User Manual for the

COPING STRATEGIES INVENTORY

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Scale Format

The Coping Strategies Inventory is a 72-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess coping thoughts and behaviors in response to a specific stressor. The format of the CSI is adapted from the Lazarus “Ways of Coping” questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1981). Persons are requested to describe, in a paragraph or two, the events and circumstances of a stressful episode. Users have the option of requesting this stressor in an open-ended manner, or of requesting a particular type of stressor (e.g., one that precipitates headaches or one that was ineffectively coped with). The norms reported in this manual were developed with an open-ended format (see Appendix A). After describing a stressful situation, persons taking the CSI are asked to respond to 72 questions in a 5-item Likert format. Respondents indicate for each item the extent to which they performed that particular coping response in dealing with the previously described situation (see Appendix B).

\[a. \text{ None} \]
\[b. \text{ A Little} \]
\[c. \text{ Some} \]
\[d. \text{ Much} \]
\[e. \text{ Very Much} \]

Subscales of the Coping Strategies Inventory

There are a total of 14 subscales on the CSI including eight primary scales, four secondary scales, and two tertiary scales (see Table 1). Construction of the subscales was based on a review of the coping assessment literature (Tobin, Holroyd, and Reynolds, 1982) and the factor structure obtained using Wherry’s hierarchical rotation (Wherry, 1984; Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1985). Twenty-three of the items were taken from the “Ways of Coping” questionnaire (Folkman & Lazarus, 1981) and 49 items were written to reflect the dimensions of the hypothesized subscales.

The primary subscales consist of specific coping strategies people use in response to stressful events. These include:

- **Problem Solving**: This subscale includes items referring to both behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to eliminate the source of stress by changing the stressful situation.
- **Cognitive Restructuring**: This subscale includes cognitive strategies that alter the meaning of the stressful transaction as it is less threatening, is examined for its positive aspects, is viewed from a new perspective, etc.
- **Social Support**: This subscale includes items that refer to seeking emotional support from people, one’s family, and one’s friends.
- **Express Emotions**: This subscale includes items referring to releasing and expressing emotions.
- **Problem Avoidance**: This subscale includes items referring to the denial of problems and the avoidance of thoughts or action about the stressful event.
• **Wishful Thinking:** This subscale refers to cognitive strategies that reflect an inability or reluctance to reframe or symbolically alter the situation. The items involve hoping and wishing that things could be better.

• **Social Withdrawal:** This subscale includes items that reflect blaming oneself for the situation and criticizing oneself.

**Higher Order Subscales**

In Wherry’s hierarchical factor analysis variance shared between primary factors is loaded onto more general, or higher order, factors (Wherry, 1984). Wherry’s method makes it relatively easy to interpret higher order factors because it provides correlations between higher order and the original variables. In this way one can avoid the problem of interpreting the loadings of factors on factors. Hierarchical factor analysis of the CSI supports four secondary subscales and two tertiary subscales (Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1985).

**Secondary Subscales**

• **Problem Focused Engagement:** This subscale includes both the Problem Solving and Cognitive Restructuring subscales. These subscales involve cognitive and behavioral strategies to change the situation or to change the meaning of the situation for the individual. These coping efforts are focused on the stressful situation itself.

• **Emotion Focused Engagement:** This subscale includes both Social Support and Express Emotions. The items reflect open communication of feelings to others and increased social involvement, especially with family and friends. These coping efforts are focused on the individual’s emotional reaction to the stressful situation.

• **Problem Focused Disengagement:** This subscale includes both Problem Avoidance and Wishful Thinking. The items reflect denial, avoidance, and an inability or reluctance to look at the situation differently. They reflect cognitive and behavioral strategies to avoid the situation.

• **Emotion Focused Disengagement:** This subscale includes Social Withdrawal and Self Criticism. The subscale involves shutting oneself and one’s feelings off from others, and criticizing or blaming oneself for what happened.
**Tertiary Subscales**

- **Engagement:** This subscale includes Problem Solving, Cognitive Restructuring, Social Support, and Express Emotions. The subscale reflects attempts by the individual to engage the individual in efforts to manage the stressful person/environment transaction. Through these coping strategies individuals engage in an active and ongoing negotiation with the stressful environment.

