

How to Create a Coping Plan

DISCLAIMER:

This guide provides **general guidance for mental health awareness and coping strategies**. It does not replace professional mental health care, diagnosis, or treatment. If stress, anxiety, or emotional difficulties are severe, persistent, or impacting daily functioning, individuals should seek support from a qualified mental health professional. Bilnor Staffing Solutions accepts no liability for actions taken based on this guide.

A coping plan is a **personalised, structured approach** to manage stress, anxiety, or challenging situations. It helps individuals **identify triggers, develop strategies, and access resources** before a crisis arises. Coping plans are practical tools for maintaining mental wellbeing and resilience in daily life or during high-stress periods.

Step 1: Identify Your Triggers

Understanding what causes stress or anxiety the first step is:

- Situations, events, or tasks that increase tension
- Environmental factors (noise, crowding, workload)
- Emotional or social triggers (conflict, isolation, deadlines)

Write these down in a simple list to recognise patterns.

Step 2: Recognise Your Warning Signs

Early warning signs indicate when stress or anxiety is building:

- Emotional: irritability, sadness, worry
- Physical: tension, headaches, rapid heartbeat
- Behavioural: procrastination, withdrawal, changes in sleep or appetite

Keeping a journal or notes can help you detect these early.

Step 3: Develop Coping Strategies

Coping strategies should be **personal, practical, and realistic**. Examples include:

- **Physical coping:** exercise, deep breathing, stretching, progressive muscle relaxation
- **Emotional coping:** talking with a trusted friend, journaling, mindfulness exercises
- **Problem-solving coping:** breaking tasks into smaller steps, prioritising, delegating
- **Distraction or leisure coping:** listening to music, hobbies, reading, nature walks

Step 4: Build a Support Network

Identify people or services you can contact when needed:

- Friends, family, mentors, or colleagues
- Community support groups or NPOs
- Professional services (psychologists, social workers, counsellors)
- Crisis or helpline numbers (e.g., [SADAG](#), [LifeLine](#))

Step 5: Emergency or Crisis Steps

Prepare a **step-by-step approach for high-stress moments**:

- Step 1: Recognise the early signs
- Step 2: Use immediate coping techniques (breathing, grounding, brief walk)
- Step 3: Contact a support person or helpline
- Step 4: Remove yourself from triggering environment if safe
- Step 5: Follow up with professional or ongoing support

Having these steps written down reduces panic and confusion during stressful situations.

Step 6: Create Your Coping Plan Document

Use the example below to get started. Or make your own.

Coping Plan Document

Name:

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1. Triggers: (e.g. Heavy workload at office, unexpected home emergencies, conflict with colleagues)

2. What are your Warning Signs: (e.g. Feeling irritable by mid-morning, Shallow sleep and fatigue, Skipping lunch or meals)

3. Coping Strategies: (e.g. 10-minute breathing exercises before meetings, Short walks during breaks, Exercising or Workouts even if it's only 20min a day, Journaling at end of day, Listening to calming music when stressed, Praying (for religious persons), Practicing gratitude for the small things in life, Spending time in nature.)

4. Personal Notes / Reflections:

Keep a record of your Triggers, warning signs and coping strategies - and review what worked and what didn't.

- Notice improvement after walks / or workouts and journaling
- Evaluate coping strategies every Friday for e.g.

A coping plan empowers individuals to **manage stress proactively**. It provides clarity, reduces anxiety, and improves confidence in handling difficult situations. Preparing in advance helps you respond calmly and effectively when challenges arise.

Bilnor Staffing Solutions

Supporting resilience, mental wellbeing, and practical self-care strategies in South African communities.