

The Top Coping Mechanisms

**Learn How To Decompress Without
Ruining Your Life**



By: Jesse Henry

Over the years, I've been fascinated to learn about the various coping mechanisms that humans have used over time.

Here is how Google defines coping mechanisms:

Coping mechanisms are ways to which external or internal stress is managed, adapted to, or acted upon.

Much like you, I have found myself trying various coping mechanisms over the years.

Some have helped, others haven't.

Everyone knows a person who has found all the wrong coping mechanisms – you may be able to find them on your local street corner.

Conversely, we all know a person who used a great coping mechanism to positively change their life.

This led me into some research – I wanted to find out where these good and bad coping mechanisms were rooted.

So I set out to find the ULTIMATE list of coping mechanisms. I wanted to build *the go to playbook for day to day coping*.

So that's what I did.

But first, before we discuss how to positively cope with our day to day stresses, let's go back to the beginning of mankind when coping mechanisms were conceived.

Back at the beginning of time.... just kidding. I'm not qualified to tell you about the beginning of time, so let's start here.

When we were cavemen, the world was quite simple, but very dangerous.

We had to satisfy the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: food, water, shelter, sleep, warmth, security, and safety. If you were a caveman, these were the core assets you needed to acquire to stay alive. Everything else was secondary.

People were asking themselves:

- Can I kill it? (or will it kill me?)
- Can I eat it? (or drink it?)
- Can I mate with it? (or does it want to mate with me?)
- Do I need to run? (or can it protect me and my family?)

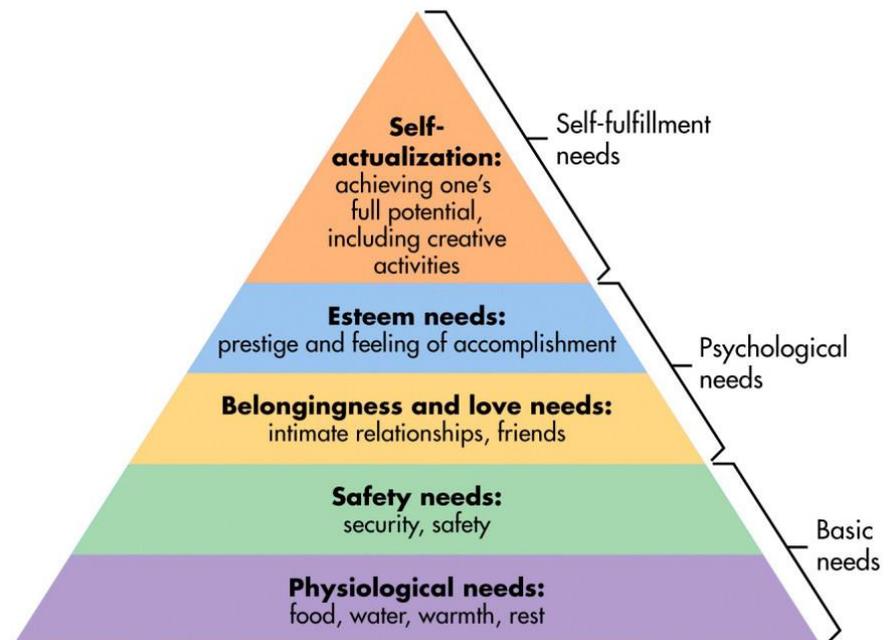
These are the questions we were trying to answer 10,000+ years ago.

In order to answer these questions and have positive outcomes, you had to fight for what you wanted. Nothing was given, and everything was earned. You eat what you kill, or starve and die.

So, **aggression** became the first coping mechanism that man discovered.

When we started to feel and encounter things that were not liked or understood, we became aggressive because we associated aggression to the things we desired: food, water, sex, shelter, safety, etc.

In order for us to keep the assets we had, we also had to focus on protecting them. If we didn't aggressively protect the things that satisfied our needs, we would end up dead.



Mankind became addicted to **aggression and protection**. In fact, Addiction, became the next coping mechanism that helped us satisfy our needs.

We became addicted to the satisfaction of our basic needs. Addicted to the certainty that we would have all the pleasures we were used to, and avoid the pain we so desperately evaded. This addiction to the satisfaction of our basic needs is what satisfies us at the most primal level.

These coping mechanisms are what feed our reptilian brain. This is the part of the brain that is responsible for keeping us alive. It regulates the innate and automatic self-preserving behavior patterns. These are the impulses that dictate our ability to survive.

