

# Coping mechanisms

Business



After times of trauma, victims need a place to focus their emotions. They often feel overwhelmed and cannot deal with their emotions effectively. Coping mechanisms provide victims of trauma solace and stress relief. Even in the most minor situations, people subconsciously use coping mechanisms to handle discomfort. They can be beneficial or detrimental to a person's mental health depending on the type.

When people who are more vulnerable or innocent go through trauma, coping mechanisms are often the only tool they have to overcome or handle their emotions; it is harder for innocent people to cope with problems that are outside their comfort zone. In the novel, *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson, and modern sources, the authors explore coping mechanisms. As seen in the article titled "Denial" by the Changing Minds Organization, and in the beginning of the novel, *Melinda*, the protagonist, employs denial as a coping mechanism to overcome the emotions she has after her rape. The article discusses many forms of coping mechanisms, the most common being "denial [which] is a form of repression, where stressful thoughts are banned from memory" ("Denial" 1). Victims suffering trauma are often unable to confront the flood of emotions they feel because they are too intense for them to handle.

This often translates into them denying that the event(s) ever happened, because it is easier for them to temporarily block out emotions that cause them stress and remind them of tragic times. The constant cycle of blocking out memories can be exhausting for a victim who is still in the early stages of recovery. Similarly, Melinda tries her hardest to block out the memories of her rape from her day-to-day life. Despite her best efforts, her rapist still

haunts her in school when she is “ hanging a poster outside the metal-shop room when IT [Andy] creeps up. Little flecks of metal slice through my veins. IT [Andy] whispers to me.

/ ‘ Freshmeat.’ That’s what IT [Andy]whispers” (Anderson 86). Melinda refuses to say her rapist’s name, because she wants to dissociate herself from her attack. Melinda calling her rapist it is her way of repressing her emotions towards him. Without realizing it, she finds subtle ways to refuse to accept that fact that she was raped: she does not call her attack a rape and she does not call her rapist by his name. Not only do these tactics minimize the event, they also prevent her from growing and fully recovering from her traumatic experience and provide only temporary relief.

Unfortunately, Melinda is never able to truly escape her rape, as her rapist finds her in school and looms over her frequently. Her constant suppressing of emotions cause her to be emotionally and physically exhausted.

Throughout the novel, Melinda copes with her rape without any support from her peers, parents, or teachers. This lack of a support circle coupled with her minimization of the rape cause her to turn to a more destructive way of coping: denial. In the article, “ Children Who Are Anxious in Silence,” by Peter Muris and Thomas Ollendick, the authors discuss the ways to identify selective mutism and the effects of it on a child; in *Speak*, the author demonstrates Melinda’s selective mutism as a way to cope.

The articlenotes that “ SM [selective mutism] also shares features with the temperament construct of behavioral inhibition, which has been defined as the habitual tendency to show persistent fearfulness and avoidance during

confrontations with novel and unfamiliar people, situations, and objects” (Muris 158). Selective mutism (SM) does not necessarily cause people to go completely mute; it simply means that in certain social situations, they find it difficult to speak. When victims of trauma go through a particularly humiliating event and feel as though they have nowhere to turn, they often develop SM. They feel as though speaking will make them subject to more humiliation and perhaps exile, and this causes them to stay introverted in most situations. Likewise, in the novel, Melinda finds it difficult to open herself up to her parents, who wonder why “ you [Melinda] won’t say anything?’ / ‘ For the love of God, open your mouth!’ / ‘ This is childish Melinda!’ / ‘ Say something.

‘ / ‘ You are only hurting yourself by refusing to cooperate.’ / ‘ I don’t know why she’s doing this to us” (Anderson 114). When Melinda is confronted by her guidance counselor and parents, she finds it impossible to stand up for herself and tell them her feelings. Melinda exhibits an absence of speech which negatively affects her school and home life, she demonstrates clear symptoms of SM. After her rape, she realizes that she is an outcast, this causes her to crawl into her own hole and not open herself up to people.