- **Disengagement:** This subscale includes Problem Avoidance, Wishful Thinking, Social Withdrawal and Self Criticism. The subscale includes strategies that are likely to result in disengaging the individual from the person/environment transaction. Feelings are not shared with others, thoughts about situations are avoided, and behaviors that might change the situation are not initiated.
# Table I

**Hierarchical Factor Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12%*</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Focused</td>
<td>Emotion Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob Solve</td>
<td>Cog Restr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emot</td>
<td>Social Supp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cog</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restr</td>
<td>Wishful Think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solv</td>
<td>Self Crit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emot</td>
<td>Social With</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 506

% total variance accounted for = 47%

* common variance
**Scoring**

Current scoring practices for the CSI involve giving all items in a particular subscale equal weights. To obtain the raw score for a subscale, simply add the item scores.

Some people may prefer to look at secondary or tertiary scores rather than the individual coping strategies (primary scales). Investigators are advised to restrict hypothesis testing to only one factor level (primary vs. secondary vs. tertiary) at a time. Researchers who elect to enter all 14 subscales into the same multivariate analysis will face the problem of collinearity between the scales.

**Primary Subscales:** There are nine items in each of the primary subscales. Raw scale scores are calculated simply by adding the Likert responses of the items for a particular subscale together (see *Table 1*).

**Table 2**  
**Primary Subscale Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>1,9,17,25,33,41,49,57,65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Restructuring</td>
<td>2,10,18,26,34,42,50,58,66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express Emotions</td>
<td>3,11,19,27,35,43,51,59,67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>4,12,20,28,36,44,52,60,68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Avoidance</td>
<td>5,13,21,29,37,45,53,61,69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishful Thinking</td>
<td>6,14,22,30,38,46,54,62,70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Criticism</td>
<td>7,15,23,31,39,47,55,63,71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Withdrawal</td>
<td>8,16,24,32,40,48,56,64,72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To calculate the secondary and tertiary subscale scores, simply add together the primary scales that make up that subscale (see Table 3).

Table 3

Secondary Subscale Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Formula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Focused Engagement</td>
<td>= Problem Solving + Cognitive Restructuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focused Engagement</td>
<td>= Social Support + Express Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Focused Disengagement</td>
<td>= Problem Avoidance + Wishful Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focused Disengagement</td>
<td>= Social Withdrawal + Self Criticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tertiary Subscale Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Formula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>= Problem Focused Change + Emotion Focused Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>= Problem Focused Stasis + Emotion Focused Disengagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Item means and standard deviations for a sample of college students is presented for comparison purposes (see Table 4).

**Table 4**
Subscale Item Means and Standard Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Males (n = 359)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Females (n = 520)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>sd</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>sd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Restructuring</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express Emotions</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Avoidance</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishful Thinking</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Criticism</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Withdrawal</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Focusing Engag</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focusing Engag</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Focusing Diseng</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focusing Diseng</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tertiary Scales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001
Reliability

Chronbach’s alpha has been the most frequently reported coefficient of reliability for measures of coping process. The alpha coefficients for the CSI range from .71 to .94 (m = 83).

To date, no other measures of coping process have reported test-retest reliability. Repeated assessments of coping process present problems that are not encountered with trait measures. Natural stressors may change over time to the extent that new ways of coping are demanded. When faced with a chronic stressor, people may try alternative strategies over a period of time. Different stressors may require very different ways of coping.

