



Maternal Mortality & Morbidity Advocates

Coping Mechanism Implementation Guide for Providers

Maternal Health & Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

SUD Resource Hub available at
www.mommasvoices.org

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Implementation Guide

A Guide for Providers to Introduce and Implement a Coping Mechanism Resource

This guide is designed to help healthcare providers introduce the Coping Mechanisms Menu to their pregnant or postpartum patients. The tool allows patients to identify their preferred coping strategies in advance, ensuring that they, their providers, and their support system can better manage stress during and after pregnancy.

1. Purpose of the Tool

- **Understanding Personal Coping Mechanisms:** Helps patients recognize what calms them and how to respond to stressors they may encounter.
- **Prenatal and Postpartum Stress Management:** Provides a preemptive plan for handling emotional and physical stress before, during and after delivery.
- **Alternative Coping Actions:** Encourages patients to identify healthy replacement activities for stressful moments.
- **Educating and Advocating:** Patients can use this tool to communicate their needs to providers, family, doulas, and other support persons.
- **Facilitating Conversations with Providers and Support Systems:** Assists in ensuring that care is patient-centered and individualized.

2. When to Use the Resource

- **Introduce Early in Pregnancy:** Providing the tool at an initial prenatal visit gives the patient time to reflect and prepare as stressors arise.
- **Review Later in Pregnancy:** Some patients may not yet have established trust with their provider early on. Reviewing the tool later allows for a more meaningful conversation.
- **During Hospital Stay or Postpartum Appointments:** Can serve as a reminder for patients to actively use the coping strategies they've identified.

3. Delivery Method

- **Printed Handout:** Provide it in a prenatal folder with an explanation.
- **Verbal Discussion:** Discuss and complete it during an appointment to encourage thoughtful completion.
- **Independent Completion:** Offer the option to complete it independently at home and review together with their provider later.

- **Engage Support People:** Use it as an opportunity to involve family members or support people in conversations about how to best assist the patient, with the patient's consent.

4. How to Use the Provider Script

The Provider Script is designed to help providers engage patients with lived experience in substance use disorder (SUD) in a respectful and empathetic manner. It serves as a tool to build trust, reduce stigma, and foster open dialogue - but its effectiveness depends heavily on how it is delivered.

Review and Practice in Advance

Providers should not read the script verbatim for the first time during a patient interaction. Instead, take time to review it thoroughly and **practice it in advance** so that the language feels natural and authentic. Scripts are most helpful when they serve as a foundation - not a crutch - for meaningful conversation.

Practice Strategies:

- **Role Play:** Partner with a colleague to simulate the conversation. Take turns playing the role of the patient to better understand how the words might feel to someone with lived experience.
- **Simulation Scenarios:** Incorporate the script into clinical simulations or standardized patient encounters to build muscle memory in a low-pressure setting.
- **Self-Practice:** Say the script out loud several times, adjusting tone and pacing so it aligns with your personal communication style while still maintaining fidelity to its intent.

Goal: Practice until the script “rolls off the tongue.” When the delivery feels smooth and confident, patients are more likely to feel respected, heard, and safe in the care environment.

Using this script skillfully can make a powerful difference in how patients with SUD experience care, helping to dismantle stigma and support recovery through genuine human connection.

Sample Provider Script

This sample script is designed to help providers introduce the Coping Mechanisms Menu in a supportive, nonjudgmental way to patients. It offers language to encourage self-reflection and empower patients to explore healthier ways of managing stress and emotions.

1. Greeting and Context Setting

- Objective: Create a welcoming and nonjudgmental environment to begin the conversation.
- Script Example:
“Pregnancy can be a very stressful time, and it’s completely normal if you do feel stressed. Everyone experiences stress differently, and having some ways to manage it can make a big difference. It can be helpful to have some strategies for managing your response to these challenges. Sometimes these strategies are referred to as coping mechanisms. Would you be open to discussing this topic today?”

If they say “no”:

“No problem at all. Would it be okay if we revisit this during a future visit? In the meantime, I’m happy to share some resources if that feels helpful.”

If they say “yes”: continue on

2. Build Trust and Provide a Safe, Supportive Space

- Objective: Reassure the patient that this is a judgment-free space and that support is the priority.
- Script Example:
“Thank you for being open and willing to have this conversation. I want to start by saying that this is a safe and confidential space, and I am here to support you in thinking through how to manage the stressors that may come up for you, as everyone’s stressors are different.”

Additional Option to create a personal connection:

“I sometimes feel stressed myself when... and have found that having a plan in place can be helpful”

3. Explain the Purpose of the Activity

- Objective: Clearly explain the goal of the coping mechanisms tool/activity.
- Script Example:
“There are many healthy ways to respond to stress, and discovering what works best for you can make a big difference. This tool is meant to help you reflect on strategies you already use and maybe find new or additional strategies that can support both you and your baby.”

4. Set Expectations for the Tool or Activity

- Objective: Let the patient know what to expect and that they can choose how they want to engage.
- Script Example:
“This activity should take about ten to fifteen minutes to complete. You can do it with me, come back to it later, or work through it on your own—or even with someone in your life who supports you. Whatever feels best for you.”

5. Provide Encouragement and Normalize Feelings

- Objective: Validate emotions that might arise and reinforce that it's okay to pause or revisit.
- Script Example:
“Talking about stress can sometimes feel overwhelming, and that's okay. If you feel like this activity becomes another cause of stress or brings emotions that you don't want to address today, please let me know and we can stop at any point. This is all about supporting you in a way that feels right.”

6. Transition to the Activity

- Objective: Gently guide the patient into the activity with relatable examples.
- Script Example:
“Before we begin, I'll share a few examples of what some coping mechanisms may look like. Sometimes people use healthy strategies, like calling a friend, reading a book, or going for a walk. Other times people might use less healthy responses, such as smoking, getting into fights, drinking, or withdrawing from people. What are some coping mechanisms you've used when you've felt stressed in the past?”

After patient responds:

“Thank you for sharing that. Have you found any of those strategies helpful? Were there any that didn't work so well for you?”

7. Explain What Happens Next

- Objective: Invite the patient to participate, describe how the information will be used to support them and offer additional resources.
- Script Example:

“Thank you again for sharing. This activity will help you learn more about your coping strategies and may even help you discover some new or additional healthy strategies. Some people prefer to walk through this activity with me, while others prefer to take time with it on their own. Either way, I'm here to provide any assistance you may need or answer any questions you may have. And if you identify areas where additional support or encouragement would be helpful, please let me know and we can work together to find resources whether that's within our organization or in the community.

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8. After the Activity

- Objective: Reinforce the patient's strength, acknowledge their efforts, and offer continued support.
- Script Example:

“Thank you so much for taking the time to go through this activity with me today. I really appreciate your openness and the thought you put into exploring the ways you're already coping, and the new strategies we talked about. Your strength and commitment to your health and your baby's health really stand out. I want you to know you're not alone on this journey. I'm here to support you, and we'll work together to make sure you get connected to any resources or support systems that feel right for you or anything else you might need. We'll take this one step at a time, together.”

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