Coping With The Stresses of Life

Coping usually involves adjusting to or tolerating negative events or realities while attempting to maintain your positive self-image and emotional equilibrium. Coping occurs in the context of life changes that are perceived to be stressful. Psychological stress is usually associated with negative life changes, such as losing a job or a loved one. However, because all changes require some sort of adaptation, even positive changes such as getting married or having a child can be stressful.

Changes are stressful as change requires us to adjust and to adapt. Experiencing too many changes within a brief time period often creates the perception that we are not in control of important events. This perception contributes to low self-esteem and may even contribute to the development of anxiety or depression. In some cases, physical illnesses may develop or be exacerbated when one’s capacity to adapt is overwhelmed by too much change.

Coping involves adjusting to unusual demands, or stressors, thus requiring the mobilisation of greater effort and the use of greater energy than usually required in daily routine. Prolonged mobilisation of effort can contribute to elevated levels of stress-related hormones and to eventual physical breakdown and illness.

Stressors that require coping may be acute, such as a change in residence or onset of marital problems. Stressors also occur that are of longer duration, such as chronic pain, chronic illness, or enduring financial problems.

The effect of many acute stressors that occur within a relatively brief period of time may be cumulative and profound. Thus, the individual who experiences a marital separation, the death of an aging parent, and a change in their job within a brief period of time may find themselves struggling to adjust to maintain their physical and emotional health.

What are some common coping strategies?

Some common coping mechanisms include:

- Lowering your expectations
- Asking others to help or assist you
- Taking responsibility for the situation
- Engaging in problem solving
- Maintaining emotionally supportive relationships
- Maintaining emotional composure or, alternatively, expressing distressing emotions
- Challenging previously held beliefs that are no longer adaptive
- Directly attempting to change the source of stress
- Distancing yourself from the source of stress
- Viewing the problem through a religious perspective