

Knowing when you are starting to enter the danger zone (feeling overwhelming or intense emotions) can make a big difference between having a crisis moment or calming down. Warning signs are clues that tell you that you need to do something to feel better. When you notice you are struggling with your emotions or possibly heading toward a crisis, there are things you can do to help work through those feelings.

Understanding the Danger Zone

Coping skills are great tools to move through overwhelming emotions. In order for these skills to help, you will need to know when it is best to use them. It is normal and healthy for people to feel emotions and just because you feel an emotion doesn't mean you are in crisis. All of our emotions help tell us what is happening in our body and can be helpful. For example, a little bit of stress can be good; it gives us motivation to study for a test or keep us safe from danger; however, too much stress can lead to feeling overwhelmed and cause us to get frustrated or shut down. These moments are when we need coping skills.

Everyone experiences emotions at different levels; this is called feeling intensity. Emotions are experienced at a different intensity by everyone. Having emotions is good, but extremes emotions are often unhelpful. When emotions are too high, we can have difficulty thinking through situations, making decisions, and choosing healthy actions, like using coping skills.

- Anytime your emotions feel like they are getting too high, you have entered the *danger zone*. That is when it's time to use a coping skill or seek support. If you continue in your danger zone, you risk a crisis. A crisis is a stressful event that involves thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and situations that the person feels unable to control
- Coping skills can be used any time we have an overwhelming thought or feeling. You should start practicing coping skills *before* you enter the danger zone, so your brain and body are ready when you need them.

What are coping skills?

Coping skills are actions that you can do to move through and get control of your extreme emotions. If you do something that makes you feel happy and healthy when you are feeling down or angry, it can help to change the emotion you are feeling. You may find that coping skills that work best for you are different than what works best for a friend. It is helpful to talk about coping skills with friends and family to get ideas and to practice coping skills ahead of time.

With coping skills, sometimes you have to try new things to see what works, and not every skill will work for you every time. That is why you will want to practice and build a list of helpful coping skills that work for you. Here are some examples:

- Physical – playing a sport, walking, riding a bike, taking your dog for a walk
- Spiritual – connecting with nature, or a religious faith (ex. Praying, meditating, hiking)
- Emotional – breathing, journaling, repeating a mantra, grounding/anchoring activity
- Social – texting or calling a friend, playing a game
- School – seeking help on a task, telling someone what would help you, taking a break
- Safe spaces – Going somewhere you feel safe and calm (ex. your bedroom, outside)

