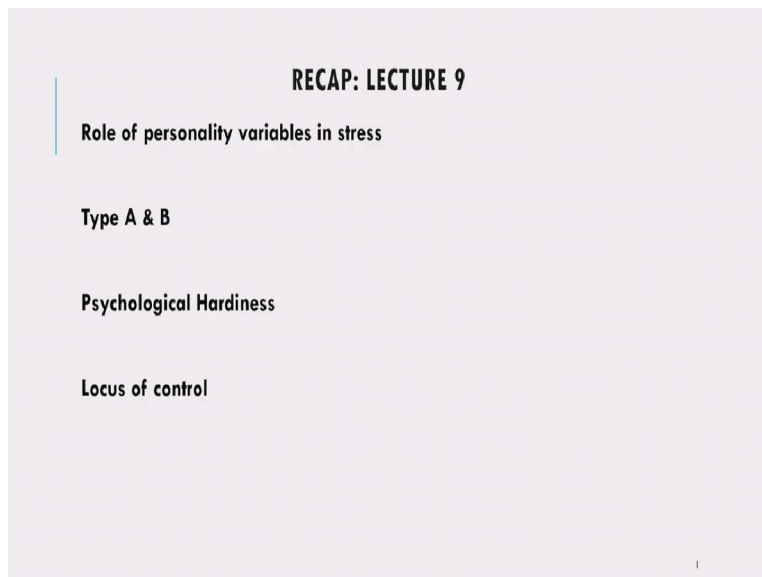


**Psychology of Stress, Health, and Well-Being**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
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**Lecture 10**

**Coping Strategies Definition and Types**

I welcome you all to the tenth lecture of NPTEL MOOCs course, titled Psychology of Stress, Health, and Well-Being. So today, we will be talking about coping strategies and before we talk about today's lecture, let us have a brief recap of the last lecture that is lecture nine.

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So, in the last lecture, we talked about how certain personality traits influence our stress reaction. So, when we talk about a personality trait or personality variables, the idea is that every individual has unique and relatively consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. So, those relatively enduring characteristics are called personality traits or variables, which distinguishes one person from another person. So, certain personality characteristics or traits may influence our stress reaction; that was the whole idea that we discussed in the last lecture.

And in this context, we have discussed type A and type B personality traits. We tried to understand that type A people because of their characteristics such as time urgency, achievement orientation, anger hostility, they are more likely to experience stress in their

life and which may lead to certain stress related disorders such as heart diseases, more as compared to type B people, who are of opposite characteristics, such as they are more easygoing. There is no time urgency, and they are a more relaxed kind of people.

Then we spoke about another personality trait called psychological hardiness, which has an effect on our stress response. As a result, people vary in terms of psychological hardiness variables. So, when we talk about psychological hardiness, we're talking about three things: a sense of commitment, a sense of control, and a sense of challenge.

In the face of stress, your sense of commitment is essentially your tendency to stay engaged with the people in the situation. So you don't flee; instead, you become more committed, and if you're committed to something, you're more likely to engage with it when faced with adversity.

People with a high sense of challenge view stress as an opportunity to grow, learn, and improve, rather than seeing it as a threat, and sense of control is about their tendency to affect the outcomes of events around them, whatever is going on around them, so that they have a sense of control and try and alter things as much as possible.

As a result, these three characteristics make people psychologically hardy, tough, or strong, and they provide the requisite courage to face and develop out of stressful situations. So, according to studies, hardiness protects against stress, anxiety, and depression, and it acts as a protective factor as well as a resource for growing out of challenging or stressful situations.

Hardy people perform better under stress, according to research, and there's a chance that hardiness can be taught, at least in part, through the use of specific hardiness training programs. So, even though it is a type of personality trait, research suggests that it can be taught in order to become more psychologically strong.

Then we spoke about another personality trait called locus of control, which is essentially how people find causality in the behaviors and outcomes they perform in their daily lives. There are two different forms of locus of control. One is known as an internal locus of control, which simply means that people attribute outcomes or causality to internal

factors or internal attributions. So, if they succeed at a task, they will try and explain it using internal factors like ability, hard work, and so on, while people with external locus of control are more likely to attribute external reasons for their actions and outcomes like chance, fate, and so on. Research shows that people with internal locus of control have an advantage in the context of stress. So, as compared to people with external locus of control, people with internal locus of control are more able to deal with stress or cope with stress, and they have better health outcomes, mainly because people with internal locus of control try to master their environment so they have a sense of control within themselves and engage in adaptive healthy coping strategies in the face of stress.

So, these are some of the findings of the study. So, there's another theory that we've discussed in the context of locus of control, called Weiner attribution theory, that inculcates or includes locus of control as one of the ideas of how people explain achievement situations like success and failure, and the Weiner conceptualizes that people explain achievement situations like success and failure in terms of three sets of factors. One is causality, internal and external locus of control. The second factor is stability, which refers to whether the factors are stable or unstable. Stable factors are less likely to change, while unstable factors are more likely to change. The third factor is controllability, which refers to whether the factor is under your control or not.

As a result, these three sets of factors have an effect on our achievement, as well as an explanation of our achievement situation. For example, if someone fails at a job, such as an exam, and blames it on a lack of ability, this is an example of internal, stable, uncontrollable factors. Then, it is likely to have an effect on his future motivation; if it is due to a lack of ability, he will most likely have lower expectations in the future, he will not have any motivation to perform the task in the future, and he will most likely quit the situation, because ability is an uncontrollable and relatively stable factor. However, if anyone attributes his failure to a lack of effort, which is an internal unstable and controllable factor, then one's future expectancy in terms of probability of success would be much higher because if someone put in more effort, it would change the situation. As a

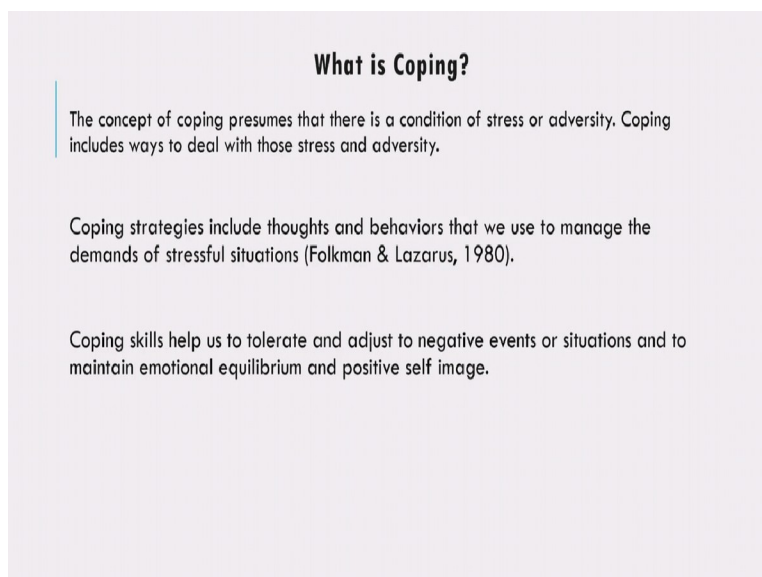
result, how we explain things and situations can have an effect on motivation and other internal and/or emotional states. So, these are some of the topics we discussed in class the last lecture.

