

THE MANY FACES OF COPING:
A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Happy to be here sharing this ^{time} ~~luncheon~~ with you
2. My thanks to you all for having me here, and especially to ~~Carol Goldberg, who has been a friend and supporter throughout my years at UCI~~

INTRODUCTION

1. As you learned from the flyer, for many years my area of research interest has been how families cope with serious illnesses and disabilities ~~in~~ their children. I would like to share with you a few of the things I have learned in the ~~process~~ ^{of this research}, both about the families I studied, and about myself.

TECHNICAL DEFINITIONS OF COPING

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1. There are many technical definitions of coping:
 - a. cognitive, affective, behavioral
 - b. problem-focused, emotion-focused, palliative, instrumental
 2. A definition by Richard Lazarus, a preeminent researcher in the field of coping, goes like this:

"Coping is efforts, both action-oriented and intrapsychic, to manage environmental and internal demands, and conflicts among them, which tax or exceed a person's resources"

3. Put even more broadly, coping is the behavior elicited in response to a stressful event in order to minimize emotional and physical distress

Slide MODES OF COPING (IV) APPRAISAL Coping Resources
LAY DEFINITIONS OF COPING Slide Slide

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1. Paraphrasing the popular book by Harold Kushner, When bad things happen to good people, what do they do?
 2. Coping involves the well-known quotation of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, since adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous:

"Give me the strength to change those things I can change;
the ability to accept those things I can't change;
and the wisdom to know the difference"

3. This is really the best summary I can think of in terms of what successful coping is all about. But as most of us know, it is rarely easy to find the strength, the acceptance, and the wisdom that Niebuhr referred to

TWO FOLK TALES ABOUT COPING

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1. Just how difficult it is to figure out what to do when things go

EFFECTIVE COPING

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~~10A~~
1. For the past ~~eight~~ years I have studied, interviewed, and spent time with families whose children had leukemia and other cancers, were physically disabled by polio and congenital birth defects, or were mentally retarded as a result of Down Syndrome.

2. How could they bear it? How could they go on? I had no idea, so I asked them ~~again & again~~.

3. After awhile it became apparent that those families who were coping most effectively, who appeared to have made a successful adaptation, who had less stress, less depression and anxiety, and better physical health, shared some things in common:

~~Slide Personality Resources (VIA) Appraisal (V) Slide~~

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a. Acquiring and using social support: asking for help (all kinds of help) and receiving it)

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b. Communicating affectively: being able to share their feelings and fears, especially with those closest to them

c. Developing instrumental skills of problem-solving and information acquisition: knowing how to interact effectively with a system, like a large hospital

d. Being flexible in terms of what coping strategies they used in responding to different aspects of a stressful event: sometimes these parents went to the medical library and read everything they could about their child's condition; sometimes they held each other and cried

e. Using humor: not being afraid to laugh at themselves and their situations, tragic as they might sometimes appear

f. The capacity to grieve their losses: to recognize the shattering of certain dreams, ~~which enabled them to create~~ ^{paradoxically} new dreams for themselves and their families

g. The ability to recognize and accept both normal and deviant aspects of their child

h. Identifying meaning: whether through religious conviction or other experiences and beliefs, evolving a sense of purposiveness and trust

Slide Negative Coping (XX)

COPING WITH DISABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIETY XIII

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1. My research also taught me something about the social context in which disabled children and their families exist

2. As one child said to me, "This handicap is not my problem. Your attitude about this handicap is my problem."

3. When comparing parents of disabled and nondisabled children, the parents of nondisabled had much more negative views of disabled persons - they evaluated them more negatively, and saw them as more different from "normal" people

4. Parents of nondisabled children also tended to...

Hassidic and one Buddhist.

2. The Hassidic story goes like this:

Once a small village in eastern Poland was beset by terrible flooding. Most of the villagers fled. But one extremely pious old woman remained calmly in her cottage. Her few remaining neighbors rode by in a big wagon, the wheels already half-covered by the rising waters. "Come with us, grandmother," they cried. "We have room." "No need," the old woman replied. "God will save me."

The waters continued to rise, until the old woman was forced to climb onto her second floor balcony. Just then a rowboat came by. The people frantically motioned her to climb aboard. But the old woman said calmly, "I have been a God-fearing woman for seventy years. He will save me."

Finally, the old woman had to climb to the top of her roof to escape the torrents. As she perched there, the waters tickling her toes, miraculously a giant bird flew by, a rope tied to its body dangling right above the old lady's head. The bird hovered above her, squawking in an imploring manner. But the old woman waved it on, saying, "God will recognize my piety. He will rescue me." At that moment, the waters closed over her head and she drowned.

When the old woman entered Heaven, as she surely deserved to, and came before the presence of the Holy One, she confronted Him angrily. "Why did you abandon me, Lord?" she said. "Haven't I been a good and righteous woman for seventy years?" "Indeed you have, Grandma," replied the Lord. "But what more did you want? I sent you the wagon, the rowboat, and the bird!"

2. This story says something important to us about the power of our own actions in responding to events, and how easy it is to ignore the external and internal resources which exist for us.

3. The second tale goes like this:

Once a woman was fleeing a tiger. She came to the edge of a cliff. She glanced behind: the tiger pursued. She glanced below: sharp rocks and raging waters crashed hundreds of feet beneath her. Suddenly she saw a slender vine by which she could lower herself over the edge. Being a resourceful woman, she courageously began the descent. But the vine was too short. The woman found herself suspended hundreds of feet above the rocks and water, the hungry tiger roaring above her. Then she noticed the vine beginning to quiver. Two small mice were starting to gnaw it through.

5/1, 2 In desperation the woman lifted her eyes heavenward and called "Help! Help!" To her surprise, the skies parted and a tremendous Voice boomed forth, "Don't worry. Everything's all right. Just trust Me and let go." The woman hesitated. She glanced upward at the tiger, downward at the sharp rocks and raging torrents, and then at the mice, who continued to gnaw through the vine. The woman looked heavenward again: "Isn't there anybody else up there?" she asked.

4. From this tale we are reminded of how difficult it is for us to abandon our own efforts, to let go, accept what comes into our