

STOP TOOL



There are two common coping strategies to dealing with **stressful events**¹⁸:

1. Problem focused* – aim is to deal with the situation causing the stress response (eg, increase effort; reanalyse and find a new plan)
2. Emotion focused – aim is to regulate our emotions in order to reduce or manage psychological stress (eg, deep breaths, relaxation techniques, seeking social support)

*For young people, this tool can help them to think about how they currently manage stressful situations, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of different strategies. In line with a strengths-based approach, we've adapted the 'problem-focused' strategy to 'situation-focused' in the tool.



For each strategy, we can adopt two main **coping styles**¹⁹:

1. Approach coping – addressing the stressful situation directly (eg, positive thinking, being realistic)
2. Avoidance coping – removing yourself from the situation either physically (ie, walking away) or psychologically (ie, cognitive distancing)

When we consider these two approaches and styles, we end up with a 2x2 grid, which helps to identify different thoughts and actions we can use when responding to stressful situations.

		COPING TOOLS	
		Approach	Avoidance
COPING STRATEGIES	Situation focused	<i>Reflect on the situation causing the stress and try to change it</i>	<i>Try again and don't worry about it (distraction/walk away)</i>
	Emotion focused	<i>Use relaxation techniques to reduce stress</i>	<i>Ignore the situation as if it didn't bother you (walk away)</i>

Using the STOP tool (65–75 minutes)

Step 1

Introduce the 2x2 coping grid, explaining that the grid shows different coping strategies (situation vs emotion focused) and different coping styles (approach vs avoidance). Discuss the different thoughts and behaviours you might have depending on your style and approach.

10 minutes

Step 2

Then introduce the STOP tool as a technique to managing stressful situations.

Stop: how easy is it to stop when you're stressed? What could the benefits be?

10 minutes

Step 3

Take a deep breath: practise taking a long, deep breath, how did it feel? Highlight how taking a breath can slow your mind down and help to make rational decisions.

10 minutes

Step 4

Options: highlight how this stage is about thinking. Think about which strategy and style will help you get the best possible outcome. What are the pros and cons of the different approaches?

15–20 minutes

Step 5

Practice: this part of the tool is about action and developing skills. Discuss the different actions you might take depending on the preferred strategy and style. What are the consequences of these actions? How can you practise this action in other situations?

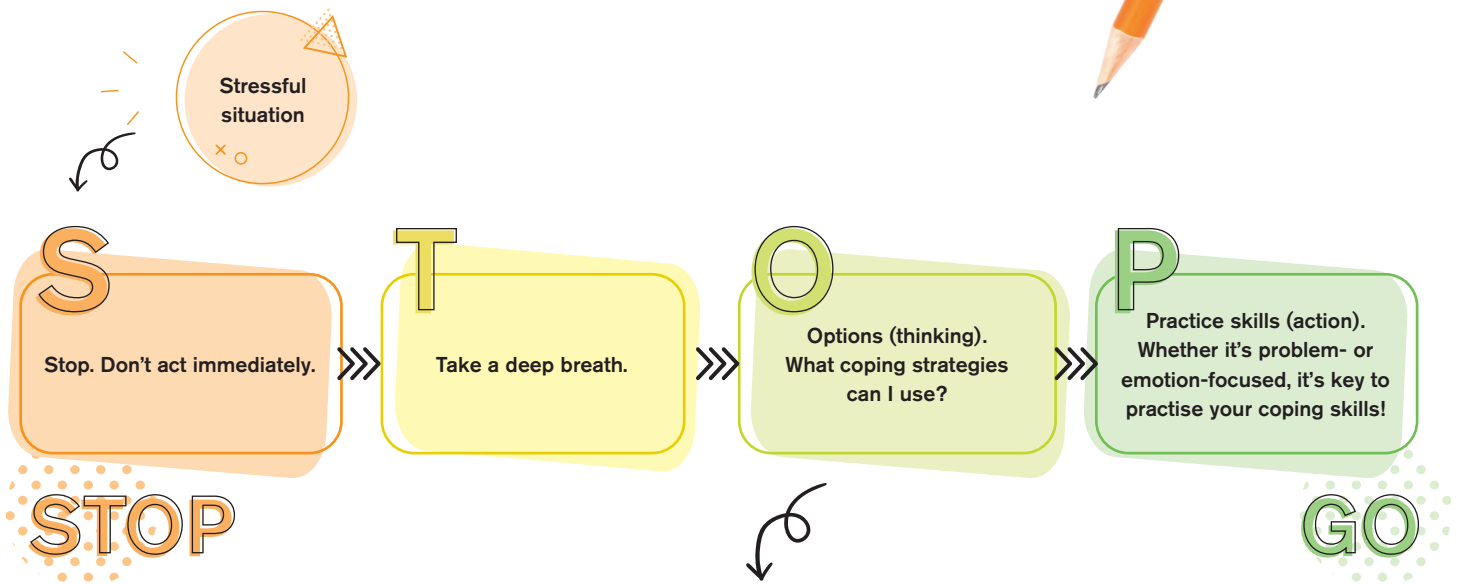
10–15 minutes

Step 6

End with an open reflection about how we've managed stressful situations in the past, how we currently deal with stressful situations, and what we could do differently in the future.