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So today, we will talk about mostly coping strategies and different types of coping strategies that people use and we will also look at specifically some of the maladaptive coping strategies, which people commonly use at the face of stressful circumstances.

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So, what is a coping or coping strategy? This is a very commonly used term in our day-to-day life. So, when we talk about coping, the idea is, there is a problem in the environment, or there are stressful circumstances. So, whenever there is stress, there is a need for coping.

So, coping and stress are always connected to each other. We do not cope when there is no stress and problems in this environment. So, these are kind of two sides of the same coin, and coping typically connotes the idea of how we deal or the ways by which we deal with stress and adversities of our life.

So, coping strategies include thoughts and behaviors that we use to manage the demands of a stressful situation. So, this is one of the definitions given by Folkman and Lazarus. So, whatever we do at the thought level in terms of thinking or in terms of action or behavior that we do to deal with the situation is collectively called coping strategies or coping.

So, coping skills help us tolerate and adjust to negative events or situations and maintain emotional equilibrium and a positive self-image. So basically, by using coping skills, we are trying to tolerate a difficult or uncomfortable situation or unpleasant situation to maintain our psychological and physiological equilibrium. So, these are some of the definitions.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:20)

### Why understanding about coping is Important?

It is significant that we have insights about coping and stress management strategies because-

It is evident that stress accounts for a significant proportions of physical and mental disorders.

Unhealthy coping strategies are major contributors to these stress related diseases.

Stress can not be removed from our life. It has to be managed properly to lead a healthy life.

So, why it is important to understand coping strategies? By now, you might have understood a lot of concepts that we have already discussed. Let me just give you some brief reasons why it is important to understand coping strategies or study coping strategies? There are some reasons. One reason is that it is evident that stress accounts for a significant proportion of physical and mental disorders. In the last many lectures, we have seen how stress contributes to both physical and mental disorders. So, most of these stress-related disorders are associated with unhealthy or ineffective coping strategies. So, we are not able to deal with stress or not able to cope with stressful circumstances. That is the primary reason for stress going beyond our control and causing all the negative influences in terms of disorders, both mental and physical disorders.

This is another reason that unhealthy coping strategies are major contributors to these stress-related disorders. The third reason is that stress cannot be removed from our lives, so it is a part of our everyday lives. So, we need to learn how to manage it and cope with it to lead a healthy and productive life. So, we cannot have an effective functioning, productive, healthy life without understanding coping strategies. So, for all these important reasons, we need to understand coping strategies; what are the possibilities of coping strategies? What are the different categories of coping strategies, and what are healthy coping strategies? What are unhealthy coping strategies? So, it is very important to understand all these aspects.

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**Categories/groupings among coping responses**

Coping is a very broad concept with a long and complex history (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004).

Many distinctions have been made within coping responses. Some of the more important distinctions are-

- (1) Problem focused vs Emotion focused coping
- (2) Engagement vs Disengagement coping
- (3) Adaptive vs Mal-adaptive coping

So, we will see the research in stress and coping. It has a long and complex history. So people have been talking about diverse types of coping strategies. So, there are many categorizations of coping strategies. We will look into some of these categories. This is not an exhaustive list, but these are some of the common categories of coping strategies. So, many distinctions have been made within coping strategies, depending on functions, goals, etc. Some of these important distinctions include problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, engagement coping versus disengagement coping, adaptive coping versus maladaptive coping and so on. So, these are some of the ways of looking at coping or kind of categorizing them based on their functions and goals, and approaches. So, we will see all these three categories briefly.

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### Emotion-focused vs Problem focused coping

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that there are two main forms of coping: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping.

**Problem focused coping** involves tackling or dealing with the problem that is causing stress such as generating options to solve the problem, implementing steps to solve the problem.

Let's look at the distinctions between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. So, according to Lazarus and Folkman, there are two main types of coping, which they call emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. So, when we talk about problem-focused coping, we're talking about all of the coping mechanisms that include solving or dealing with the issues that are causing the stress, such as generating options to solve the problem implementing steps to solve the problem. Problem-focused coping implies that we are feeling tension as a result of a specific problem. So, there's a problem, and we're feeling stress as a result of it. People will try to solve the problem in problem-focused coping. So, if the root of the issue is resolved, there would be no stress. So, if you try to fix the issue yourself to cope with your stress, this is known as problem-focused coping. Let's say you expect layoffs or a reduction in the number of positions available at the company where you work. So, if you were expecting, you could engage in a variety of problem-focused coping strategies, such as working very hard in the organization to demonstrate your worthiness, so that you are not replaced, or you could start applying for other jobs, so that if you are removed from that job, you have another job, or you could start improving your skills, so that your employability improves. So, these are some of the problem-focused coping measures you may take to cope with that situation or reduce the traumatic stress in terms of your experience.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:11)



**Emotion focused coping** are aimed at managing the feelings of distress associated with the stressful situations rather than the actual problem or the source of the stress such as positive reappraisal, self controlling etc.

Emotion-focused coping includes a very wide range of responses (Carver, 2019), such as -

self-soothing (e.g., relaxation, seeking emotional support),

expression of negative emotion (e.g., yelling, crying),

focus on negative thoughts (e.g., rumination),

attempts to escape cognitively from the stressful situation (e.g., avoidance, denial, wishful thinking)

Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, is aimed at handling the distress associated with the stressful situation rather than the actual problem or the cause of the stress, as the name implies. So, in emotion-focused coping, you're not attempting to fix the issue that's triggering the stress, nor are you attempting to address the cause of the stress; rather, you're attempting to control the stress-related emotions. As a result, you're dealing with the emotional distress that the problem is causing. So, instead of coping with the issue, you're dealing with the emotions that arise from problems or stressful situations.

So, self-soothing steps like relaxation, seeking emotional support, expression of negative emotion, yelling, crying, focus on negative thoughts like regulation, focus on positive thoughts, so that you see the bright side of the situation, attempts to escape cognitively from the stressful situation, and so on are all examples of emotion-focused coping.

