehabilitative setting.
- Identify the importance of providing a supportive, stigma-free environment when discussing mental health and coping skills with youth and caregivers.

Chapter 1

When Coping Goes Wrong: Recognizing Unhealthy Strategies in Youth



Signs of Stress and Emotional Distress

- Withdrawal or shutdown during therapy
- Irritability, mood swings, and crying
- Somatic complaints (headaches, stomachaches)
- Avoidance of tasks or people



1. Anselimus, 2025

2. Lo & Brown, 2025

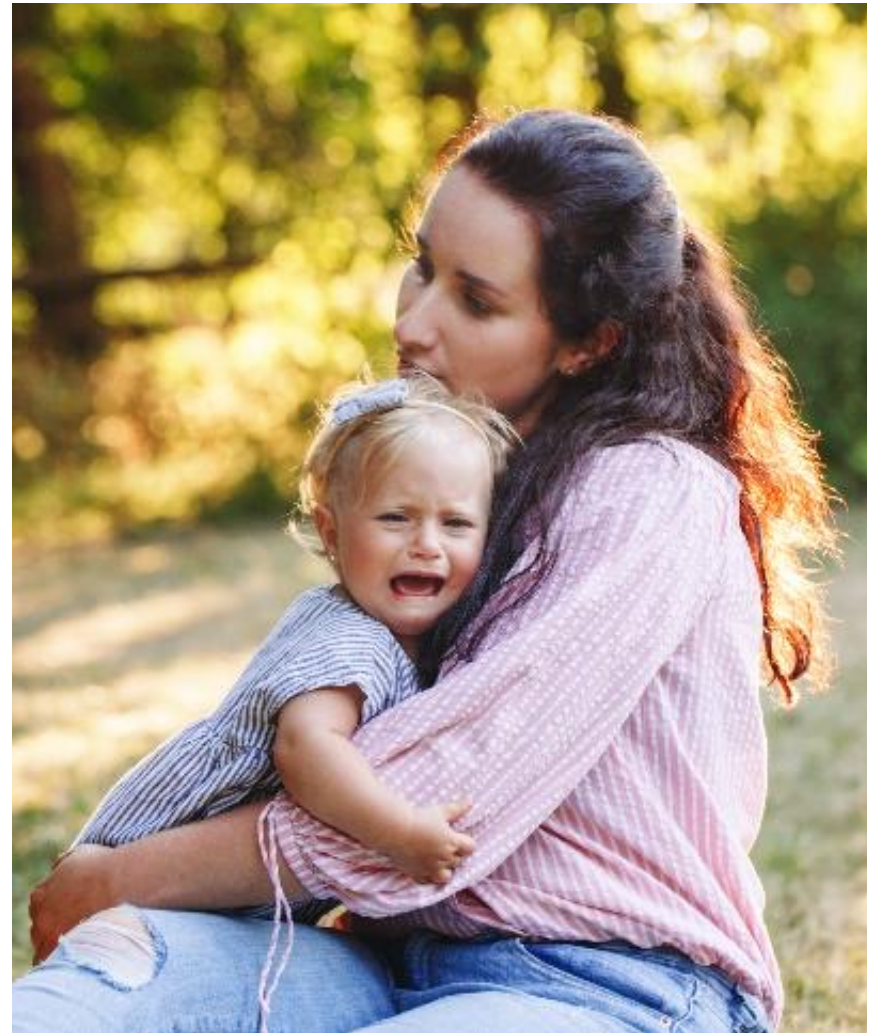
What Are Coping Skills?

- Strategies, behaviors, and processes that allow an individual to adapt to a situation, adjust , or manage anything that may be challenging or place high demands on them
- Examples: deep breathing, positive affirmations, listening to music, etc.



Maladaptive Coping Behaviors

- Aggression or oppositional behaviors
- Overreliance on escape/avoidance
- Negative self-talk
- Sensory-seeking or sensory-overload behaviors



1. Anselimus, 2025

2. Lo & Brown, 2025

3. Vaz et al., 2025

How Symptoms and Maladaptive Coping Effect Daily Life

- Decreased concentration and difficulty completing school/work tasks
- Lower motivation leading to procrastination or avoidance
- Physical symptoms (fatigue, tension) interfering with routine activities
- Heightened emotions reduce problem-solving ability
- Maladaptive coping (withdrawal, overthinking) disrupts productivity
- Increased stress makes simple tasks feel overwhelming

1. Anselimus, 2025

2. Lo & Brown, 2025

3. Vaz et al., 2025

Chapter Summary

- Youth experience situations daily that are challenging and difficult, and they need to be able to utilize coping strategies to handle these situations
- Some youth utilize maladaptive coping strategies, which can affect their daily life

