



9th UpCare training: Evaluation of the concept "World".

Adaptation

Harnessing the experience drawn from negative life events.

Coping: beneficial strategies for coping with difficulties

According to Mental Health Promotion, successful coping with difficulties comes through a person's ability to effectively manage the problem at hand, and to use this experience to deal with future similar situations.

Through this they will develop beneficial strategies creating a kind of mental immunity for future problems.

(Vassiliadou, 1998)

Factors influencing psycho-emotional reactions to environmental stimuli

- Genetic predisposition
- Environmental influences/effects
- Individual perception of reality

How is coping difficulties defined?

As an adaptive mechanism that promotes quality of life but also as a psycho-immune function that is capable of

- Protect the person from unpleasant events
- Provide him with the appropriate equipment to cope with any future problems

Barriers to coping with problems of life circumstances

- Immature weighting of problems
- Maladaptive defence mechanisms



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Immature weighing of problems

According to cognitive models, unrealistic beliefs lead to immature weightings and hence to pathological reactions such as phobias, regret, distress. (Beck, 1976)

Maladaptive beliefs associated with a decrease in self-support abilities:

- Unrealistic expectations of a risk-free life
- Maladaptive beliefs that events can be avoided if one is constantly alert
- Overestimation of the negative consequences of a potential risk
- Underestimation of human natural abilities in managing various potential risks

(Table 12, Vassiliadou)

Maladaptive explanatory schemes

- "There are situations that no one can cope with"
- "Our problems gradually accumulate and eventually kill us"
- "To be adaptive in life is to be defeated"

(Table 13, Vassiliadou)

Maladaptive defence mechanisms

Individuals who spend too much time trying to achieve excessive self-protection measures, compared to what they really need, end up being addicted to a state of constant vigilance, believing that this way they will perceive a danger in time.

On the other hand, chronic and excessive stress has negative effects on health. The slightest stimulus can cause functional and biomechanical disturbance to anything related to the object of one's phobia.

(Asmundson 1999)

Strategies for the beneficial use of experiences

- Realistic perception of problems
- Promotion of intrinsic coping skills



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Realistic perception of problems

It is important for each of us to accept the fact that there is no life without risks and no one can guarantee us conditions of a completely safe life. Then they will be able to disengage from utopian expectations and enhance the ability to overcome life difficulties. (Salkovskis, 1996)

Group of utopian assumptions for achieving and maintaining happiness

- Being perfect and healthy always
- Earning and keeping forever as many material possessions as one could wish for
- To dominate others forever
- To achieve a lifetime guarantee that whatever you wish for will surely be fulfilled in the future

(Table 14, Vassiliadou)

Strategies

- Testing new positive interpretations of events, as well as alternative strategies for coping with difficulties
- Shifting attention to coping strategies of other people when facing risks similar to those the individual is trying to avoid
- Realistic acceptance that something very dangerous happens very rarely, compared to supposedly dangerous situations
- Realistic acceptance that real risks cannot be completely eliminated
- Realistic acceptance that fear and anxiety can critically increase negative impacts

Fostering endogenous coping skills

R. Lazarus (1999) discusses two main categories in coping techniques

- Finding an immediate solution to the problem (problem focused coping)
- Getting rid of disturbing emotions due to the evaluation of the problem (emotion focused coping)



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Basic principles of beneficial coping with difficulties

- Realistic review of the relevant factors and circumstances under which a problem has arisen
- Realistic assessment of the likelihood of recurrence after the necessary efforts have been completed
- Identification and recording of the 'hidden benefits' that are likely to arise from the problem or difficulty

(Table 15, Vassiliadou)

Realistic control of the consequences of the problem

- Investigation of the real costs and consequences in life without "overgeneralization" errors
- Checking the consequences of the criticism coming from the "significant others"
- Evaluating the cost-benefit logic in order to establish an accurate "decision-making process"

(Table 16, Vassiliadou)

Self-control

The ability to self-control has been accepted as one of the key conditions for adaptation and a tool for coping with difficulties. (Kanfer & Karoly 1972)

However, it is possible to be impaired by an individual's **egocentric denial** or due to his or her refusal to face pains and risks. Even in cases of bereavement where strong emotional emotions make it difficult for the person. For this reason, the goal of strategies that could help manage grief is not to get rid of the normal feeling of sadness but to increase self-control. (Breckenridge et al 1986)

Creative grief management

- Taking responsibility for providing support for others to cope with grief
- Accepting the reality that death is a common fate for all
- Acceptance of the principle of the uncertainty of life
- Acknowledgement that nature has equipped people with capacities to overcome even the harshest events



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- Attempts to accept the possible "will" of the "absent other" with respect rather than pity

For people with **"adjustment syndrome"** or **suicidal ideation**, medication is indicated as an immediate solution.