There are a variety of approaches to coping with our emotions. So, when we are unable to solve a problem, we often feel stress as a result of a problem that is beyond our control and that we cannot truly solve. As a result, we have no choice but to control our emotions at that point. As a result, in cases where the problem or circumstance is uncontrollable, emotion-focused coping may be more prominent. However, when there is a possibility of solving the issue, people can engage in emotion-focused coping. That isn't always the case.

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Some behaviors can serve either a problem-focused or an emotion-focused function, depending on the goal behind their use (Carver, 2019).

For example, seeking social support is emotion focused if the goal is to obtain emotional support and problem focused if the goal is to obtain advice or instrumental help.

Problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping also tend to facilitate one another (Carver, 2019).

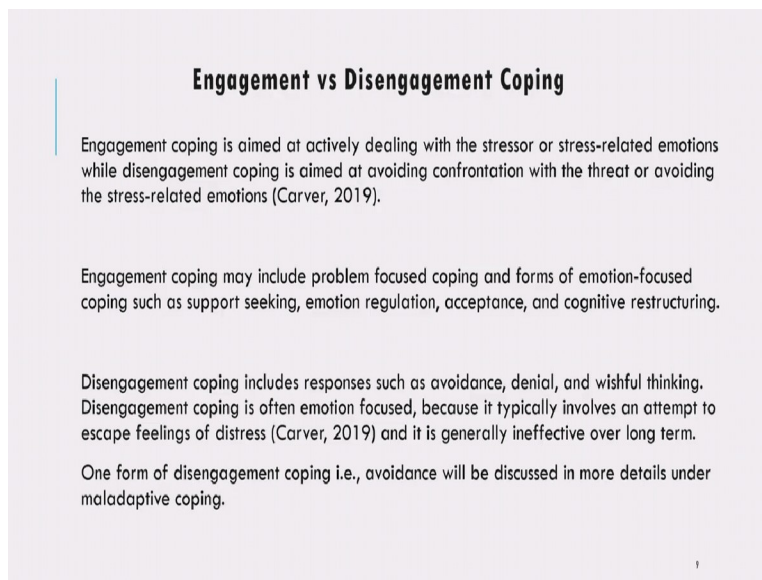
Effective problem-focused coping diminishes the distress generated by a threat. On the other hand effective emotion-focused coping facilitate better problem focused coping by diminishing emotions and helping solving problem more calmly.

Some behaviors can serve as both problem-focused as well as emotion-focused coping depending on the goals of the strategy. For example, seeking social support can be emotion-focused if your goal is to get emotional support from another person. If your aim is to receive emotional support from another person, for example, finding social support may be emotion-focused. Then you go out and seek help from others, and you go to talk about your problems. So, if it allows you to relax and calm down, it is an emotion-focused coping strategy. However, if you seek guidance from another person about how to solve the problem, the same strategy of finding social support may become a problem-focused coping strategy. So, depending on the objective, what is the goal you are trying to accomplish, finding social support may be both emotion and problem-focused coping.

Problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping seem to complement each other; they are not mutually exclusive strategies; each may support, encourage, and facilitate the other. Efficient problem-focused coping, for example, can also reduce emotional distress. As a result, when you solve the problem, the emotional distress naturally decreases. As a result, it facilitates emotion-focused coping as well. Efficient emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, will help you tackle the problem more effectively, and many times when we encounter intense feelings, we are unable to solve a problem because our minds are cluttered and clouded. We can reduce those emotional, overwhelming feelings by using

emotion-focused coping, and then see more clearly how to solve the issue. As a result, emotion-focused coping will make problem-focused coping easier, and vice versa.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:29)



**Engagement vs Disengagement Coping**

Engagement coping is aimed at actively dealing with the stressor or stress-related emotions while disengagement coping is aimed at avoiding confrontation with the threat or avoiding the stress-related emotions (Carver, 2019).

Engagement coping may include problem focused coping and forms of emotion-focused coping such as support seeking, emotion regulation, acceptance, and cognitive restructuring.

Disengagement coping includes responses such as avoidance, denial, and wishful thinking. Disengagement coping is often emotion focused, because it typically involves an attempt to escape feelings of distress (Carver, 2019) and it is generally ineffective over long term.

One form of disengagement coping i.e., avoidance will be discussed in more details under maladaptive coping.

Emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping are two approaches to coping. Engagement coping vs disengagement coping is another way to categorize coping. So, when we use the word "engagement coping," it refers to actively dealing with the stressor or stress-related emotions, while "disengagement coping" refers to avoiding confrontation with the threat or stress-related emotions.

So, based on the name, it's pretty self-explanatory. You actively engage with the problem and actively engage yourself in dealing with the stressor or feelings in engagement coping. So you don't run away; instead, you consciously interact with the situation in order to relieve stress or emotions.

Disengagement you try to kind of avoid confronting, you would kind of try to run away from the situation itself or kind of avoid facing the emotional distress. In disengagement, you try to disengage from action, while in engagement, you try to engage in activity. That's the main distinction.

Problem-focused coping as well as some emotion-focused coping can be included in engagement coping, such as support seeking, emotion regulation, acceptance, and

cognitive restructuring, which essentially involves changing the thinking processes. So, engagement coping can involve both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, as long as they are linked to consciously engaging with situations and feelings rather than avoiding them.

Avoidance, denial, and wishful thinking are examples of disengagement coping. So, in this case, all of these tactics are aimed at avoiding the situation or the thing, in this case, the stress-related emotions. Too many times, we simply deny that anything has happened so that we don't have to face it or run away, or we indulge in our dream world of wishful thinking so that we don't have to see the real problem. Since it usually requires an effort to avoid feelings of distress, disengagement coping is mainly emotion-focused. Disengagement is mainly an emotion focus so people tend to escape distressing feelings because they don't want to deal with them because they are painful. It is generally counterproductive; it doesn't fix issues in the long run; instead, it provides temporary relief. So, after a few slides on maladaptive coping, one form of disengagement coping, avoidance, will be explored in greater depth.

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**Adaptive vs Maladaptive Coping**

People may cope with stress with diverse strategies ranging from maladaptive (unhealthy) to adaptive (healthy) strategies.

Adaptive coping has been defined as an effective means of coping that allows individuals to adequately address stressors (Brown, Westbrook, & Challagalla, 2005)

Adaptive or constructive coping involves confronting problems, realistic appraisals of stress and coping resources, learning to recognize and manage disruptive emotional reactions to stress, and learning to control harmful and destructive habitual behaviors (Weiten and Lloyd, 2005).