Now that we understand the coping mechanisms that our ancestors used to satisfy their basic needs, we can better understand the **social coping mechanisms** that developed thereafter. Most of the brain activity that meets our social needs comes from our limbic brain (or mid brain).

Not too long after aggression became the core of the primal human coping mechanism, the need for **relationships and status** became a key driver of our decision making. As I'm sure you can understand, aggression does not mix well with relationships and status. In fact, this is what started to create the early internal conflicts of mankind.

These social coping mechanisms became extremely conflictive to human ability to attain happiness.

Here are just a few of the social coping mechanisms that early humans started to develop.

- **Avoiding** people we didn't want to speak to, and situations we didn't want to be in.
- **Defensiveness** when we were wrong to avoid hurting our ego and status amongst others.
- **Suppression** (or repression) in fear that we would be judged, and our social and primal needs would not continue to be met.
- **Displacement** when anger could not be expressed to the individual who exasperated a situation, it was taken out on another human.
- **Regression** to bring back old states of being that feel more comforting to the individual.
- **Fantasizing** so that we could avoid reality and find a safe space in our mind.
- **Rationalization** to give reason to unjust actions, usually in the pursuit of power, status, or resources.

We must remember that thousands of years ago, a class system separated the 'haves' from the 'have nots.'

The people with all the resources we're able to do things that the workers and slaves couldn't. Bottom line. This means that the royalty and government officials we're able to cope in ways that people without resources couldn't.

One of the first physical coping mechanisms that most humans aspired to attain was **wine**. Wine became a vehicle for human connection. Some of the oldest pictures of mankind were of people eating and talking around a table while drinking wine.

Wine became a coping mechanism because humans found that others were much more likable when everyone was a little under the influence.

This further perpetuated a whole new set of coping mechanisms for mankind to attach on to.

- **Acting out** with outlandish actions instead of reflecting upon internal feelings.
- **Humor** became more prevalent because people we're more apt to point out the funny and ironic intricacies of a situation.
- **Affiliation** with likeminded people, as people who drank wanted to hang around others who did the same.

This type of affiliation is on a social level, not a primal level. On a primal level, we have to associate with others or else we will die out in the wilderness by ourselves.

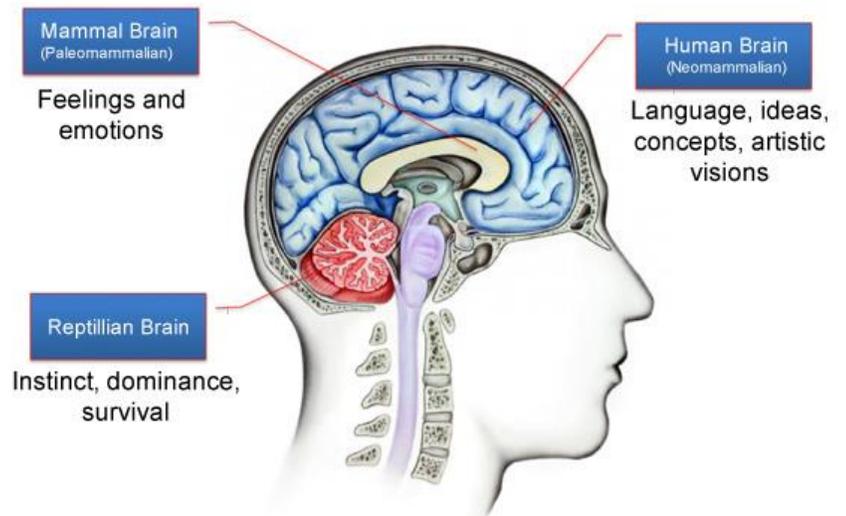
On a social level, we affiliate because others who act like us provide external validation that our actions are appropriate.

Since we live in the 21st century, it's easy to see now that affiliation and association create **polarization**. The separation of you from me comes about through labels. And, when we start interacting with those who have different labels than ourselves, we encounter a whole new set of coping mechanisms to deal with.

- **Denial** that others could be right, or that challenging our own beliefs could actually be healthy for us, instead of detrimental to our ego.
- **Projecting** by taking our own unacceptable thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and attributing them to others.
- **Intellectualization** by coming up with logical deductions to avoid emotional and social conflicts.
- **Passive aggression** by avoiding direct conflict by creating indirect resistance.

As you can see, humans started to use some very devious tools to distract from the REAL problems they were facing.

I hope that this gives you some perspective and insight as to how the most primal instincts from our ancestors have turned into social constructs passed down generation after generation. Unfortunately, the most addicting and common coping mechanisms became the ones that were the most destructive.