Chapter 2

Developing Age-Appropriate Coping Skills in Youth

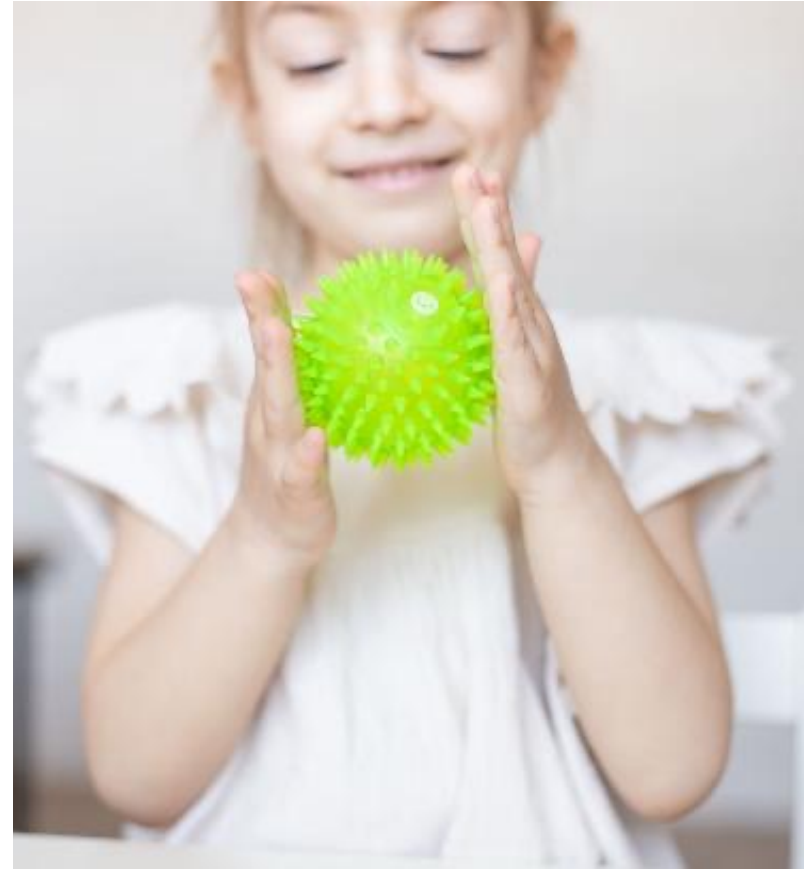


Developmental Coping Skills

**Preschool: simple breathing,
visual supports, and sensory tools**



1. Cahill et al., 2020



2. Kingsley et al., 2023

3. Taparo et al., 2023

Developmental Coping Skills (cont.)

**School-age: problem-solving,
emotional labeling, and role-play**



1. Cahill et al., 2020



2. Kingsley et al., 2023

3. Taparo et al., 2023

Developmental Coping Skills (cont.)

**Teens: cognitive reframing,
autonomy-building, and peer support**



1. Cahill et al., 2020
2. Kingsley et al., 2023

3. Morales-Rodriguez et al., 2023
4. Taparo et al., 2023

What Is Resilience?

- Not a clear definition of what resiliency is in the literature
- Overall, the ability to bounce back from difficulties and challenges



Lo & Brown, 2025

Resilience-Building Strategies

- Strengths-based communication
- Opportunities for mastery and choice
- Encouraging self-advocacy and communication



Lo & Brown, 2025

Chapter Summary

- Appropriate coping skills are dependent on the developmental age of the child, coping strategies used at a younger age can be utilized in adolescence
- Resiliency is a youth's ability to bounce back from a challenge, and there are strategies to help increase resiliency

