Coping with Chaos

Facilitator Reproducible Guided Self-Exploration Activities

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Illustrated by Amy L. Brodsky, LISW-S
Coping with Chaos Introduction

Using This Book

DEFINITION OF CHAOS: a state of utter confusion; complete disorder; a jumble.

One thing that all people can count on in the twenty-first century is living with chaos. Chaos refers to a state of confusion in your life, the experience of random or unpredictable occurrences, and/or a lack of order to your daily life, space and belongings. Chaos can be seen in the many changes in the workplace, cell phones ringing and people constantly beset with interruptions, the barrage of new information flooding into your brain, thousands of choices, new and improved product ideas, new technologies that arrive daily, and new family structures. Often a family member volunteers or is forced to take on a new role such as caregiving. These are just a few of the many ways people are experiencing increased chaos in their lives which leaves them feeling irritated, frustrated, exhausted, angry, overwhelmed and/or confused.

Many people are interested in returning to the days when life was simpler, calmer, more controllable and more predictable. People want their lives to be full of events, people, and things they can predict and count on. Instead, they feel like they are losing their sense of purpose, control and predictability, and the result of these feelings is a sense of exasperation and weariness.

Faced with many choices, loads of information at everyone’s fingertips, and complex technological systems, people seek to establish order and control in their chaotic lives. More than ever before, it is important to understand chaos and attempt to find patterns in the chaos.

This can be seen throughout history:

- **Religion** – Various religions have tried to make sense of the world by coming to terms with evil and making sense of a world that seems aimless, violent, and full of random acts and events.

- **Science** – The history of science is an ongoing attempt to discover patterns in the physical world and to understand incomprehensible and disorderly events. Scientists usually spend their lives searching for laws and patterns that can be repeated and therefore understood.

- **Mythology** – Myths have been handed down through the ages to help cultures make sense of the randomness of events. Myths include parables related to birth, death, journeys to distant lands, magical beasts, mythical heroes and heroines, and gods and goddesses.

People often ask, “Why worry about chaos, there’s nothing you can do about it?” The fact is that people can control the chaos in their lives. It can be quite liberating to realize that chaos, although unsettling, need not be as frustrating as people believe they can learn to define patterns of chaos and redirect their energies and abilities.
Coping with Chaos Introduction

A New Way of Looking at Chaos

The Chaos Theory is one of the best theories for dealing with the chaos in the lives of people. This Chaos Theory was developed in the 1970s when James Gleick and Edward Lorenz found that small changes and fateful events set off patterns that could affect everything in the surroundings. They referred to this as the “butterfly effect” when they observed that a butterfly flapping its wings in China could affect weather patterns in Europe.

Therefore, even though chaos finds its way into the lives of every person, it is critical that people find ways to effectively cope with and overcome the chaos. The Chaos Theory suggests that there is no chaos; rather, there is a pattern and underlying order that can be defined by observing it with the right lens.

The purpose of this book is to provide people with the right lens to see the patterns in the chaos in their lives. This workbook will show participants that although chaos can be frustrating and stressful, by being redirected it can also enrich lives and provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

In this book, we will illustrate several ways to embrace and manage chaos:

- **Expect it** – In the twenty-first century it is almost impossible to avoid chaos in life. People need to be aware that their plans are likely to be interrupted and changed, and that everything cannot be predicted and controlled.
- **Understand it** – By seeing chaos for what it is and accepting and controlling it, people can see chaos as freedom from predictable routines and constraints. Eventually, chaos can be seen as a transition point to a more controlled, calm and satisfying life.
- **See it for what it is** – Chaos Theory reminds people that even in chaos one can find distinct, critical life patterns. When people are able to identify the patterns in their lives, they can work to control the chaos and live simpler lives.
- **Control It** – Chaos Theory suggests that there is always going to be chaos in the lives of most people. The secret is to be alert to the opportunities chaos brings and find ways of doing one’s best to control it so that it does not negatively affect one’s life.

