

COSA - R2 (Coping Skills Assessment - 2nd Revision)

Report for: Louise

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Summary

People use a variety of techniques to deal with stress in their lives. Some of these techniques are helpful; others are definitely not. Louise's range of coping skills will help determine how well she deals with the different stresses in her life.

Overall results



Louise's coping skills appear to be fairly good. She seems to be using more effective than ineffective methods of handling difficult situations. She will likely be quite adept at finding ways to deal with hardship in her life, probably using emotion or problem-focused methods of coping (or both). Louise's coping skills will help her get through tough times in far better shape.

Introduction

Stress is part of life. Since it can't be excised from the life experience, it is very important to learn how to deal with it. Research shows that it isn't necessarily the nature of the stressor that drives people to dizzying heights of fist-clenching, jaw-grinding, and cold-sweating states of stress and panic. The key factor is one's response to a stressful situation. Different people respond differently to stressors. Overall, the best way to deal with stress is to learn how to work with and around it, rather than trying to master it or make it go away.

Stress manifests itself physically. When facing a stressor, the body responds by switching into "fight or flight" mode. Physiologically, the body is ready to deal with the perceived danger (the stressor). Blood pressure goes up, heart and respiration rate increases, and hormones such as adrenaline are released. The muscles become tensed (some people clench their jaw), head-aches, back pain, stomach aches (ulcers become exacerbated), bad skin and the inability to concentrate may plague a person's day. The extremities become cold as blood is kept in the central part of the body. The immune system is weakened (since the body is concentrating on dealing with the stressor) and a person can become very susceptible to colds, the flue, cold sores, cankers, etc. Evidently stress is a very real and potentially uncomfortable component of life.

According to an APA (American Psychological Association) survey a majority of workers (52%) are more stressed because of work than home factors.

Graphs

Overall results



Problem-Focused Coping



Problem Solving



Information Seeking



Negotiation



Emotion-Focused Coping



Social Support



Positive Cognitive Restructuring



Emotional Regulation



Distraction



Hang-Ups



Rumination



Avoidance



Helplessness



Social Withdrawal



Opposition



Details

Overall results (score 70)

Louise's coping skills appear to be fairly good. She seems to be using more effective than ineffective methods of handling difficult situations. She will likely be quite adept at finding ways to deal with hardship in her life, probably using emotion or problem-focused methods of coping (or both). Louise's coping skills will help her get through tough times in far better shape.

Ability to use coping methods to deal with life's hardships.

Problem-Focused Coping (score 86)

Louise's results indicate that she tends to use problem-focused strategies in order to cope with stress. Although using these methods is generally ineffective when dealing with situations one can't change or control, they tend to be rather handy when the stressor being faced is controllable. Thus, in certain cases, although it's a good idea to take action to modify or take charge of the stressor in order to better cope with it, there are some situations when other strategies would be more useful.

Refers to ways of handling stress that deal with taking action in order to improve the stressor.

Problem Solving (score 85)

On a regular basis, Louise uses problem solving as a method of coping with stressors in her life, making concrete plans to try to improve or resolve her situation. Taking active steps can be very empowering, as it gives her something to focus on, provides motivation, and gives her something to strive for. However, in some situations, particularly if Louise has no control over the outcome of a stressful situation, using problem solving as a way of coping may lead to frustration.

Consists of looking for ways to improve a stressful situation.

Information Seeking (score 88)

When Louise experiences stressful situations, she usually seeks out information from a variety of sources in order to cope. Gathering information can help her deal with a situation for a variety of reasons; it helps her know what to expect, to understand why the circumstances have occurred, and it may help in discovering appropriate solutions. Even if what Louise learns about the source of her stress is upsetting, knowing what to expect can help her feel more in control.

Seeking out knowledge to increase understanding of the situation.

Negotiation (score 84)

It appears that negotiation is a major part of Louise's coping repertoire. Negotiation can include compromising with other people when in a stressful conflict situation. It can also mean adjusting her behavior, attitudes, or thinking style in order to adapt to the situation at hand. These are useful strategies because they can help her find constructive solutions to problems - adjusting her approach is often easier to do than preventing or totally overcoming a stressful situation in her life.

Consists of compromising goals, mindset, or behavior in order to better fit within the constraints of a stressful situation.

Emotion-Focused Coping (score 68)

According to Louise's score, she often uses strategies that involve emotion-focused coping. This likely helps her to deal with the feelings that usually arise in tough situations. Emotion-focused coping is a very useful strategy when dealing with stressors that one can't change or control, so it would be well worth the effort to further improve in this area.

Methods of handling stressful situations that entail learning how to deal with the situation emotionally.

