

# Prevalence & Efficacy of Coping Strategies Utilized by Entry-Level OT Students

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**PURPOSE:** OT student stress is increasing and negatively impacts academics, well-being, and physical health. Coping strategies can help manage stress levels; however, there is limited current evidence describing the specific coping strategies that OT students use and their level of effectiveness. This study's purpose was to identify coping strategies most used and describe which coping strategies students found to be most and least effective. The specific research questions were: 1) What coping strategies do OT students use to help decrease their stress during OT school? and 2) Which coping strategies do they find most and least effective?

**DESIGN:** This is a mixed methods descriptive study. Recruitment involved emailing entry-level OT program contacts and posting to social media. Inclusion criteria were current enrollment in an entry-level program and at least 18 years old. Those enrolled in OTA, OT bridge, or 3+3 programs and/or anyone who could not read and understand English were excluded from the study.

**METHOD:** Data was collected via a survey containing the Brief COPE and nine open-ended questions. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software. Qualitative data was analyzed using open coding with themes emerging from the responses.

**RESULTS:** There were 739 participants. Emotional support and positive reframing were reported as the most used coping strategies. From the qualitative data, fifteen themes emerged to represent most and least effective coping strategies. The quantitative and qualitative results aligned.

**CONCLUSION:** Coping strategies were identified as most and least effective depending on the student, suggesting coping skills are individualized. Being aware of different coping strategies is essential, but more importantly is students knowing which strategies are personally most and least effective. Academic programs can help students identify individualized coping strategies, which is consistent with the profession's focus on client-centered care.

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