Maladaptive coping strategies are generally unhealthy and has limited value and provide temporary relief.

11

So we can divide coping into two types: engagement coping and disengagement coping. Adaptive coping and maladaptive coping may be the third way of looking at coping strategies. As a result, people can cope with stress in a variety of ways, ranging from

maladaptive (the term "unhealthy" is also used for maladaptive strategies) to adaptive (the terms "healthy" or "constructive" are also used for adaptive strategies).

When we talk about adaptive coping or constructive coping, we mean that individuals should use efficient, effective coping strategies to better overcome the stressor. So, when you properly resolve the stressors or whatever is causing the stress, it is adaptive coping, and you are attempting to address them to the best of your capacity. It may not fix the problem, but you are always trying to address it.

As a result, adaptive or constructive coping entails confronting issues. As a result, some of the attributes include confronting the problem rather than avoiding it and attempting to fix it as much as possible. There is a practical assessment of stress and coping mechanisms. Then you assess the likelihood of skill or ability to solve the problem realistically. Realistically, you can see how overwhelming it is; don't exaggerate it. As a result, you conduct a rational assessment of the situation and your ability to handle it.

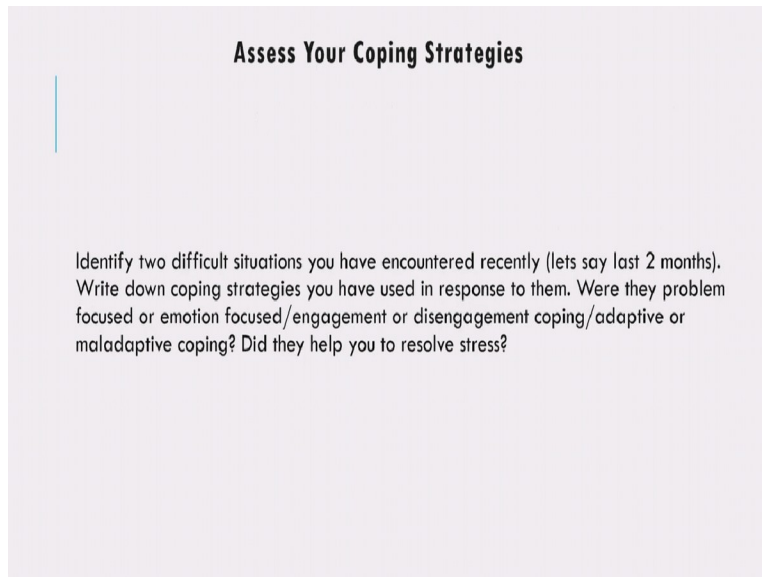
Some people, most of the time, are not very rational in stressful situations, particularly when we experience stress. When we experience stress, we sometimes exaggerate it too much. So one of the key features of adaptive coping is that you do a rational assessment of stress and your resources. You will also learn to identify and control emotions, especially those that are destructive in a stressful situation. This is also a part of healthy coping, which is the ability to control your destructive or negative feelings.

So, as we speak about coping strategies and learning to regulate negative and disruptive habitual behaviors, we will look at this management aspect in different lectures. As a result of adaptive coping you would not engage in self-destructive and unhealthy activities as a result of stress. As a result, behavior management, destructive habits, and emotional management are all essential components of positive or adaptive coping.

In general, maladaptive coping mechanisms are unhealthy, have little utility, and only offer temporary relief. So, maladaptive solutions are when we don't fix issues properly, and they're only useful in the short term; they may not solve the issue, but they may cause

further problems in the long run. As a result, they are referred to as maladaptive coping. So, these are some of the different ways we can categorize coping mechanisms, and we all use them from time to time.

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**Assess Your Coping Strategies**

Identify two difficult situations you have encountered recently (lets say last 2 months). Write down coping strategies you have used in response to them. Were they problem focused or emotion focused/engagement or disengagement coping/adaptive or maladaptive coping? Did they help you to resolve stress?

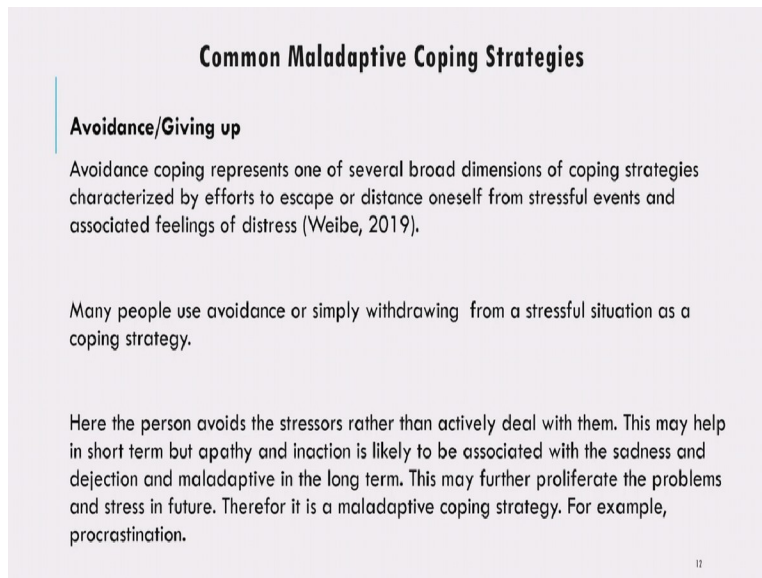
So, I'll give you one easy exercise that we can all do to figure out some of the coping mechanisms we use on a daily basis. As an example, in this simple exercise, describe two difficult situations you have recently experienced.

So, in the last month or two months, describe two situations in which you have experienced very difficult situations and consider what strategies you have used to deal with them. What coping mechanisms have you used in the past to deal with them? Are these strategies problem-focused? Are they emotion-focused? Are they related to engagement coping or are they related to disengagement coping? Were they, were they adaptive coping or maladaptive coping? So, try to categorize the kinds of coping strategies that you used recently in response to a stressful situations that you have faced one or two stressful situations.

And see whether such coping mechanisms really relieve your stress or assist you in dealing effectively with your surroundings. Or were they a form of maladaptive coping that didn't work? So, this is an experiment that we can all do to discover the various

coping mechanisms that we use on a regular basis. Some people use maladaptive coping all of the time and don't use adaptive coping at all. Some people use reasonably adaptive coping strategies, and by completing this simple exercise, you can discover the patterns of coping strategies that you employ.

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**Common Maladaptive Coping Strategies**

**Avoidance/Giving up**

Avoidance coping represents one of several broad dimensions of coping strategies characterized by efforts to escape or distance oneself from stressful events and associated feelings of distress (Weibe, 2019).

