



reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

Mistakes in Coping With Anxiety and Mood

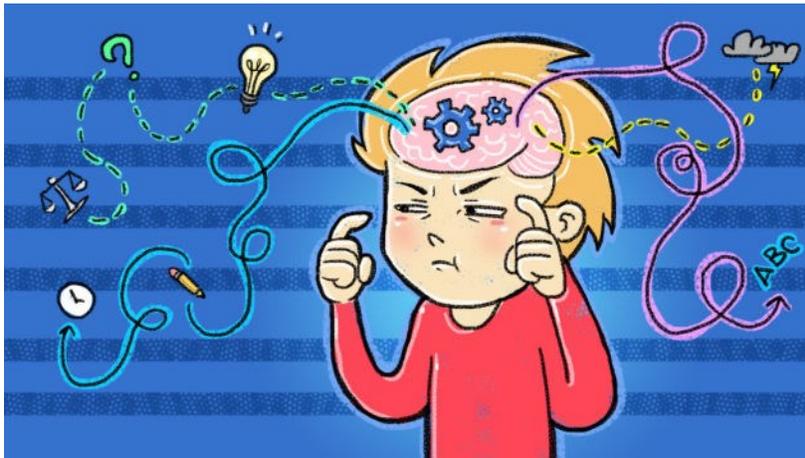


Illustration by Tina Mailhot-Roberge

Just about everyone experiences stress, anxiety, or a low mood from time to time. There are ways we try and cope, both to prevent anxiety or low mood from becoming problematic and to help ourselves feel better when we do have these experiences. Some strategies work better than others. Knowing about some common “mistakes”—less helpful ways for dealing with anxiety and mood issues—can help free you up to try the things that may be more effective.

Here are some of the most common maladaptive coping strategies:

1. **Being inactive.** Anxiety and low mood can sap your energy and make it tempting to isolate yourself and/or lie on the couch all day doing nothing. However, getting physical exercise, being social, and doing things you enjoy are usually more effective for reducing symptoms in the long run than doing nothing. You don't need to overdo
2. **Letting your anxious and self-critical thoughts run rampant.** Sure, it's hard to learn to control your thoughts, but it is possible. Therapy can help, and there are also some good self-help websites, books, and apps out there to teach you how. Just becoming more aware of your thought patterns and whether they are helpful or harmful

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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!

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is a good first step in gaining better control.

3. **Listening to sad music.** Some people like to seek out music that “matches” or even amplifies their bad or stressed-out mood. Listening to happy or inspiring music is often a better strategy. (See the wellness tip on music on page 4.)
4. **Spending time with anxious or negative people.** While being social can be helpful in managing anxiety and bad moods, hanging with people who are constantly expressing worry, complaining, or being critical of themselves and others can make you feel worse. Try to limit contact with stressed-out or critical people and spend time with positive and calm people, or if you are able to change the tone of a conversation from negative to positive, that can also help.
5. **Relying on alcohol or other drugs.** Recreational drugs and alcohol may temporarily mask anxiety or difficult feelings, but they can make symptoms worse in the long run because of their physiological effects and by preventing you from using other, more helpful, strategies. Alcohol and other drugs can also cause additional problems, such as getting in trouble, health issues, or conflict with other people, that increase anxiety and low mood.
6. **Misusing prescription medications.** Anxiety medications like Xanax, Valium, and Ativan have some valuable uses, but they are not long-term treatments: They are meant to be

taken in small quantities for short periods because they are addictive and can cause increased anxiety during withdrawal. In some cases, antidepressants, which are nonaddictive and can help with both mood and anxiety symptoms, may be a safer choice for those with anxiety issues. Some herbal remedies may help, but they can have side effects or interact with other medicines, so be sure to ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice. Medications are typically most helpful when combined with therapy and positive lifestyle changes.

7. **Giving up on new coping tools if they don't help right away.** It can take time to see progress, so be sure to give new strategies a fair chance to work. It's also important to have realistic

expectations: Managing anxiety or low mood doesn't mean eliminating it. Unfortunately, we can't totally prevent or “get rid of” anxiety or low mood—these experiences are part of being human. However, there are ways to reduce anxiety and mood issues and cope with them effectively.

Now that you know about some strategies that probably **won't** help, what **will** work? While each person responds differently to different ways of coping, there are a few that seem to be helpful for a lot of people. These include getting enough sleep and a healthy diet, getting involved with positive people and activities, regular exercise, and building gratitude for the good things in our lives. Therapy can also help, and in some situations, medication can be very useful.

FEELING
DOWN??



Have you tried dwelling on it and thinking about your problems over + over?

Need to Talk to a Counselor? Try Let's Talk!

Let's Talk is a drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential chat with a CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in!