Social Support (score 58)

Louise sometimes actively seeks out emotional support from others when under stress. This means that she may be taking full advantage of a major source of comfort: friends and acquaintances. There are several benefits to this coping strategy. Trusting others can help her feel less alone; it also helps build closeness between people. Finally, others may have new perspectives on the problem and could offer reliable advice. Although Louise uses this strategy on some occasions, she may sometimes prefer to handle things on her own. When this is the case, she should make sure that she is getting the emotional support she needs.

Consists of looking for emotional support from others.

Positive Cognitive Restructuring (score 90)

Louise very often utilizes positive cognitive restructuring as a part of her coping repertoire. Sometimes when she is under stress, it can be useful to think about the problem in a different manner. If not, her problems can take over, increasing in severity as the other issues in life seem to shrink in importance. Even for the most severe stressors, it can help her to reframe her way of thinking. Strategies such as putting things into perspective, comparing her situation to others who have it worse, or looking for the hidden benefits can help her feel better about what she is going through. Louise is likely able to find the silver lining in all but the worst scenarios.

Involves making changes to the way Louise thinks about a stressful situation in order to feel better about it.

Emotional Regulation (score 62)

Louise sometimes tries to self-regulate her emotions when under stress. Learning how to relax even in stressful times and finding other outlets for emotions are good strategies, particularly in scenarios where she has little control over the source of stress.

Using relaxation techniques or finding healthy outlets for negative emotions.

Distraction (score 61)

Louise sometimes tries to distract herself from stressful situations. While completely avoiding dealing with hardships is not helpful, no one can afford to think about these issues all the time. Sometimes it can really help Louise to get her mind off things. Learning to distract herself even when things are hectic can be a helpful coping strategy for Louise, so long as the things she chooses to help her unwind are not unsafe or harmful to her health.

Involves temporarily letting go of a stressful situation and simply enjoying oneself.

Hang-Ups (score 38)

According to Louise's responses, she seldom uses hang-up strategies to cope with stress. This is good news because such "empty" strategies tend to be rather ineffective and may even exacerbate stressful situations.

Entails "empty" coping strategies that generally will not be helpful in dealing with stressful situations.

Rumination (score 48)

Louise does not have much trouble controlling her thoughts when under pressure. This is great because unhealthy levels of rumination can lead to a number of problems. Some people may find that their troubles end up taking over their thoughts completely. Rumination can also lead to depression or other mental health issues. It's fine for Louise to think about her problems as long as she is able to keep them in perspective and prevent them from taking over her life, which she seems to be able to do reasonably well.

Involves thinking obsessively about a source of stress.

Avoidance (score 43)

Louise seldom tries to avoid facing her problems and stressors in life. This is important because people who avoid dealing with their problems will rarely be able to overcome them; that is, unless they are lucky enough to have them go away on their own. While it is not always possible to totally overcome a major stressor (after all, not everything in life is within one's control), Louise can always learn to deal with the emotions involved. People who avoid a problem will not be able to do this.

Tendency to avoid thinking about a problem and doing what needs to be done.

Helplessness (score 7)

Louise rarely, if ever, concedes defeat or gives up trying to deal with harsh situations. Instead of offering her fate up to an external force, she sees hope. Looking on the bright side and retaining an optimistic attitude goes a long way to handling life's problems.

Conceding defeat and not taking responsibility for a situation.

Social Withdrawal (score 45)

Louise rarely avoids social contact when feeling stressed. This is great because others may often want to help her deal with hardships. Rejecting offers of help and avoiding the people one cares about will only make matters worse. While this score does not mean that Louise actively seeks out social support (see Support Seeking for that), just by continuing her normal routine and not putting her head in the sand will help to some extent.

Tendency to avoid all contact with the outside world and to avoid dealing with others.

Opposition (score 50)

When pressures in Louise's life abound, she sometimes lashes out at others. She may at times blame others for her problems or use stress as an excuse to treat them badly. This is problematic because people who verbally attack others in times of stress can lose friends.

Tendency to lash out at others or to place blame elsewhere.

Strengths & Limitations

Below you will find a breakdown of how often Louise uses the various coping mechanisms described in this assessment.

Frequently Used

- Problem Solving
- Information Seeking
- Negotiation
- Positive Cognitive Restructuring

Occasionally Used

- Social Support
- Emotional Regulation
- Distraction
- Opposition

Rarely Used

- Rumination
- Avoidance
- Helplessness
- Social Withdrawal

Not all stress is negative. Positive stress, also known as "eustress", provides motivation and vitality in our lives.

Advice

Everyone experiences stress of some kind, but some people deal with it better than others. These individuals likely utilize healthy coping skills, possess a positive outlook, and take good care of themselves during stressful periods. Everyone can all learn how to cope better with stress because many of the best techniques for dealing with it are easily learned.

