



Coping Circle

Introduction: This exercise is an interesting and interactive way to discuss a wide variety of coping skills as a group. The expected outcome of this exercise is for group members to help one another by sharing how to use various coping strategies while learning about new skills for areas where one may be lacking and need improvement. This is done through an open interchange of ideas as a group. This group can be done in person or virtually through telehealth. Also, this group can be done repeatedly over time because when clients come up with new problems to discuss, the outcome of using this group format changes from one time to the next.

Directions: First, everyone list a few stressors in their life to potentially discuss. Two or three is good for each person, but if someone is struggling, they should be able to try to contribute at least one. In person, the group leader can track the list of stressors on the board to make a master list. Done virtually over telehealth, everyone should message their ideas to the rest of the group using the chat feature. Everyone then can access the list by viewing the group chat box on telehealth

There are two recommendations for coming up with stressors to discuss:

- 1) *Be specific* – For example, don't just say "Anger", but instead elaborate specifically about what makes you angry, for example "Dealing with anger and frustration when my parents constantly nag me and make false accusations about me"
- 2) Format the wording of your stressor so that the group is prepared to discuss coping skills. Some suggested phrases for stressors are:
 - a. Coping with _____ (*Stressor*)
 - b. Dealing with _____
 - c. Handling _____
 - d. Finding ways to _____
 - e. Getting help for _____
 - f. Learning to cope with _____
 - g. (Etc.)

The counselor/group leader and others in attendance (co-facilitators/interns, etc.) should be invited to add to the list as well with some of their own ideas which will help the list grow so there are plenty of choices

Next, after everyone in the group has added at least 1 to 3 stressors to discuss to the overall group list, the group should begin discussing these issues in the following manner:

Everyone in the group is encouraged to participate and take their turn when it comes around. Start with a volunteer who is willing to go first. When it is someone's turn, that person should review the overall group stressor list carefully and choose one that he or she feels proficient at using in their own life. Keep in mind what it means to be proficient. (Review this as a group)

➤ **Proficient** – *adj – Skilled, advanced, competent*

If someone is proficient in an area, then he or she should be able to explain it in simple terms so that others can understand it. Einstein said it well with the following quote:

If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.

Albert Einstein

Once the group member who has their turn has chosen a stressor to discuss, the floor is theirs and that person should be given a few minutes to explain how they cope with that stressor by describing what skills and supports they use and how they use them personally. Again, be specific and everyone should do their best to explain the coping skills that they use for the stressor in a way that others in the group can learn.



The counselor/group leader has the right of “*Counselor Redirection*” – This would only be necessary if someone gives unhealthy or unsafe advice to the rest of the group. An example of something unsafe: “I cope with work stress by drinking a pint of vodka then get on my motorcycle and go 100mph down the highway – The adrenaline really helps me get my mind off of things”. Another example of an inappropriate answer: “I deal with my emotions when my family is getting on my case by going out and either picking a fight with the first person who looks at me funny and beating them to a pulp or by randomly vandalizing peoples cars or houses”

Finally, it would be helpful if someone played the role of “tracker” by keeping track of some of the coping skills and supports discussed by the group. Also, it would be helpful to note which areas no one picked as areas of proficiency as possible areas for future group education

When enough people have had a turn sharing in the Coping Circle the group can process the following discussion questions at the end as a group:

First, the person who was tracking coping skills and supports discussed by the group should review the list with the group so the group can again get an overview of all the good skills everyone is already using effectively. Then answer the following questions as a group with everyone encouraged to share and participate:

1. How did it feel to share your expertise when it was your turn?
2. Did one of your personal stressors get picked as an area of discussion? If yes, what do you think about the feedback and advice given for that stressor? What did you appreciate?
3. What are some coping skills that you heard about today from anyone else in the group, that you may like to give a try yourself in the future?
4. Finally, what stressors did not get picked by the group. Discuss as a group how perhaps some of these areas can be future topics of education and discussion for the group