Research with the CSI has demonstrated some of these difficulties. When persons are asked to complete the CSI at several assessments, many people complete the scale with reference to different stressors. Two week test-retest Pearson correlation coefficients reflect the effect of these different situations on coping; the correlations range from .39 to .61 (m = .73). Both alpha coefficients and the Pearson correlations indicate the scale reliably assesses coping process (see Table 5).
Table 5
Reliability Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Scales</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alpha</td>
<td>test-retest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Restructuring</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express Emotions</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Avoidance</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishful Thinking</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Criticism</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Withdrawal</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Secondary Scales                |       |       |
| Problem Focusing Engagement     | .87   | .69   |
| Emotion Focusing Engagement     | .92   | .82   |
| Problem Focusing Disengagement  | .81   | .74   |
| Emotion Focusing Disengagement  | .90   | .79   |

| Tertiary Scales                 |       |       |
| Engagement                      | .90   | .78   |
| Disengagement                   | .89   | .79   |

alpha n = 801    test-retest n = 354
Sample Factor Items and Structure Coefficients

**Primary Factors**

**Problem Solving:**
- I worked on solving the problems in the situation. \( .49 \)
- I made a plan of action and followed it. \( .48 \)

**Cognitive Restructuring**
- I convinced myself that things aren’t quite as bad as they seem. \( .42 \)
- I reorganized the way I looked at the situation, so things didn’t look so bad. \( .39 \)

**Express Emotions**
- I let my emotions out. \( .54 \)
- I got in touch with my feelings and just let them go. \( .54 \)

**Social Support**
- I found somebody who was a great listener. \( .50 \)
- I talked to someone about how I was feeling. \( .49 \)

**Problem Avoidance**
- I went along as if nothing were happening. \( .37 \)
- I avoided thinking/doing anything about the situation. \( .34 \)

**Wishful Thinking**
- I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with. \( .50 \)
- I hoped a miracle would happen. \( .44 \)

**Self Criticism**
- I criticized myself for what happened. \( .70 \)
- I blamed myself. \( .70 \)

**Social Withdrawal**
- I spent more time alone. \( .56 \)
- I avoided being with people. \( .49 \)
Secondary Factors

Problem Focused Engagement
I reorganized the way I looked at the situation, so things didn’t look so bad. .46
I worked on solving the problems in the situation. .45

Emotion Focused Engagement
I let my emotions out. .54
I talked to someone about how I was feeling. .51

Problem Focused Disengagement
I went along as if nothing were happening. .34
I hoped the problem would take care of itself. .30

Emotion Focused Disengagement
I criticized myself for what happened. .36
I avoided being with people. .30

Tertiary Factors

Engagement
I worked on solving the problems in the situation. .31
I reorganized the way I looked at the situation, so things didn’t look so bad. .39
I let my emotions out. .40
I talked to someone about how I was feeling. .40

Disengagement
I avoided thinking or doing anything about the situation. .40
I hoped a miracle would happen. .39
I criticized myself for what happened. .36
I spent more time alone. .37
Validity

Validity for the CSI has been assessed in a number of ways. Several studies will be briefly reviewed.

Factor Structure: The factor structure of the CSI (Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1985) supports a hierarchical relationship between the proposed subscales. Using Wherry’s (1984) hierarchical factor analysis program, eight primary factors, four secondary factors, and two tertiary factors were obtained. Item loadings were representative of the hypothesized subscales previously presented.

Criterion Validity: The successful discrimination between symptomatic and normal samples from several different populations supports the CSI’s clinical utility. The CSI has successfully differentiated depressed from nondepressed samples (Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1985), headache from non-headache sufferers (Holroyd et al, 1983), and neurotic vs. Normal samples (Tobin, Holroyd, & Reynolds, 1982).

Construct Validity: There have been several studies that have looked at the relationship of the CSI to instruments measuring other important constructs in the stress and coping literature. The CSI is particularly predictive of depressive symptoms for individuals who are under high levels of stress (Tobin et al, 1983). Also, persons who have greater self-efficacy report doing more problem-solving and less problem-avoidance than individuals with lower self-efficacy (Tobin et al, 1984).
The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out the kinds of situations that trouble people in their day-to-day lives and how people deal with them.

