

THINKING ABOUT COPING...

Adapted from the Courage to Heal Workbook (Davis, 1990, p. 144-163)

There is an old saying `whatever gets you through the night` - this implies, do whatever you need to do to make it through till morning. We all have strategies of compensating the hurt we've suffered and dealing with our pain – they are necessary survival tools.

The problem is that many of our coping mechanisms can become patterns that we turn to whenever we feel discomfort. We may become addicted to gambling or drugs, run away when someone gets too close, or consistently ignore important problems that need to be dealt with. The effects of these coping strategies may keep us isolated, damage our health or block our important information, awareness or feelings.

As survivors, we should feel proud of our resourcefulness in staying alive and surviving abuse, yet many of us instead feel guilty and ashamed for the coping strategies we've turned to. Here's the truth: we did whatever we could to survive. We may no longer be in immediate danger, but the survival skills we learned have become habits because they worked for us and we likely had no other options.

One important thing to remember is that we've grown since then. We have the ability to look at our inventory of coping skills and ask ourselves – what purpose is this serving? We can begin to stop being ashamed of our survival tools and start exploring and accepting our strength and resiliency for getting to this point. If we can learn to approach these changes with love for ourselves and respect for our needs, we can make changes that will last.