Fast forward a few thousand years, and you'll find that since most humans are able to satisfy their basic and social needs, the focus

has shifted to **self-actualization**. People today will do anything to hit their social, creative, and intellectual potential since most aren't afraid of losing their basic everyday needs.

The coping mechanisms that we use to obtain self-actualization are correlated to the outer most part of our brain – the neocortex.

We started to abuse things that weren't meant to be abused. Things like:

- **Drugs**
- **Alcohol**
- **Steroids**
- **Social media** (and technology)
- **Pornography**

These are all forms of substance abuse. Our culture literally invented new ways to cope with our problems. If that doesn't tell you how motivated people are to cope with the daily stresses of life, I don't know what will.

The destructive coping mechanisms are the ones that people tend to get caught up in. I speak about these not to impress them upon you, but to bring to light how and why people cope the way they cope.

We have self-perpetuated these negative coping mechanisms that mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually limit and suppress our greatest ideals. We search to remove the pain from our lives, but quite often, we're just putting the pressure upon ourselves. We self-sabotage our ability to self-actualize by creating a toxic internal environment.

- We're **defensive** when we know we're wrong.
- We're **tolerant** when we know that something isn't acceptable.
- We **overcompensate** when we don't get enough of something we want.
- We even **harm ourselves** by telling ourselves that we're not worthy, undeserving, or valueless. The feeling that we're not 'enough' is what hurts us more than anything.

We self-destruct by drowning in the coping mechanisms that have been passed on to us by previous generations. We simply accept that the way to go about life is to avoid anything uncomfortable by coping with something that makes us feel better.

This can be used both for good and bad.

The only problem is, *most people don't get what they want because they spend too much time focusing on what they don't want.*

Because our brain is trained to focus on the things we want to avoid – we spend more time escaping the things we dislike, than moving toward the things we do like.

So, as I started to recognize this change in how humans were coping with their lives, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, I realized that there HAD to be ways that humans could reconnect with themselves. Humans can do positive things to bring themselves back to homeostasis, but for some reason, we tend to go with the more destructive option.

So, one day I decided to focus on becoming aware of all the things I was doing to cope in my day to day life.

I started to look for all the moments where I was getting stressed, and then sought to understand the coping mechanism that I would use to bring myself back to homeostasis.

What I quickly noticed was that all coping mechanisms were simply patterns. The repetitive nature of a coping mechanism gives our brain the certainty it needs to know that the outcome will be positive.

When I started to realize that all coping mechanisms (inputs) – elicited a predictable result (output) – I knew that the answers I was looking for were right in front of my face.

The first coping mechanism that I started to recognize in myself was my incessant need to **wash my hands**. Any time something stressful would happen, I would find myself telling myself that ‘my hands were dirty, and that if I just cleaned my hands, somehow everything would be better.’

So below I decided to list **all the positive coping mechanisms I could possibly think of**, and their corresponding outputs.

There was only one guideline for this process. All positive coping mechanisms had to be **free**, and easily accessible by most humans.

Coping Vehicles (Inputs)	Desirable Results / Outputs
Drinking water	Hydration, and cognitive efficiency
Taking 1-10 deep breaths	Clarity, Presence, and Relaxation
Going on a walk	Detachment, exploration, and peace
Stretching	Blood flow, extending beyond our limits
Visualizing	Focus, neuro-plasticity, and limitlessness
Smiling	Happiness, beauty, and magnetism
Learning something new	Amazed, proud, awe-struck, and triumphant
Loving	Abundance, freedom, and opportunity
Clapping	Happiness, acceptance, and excitement
Redefining a relationship	Contentment, maturity, and growth
Thinking of 3 things you're grateful for	Appreciation, love, and optimism
Asking a question	Inquisitiveness, curiosity, and foresight
Writing down your feelings	Understanding, expressing, and awareness
Calling (or seeing) an old friend	Relatableness, understanding, and appreciation
Listening to (or find new) music	Connection, transcendence, mood, and love
Eating healthy	Live a healthy life...
Meditating	Download, release, relax, feel, and be
Taking a deep breath and counting to 5	Recalibration, calm, and tranquility
Finding a mentor (digital, or physical)	Insight, perspective, opportunity, and enlightenment
Strategizing	Intellectualize, streamline, and clarity
Exercising	Energize, strengthen, develop, and persevere
Meeting a new friend	Enlightenment, confidence, and connection
Donating to the less fortunate	Generous, altruistic, purposeful, and helpful
Joining a club	Enrollment, acceptance, and understanding
Going to a library	Inquire, discover, listen, read, be, think, see
Cleaning	Revitalization, appreciation
Starting a new project	Creativity, utility, and satisfaction
Watching a movie or tv show (cautiously)*	Empathy, understanding, and relatableness
Completing something you've put off	Freedom, release, satisfaction, and calm
Studying and looking at the sky	Admiration, respect, inquisitiveness, and curiosity
Writing a letter that you'll never send	Liberation, release, restraint, and tolerance
Reading a great book	Respect, accomplishment, success, and fulfillment
Asking for help from someone qualified	Quality insight, proper systems, and clear direction
Facing the problem	Bravery, fortitude, relief, and release
Starting (or revisiting) a good hobby	Fun, self esteem boosting, creative
Playing team sports	Confidence, comradery, and power
Dancing	Dynamic, energetic, active, and freedom
Making a Pros vs Cons chart	Independence, and justice (or justification)
Sleeping (or taking a nap)	Restored, rested, refreshed, and reliable
Playing with an animal	Amused, humored, pleased, charmed, and loving
Writing or Journaling	Centered, balanced, congruent, and grounded

