



# COPING CATCHER

## Catch Yourself Coping Not Smoking

### BACKGROUND:

Increasingly, mental health is an important topic for young people. Young people report increased stress and feelings of isolation. When we are struggling, we often turn to coping mechanisms—or, ways to relieve/address stress or numb feelings. Coping mechanisms can either support health or negatively impact it. One way some young people cope is through using substances, such as tobacco products (vaping, smoking). Contrary to messages from the tobacco and vape industry, research shows that quitting tobacco improves treatment outcomes for substance use and mental health conditions ([Truth-Mental Health](#)).

During moments of stress or anxiety we may forget about the many healthy coping strategies that are available to us, which puts us at risk for turning to less healthy options. Slowing down our thoughts in times of high stress/anxiety can help remind us to pause, identify what we're feeling, and choose a healthy coping skill.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Youth will identify challenging emotions they are experiencing and potential healthy coping strategies in their lives.

#### Facilitator note:

In this activity we are engaging with youth around their mental health. We are asking that young people identify things/triggers that cause them stress/anxiety in their daily lives and engage in a discussion around coping mechanisms that they are using or could use when feeling overwhelmed.

#### MATERIALS:

- Coping Catcher Print Out
- Pens/Markers/Pencils
- Sticky Notes
- Chart Paper or Blank Surface
- Scissors

### Introduce Coping Catcher

**Facilitator Note:** Consider reviewing group norms/creating group norms prior to this conversation, to support emotional safety for participants.

1. **Explain:** *There is a lot going on in our lives and in the world, it can feel overwhelming and stressful. These are normal feelings to have.*

- **Facilitator:** Share about a time you weren't feeling your best and either didn't have a positive coping skill to use, or when you used one that was helpful. Consider being vulnerable in order to connect genuinely with participants.
- The goal is to be connecting and not triggering.
- **Ask:** *Can you name/list 2-3 things in your lives that cause you stress/anxiety?*

2. **Explain:** *Everyone feels a broad range of emotions every day. Experiencing a lot of complex emotions is normal. We know a lot of young people struggle with strong emotions like stress, anxiety, fear, or overwhelm. Identifying these emotions and healthy outlets for these feelings can be helpful. Sometimes, youth turn to substances, such as cannabis, alcohol, or nicotine to cope or numb, hoping it will decrease stress and make us feel better. Even if you don't use substances, some of your peers do, and they may not know how it's actually affecting their mental health. Right now, we will just focus on nicotine.*

#### • Share the following:

- **Fact:** Smoking actually increases physical reactions in your body to increase stress (elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate, less oxygen flow to the brain, tensed muscles) thus leaving you feeling worse in the long run. [[Do Something](#)]

- **Fact:** The Tobacco and vape industry has promoted messages that cigarettes will "improve your mood" and "help you to relax". [[Truth-MentalHealth](#)]
- **Fact:** People with mental health diagnoses make up 25% of the population but smoke 40% of all cigarettes sold in the United States. [[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)]
- **Explain:** *Vaping or smoking is not a character flaw, but it can impact your health and wellbeing, and get in the way of healthier stress relief options/coping skills.*

### 3. Ask:

- Do you notice when you are stressed, sad, anxious, angry?*
- Where do you feel these emotions in your body?*
- Are these emotions bad? Or Good? Why or why not?*
  - The key to this question is to notice that emotions are responses to stimuli, they provide information, but they are not good or bad. The goal to a full life is not just "happiness" but the ability to feel our emotions in healthy, life sustaining ways.
- What do you typically do to make yourself feel better when you are feeling difficult emotions?*
  - Participants discuss/name/list ways they can calm themselves down. They are invited to put them on sticky notes or write them on chart paper.
    - **Facilitator:** Take a picture of all the brainstormed coping skills and send them to your UpRISE TA Provider.
    - **Explain:** *Sounds like you already have some coping skills that work for you! Let's come up with a few more together, then we can complete a Coping Catcher as an interactive way to remember and access these resources.*
    - **Explain:** *Being able to identify your emotions can make it easier to find the right coping skill for what you're feeling. Because one skill might not work for every situation. That's why it's important to identify a few coping skills you can use for times when you aren't feeling your best.*
    - **Consider sharing first:** E.g., I know when I'm angry, I need more of an active outlet for it, so resting and listening to music isn't going to help me. I opt for a physical activity like running around the block a few times or playing basketball for a few minutes. However, when I'm sad I know I like talking to a friend, or being alone and listening to music.

## Coping Catcher Instructions

- Show them an example Coping Catcher, play a round or two with them.
  - **Facilitator note:**
    - Make an example Coping Catcher prior to group facilitation
    - **Explain:** *Fill out the innermost level of the coping catcher with coping skills that work for you or you want to try.*
  - The second layer flaps have corresponding categories to indicate what type of coping skill you might need, be sure to write them in correspondingly.
  - Fold along the lines and into shape. Follow your instructor or watch the video below for directions.
  - How-to Video [How to Make a Cootie Catcher!](#)

## Debrief and closing

- **Explain:** *Before you go, we'd like to offer a few resources for you and your friends to take with you.*
- *While talking about challenging emotions is really important, it can bring up big feelings we might not be anticipating. We want to offer you some resources to take with you in case you're needing support after today's session. It's always ok to reach out and ask for help when you're needing it. You can contact any of the support lines we have listed in addition to reaching out to (UpRISE Facilitator, School Social Worker, Counselor, trusted adult) for support.*
- **Include resources like helplines**
  - [Colorado Crisis Services:](#) (844)-493-8255 or text TALK to 38255
  - [The Trevor Project Lifeline:](#) 1(866)-488-7389 or text 678-678
  - [My Life My Quit:](#) Text "Start My Quit" to 36072
- **Explain:** *If you'd like to post your Coping Catcher on social media, tag us @upriseyouthmovement*