



Accept – Cope – Adapt

Learning to **Accept, Cope and Adapt** is a way to approach a lot of life's challenges effectively

Many life challenges fall into one of three categories:

1. Challenges from our past that we still may be dealing with today
2. Challenges that are a direct result of negative choices we or others have made (Consequences)
3. Challenges we weren't expecting (Unforeseen occurrences, misfortune, wrong place-wrong time, etc.)

DISCUSS - Come up some examples for each type of life challenge 1, 2, and 3.

1. **Examples** – Being born poor, having a learning disability, **OTHERS:** _____
2. **Examples** – Having a criminal record, losing driver's license, **OTHERS:** _____
3. **Examples** - (Simple) – a flat tire, (More complex) – Losing a loved one, **OTHERS:** _____

*Keep in mind that while the **accept, cope, adapt** idea may sound simple, in reality, dealing with more serious life challenges often takes time and is a process that can require a lot of hard work, patience, support and endurance.

Read the following three brief vignettes which will be referenced throughout this exercise:

Joe was born shorter than average and he spent most of his life thinking about how that just isn't fair. Because of being smaller, Joe was picked on a lot as a kid and for years he lacked self-confidence which affected him in many areas starting from childhood and lasting into adulthood. Joe spent a lot of years feeling angry about being short, which eventually lead to him drinking too much as a way to bury his feelings. When Joe reached his early 30's he decided he had enough. He stopped drinking and after he got motivated to stay sober he decided to take a new viewpoint on being short, but he didn't know where to begin because he still felt so bitter, depressed, moody and angry about it...

Lou felt like he was on the path to be an addict since he was born. He grew up around alcoholism, addiction, violence and dysfunction from childhood as the youngest of 4 older brothers all who had troubles of their own. Lou started getting high and into trouble at a very early age as his older brothers introduced him to drugs, fighting, stealing, and getting arrested. By the time Lou finally got it all together and tried to get his life in order he was already 30 years old with multiple felonies on his record and a history of jail time. Lou had no driver's license, only a basic education and not much of a work record. Lou kept going back to getting high for years over and over even after he would try to get clean because he kept feeling frustrated, impatient, stressed and anxious by thinking about how unfair it is that life is stacked against him...

Mary lost her husband three years ago to cancer. It was the hardest thing she ever had to deal with her entire life up to that point. To make matters worse, after her husband died there was a lot of leftover pain medication in her house. Mary was her husband's primary caretaker at home until the end so she often had a sore back from lifting her husband up when he was still alive and sick. Mary was too focused to take pain medication when her husband was alive because but after he died she started taking his leftover pain meds for herself. Soon she got her own prescription and not long after she was hooked. While medicating herself with opiates Mary never really dealt with the loss of her husband. Finally after a few years her opiate habit got out of control so she went to detox and then entered a program and stopped getting high. Not soon after getting sober, Mary's feelings about the loss of her husband became overwhelming because she had numbed herself with drugs for so long. She felt angry he was gone while also feeling guilty, sad, alone and afraid all at the same time. Even though she stopped using drugs to escape, she didn't know what to do next about dealing with her feelings of loss...



Using Accept – Cope – Adapt:

Accept: *Believe or come to recognize...*

Accepting may be the hardest part of this whole process. People can spend a lifetime failing to accept unpleasant information. The mind can be very powerful when it comes to refusing to accept an uncomfortable reality or truth. Everyone at one time or another had a hard time accepting something difficult.

Acceptance directly involves **insight**: Self-awareness, “seeing into the inner character or underlying truth”.

Accepting often involves the facing things we may not want to face and recognizing things that can be scary, embarrassing, unnerving or hurtful. Letting your guard down is a part of the acceptance process but often we may resist doing that because letting your guard down can leave a person feeling extremely vulnerable. Therefore it often takes courage to accept the truth.

Discuss each example from page 1 – What did each person need to accept? What must that process feel like for each person?

- **Joe**
- **Lou**
- **Mary**

Discuss further: Be honest: What is one thing in your life that you had (or are having) difficulty accepting?

Cope - *Deal with, manage, handle, persevere*

After one learns to accept something, afterward this can really open up the door to a lot of raw feelings and distressing thoughts. Therefore the second part of this process is learning to cope with these uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

Coping involves **motivation** because you have to *want* to cope in order to be successful at doing it.