Painting, drawing, scribbling, or doodling	Artistic, independent, innocent, and childlike
Learning an instrument	Harmonious, brave, courageous
Putting your hands on your hips for 2 minutes	Power, confidence, certainty, and optimism
Taking a hot (or cold) shower	Reset, clean, wellbeing, and thriving
Performing a random act of kindness	Helpfulness, caring, devoted, inspired
Burning a piece of paper with a note on it	Released, relieved,
Writing a letter or send an email or a text	Friendliness, receptiveness, and accommodation
Singing	Connected, care free, easy-going
Hyper focusing on a meaningless object	Deep thought, curiosity, captivation, and stimulated
Exploring nature	Reconnecting, authentic, and genuineness
Talking to someone close to you	Confident, assured, comfortable
Feeding (or educating) another animal	Safety, stability, delight, euphoria and caring
Memorizing something	Disciplined, self-reliant, patience, and fortitude
Writing an "I love you because..." letter	Gratitude, blessings, satisfaction,
Learning and using a new word	Attentive, insightful, victorious
Rearranging your environment	Resourceful, grateful, creative, and capable
Doing Yoga	Dynamic, powerful, strong, and triumphant
Giving someone a compliment	Positivity, encouragement, and loving
Being Authentic with someone	Honorable, moral, honest, and candor
Just being	Mindful, peaceful, present, and unconcerned
List: 3 month, 1 year, 10 year, + lifetime goals	Visionary, foresight, success, and opportunity
Holding Hands	Desirable, intertwined, and loved
Hugging	Touched, embraced, comforted, and liked
Laughing	Excitement, joy, enthusiastic, and exhilarated.
Connecting with a higher power	Transcendence, interconnectedness, and grounding

Just the activity of creating this list has shown me that I have undoubtedly self-destructed and self-sabotaged my desired outcomes by prescribing myself the wrong coping mechanisms. Time and time again.

As I read through all of the coping mechanisms above, I'm awestruck by their simplicity.

These coping mechanisms are all free, they're all doable by 90%+ of the planet at any given time.

The simple things are not necessarily easy, but this exercise has showed me that success is about doing the simple things that 90% of people forget to do on a daily basis.

All of the inputs, as I see them, are simply **patterns**. They're habits, that when repeated over and over again create predictable emotional satisfaction.

As I started to fill in the outputs on the right-hand side. I was thinking about **feelings, emotions, states of being**, and desirable outcomes that would happen as a result of the corresponding

coping mechanism. But, the ultimate output of any coping mechanism is a desirable emotional state.

If you want some outcome, and continue to ask yourself “why?” you will most likely arrive at the final conclusion: “because it feels good.”

Did we want the nice car? Or the feeling of power, confidence, certainty, and status?

This was an exercise in discovering our ability to attain the emotional states we desire in alternative ways.

Our cognitive capabilities allow us to consciously create the coping mechanisms that will elicit the emotional states we desire.

Neglecting to become aware of our damaging habits is allowing our genetic programming to control our day to day coping capabilities.

Now is the time for you to build out a customized set of coping strategies that you can leverage when you’re in search of desirable emotional states that you’re having a hard time attaining.

What are morning habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms?

What are afternoon habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms?

What are evening habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms?

What are habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms during times of stress and anxiety?

What are habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms during times of conflict or anger?

What are habits and activities that can serve as constructive coping mechanisms during times of depression or sadness?

What are limiting habits and activities that currently serve as coping mechanisms that I need to consciously remove?

If you could create a 15-minute routine that stacked multiple positive coping mechanisms, what would that look like?

