

## Coping Strategies Plan

In each box below, please place an **S** for *Success* or an **I** for *In progress* to document status of your coping plan. Continue to track your progress daily.

- 1. **Make a list** of the actions or resources **that help you cope** with moodiness, anxiety, guilt, depression, anger, resentment, restlessness, boredom or stagnation.
- 2. **Anticipate** which times of the day, week or month cause you the greatest risk of emotional instability. Notice when nutrition, hormones and seasonal changes impair your mood.
- 3. **Be proactive** in planning how you will either *prevent* or *cope* with mood swings. *Recognize your early warning signs of mood instability. Make a preventative action plan with your doctor, therapist, sponsor, support group or trusted friend.*
- 4. **Limit alcohol and marijuana use.** Mood altering substances may negatively impact your mood and stability. Notice your sleep, appetite and mood changes related to over consumption.
- 5. **Express your feelings openly within yourself.** Express emotions through music, dance, art, spoken or written word. Practice mindfulness by listening to your thoughts.
- 6. **PLAY.** Take time to discover your interests. What activities did you love as a child? What interests could you rekindle now? Use art, music, hobbies, crafts, exercise, games, learning or recreation. Do not let a “stay in place order” restrict the playfulness of your mind.
- 7. **Practice positivity and self-compassion.** Positivity looks for silver linings. Self-compassion requires speaking to yourself like a beloved.
- 8. **Reassure yourself:** *“This is a really difficult time for everyone” “I am not a failure, I am just stressed.” “I am not falling apart, I am experiencing normal emotions—painful but normal.” “I can feel stress without becoming self-destructive.” “This feeling will pass. I will be okay...I know this because I have been through difficulties before.”*
- 9. **Allow a good cry.** Embrace your emotions. Tears are your body’s natural way of releasing tension and alerting you and others of the need to address your emotional pain. Address tears with self—compassion, not shame.
- 10. **Make a list of reasons why your mood is disturbed, then problem solve.**
  - \*Cross off all of the reasons that are **not** within your control.
  - \*Create a plan to address the reasons that **are within** your control.
  - \*Do a reality check. Talk with yourself exactly as you would speak to a friend in the same situation. Do you exaggerate the negative or do your emotions match the situation, ie: human

reaction? What are your options for problem solving?

- 11. Create a positive environment.** Brighten up your living and workspace by de-cluttering, organizing and cleaning. Caution: work within your budget! If you are not able to improve your indoor space, consider spending time outdoors.
  
- 12. Create a vision board:** Focus on what you would like to learn, accomplish, experience or give. Use the internet for inspiration. Your vision board can be a work of art using poster board and magazine clippings or on the computer—your choice. Google the term “vision board” for ideas... you can do this!
  
- 13. Avoid negative people.** Detach from people who bring you down. Explain why you are detaching. Sometimes providing feedback to negative people sparks them into positive action. Perhaps they had no idea they were so negative and would love to be more positive with you. If your feedback offends them, they will avoid you. (Win/Win result!).
  
- 14. Move.** Physical activity stimulates production of the brain’s “feel good” chemicals. Depressed and stressed people often complain that they cannot *EXERCISE* because they have no time, energy or willpower. Avoid that *E* word. Just move. Take the stairs. Park your car farther away from the building. Any movement trumps inertia.
  - ✓ Got 15 minutes? Stretch. Reach. Bend.
  - ✓ Wash your car, sweep the steps, walk the dog.
  
- 15. Consider joining others or volunteering:** Sadness loves loneliness. Challenge emotional upset by connecting with others. Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing. Contacting people via phone, mail, social media, safely distanced outdoor gatherings are all steps in the right direction of combating loneliness. Seek role models in the media. Read biographies about your heroes.
  
- 16. Eat healthy food. Eat in moderation and feel proud you did.** Reduce sugar, fat, salt and caffeine. Discuss nutrition with your health care provider. Make a rule not to engage in binge eating or emotional eating. Excessive eating leads to self-loathing and more binging.
  
- 17. Practice good hygiene.** Careful grooming provides an emotional lift. Take care of your body with the same attention and affection you give to loved ones.
  - ✓ Take a shower or bath daily.
  - ✓ Use deodorant or powder.
  - ✓ Brush and floss your teeth daily.
  - ✓ Apply lotion or sunscreen.
  - ✓ Wear fresh underclothes and socks each day.
  - ✓ Comb or style your hair daily. Keep it clean.
  - ✓ Tidy up the nails on your hands and feet.
  - ✓ Take medication as recommended by your physician.



- 18. Expose yourself to natural sunlight.** Sunlight helps reduce depression. A brisk walk the first thing in the morning is a wonderful mood booster. (Use sunscreen!).
  
- 19. Use internet resources and apps to practice meditation, deep breathing exercises or guided imagery.** Free and low cost resources are everywhere... just Google it!
  
- 20. Consult your health care professional** if your mood problems last for more than two weeks and do not respond to the 19 previous coping tools.

**Call for help immediately when you have thoughts of hurting yourself or others.**  
Keep a list of emergency numbers in or near your phone.