

# Dealing with setbacks

## ACE - Grow Your Skills



@Tilburg University - Maurice van den Bosch



# Dealing with setbacks

*Making the right decisions and choices to deal with difficult situations.*

## Description

At some point during your life, you will experience stress or setbacks. For example, you might lose a soccer match or fail an important exam. The way you deal with stress and setbacks is called **coping**. Resilience is the ability to deal with and recover from stress, setbacks and difficult situations. For this, it is important that you recognize your emotions in different situations and deal with them accordingly, so that you can feel more comfortable again. Applying coping strategies means knowing the best way to deal with a difficult or stressful situation or event.

There are several strategies to deal with difficult situations. None of those strategies is right or wrong by itself. The important thing is to choose the strategy that suits you. Some strategies are useful in the short term (for example, expressing your feelings), while other strategies achieve more results in the long term (for example, daring to ask for advice). Which strategy works best depends on the specific person or situation.

The coping strategies can be divided into 4 categories:

1. **Social support:** you can look for support by asking for help or talking to others.
2. **Problem solving skills:** you can actively work to solve the problem by making a plan and taking action.
3. **Avoidance:** you can pretend the problem does not exist; this is called avoidance. In this case, you deny the problem, seek distraction, give up or are critical of yourself.
4. **Positive thinking:** you can also think positively by, for example, looking for something positive in the situation, approaching the problem with humor or accepting the situation as it is.



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## Tips

When dealing with a difficult situation, it helps to go through the following steps.

### **Step 1: Recognizing.**

Recognize that you are in a difficult situation. Ask yourself: What am I feeling right now? What am I thinking right now?

### **Step 2: Weighing options.**

Think about which strategies you have at hand to deal with that difficult situation. Ask yourself: How can I deal with this difficult situation? What options do I have?

### **Step 3: Choosing.**

Choose a strategy that works for you. Ask yourself: What strategy works for me?

### **Step 4: Getting Started.**

Get started with the chosen strategy and evaluate how it goes. Ask yourself: Is this strategy helping me solve my problem?

## Traffic light method

If you are in a difficult situation, use the traffic light method.

### **Step 1**

Stop. Be aware of your underlying emotions and thoughts.

#### **You ask yourself:**

What emotions am I feeling? What thoughts am I having?

### **Step 2**

Think about which strategies (ways) there are to deal with the difficult situation.

#### **You ask yourself:**

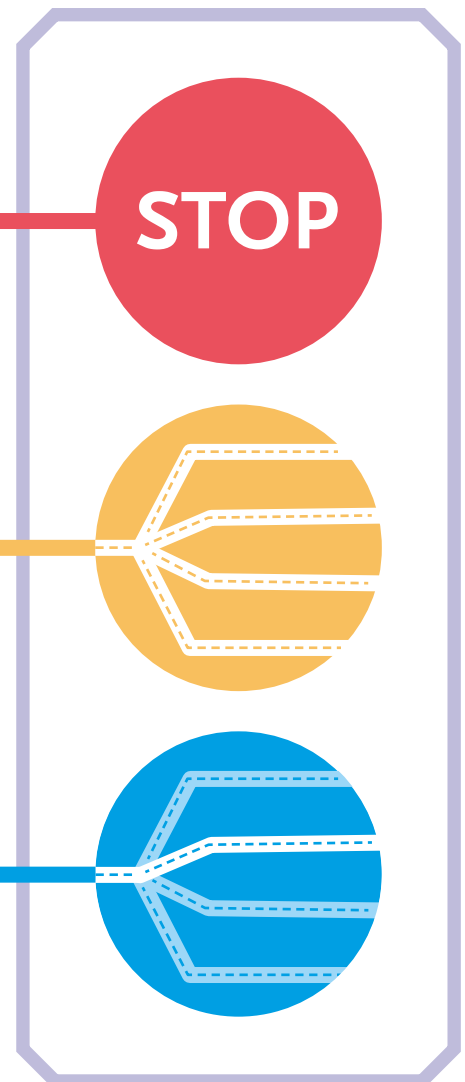
How can I deal with this difficult situation?

### **Step 3**

Make a choice. Experience for yourself which strategy works for you.

#### **You ask yourself:**

Which strategy works for me?





## **Assignment 1** *Mapping your coping strategy*

Different ways of dealing with adversity.

**Step 1:** Identify what coping strategies you use.

Think about how you handled a recent difficult situation.

What did you think?

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How did that make you feel?

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What did you do?

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What effect did this have?

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Was this the desired effect?

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Which of the four defined categories (social support, problem-solving, avoidance or positive thinking) fits your actions best and why?

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**Step 2:** Choose a coping strategy that you don't use often, but that you expect would be useful in this situation.

My chosen coping strategy is: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe below:

What thoughts will you have if you choose this coping strategy?

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What feelings will you have if you choose this coping strategy?

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What kind of behavior will you show when you choose this coping strategy?

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What will be the effects of this coping strategy?

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Do you expect this coping strategy to work better for you than your usual style and why?

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## Assignment 2 *Coping in your class*

Learn from the coping strategies of others.

Answer the questions below.

**Step 1:** Engage in a group discussion.

Imagine a realistic setback together. Discuss who would use which coping strategy and why. Write down your findings below.

The chosen setback: \_\_\_\_\_

The chosen coping strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Step 2:** Now discuss the following reflection questions. Write down your findings.

What are the advantages of the discussed coping strategies in this situation?

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What are the disadvantages of the discussed coping strategies in this situation?

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Are there coping strategies which you would not be so quick to choose yourself, but which you might give a try after this conversation? Why is that?

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# Literature

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