Coping Mechanisms for Certain Situations

Unfortunately, one can recognize all the positive and negative coping mechanisms, but unless they are given the solution, they may continue to fall into the same old habits and patterns that got them to exactly to where they're at.

So we wanted to make this as easy and straightforward as possible. Here is a simple guide of things to do when we feel limited by certain internal and external forces.

<p>When we're sad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laughing • Smiling • Playing with animals • Singing • Dancing • Listen / play good music • Clapping • Think of 3 things you're grateful for 	<p>When we're anxious (Stressed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being authentic with someone • Writing or Journaling • Release from our attachments • Exercise • Paint or draw • Take a deep breath and count to 5 	<p>When we can't think clearly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • list out your goals • Give someone a compliment • Take a shower • Go on a walk • Strategize • Study and look up at the sky
<p>When we feel lazy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore nature • Seek advisory from a mentor figure • Face the problem • Cleaning • Eat Healthy • Complete something that's been put off • Start a new project 	<p>When we feel stuck</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rearrange your environment • Learn something new • Ask for help (from someone qualified) • Focus on the next step • Complete something that has been put off • Talk to a close friend 	<p>When we feel unaccepted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting to a higher power • Play team sports • Donate to the less fortunate • Start or revisit a good hobby • Join a club
<p>When we feel unloved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugging and holding hands • Writing an "I love you because..." letter • Perform a random act of kindness • Give yourself love • Call an old friend 	<p>When we feel pessimistic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visualize a positive outcome • Take a nap • Read a great book • Redefine one of our relationships • Write a letter that will never be sent 	<p>When we lack awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meditate • Memorize something • Doing yoga • Just being • Be Curious • Write down your thoughts and feelings

All a coping mechanism is doing is shifting your focus, and creating a desirable internal and external environment.

So, if we're feeling indecisive, we can shift our focus by:

- Making a Pros vs Cons chart
- Strategizing
- Learning new information
- Seek external council
- Listen to our intuition
- Understanding how our decision will impact our ultimate outcome

It's our ability to shift our focus that will determine our ability to choose positive coping mechanisms that will continue to drive our lives forward.

Naturally, there has to be an ultimate list. A list of patterns that helps us gain control and certainty is the core playbook for any situation, right?

So here is a list of **the 10 easiest, most powerful coping mechanisms that can be used by any one at any time in any place.**

1. Drink water – when we are dehydrated, our brain doesn't function at 100%.
2. Stretch – because proper blood circulation helps create desirable states of being.
3. Take 10 deep breaths – to reset your thoughts, emotions, decisions, and actions.
4. Put your hands on your hips for 2 minutes – to build confidence and certainty.
5. Ask better questions – to approach situations from all possible angles.
6. Find a virtual mentor or advisor – to get specific learning when it's needed.
7. Meet someone new – to connect in a way that allows others to see the best you.
8. Read a great book / or learn something new – to satisfy your intellectual capacity.
9. Go on a walk – to decompress and see that what we have to do is straightforward.

It's time for you to get honest with yourself and give your mind, body, and spirit the resources it needs to thrive. This all starts with changing the habits we have for coping with the days ups and downs. Better understanding our coping mechanisms is the key to attaining everything we've ever wanted.

Author Biography

Hey, my name is Jesse Henry. I'm an entrepreneur by day, and philosophy enthusiast by night.

For a background of my professional life, please visit either www.JesseHenry.co or my [Linkedin profile](#).

I love working with others and identifying the gaps that we experience throughout our lives. For more on how I see gaps, please visit www.Quadality.com.

A quick search on Google will tell you about some of the other things I've done over the past few years.

As someone who enjoys discovering philosophy, peak performance, spirituality, and psychological frameworks – I find myself diving into obscure topics from time to time.

- I'm not a psychiatrist.
- I'm not a licensed therapist.
- I'm not a life coach
- I'm not a PhD candidate doing my research dissertation on coping mechanisms.

I'm just a guy who dives deep into practical psychology. Theory is great, but I'm always in search of the intersection between process and application.

This is why you didn't notice any references or citations. That's not what this experience was about.

This was an exercise in creativity. This was an exercise in better understanding ourselves and the world around us. But more so than all of that, this was an exercise in getting brutally honest with ourselves to understand what actions drive us forward, and which ones hold us back.

We don't need a PhD to figure that out. We just need a sounding board to start a conversation.

If you're looking to continue the conversation with me, feel free to check out my first book, *The Millennial Merger: How to Sell, Manage, Empathize, and Communicate in a Multi-Generational Workforce*.

