

Taking Charge

Category: Coping

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | August 1, 2022

I take Osher classes—courses designed for senior citizens—to exercise my mind. However, I had another reason for recently enrolling in a class on “Adapting to the New Normal”: a desire to improve my coping skills. When facing an upsetting situation, I typically cry, gobble bags of dark chocolate M&Ms, retreat from society, or sink into depression. Sometimes, I simultaneously do all four.

Both the course and hours of self-reflection have made me realize that I cannot be in control of everything that happens in my life or in the lives of others. When I fell four weeks ago and fractured my pelvis, I spent too many days blaming myself for my clumsiness. Only when I gradually realized that accidents happen did I begin to adopt more effective coping skills to deal with my painful situation: resting when I really wanted to be walking; reaching out to others to do my grocery shopping; recognizing that I could still celebrate my 75th birthday, even if I could not travel to New York City to do so with my children.

Coping means accepting what is and finding the positive in the negative. It means embracing the present and looking forward to the future, not obsessing with the past. Coping means engaging in adult conversations with myself, ones that focus on how I can make the situation better, not on why a bad thing occurred—and why it happened to me. It means replacing self-pity and emotional chaos with rational thoughts and serenity.

To cope is not easy, but it is necessary. I cannot let every symbolic pothole, road block, or wrong turn upset me. I can allow myself some tears and sighs of discontent, only if those feelings are short-lived and pave the way for more constructive ones. I am now beginning to accumulate the tools I need to do this: accept what is; acknowledge my fears without letting my fears consume me; explore options that allow me to thrive, not just survive; and never ever give up hope.

Unwelcome changes will still invade my life, but with coping skills, those changes will not exert power over me. Instead, I will be the one in charge.

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