Many people use avoidance or simply withdrawing from a stressful situation as a coping strategy.

Here the person avoids the stressors rather than actively deal with them. This may help in short term but apathy and inaction is likely to be associated with the sadness and dejection and maladaptive in the long term. This may further proliferate the problems and stress in future. Therefore it is a maladaptive coping strategy. For example, procrastination.

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So, now we'll talk about some of the most common maladaptive coping mechanisms that people use in their daily lives. In the coming lectures, we'll talk about adaptive coping. But first, let's look at some of the most popular forms of maladaptive coping.

Avoidance or giving up as a coping mechanism, avoiding situations, is one of the maladaptive, non-helpful coping strategies. And when we are confronted with a difficult situation, one of the easiest things we can do is run away. So, if you flee, it seems that you are not under any stress because you are unlikely to face the situation. So, if you run away, it appears that there is no stress and you are kind of, you are not required to deal with it. As a result of this, people often use avoidance as a coping mechanism. As a result, avoidance coping is one of the several broad aspects of coping strategies, and it is defined by attempts to escape or distance oneself from a stressful event and the resulting feelings of distress.

So, one aspect is that you physically run away from the stressors, while another aspect is that you emotionally distance yourself from the stressors and stop processing them; both can be classified as avoidance coping strategies. As a result, many people resort to avoidance or actually withdrawing. So, a person decides, "I'm not going to face it, I'm not going to deal with it." So, as a coping mechanism, you simply detach from the situation because you don't have to face the situation and its painful consequences for the time being. Rather than consciously dealing with the stressors, the individual avoided them in this case. This can help in the short term, but apathy and inaction are more likely to be associated with sadness and depression in the long run, as well as being maladaptive. You might feel relieved in the short term because you are unlikely to encounter the issue. However, in the long run, most of the issues will resurface, and you won't be able to stop them for an indefinite period of time. As a result, problems and stress will continue to arise in the future.

Many problems we must face in life, because if we avoid them, they will return, and you will have to face them somewhere. As a result, it often propagates or worsens the issue rather than resolving it. As a result, it is a form of maladaptive coping strategy.

Many people, for example, use procrastination as a coping strategy; they need to do something and keep avoiding it, so that they do not want to do to do it, because it is difficult and they do not find it easy to do it, or because they lack ability, for any reason. However, this is an important job for them to complete, and they will have to do so eventually. So they eventually plan to do it, but there is a time constraint, and a slew of other issues will arise. As a result, rather than alleviating the distress, it could exacerbate it in the future anxiety or stress.

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There is no active attempt to solve the problem causing stress or reduce the distress associated with the stressful situation.

In many situations, the longer a person avoids dealing with the problem, the more difficult or complex it becomes, and the less time is available to deal with it when one can not avoid it any longer. E.g., procrastination

Avoidance coping mostly include emotion focused coping strategies, which is aimed at minimizing the emotional consequences of stressful events rather than to deal with the stressor directly.

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So, in avoidance coping, there is no active attempt to solve the problem causing the stress and reduce the distress associated with the stressful situation; you are not actively doing anything to solve it, and, as I previously said, the longer a person avoids dealing with the problem, the more difficult or complex it becomes, and the less time is available to deal with it.

So, I gave you an example of task procrastination, which also raises stress many times because you don't have much time now because you have to do a lot of things in a short period of time, so it becomes more complicated and no more stressful.

The majority of avoidance coping mechanisms are emotion-focused, with the aim of mitigating the emotional effects of stressful events rather than dealing with the stressor directly. As a result, people avoid coping with issues simply to avoid having to deal with them. So it's all about thoughts, because they don't have to, don't have to go through the unpleasant feelings.

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The use of avoidance coping is influenced by both dispositional and situational factors (Weibe, 2019).

Individuals who have personality traits that are linked to the behavioral inhibition system such as neuroticism are more likely to use avoidance coping strategies than those who have traits that are linked to the behavioral activation system such as optimism and extraversion.

One's personal and environmental resources also influence the use of avoidance coping strategies. Avoidance coping is more common among people with fewer personal, economic, and social resources (Holahan & Moos, 1987).

11

The use of avoidance coping is affected by personal characteristics as well as situational factors. So, we use avoidance coping a lot of the time, either because of our personal traits or because of a situational purpose.

As a result, research suggests that people with some personality characteristics associated with the behavioral inhibition mechanism, such as neuroticism, are more likely to use avoidance coping. Neuroticism, for example, is a personality disorder. So, in neuroticism, some people are in general, in their personality trait, very moody, they have a high anxiety level, they worry a lot, they fear a lot, and they have a lot of emotional instabilities.

As a result, some people are more emotional and emotionally unstable than others. So they have a high level of neuroticism because they are always worried, and they have a lot of fear and anxiety in their personality. As a result, they are more likely to use avoidance coping strategies. However, people with other personality traits such as optimism and extraversion may not use avoidance strategy. So, people with extraversion personality traits are people who are outgoing, social, have a lot of energy, do a lot of things, and enjoy interacting with others. As a result of their personality traits, these people may not use avoidance as often as others.

As a result, personality traits may also affect the use of avoidance coping. Often one's personal environmental resources, not just personality traits, but what psychological and environmental resources are available to you, will affect whether or not you use avoidance coping. Avoidance coping, for example, is more common in people who have less personal resources. A personal resource may be a psychological resource, such as the confidence or ability to cope with a problem. So, if you lack these abilities, you would most likely escape it. Economic and social resources may also influence the use of coping strategy. So, if you don't have enough financial support, you'll probably avoid a situation requiring money. Social resources, on the other hand, are connections with people who can help you. So, if you don't have a large, supportive network, you'll likely to escape several circumstances that are stressful or troublesome. As a result, both of these variables can have an effect on whether you use avoidance coping or not.

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**Learned helplessness and avoidance coping**

Avoidance coping is more common when one is dealing with situations that cannot be actively altered (Weibe, 2019).

Martin Seligman (1967) proposed the concept of "learned helplessness" (LH) which is also related to the giving up/avoidance syndrome.

Learned helplessness occurs after an individual repeatedly experience negative uncontrollable situations and become passive and unmotivated and stay that way even after the environment changes so that success/control is possible.

15

The term "learned helplessness" is associated with avoidance coping. Since this is linked to avoidance coping, we'll talk about it briefly. When faced with situations that cannot be actively changed, avoidance coping is more normal. So, several times, people avoid a situation because they believe it is out of their control or that they cannot alter it, if they see it that way. As a result, they would most likely use avoidance coping to get out of the situation.