Chapter 3

Practical Strategies for Teaching Coping to Youth With Mental Health Challenges



Coping Strategies: Sensory Tools



1. Cahill et al., 2020

2. Kingsley et al., 2020

3. Taparo et al., 2024

Coping Strategies: Breathing Techniques

- Belly breathing
- Box breathing
- Balloon breathing



1. Cahill et al., 2020

2. Kingsley et al., 2020

3. Taparo et al., 2024

Coping Strategies: Grounding Techniques

- Connect you back to the present moment
- 5 4 3 2 1 grounding
- Imagery



1. Cahill et al., 2020



2. Kingsley et al., 2020

3. Taparo et al., 2024

Coping Strategies: Visual Supports



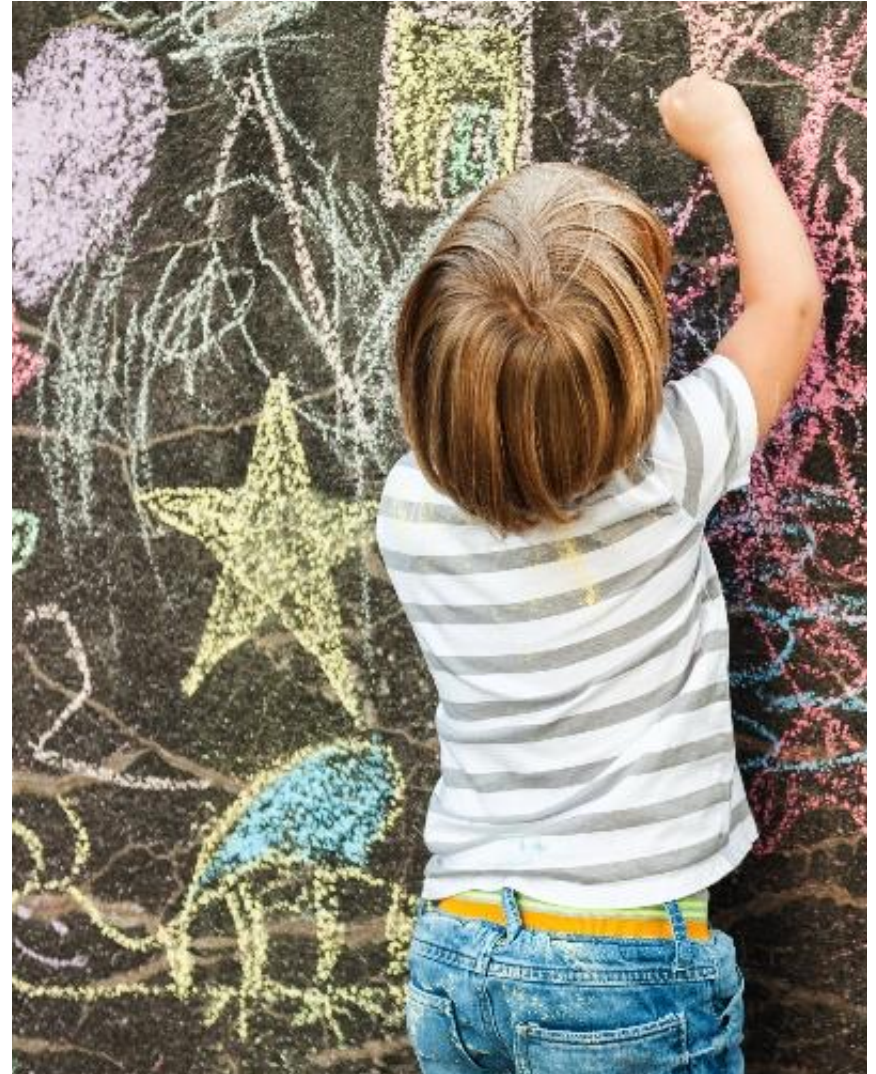
1. Cahill et al., 2020

2. Kingsley et al., 2020

3. Taparo et al., 2024

Other Coping Strategies

- Music
- Exercise/walking
- Deep pressure
- Going out in nature
- Expressive arts
- Coping strategies are individualized



1. Cahill et al., 2020

2. Kingsley et al., 2020

3. Taparo et al., 2024

Case Study 1

- K.P. is currently 13 years old and in eighth grade. He has a diagnosis of autism and no other comorbid diagnosis.
- In sixth grade, his social studies teacher noticed an increase in behaviors (touching self and calling out), but this was not noted in any other classes. These behaviors were also seen in seventh-grade social studies and eighth-grade science.
- A behavior plan was implemented in sixth grade.

Case Study 1 (cont.)

- **Why might these behaviors have been occurring?**
 - Anxiety due to other students not following the rules within the classroom
 - Taught coping strategies to help decrease the behaviors

Case Study 2

- J.P. is in the second grade at a school in a lower SES area within the school district. He is currently in a classroom that provides support for conduct disorder.
- The members at the school think he may have autism; however, you, as the rehab professional, do not believe there are signs to indicate that. J.P. is quiet when he works with you; however, he is very motivated by Connect 4 and answers questions.

Case Study 2 (cont.)

- One day, you come to do therapy with J.P., and you see a staff member watching him as he is screaming and throwing trash cans over a fence.
- The staff member tells you they decided to switch J.P.'s classroom and that they did not inform him of this change prior to that morning. When you ask if you can intervene, they say no, and mom is on the way (which she shows up a minute later).
- Why did this reaction occur?

Chapter Summary

- There are a variety of coping strategies that can be utilized with youth, and they must be individualized
- Work with the youth to determine strategies that work for them and how to implement them

Course Summary

- Coping strategies allow youth to handle situations that may be challenging within all contexts of life; some children utilize maladaptive coping skills
- As rehabilitation professionals, we can help children learn how to use coping strategies when needed within therapy sessions
- There are a variety of age-appropriate coping strategies; they should be individualized and involve the youth

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Medbridge

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