(Table 17, Vassiliadou)

Strategies for coping creatively with loss

- Activation of natural creative mechanisms to achieve an objective goal
- Recognition of the potential benefit that can result from changes in circumstances
- Estimation of the benefit resulting from creative coping with loss
- Recognition of the value of opportunities to discover alternatives
- Realistic acceptance of the 'never forever' principle
- Developing the potential for deriving satisfaction from the 'journey to Ithaca' despite the existence of risks

The phrase "journey to Ithaca" means the experience of "travelling" towards whatever goal one sets.

(Table 18, Vassiliadou)

Strategies for creative coping with feelings of devaluation

- Taking the opportunity to identify potential mistakes and to improve strategies
- Evaluating criticism with minimal misrepresentation, even if it comes from significant others, in order to understand whether the criticism is fair or unfair
- Creative understanding of the value of criticism as an opportunity for change, if it is fair
- Creative perception of criticism as an opportunity to improve other skills
- Taking advantage of the opportunity to promote natural talents e.g. adaptability, creativity etc.
- Promotion of the individual's natural tolerance abilities through "dignified acceptance" of criticism

(Table 19, Vassiliadou)



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The concept of communication

Support is necessary whether it is provided by oneself or by one's environment (social support) and both of course depend on how individuals communicate in order to effectively exchange supportive behaviour. However, this requires specific skills, which are related to the development of the individual's potential (Infante et al 1996, Hargie et al 1994) to achieve harmonious communication.

- To select beneficial thoughts that can be helpful in self-improvement
- To recognise what kind of support he or she really needs from others
- To discover whether this support is actually beneficial
- To discover what kind of support others are willing to provide
- To ask in a clear and polite way for the support he/she needs
- Understand the kind of support that others want from him
- Decide whether he or she is capable of providing such support to others
- Provide the support that others need with discretion
- Provide support without seeking any kind of reward
- To strive to improve his or her skills in order to provide effective support

Assessing the suitability of the circumstances for providing or accepting support

Steps:

- Identify needs and obligations of others that may be hindering the provision or acceptance of support
- Assessment of these, taking into account the outcome
- Clear planning of the support intervention

Constraints:

- Provision of support is based on the willingness of others to accept it
- The goal for which support is provided and the potential benefits are not understood if they are not agreed at the outset and if they are not realistic

(Table 20, Vassiliadou)

Factors associated with reduced effectiveness in communication

- Negative cognitive schemas
- Dependent behaviours



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- Conflicting interests
- Cultural differences
- Individual differences
- Psychological difficulties

(Table 21, Vassiliadou)

Barriers to harmonious provision of mutual support

- Maladaptive social cognitions
- Factors related to ineffective communication

Maladaptive social cognitions

They promote isolation rather than foster harmonious relationships between people living in a society.

Examples:

- "Being successful in life means you don't need anyone"
- "First you have to take and then you have to give".
- "If one is supportive of others, one will be taken advantage of"
- "You should not lose by giving to others"
- "You should take as much as you can from others"

(Table 22, Vassiliadou)

Factors related to ineffective communication

- Maladaptive cognitive representation of the "world"
- Negative motivations or attitudes attributed to "everyone else"
- Proneness of the individual to easily suspect the motives of others
- Maladaptive patterns of social behaviour
- Lack of homogeneity in the way people express their thoughts and feelings
- Insufficient individual efforts to identify and form a clear picture of the common interest
- Perception of others as threats or opponents
- Maladaptive management of relationship difficulties



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Strategies for achieving harmonious provision of mutual support

- Assessment of positive communication skills
- Promotion of positive communication skills

Assessment of positive communication skills

- **Realistic self-concept:** inner tendencies and dispositions that are a factor in achieving communication skills (Shaw 1997)
- **Realistic self-assessment:** assessment and perhaps grading of positive personality traits
- **Creative self-criticism**
- **Autonomy of thought:** avoiding maladaptive expectations and heteronomous attitudes
- **Freedom from addictions:** requires maturity in cognitive functions and a healthy mental state (Horwitz & Scheid 1999)
- **Value judgements formed on the basis of the smallest possible distortions of reality**
- **Improvement of maladaptive interpretive schemas**
- **Acquisition of positive cognitive schemas**
- **Metacognitive testing of interpretive schemas:** repeated testing of a solution
- **Minimal distortion in the exchange of information:** minimal falsification and more accurate "presentation"
- **Emotional understanding of others**
- **Identification and definition of common interests:** successful evaluative assessment of real needs



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- **Awareness that reaching an objective judgement is a very difficult task**
- **Creative coping with difficulties:** a state of mental immunity, useful for protection against future challenges
- **Mental well-being:** the familiarization of the individual with positive cognitive patterns, the positive evaluation and utilization of experiences resulting from life's difficulties



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