10 minutes

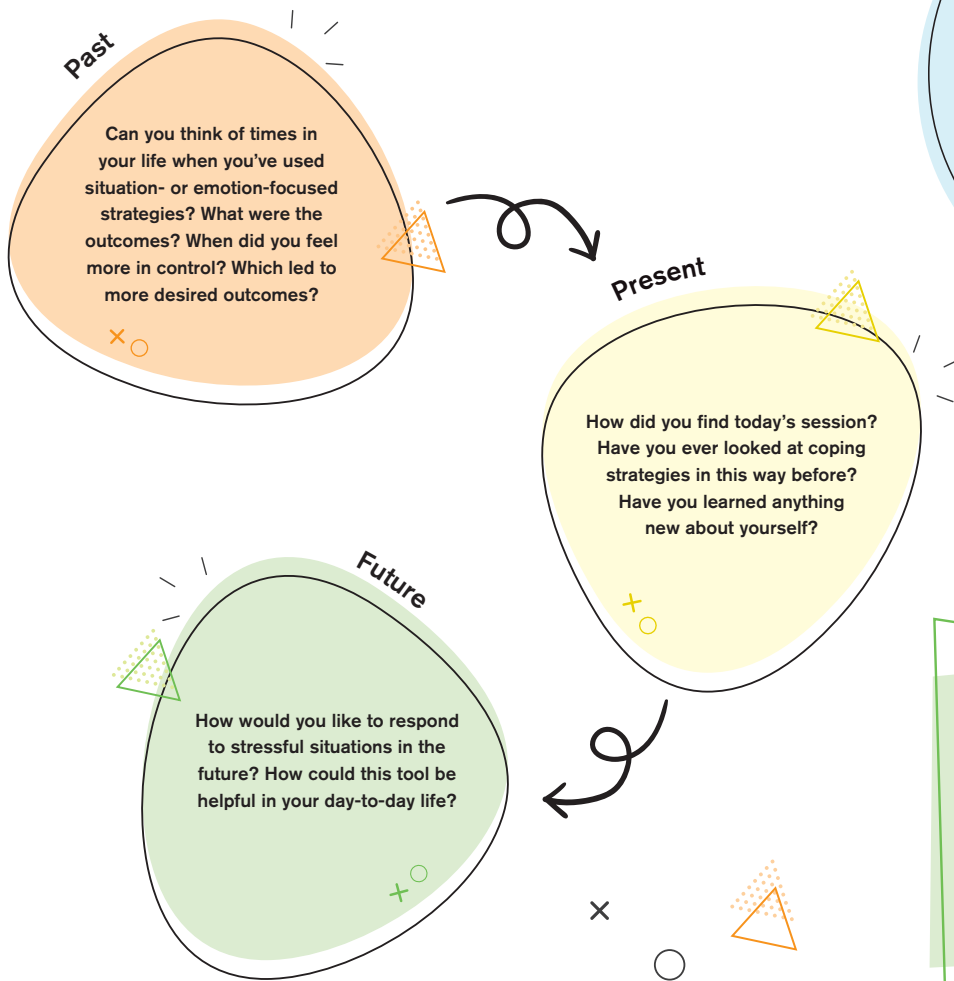
THE STOP TOOL



		COPING STYLE	
		APPROACH	AVOIDANCE
COPING STRATEGY	SITUATION FOCUSED		
	EMOTION FOCUSED		



Reflection questions on the tool



Try to really focus on the technique of your breathing

1. First, take a deep breath through your mouth, like you are sipping through a straw
2. Hold your breath for a few moments
3. Then gently exhale, like you are slowly blowing out a candle

Top Tip!

Try to encourage an 'approach style' to coping with stressful situations. However, sometimes this can escalate a situation (eg, conflict), so also recognise the strengths in avoidance styles when necessary.

Action plan

Practice makes permanent!

When first using the tool, identify less stressful events, ones which you can already manage pretty well, and try applying the STOP tool.

This will give yourself a chance to try different strategies. If you're very emotionally aware, how can you try and be more situation focused? Or, if you're a good problem solver, could you try and focus on regulating your emotions?

Practise different skills that work for you. Just like a sports person will practise a physical skill until they master it, practise your psychological skills consistently to ensure they're easily accessible when you need them!

Over time, identify more stressful situations where the STOP tool could help you manage different scenarios.

To do...