Strategies for dealing with stress depend on the problem and the person. By being aware of what the stressor is, an individual will be much better equipped to handle it effectively. Although the following tips can help Louise cope with stress, it is up to her to choose the approach that best suits her lifestyle and personality.

Evaluate the source of stress. Is it something that you can control, or is it out of your hands? It's important to gauge the controllability of the problem so you can target the best response. If the problem is something that you can change, then information-seeking and other problem-based coping methods can be useful. If it seems out of your hands however, it may be better to learn to live with the stressful situation using emotion-based coping methods, such as seeking social support, changing the way you think about the problem, distracting yourself, or finding ways to express your emotions.

Do not self-medicate. Remember that if you are using drugs or alcohol to cope with your problems, you are not dealing with the trouble at hand. Two wrongs don't make a right - all you'll end up doing is adding on yet another problem to your life. If you need help stopping or reducing your alcohol or drug intake, seek professional support.

Exercise. Not only does regular exercise promote good health and high self-esteem, but according to research, it also helps battle anxiety and depression. Exercise releases tension and feel-good hormones. Try working out for a half hour or more at least 3 times a week. Choosing activities where you're outside with nature is also a naturally soothing experience.

Stretch. Take a yoga class or buy a yoga book. Yoga is an excellent way to integrate mental and physical wellbeing. It can be very physically trying, but anybody can start with the basics. Practice daily for at least 20 minutes if possible.

Stop the rumination trap. Over-thinking problems in your life and allowing them to take over your thoughts can make the problem seem even more overwhelming. If you find yourself obsessing over a problem in your life, make an effort to stop those thoughts in their tracks - pick up an engrossing book, watch a comedy on television, or go for a bike ride.

Meditate. Find a book about meditating and practice daily. This relaxing activity allows you to detach yourself from all the clutter that is filling your mind. It helps you to gain perspective and accept the present situation.

Try walking meditation. This is an excellent way to combine the benefits of meditation with a change of scenery, fresh air, and a little bit of exercise. It involves walking slowly but very deliberately. While you are walking, concentrate on your breathing (breathe from your lower abdomen) and imagine your feet gently pushing against the earth as you take each step. Breathe so that for every breath in, you take 3 or so steps, and for every breath out you take 3 or so steps. Adjust this to your liking, but the slower the better. This exercise forces you to be aware of the present moment (and to not be mentally embroiled in the past or the future), and the deep breathing works to calm anxiety.

Curb negative thinking. Try to become aware of any negative self-talk that might be going on your head. Make an effort to curb self-deprecating remarks like, "I am doing terribly at work" or "I am such an idiot". Switch to more self-affirming chatter in your head. Changing your thinking pattern will help you feel more in control of your fate.

Join a community. Any activity that will bring you together with like-minded people will help you increase your support base. While it may take time for you to feel comfortable opening up to new people, simply being around others is uplifting on its own.

Write. Keep a journal and let everything out in your writing. You can leave your worries on the page (and maybe create something beautiful).

Try a news vacation. Take a break from watching the news or reading the newspaper (if it's a habit you have). World news focuses on calamity, ill fortune, and pending disaster. This is especially important when there is a disaster unfolding in your own world. Watching the news too much can be overwhelming and could leave you feeling all-the-more helpless.

Learn to say no. If you are really overloaded with things to do, it would be in everybody's best interest, as well as your own, to refrain from taking on more. If you don't have time at work on an assignment or to meet your friends for dinner, just say so! Taking on too much is bound to make anyone burn out.

Laugh. Laughter is an excellent stress-buster. Make an effort to see funny movies, hang out with a hilarious friend, or do whatever it is that gets you giggling.

Eat well. A good diet helps to keep your body strong and healthy so you are better equipped to deal with the physical strain of stress. Learn about the food groups (fruits and veggies, grains and cereals, meat, dairy, and fats and oils) and try to focus on taking in more fruits, veggies and whole-grain cereals and less meats, fats and oils.

Get enough sleep. Most people do not make sleep their priority, especially in times of stress. Sleep deprivation leaves you much less able to deal with life's ups and downs. Try to pack in at least 8 hours a night. It will help you be more productive.

Make little changes. During a stressful time at work, for example, give yourself 15 minutes extra in the morning so that you can take your time getting ready to go. This calmer start will set the tone for the day.

Get a pet. Provided that you have the resources to care for an animal, pet ownership can be a great stress-buster. For example, some research shows that the positive impact of dog-ownership approaches that of social support!

Reach out. There's nothing wrong with calling a friend and telling him or her you need to talk. If you're not comfortable with this, you can also find a therapist to speak with to work on ways of handling the stressful situation you are in. Rest assured that despite what some people may believe, asking for help is not a sign of weakness - it actually takes a lot of courage. Besides, research has shown that simply talking about a problem can help you feel better.