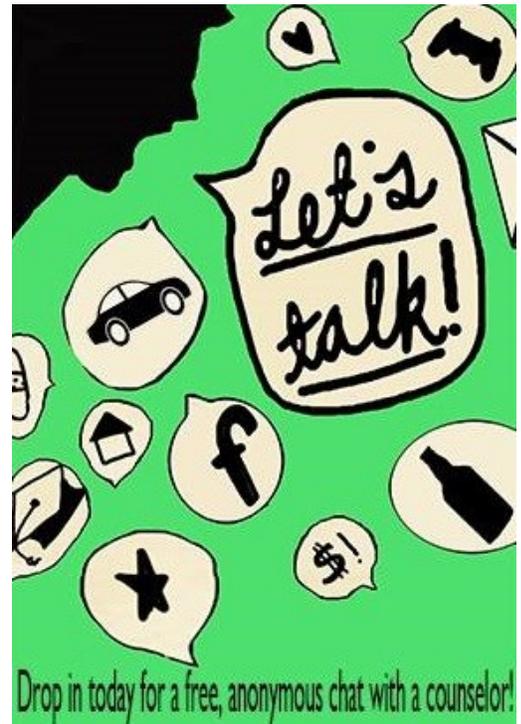
CAPS launched Let's Talk a few years ago to provide another option for students looking for help. CAPS recognized that sometimes students just want a short, one-time conversation with a counselor without having to schedule an appointment. That's what Let's Talk is all about.

Let's Talk is a good option if you want some advice or a therapist's perspective, or maybe you need information about counseling and CAPS services but aren't sure yet you want to visit CAPS. In some

cases, the Let's Talk counselor may recommend that you do contact CAPS to look into therapy services, such as individual or group counseling, or may suggest you check out CAPS' groups and workshops.

Let's Talk is not for mental health and emotional crises—in these situations, calling or stopping by the main CAPS office is the best plan.

Let's Talk is held every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday this quarter until finals week from 1 to 3 pm at a different location each day. Read more about Let's Talk and find the current schedule on our [website](#).



Dear CAPS,

How do I know if an off-campus therapist is the right one for me?

—Shopping Around

Students seek off-campus therapy for different reasons: Some prefer or need open-ended therapy (rather than brief therapy, which is what CAPS provides). Others are seeking a type of treatment not offered on campus. Still others have already done a round of brief therapy through CAPS and would like to continue receiving therapy. And, some may choose this option when CAPS is backed up and there's a long wait for first appointments.

You can get referrals from CAPS—if you don't have a current CAPS

counselor to ask for referrals, call us or stop by to set up a phone appointment, where a counselor will get information about your concerns and give you contact info for off-campus clinicians and tips on connecting with them. You can also search for referrals yourself by using the [CAPS online database](#) or calling your insurance company.

Here are a few tips that may help you choose a therapist:

1. When calling potential therapists, ask questions to get a feel for their experience, personality, and style. You may decide to talk with several before picking one to meet with in person. Often, you'll get the therapist's voicemail when you call. Be sure to leave a clear message,

including your name, number, and reason for calling. Be sure to answer your phone and check that your voicemail box is not too full for messages!

2. Decide whether the therapist's gender, racial or ethnic background, or other identity factors are important to you and if so, seek out therapists who have these identities.
3. A good personality fit is one of the most important factors in successful therapy. You should feel comfortable with how the therapist interacts with you and feel safe enough to open up. If you are choosing between several who are all qualified, go with the one who feels best.

Upcoming Events

See our [website calendar](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more upcoming events.

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS offers a different drop-in workshop every Wednesday from 3:30 to 4:30 pm at the CAPS Central Office (health center complex above the pharmacy). These workshops provide info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thought patterns, how positive psychology relates to academic success, and improving focus. Read more on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#). No sign-up needed.

STRESS LESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS' trained Peer Educators are offering Stress Less workshops five different days and times this quarter to provide fun and

experiential tools for managing stress. CAPS Central Office. Drop in—no sign-up needed. Free food provided. Read more and see the schedule on our [website](#), or call to get more info at (831) 459-2628.

HOW TO GET AWAY WITH GRAD SCHOOL: Drop-in workshop on intersecting identities and imposter syndrome in academia for Asian/Pacific Islander graduate students. Offered by CAPS and the Asian/Pacific Islander Resource Center. Monday, May 8th, 5 to 7 pm, Graduate Student Commons. Led by Audrey Kim, Ph.D., a 1.5-generation Korean American, who has both personal and professional experience navigating graduate school. Dr. Kim is a psychologist at CAPS. Free dinner!

Wellness Tip: Music's Power to Heal

Most people like music. There seems to be something hard-wired in our brains that makes us respond to it. But did you know that music may have the power to heal emotional suffering and psychological problems? Even if you've never read any scientific literature on music's healing powers, you've probably experienced them.

Controlled treatment outcome studies demonstrate that listening to and playing music is an effective and powerful treatment for mental health issues. For example, research shows that adding music therapy as an element of treatment for people with schizophrenia can lead to improvements in social functioning and a lessening of symptoms. Studies also show that music can reduce the effects of depression and anxiety. What's more, music has been shown to have positive effects on healing from illness and injury.

The benefits of music are many: It can build social connection, which is an important factor in mental health and well-being, and, when the lyrics are "prosocial," a song can increase empathy and positive thoughts: Think inspirational music, such as songs that have been used in political marches, for conscious-

ness raising, and in religious or spiritual ceremonies and celebrations.

Music can be used in a lot of different ways for healing purposes. Read more in this great [BeliefNet article](#).



Photo by Cole Hutson