A phenomenon similar to that has been discovered by a psychologist named Martin Seligman, who suggested the idea of learned helplessness in 1967, which is often related to giving up or avoidance syndrome. As a result, learned helplessness develops when a person is repeatedly exposed to negative uncontrollable situations and becomes passive and unmotivated, even when the environment changes and performance or control becomes possible.

So it literally or clearly applies to a large number of individuals or even animals who are confronted with an uncontrollable negative situation. As a result, they are trapped in a negative situation over which they have no control. As a result of this past conditioning, many people, when they encounter another situation in the future where success is possible, actually do not try to change things because of their past conditioning, where they were unable to avoid a challenging or uncomfortable situation. So they learned to become helpless, which is not true helplessness but conditioned helplessness, in which you couldn't change or alter a situation because of your previous learning. You're kind of generalizing it to newer circumstances where success is possible if you try, but you don't because of what you've seen in the past. This is referred to as "learned helplessness," and it can affect both humans and animals.

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Learned helplessness was discovered accidentally by psychologists Martin Seligman and Steven Maier in 1967.

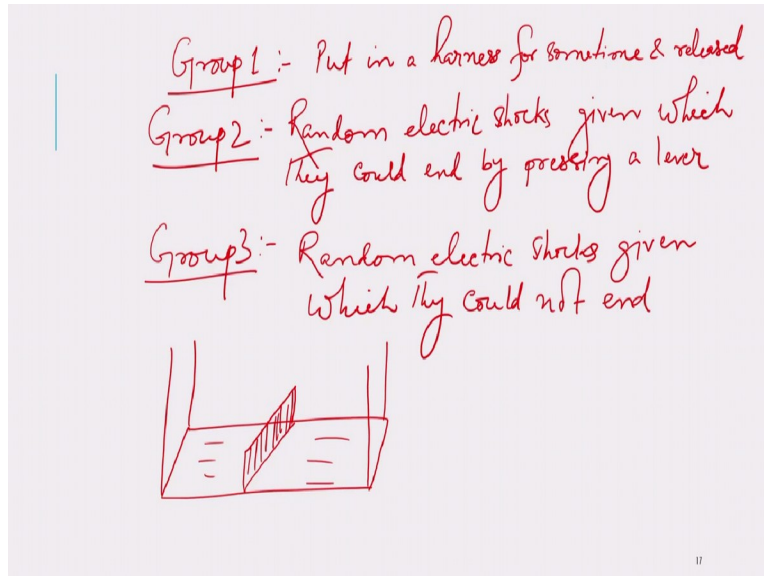
They were studying the effects of an inescapable shock upon subsequent escape and avoidance learning in an animal model (dogs).

Dogs that were classically conditioned to expect an inescapable electrical shock after hearing a tone made no attempts to escape when later shifted to an shuttle box even though simply jumping over the low barrier would provide them relief from the shock.

Learned helplessness, which was discovered by Martin Seligman and Steven Maier by mistake in 1967 during one of their experiments. They were attempting to research the consequences of an inescapable shock. They used dogs their experiment. if dogs are subjected to inescapable shock, how does this affect their subsequent escape and avoidance learning? They were attempting to apply the classical conditioning model, which we addressed previously while talking about stress and the immune system.

So, when dogs were moved to a shuttle box after being classically trained to expect an inescapable electric shock after hearing the sound, they made no attempts to flee, despite the fact that merely jumping over the low barrier would provide them with relief from the shock. As a result, they conducted an experiment with various groups of dogs to determine when dogs were conditioned to an inescapable shock. So the dog received a shock, an electric shock. So, these aren't lethal electric shocks, but more painful electric shocks in a chamber that these dogs couldn't avoid. As a result, they had been accustomed to an unavoidable shock. As a result, they've been forced to go through it helplessly. And when this group of dogs was moved to another cage, a shuttle box with a small barrier a few inches high, where they could jump into another side of the box to escape the electric shock, many of these dogs did not even attempt to jump into another side of the box to avoid this difficult situation because of their previous experience. So, to make it clearer, I'll just explain what this experiment is all about.

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So, they used three groups of dog in the initial experiment. So I'll just talk about the first experiment because they did a lot of variants of it later. So in group 1, which is mostly a control group, dogs were not given any treatment. As a result, they were harnessed. As a result, this was a control group in which the dogs were not subjected to any conditions or treatments. They put a harness on them and then let them go.

Group No. 2 So, in this group of dogs, they were placed in a chamber with some plates underneath the chamber and a lever in that chamber to switch on or off electricity. If electricity was applied to the box, the dog would receive a shock, which was unpleasant for the dog. However, the dogs in Group 2 were able to explore and if there was a need to push a lever, this actually avoided the electric shock by pressing the lever. So, they kind of experience shock, but they could control it by pressing a lever.

In the third group, So, similar to group 2, random electric shock was given similar to group 2. However, dogs in this group could not stop electric shock as there was no lever to switch off the shock. So, in this case, the third party was merely placed in a powerless condition in which they were forced to endure electric shock and could do nothing to prevent it. In group 2, they were shocked, but they were able to stop it by pushing a lever. Since Group 1 was a control group, none of these stuff happened to them.

Now, they discovered that after this experiment, all three groups of dogs were placed in a shuttle box that looked similar to this. So, this was a box with a barrier between two chambers that was very thin, in fact, the height of the barrier was very low. So the dog could hop from one side to the other, and both sides had electric plates on which the dog could be shocked.

So, when all three groups of dogs were placed in such chambers, shuttle boxes, or shuttle boxes, they discovered that group 1 and 2 learned to jump and jump to the next side where the shock was not present, so that they could escape. They learned this, they learned this very quickly this escape learning, they learned to escape the shock. However, they discovered something interesting when the third group of dogs were placed in those shuttled boxes. Most of them did not even attempt to flee or jump from one side to the other in order to avoid the shock. The majority of them had withdrawn and were experiencing this shock, despite the fact that they could change it or avoid it by simply moving from one side to the other.

As a result, this was one of the first experiments that contributed to the concept of "learned helplessness." So, quite surprisingly, group 3 dogs have learned or have been conditioned to feel that they are powerless over the electric shock. Whatever they do, they will have to go through it. So, this was their previous learning, and this previous learning was affecting their future actions, where there was a chance of success, but they did not try to avoid it.

So, this is an example of learned helplessness; they did other variations of the experiment with the dogs and then introduced humans, and they discovered that this phenomenon is also possible in humans. Many times, when we as a human being encounter inescapable difficulties, difficult situations, we generalize it to many other future situations where success is possible but one may not try to change because of the past conditioning.

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Here the individual believes that efforts are futile as failure is inevitable. Here the individual learned to be helpless.