Coping often requires some kind of education or guidance. We can learn to cope from our own experiences but it also may be necessary to get assistance from friends, loved ones, other supports. Sometimes trained professionals and counselors can help someone with coping when they are having a hard time doing it alone.

Discuss each example from page 1 – What kinds of negative thoughts and challenging feelings did each person probably need to learn to cope with?

- **Joe**
- **Lou**
- **Mary**

Discuss further: What types of thoughts, feelings and other challenging situations do you think that you need to learn to cope with?



Adapt –

- To adjust oneself to different conditions, environment, etc.
- To fit, change, or modify to suit a new or different purpose

After accepting an issue then learning to cope with the aftermath, things do not stop there. In order to keep moving forward in a positive direction in life then some kind of change needs to happen. That change often involves adapting your lifestyle to make improvements.

Adapting involves **inspiration** because lifestyle changes do not usually last unless someone is stimulated, moved, and invigorated to sustain those changes on a long term basis.

Discuss each example from page 1 – What do you think that each person could do to better adapt to their situation for the future?

- **Joe**
- **Lou**
- **Mary**

Discuss further: How can you learn to adapt to one your own challenging life situations that you mentioned earlier?



Accept: "It is what it is..."

Cope: "I may not like it but I can handle it"

Adapt: "I'll find another way to keep moving forward"



Outcomes from our examples: How did Joe, Lou and Mary, use the “**Accept-Cope-Adapt**” strategy to make positive changes in their lives?

Joe -

Joe told himself “I am just going to **accept** the fact that I am short and that is just the way it is”. Joe decided to instead focus his energy on learning to be **cope** with his depression, anger and mood swings. One thing Joe did was to learn not to get so upset when he thinks someone is making a short joke and he made a conscious decision not to be so bitter and resentful about the hand he was dealt in life. Finally, Joe worked with his counselor on ways to **adapt** to his situation as best he could. Joe decided that even though he is short, he could still adapt by learning to have a “big” personality. Joe worked on learning assertiveness, building self-confidence, increasing his ability with speaking up for himself and he also worked on his “people” skills by learning the art of persuasion and working on his sense of humor and charm. Joe still doesn’t like being short but since he decided to accept, cope and adapt he is no longer angry about it and he has been able to use his new skills, motivation and outlook to make a better life for himself. With his increased confidence he was able to land a good job and get into a positive relationship with someone who really cares about him

Lou –

Finally one day Lou decided to stop using his predicament as an excuse to keep relapsing and he decided to **accept** his situation for what it is and do his best to make it better. Lou learned to **cope** with his feelings by learning how to deal with the frustration, stress and anxiety that held him back every day. Lou also learned to be patient and to accept that change is a steady process, not a race. Finally, Lou **adapted** to his situation by taking a job he used to think was beneath his skill level because it was all he could get with his criminal record. However instead of complaining about the job, he decided to give his all and work extra hard by making the best of the situation as it is. After about six months his supervisor saw Lou’s dedication to the job and as a result, Lou soon got a promotion and a raise. All along Lou patiently paid off his fines and soon he got his driver’s license back and within a year he got another promotion to an assistant management position with an even better rate of pay. Lou realized he had a long way to go still to get where he wanted to be but he realized that since he accepted his situation, learned to cope, and then adapt, within a year he was making excellent progress with a lot more hope toward a better future in close in view.

Mary –

Mary worked with her counselor to learn to **accept** the loss of her husband. She came to terms with the unfortunate loss and accepted that he is gone and even though she will always love him and miss him she had to move on and get her own life back in order. Mary learned to **cope** with her emotions of feeling guilty, sad and lonely. She did this by giving herself time to properly mourn her loss and feel and express her feelings without burying them behind getting high. Finally, Mary learned to **adapt** to her situation by getting a job so she could stay busy and help support her children while also coming up with new hobbies to fill in the void during the spare time that she used to spend with her husband. Mary still thinks about her husband every day but she is functioning well in spite of her loss. Mary felt so much better moving forward rather than being trapped and held back by constantly trying to run from her past

CLOSING DISCUSSION – When it comes to learning to accept, cope and adapt to your personal situation, what did you get out of this? Specifically, what do you think you could start to work on?