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## Coping strategies: literature review

People in general seek happiness, but happiness eludes many. This happens especially with adolescents. The adolescent stage of life is a defining time. Adolescents are faced with decisions that can ultimately affect the rest of their lives. This stage can be stressful and filled with hardships. A study done by Mishra (2013) found that because of inexperience with disappointment, some adolescents and young adults struggle when faced with hardships. Research shows that although some adolescents aren't naturally inclined towards happiness, they can increase their happiness and better face adversity through learning resilience, cultivating optimism, and practicing gratitude.

According to a paper written by Manderscheid & Kobau (2017), just as people genetically have a predisposition toward certain medical conditions such as heart disease, there is also a genetic predisposition towards happiness. Health and disease can be altered by a person's diet and exercise. Similarly, happiness can be altered through skills such as optimism, resilience, and gratitude. An individual must have the desire to make a change, set specific and challenging goals in the area and then follow them through. In addition, there are therapies and coping strategies that can be utilized to teach these skills. It is also important to have a social support group to be accountable to.

Kushlev, Heintzelman, Lutes, Wirtz, Oishi & Diener (2017) found that optimism is a genetic trait people are born with but optimism is also a personality trait that can be developed. Mishra (2013) studied the relationship between a person's optimism and their well-being. Optimism was positively correlated with well-being. Mishra showed optimism most affected social relationships and psychological and physical health in the participants. Optimists are more likely to use coping strategies such as acceptance, humor and reframing. Feder, Southwick, Goetz, Yanping, Alonso, Smith, Buchholz, Waldeck, Ameli, Moore, Haine, Charney & Vythilingam (2008) studied optimistic people and found they are more resilient and able to cope with adversity. Stressful experiences in life can be undone by positive emotions. Optimism does not mean naiveté, it means a person chooses to focus on a positive and ignore the negative.

De Giacomo, L'Abate, Pennebaker & Rumbaugh (2010) explored different ways people deal with depression through various outlets including dwelling on emotions, aggression, and productivity. Some approaches are more successful than others. Channeling depression toward a positive outcome (actively being optimistic) was found to be the most successful way to deal with depression. Yates & Masten (2004) found that adolescents who endured adverse childhood experiences could achieve positive outcomes despite what they had experienced. Although an adolescent might be familiar with techniques to handle these situations, many

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times the knowledge base is not large enough to cover every situation an adolescent is faced with.

Gratitude, along with resilience, is a life skill used as a coping strategy during times of adversity. Studies indicate that gratitude is useful in dealing with adversity. Gratitude is an emotion-focused strategy. Conover & Daiute (2017) found practicing gratitude increases positive feelings in times of hardship and gratitude is an effective self-regulation strategy during times of hardship and stress. Alkozei, Smith & Killgore (2018) researched in the area of gratitude and found it to be related to a general sense of well-being. Well-being is found to affect general outlook on life, which in turn can accompany changes within the brain and the body. Gratitude has been shown to have a positive effect on social support. It can be taught through various therapies. Although specific techniques were not studied, therapy was found to be an effective tool. If an individual can recall past experiences that might be adverse, in a positive way, this can empower to focus on positive energy in the future leading them to use this skill for future stressors or adverse situations, creating a feedback loop. Gratitude also enabled an individual to consider a broader range of possibilities and solutions when faced with adversity.

Yates & Masten (2004) said resilience is key in handling adversity. Resilience is commonly defined as the ability to adapt to life's hardships. Their research found that many at risk children developed successfully despite their circumstances. They labeled these children as resilient. Howard & Johnson (2000) used Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in analyzing resilient children. This study compared children from disadvantaged areas and found that the children's resilience was related to both external factors like family and community and internal factors like personality traits. Some of the internal traits that affected resiliency were social competence, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. External assets that affected a child's resilience were family, school, and community. Specific protective factors related to resilience included care and support from the child's family, attending school, having caring teachers, and access to facilities in the community. These were more important than affluence. Distelberg, Martin, Borieux & Oloo (2015) conducted a study and measured internal factors affecting resilience. The study found that self-esteem and spirituality had the greatest effect. Duan, Ho, Tang, Li & Zhang (2014) found resilience is increased through attributing negative experiences to external factors and focusing on character strengths.

Mishra (2013) found it is hard to know where to turn when faced with adversity. As a result many adolescents and young adults struggle to know how to handle difficulties. Empowering adolescents and giving them the tools needed can improve their well-being and prepare them to face forthcoming challenges. Learning the life skills of resiliency, gratitude, and goal setting helps adolescents and young adults handle adversity with optimism.

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