Uncontrollable and undesirable event -----> Perceived lack of control ----->  
Generalized helpless behavior

LH may contribute to other psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety.

11

So, basically, in learned helplessness, individual believes that efforts are futile, as failure is inevitable. Because they have learned in the past that whatever you do, success is not possible. So, it is an inevitable kind of things. Here individuals learn to become helpless.

So, what happens basically, whenever some somebody experiences uncontrollable and undesirable event for a certain period of time, they internalize a perceived lack of control that I cannot change the situation and then this perceived lack of control is generalized. Then it becomes a generalized helpless behavior where they can change it but they do not try to do it, simply because of their past condition.

So, this is how this learned helplessness happens and research showed that this learned helplessness phenomena could be one of the reasons for psychological disorders such as depression or anxiety. Obviously, there are many reasons behind depression, but learned helplessness could be one of the contributing factors.

So, when people experience depression, they become hopeless, they do not see any hope in their future, they become sad, they lose interest in life. So, one of the reason sometimes learned helplessness could also contribute to such symptoms.

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In general, avoidance coping is less adaptive than approach coping, and is associated with poorer subjective well-being, psychological adjustment, and physical health (Weibe, 2019).

Giving up/avoidance could be adaptive in certain circumstances where it is pointless to keep adjusting such as a job in which one is not equipped to handle even after repeated efforts or one is faced with unattainable goals.

Avoidance coping that occur in the early stages of dealing with a stressful event appear to be adaptive as it give time to develop skills and resources to manage stress (Suls and Fletcher 1985).

Similarly, avoidance strategies such as distancing may be adaptive when dealing with uncontrollable stressful events such as loss and bereavement (Carver, 2006)

11

So, let's return to the avoidance coping strategy. In general, research suggests that avoidance coping is less adaptive, which is why we refer to it as a maladaptive coping strategy. Then there's approach related coping, in which you're actively interested in solving a problem, and avoidance coping, which is linked to lower subjective well-being, psychological change, and physical health. As a result, it's been linked to a slew of negative health and well-being indicators.

In certain cases, giving up or avoiding a situation might be the best option. So, it is not all bad; in certain cases, it could be adaptive, where it is futile to continue adapting, such as a job that one is not prepared to manage despite repeated attempts, since one is confronted with unattainable goals.

When you try over and over and think success is impossible, it's clear that it's useless to keep working on something that is out of your control and that you're not ready to handle. So, no matter how hard you try, there are certain situations that are out of your reach and beyond your expertise and abilities to handle. So, because it's useless to keep trying, avoidance might be appropriate in such circumstances.

So, we see and avoidance is bad only in the context where, you can make changes or you can deal with that problem, but you are running away from it. So, mostly in that context, we are talking about it. So, avoidance coping also a research shows that, it is adaptive, if

it occurs in the early stages of dealing with a stressful event. So, at first, avoidance can be beneficial in the sense that, when faced with a traumatic situation, we may only be beginning to build skills and tools to handle stress. So, rather than facing it head-on without the necessary knowledge and talents, it is often preferable to avoid it in the early stages so that you can improve skills and resources before confronting it.

As a result, in certain cases, insight-related avoidance may be useful, supportive, and adaptive. Similarly, when coping with uncontrollable traumatic events like death and bereavement, avoidance tactics like distancing, mentally distancing oneself from a circumstance, may be adaptive.

As a result, several times when a loved one dies or other events occur, avoidance in the sense of distancing oneself from such events is adaptive in order to cope with the issue. Otherwise, it will become too overwhelming, so you may psychologically distance yourself from the situation or the goals in terms of your mental coping. As a result, it assists you in better managing it. As a result, it is often useful in that sense.

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**Self-indulgence**

It basically means excessive/unrestrained or impulsive satisfaction of one's desires, appetites, or urges. For example, smoking, drinking, internet addiction etc.

Stress may lead to reduced impulse control and self-indulgence behavior (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001).

As a response to stress, people may develop alternative rewards as a compensation by substituting forms of satisfaction such as eating, smoking or drinking (Moos & Billings, 1982).

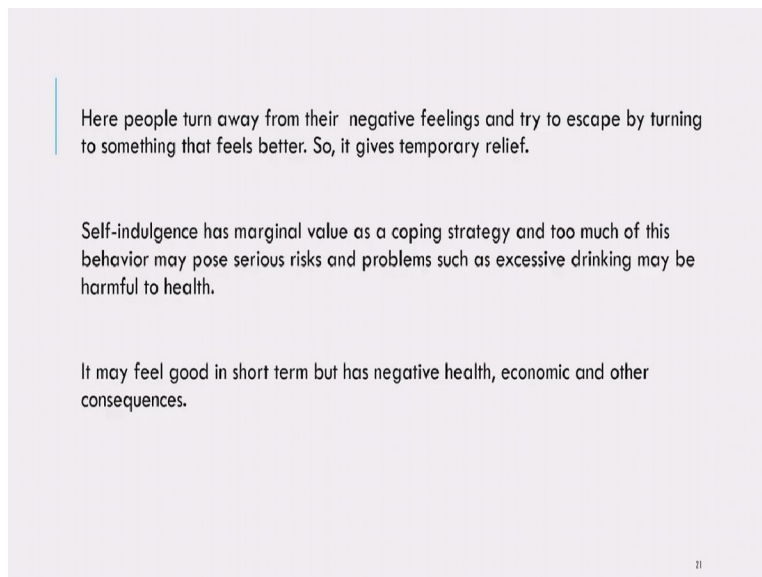
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So, as we've seen, avoidance is a maladaptive coping strategy that people use often, particularly when they start avoiding rather than confronting issues. As a result, this is maladaptive in that situation. Self-indulgence is an example of a maladaptive coping

mechanism. So, it literally means satisfying one's desires, appetites, or impulses in an unreasonable, unrestrained, or impulsive manner such as excessive smoking, drinking, or internet addiction, and all of these things can be considered self-indulgent. As a result, many people engage in self-indulgence in reaction to stressful events, largely because stress can lead to a loss of impulse control. So, when we are stressed, one of the things that happens is that our ability to regulate our emotions and monitor our actions decreases because our energy is used up coping with our overwhelming emotions. As a result, a decrease in impulse regulation may often stimulate self-indulgence in behaviors.

People can develop alternative reward systems in response to stress. As a result, since dealing with stressful situations is uncomfortable and challenging, many people create an alternate reward system in which they pursue rewarding self-indulgence such as eating more, drinking more, and other similar activities. As a result, it is a symptom of developing an alternative reward system, as they are confronted with stressful circumstances and have compensated by developing an alternative reward system.

