

The coping keyboard

Does this sound familiar? You're feeling stressed, nervous, sad, angry, or simply fed up but you don't know why – and your usual 2 strategies (maybe going for a run or opening a pack of potato chips) don't seem to be working anymore?

People tend to resort to the same coping strategies again and again when they are faced with stressful situations. Over the course of our lives, each of us has built up a personal repertoire of coping strategies, maybe downing a candy bar, exercising, curling up in bed, consuming alcohol, calling friends, punching a pillow, etc.

The possibilities are endless, but unfortunately new options rarely occur to us when we need them most or when our old strategies don't cut it anymore. And so we keep coming back to the same old routines without trying out any alternatives.

It therefore makes sense to take some time in a calm moment to draw up a piano keyboard with a wider range of coping strategies that may work well for you in bad times. You'll be able to come back to this keyboard of coping strategies when you need it and it will help you to strike a different note to cope with the situation as best as possible.

The exercise:

- Set aside 10–15 minutes of your time. You can draw a piano keyboard, if you like (it should have 10 white keys).
- On each of these keys, write down one activity or one thing that could help you the next time you feel bad. Your ideas don't have to be reasonable – it's not about making judgements. What matters is to find alternatives so that you don't always have to "play the same note" (i.e. use the same coping strategy) when you feel off-kilter.
- It makes sense to keep your life circumstances and certain limitations in mind when filling out the white piano keys (e.g. financial or temporal limits).