Take a few moments and think about an event or situation that has been very stressful for you during the last month. By stressful we mean a situation that was troubling you, either because it made you feel bad or because it took effort to deal with it. It might have been with your family, with school, with your job, or with your friends.

In the space below, please describe this stressful event. Please describe what happened and include details such as the place, who was involved, what made it important to you, and what you did. The situation could be one that is going on right now or one that has already happened. Don't worry about making it into an essay. Just put down the things that come to you. Continue writing on the back if necessary.
Appendix B

Coping Strategies Inventory
(Revised 1984)

Once again, take a few minutes to think about your chosen event. As you read through the following items please answer them based on how you handled your event.

Please read each item below and determine the extent to which you used it in handling your chosen event. Please do not mark on this inventory. Please use the provided answer sheet in the following manner.

a. Not at all
b. A Little
c. Somewhat
d. Much
e. Very much

1. I just concentrated on what I had to do next; the next step.
2. I tried to get a new angle on the situation.
3. I found ways to blow off steam.
4. I accepted sympathy and understanding from someone.
5. I slept more than usual.
6. I hoped the problem would take care of itself.
7. I told myself that if I wasn't so careless, things like this wouldn't happen.
8. I tried to keep my feelings to myself.
9. I changed something so that things would turn out all right.
10. I looked for the silver lining, so to speak; tried to look on the bright side of things.
11. I did some things to get it out of my system.
12. I found somebody who was a good listener.
13. I went along as if nothing were happening.
14. I hoped a miracle would happen.
15. I realized that I brought the problem on myself.
16. I spent more time alone.
17. I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.
18. I told myself things that helped me feel better.
19. I let my emotions go.
20. I talked to someone about how I was feeling.
21. I tried to forget the whole thing.
22. I wished that I never let myself get involved with that situation.
23. I blamed myself.
24. I avoided my family and friends.
25. I made a plan of action and followed it.
26. I looked at things in a different light and tried to make the best of what was available.
27. I let out my feelings to reduce the stress.
28. I just spent more time with people I liked.
29. I didn't let it get to me; I refused to think about it too much.
30. I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.
31. I criticized myself for what happened.
32. I avoided being with people.
33. I tackled the problem head-on.
34. I asked myself what was really important, and discovered that things weren't so bad after all.
35. I let my feelings out somehow.
36. I talked to someone that I was very close to.
37. I decided that it was really someone else's problem and not mine.
38. I wished that the situation had never started.
39. Since what happened was my fault, I really chewed myself out.
40. I didn't talk to other people about the problem.
41. I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts and tried harder to make things work.
42. I convinced myself that things aren't quite as bad as they seem.
43. I let my emotions out.
44. I let my friends help out.
45. I avoided the person who was causing the trouble.
46. I had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out.
47. I realized that I was personally responsible for my difficulties and really lectured myself.
48. I spent some time by myself.
49. It was a tricky problem, so I had to work around the edges to make things come out OK.
50. I stepped back from the situation and put things into perspective.
51. My feelings were overwhelming and they just exploded.
52. I asked a friend or relative I respect for advice.
53. I made light of the situation and refused to get too serious about it.
54. I hoped that if I waited long enough, things would turn out OK.
55. I kicked myself for letting this happen.
56. I kept my thoughts and feelings to myself.
57. I worked on solving the problems in the situation.
58. I reorganized the way I looked at the situation, so things didn't look so bad.
59. I got in touch with my feelings and just let them go.
60. I spent some time with my friends.
61. Every time I thought about it I got upset; so I just stopped thinking about it.
62. I wished I could have changed what happened.
63. It was my mistake and I needed to suffer the consequences.
64. I didn't let my family and friends know what was going on.
65. I struggled to resolve the problem.
66. I went over the problem again and again in my mind and finally saw things in a different light.
67. I was angry and really blew up.
68. I talked to someone who was in a similar situation.
69. I avoided thinking or doing anything about the situation.
70. I thought about fantastic or unreal things that made me feel better.

71. I told myself how stupid I was.

72. I did not let others know how I was feeling.
REFERENCES