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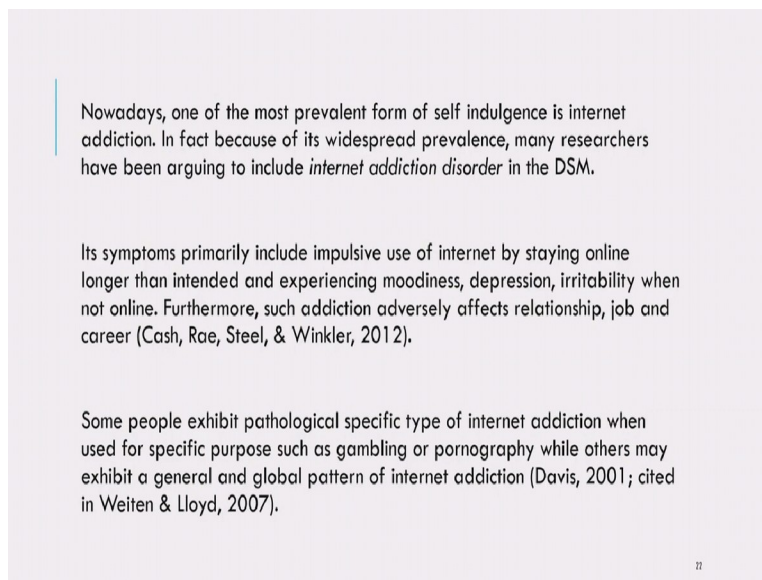


People in this situation want to avoid negative emotions by moving to something that feels better. So, they're not happy about it because they're in that situation. As a compensation or coping mechanism, they turn away from it and do something else that feels better. As a result, it provides temporary relaxation in the same way that avoidance

does. As a result, it just has a marginal benefit in terms of coping because excessive self-indulgence can lead to a slew of other issues, like severe danger and issues like excessive drinking, which can be detrimental to your health.

And while it may feel good in the short term, it may have detrimental effects for our wellbeing, our economy, our financial aspects of life, and many other factors, all of which most of us are aware of. Too much self-indulgence can lead to a variety of health and financial issues, as well as a lack of ability to pay attention to many other areas of your life that need you to do so. As a result, it is maladaptive in that sense.

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Nowadays, one of the most prevalent form of self indulgence is internet addiction. In fact because of its widespread prevalence, many researchers have been arguing to include *internet addiction disorder* in the DSM.

Its symptoms primarily include impulsive use of internet by staying online longer than intended and experiencing moodiness, depression, irritability when not online. Furthermore, such addiction adversely affects relationship, job and career (Cash, Rae, Steel, & Winkler, 2012).

Some people exhibit pathological specific type of internet addiction when used for specific purpose such as gambling or pornography while others may exhibit a general and global pattern of internet addiction (Davis, 2001; cited in Weiten & Lloyd, 2007).

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As a result, one of the most common forms of self-indulgence nowadays is referred to as Internet addiction. Addiction to technology-related items such as the Internet or a cell phone. Since it is so common nowadays, many people believe it should be classified as a type of formal illness. However, it is clear that it is not a disease. As a result, the symptoms of Internet addiction can include impulsive internet use, such as staying online longer than expected and spending too much time on the internet, as well as moodiness, depression, and irritability while not online. Furthermore, when you are not paying attention to other aspects of your life, such addiction has a negative impact on your friendship, work, and career. So, like any type of addiction, you spend too much time on a single thing and neglect to look at other areas of life that need your attention.

Some people develop common internet addictions, such as becoming addicted to online gambling, pornography, or other similar activities. Some people have a general form of internet addiction or a global trend of internet addiction. As a result of their stress, people may engage in excessive self-indulgence behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drug addiction, and, increasingly, Internet addiction as a coping strategy for dealing with their stress.

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#### **Self-blame and negative thoughts**

In response to stress, people tend to engage in excessive negative thoughts and self-blame which may be maladaptive and counterproductive.

Realistic self-blame may be necessary in many circumstances. However, many people tend to engage in irrational thoughts and self-blame which are also called as catastrophic thinking. Such thought processes may have adverse impact on our psychological and emotional health.

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The last one we'll touch on briefly is self-blame and depressive thinking, which is a type of maladaptive coping strategy. People appear to indulge in repetitive negative thinking and self-blame in reaction to stress, which can be maladaptive and counterproductive. When confronted with stressful situations, some people indulge in excessive negative thoughts or situations that stimulate excessive negative thoughts, and they often engage in a lot of self-blaming.

When you need to take responsibility for something, logical self-blame is important, but sometimes people use unreasonable self-blame, where it was not their fault, but they would blame themselves, and they indulge in so much negative thinking, focusing only on the negative aspects of a situation.

As a result, such thought patterns are referred to as catastrophic thinking, and many people use it if they face a negative or life crisis. They are, however, normal in many cases since they are reacting to a situation in a natural way. However, excessive involvement in these types of thoughts can prove to be counterproductive and maladaptive, and may not serve or assist you in any way in terms of avoiding or coping with the situation.

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Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck did pioneering research in this direction. Beck (1987) proposed that people with excessive negative thoughts often-

- (1) irrationally attribute failures to personal shortcomings.
- (2) Focus more on negative feedback from others and ignore positive feedback
- (3) Make pessimistic projections about their future.

More detailed discussion will be made about the role of thoughts in coping while discussing constructive coping.

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As a result, the two researchers have put in a lot of effort in that field. Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck are two of them. They conducted groundbreaking studies into how thought patterns affect mental and psychological disorders. As a result, we'll dig deeper into it when we talk about constructive coping and how our thoughts influence our emotions, because thoughts and emotions are inextricably linked.

According to Beck (1987), people who have an excessive amount of negative thoughts frequently attribute failures to personal flaws. As a result, if there is a mistake, they leap to the conclusion that it is their fault. As a result, self-blame enters the frame, which may or may not be accurate in many cases. Pay more attention to negative feedback. As a result, they are still on the lookout for negative feedback. However, they pay no attention to the many positive feedback they get. As a result, stressful situations and feelings multiply, and negative projections about the future emerge.

So, this will be addressed in greater depth later, but such a reaction to stressful situations is unhealthy and does not assist you in getting out of it. Some of it is normal at first, but if one dwells on it long enough, it may lead to a slew of harmful effects, like psychiatric disorders. So, in the constructive coping section, look at those things a little bit more.

With this, I will conclude today's lesson, and in the following lectures, we will discuss a few more aspects of maladaptive coping, before moving on to adaptive and positive coping. Thank you so much.