An internal struggle is seen by the reader between Melinda and herself. She often questions whether she should say something and worries about the consequences of speaking up. Her rape is something she tends to hide because she feels as though she will be alienated even further, and this causes her to bite her lip to prevent herself from slipping anything out that she does not want the world to know. Despite this, she is still able to speak up during her art class, where she feels the most safe and free. In certain

<https://assignbuster.com/coping-mechanisms/>

situations, Melinda exhibits her incapacity to speak and confront problems, and in turn, demonstrates her selective mutism as her way of coping with her rape . According to the article titled “ Healing Trauma through Art,” by Caelan Kuban, and the novel, art can be used to help people cope with their emotions after trauma.

The article indicates that the main focus of art is “ to teach youth how to become aware and non judgemental about their feelings...Art activities also can help adolescents develop their identity and autonomy, giving them a sense of mastery, control, and future orientation” (Kuban 20). Most children who experience trauma find it difficult to regain their self esteem and reclaim ownership of their emotions and actions. They also lose the sense of control they have over their lives.

The arts have had the ability to help people cope with the aftermath of trauma and express their feelings to others. Literal and symbolic representations in art give a glimpse into how a victim is feeling, what the victim is thinking, and how people can help them with their emotions. Most people find it extremely difficult to be upfront about their innermost thoughts and often cannot name the complex and fierce emotions they feel. So, art allows them to explore and let out their emotions in a non-judgemental setting where they feel safe and secure. Furthermore, in *Speak*, Melinda is able to use her artistic talent to let “[w]ater drip on the paper and [let] the birds bloom in the light, their feathers expanding promise.

IT happened. There's no avoiding it, no forgetting... Andy Evans raped me in August when I was drunk and too young to know what was happening. It wasn't my fault...And I'm not going to let it kill me.

I can grow...Words float up. / ' Let me tell you about it.

"" (Anderson 197-198). Melinda acknowledges her emotions for the first time after her rape, which is a huge step towards her recovery. She leaves her harmful and destructive coping mechanisms behind her and moves toward a more healthy and effective way of coping. Her art provides her an escape from the emotions that are often too intense for her to explore or talk about. Melinda's lack of support cause her to hide most of the feelings she has post trauma, but through her art, she develops a sense of control over her rape and her story. She does not let Andy Evans, her rapist, dictate her emotions, she admits to herself that she was raped and clearly establishes the fact that it was not her fault.

Melinda's art gives her a sense of ownership and power over herself, something she clearly lacks, but desperately needs. Moreover, Mr. Freeman, Melinda's art teacher, is the first person she confides to about her rape. This is a salient step for her because she distrusts most of the adults around her. Melinda has immense trust for her art teacher and feels safe in her art room. She feels as though she can express who she really is without being alienated, like she is in most places.

Melinda uses myriad coping mechanisms that do not help her recover, they simply help her block out her memories. Through her art, though, Melinda is able to dig deep into herself, acknowledge her rape, and move forward with <https://assignbuster.com/coping-mechanisms/>

her emotions. The idea of victims of trauma using coping mechanisms, in various ways, is explored by modern sources and Laurie Halse Anderson, the author of the novel *Speak*. People will always try to find ways to cope because it helps them leave traumatic events in the past. While they may not always be effective, all coping mechanisms signal the mark of the most important step in reaching recovery: survival.

Victims often yearn to feel as though they have moved on from a traumatic event or hope to feel some sort of closure, but often the most important step to make in recuperating is to know that they have survived the traumatic event. While closure may provide victims with the feeling that they have ended a painful chapter of their life, survival is a something much more important: continuing to exist despite the harsh aspects of someone's life or the calamitous situations they have had to go through. While it may seem simple, getting up everyday and continuing to live life is a feat that most trauma victims strive to accomplish. Coping mechanisms are a catalyst for survival, and in turn recovery.