All people at some point will experience chaos that will come from a wide variety of sources and can cause people to feel frustrated, stressed out and weary. Most people see this chaos as a symptom of the twenty-first century and feel that there is nothing they can do about it. In reality, chaos can be seen for what it is. People can do something about it and control it in their own lives.

To lead a more stress-free, calm and satisfying life, it is important to deal with the emotions, thoughts and actions related to chaos. The *Coping with Chaos Workbook* provides assessments and self-guided activities to help participants learn useful skills for coping with various forms of chaos. Self-exploration activities are provided for participants to determine which best suit their unique needs.
Format of Book

The *Coping with Chaos Workbook* contains assessments and guided self-exploration to use with a variety of populations to help participants cope more effectively with chaos in their lives. Each chapter of this workbook begins with a Table of Contents annotated with notes and examples for the facilitator. Each chapter contains two primary elements: 1) a set of assessments to help participants gather information about themselves in a focused situation, and 2) a set of guided self-exploration activities to help participants process information and learn ways of coping with chaos.

**Assessments**

Each chapter begins with an assessment that provides participants with valuable information about themselves. These assessments help identify productive and unproductive patterns of behavior and life skills, and they encourage development of an awareness of ways to interact with the world. Assessments provide a path to self-discovery through participants’ exploration of their own unique traits and behaviors. The purpose of these assessments is not to “pigeon-hole” people, but to allow them to explore various elements critical for coping with guilt and shame. This book contains *self-assessments* and not *tests*. Traditional tests measure knowledge or right or wrong responses. For the assessments provided in this book, remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers. These assessments ask only for opinions or attitudes about topics related to a variety of coping skills and abilities.

The assessments in this book are based on self-reported data. In other words, the accuracy and usefulness of the information is dependent on the information that participants honestly provide about themselves. All of the assessments in this workbook are designed to be administered, scored, and interpreted by the participants as a starting point for them to begin to learn more about themselves and their coping skills. Remind participants that the assessments are exploratory exercises and not a determination of abilities. Lastly, the assessments are not a substitute for professional assistance. If you feel any of your participants need more assistance than you can provide, please refer them to an appropriate professional.

As your participants begin the assessments in this workbook give these instructions:

- Take your time. Because there is no time limit for completing the assessments, work at your own pace. Allow yourself time to reflect on your results and how they compare to what you already know about yourself.
- Do not answer the assessments as you think others would like you to answer them or how you think others see you. These assessments are for you to reflect on your life and explore some of the barriers that are keeping you from living a calmer, more rational and less anxious life.
- Assessments are powerful tools if you are honest with yourself. Take your time and be truthful in your responses so that your results are an honest reflection of you. Your level of commitment in completing the assessments honestly will determine how much you learn about yourself.
- Before completing each assessment, be sure to read the instructions. The assessments have similar formats, but they have different scales, responses, scoring instructions and methods for interpretation.
- Finally, remember that learning about yourself should be a positive and motivating experience. Don’t stress about taking the assessments or discovering your results. Just respond honestly and learn as much about yourself as you can.

(Continued on the next page)
Coping with Chaos Introduction

Format of Book (Continued)

Guided Self-Exploration Activities

Guided self-exploration activities are any exercises that assist participants in self-reflection and enhance self-knowledge, identify potential ineffective behaviors, and teach more effective ways of coping. Guided self-exploration is designed to help participants make a series of discoveries that lead to increased social and emotional competencies, as well as to serve as an energizing way to help participants grow personally and professionally. These brief, easy-to-use self-reflection tools are designed to promote insight and self-growth. Many different types of guided self-exploration activities are provided for you to pick and choose the activities most needed and/or will be most appealing to the participants. The unique features of self-guided exploration activities make them usable and appropriate for a variety of individual sessions and group sessions.

Features of Guided Self-Exploration Activities

Quick, easy and rewarding to use – These guided self-exploration activities are designed to be an efficient, appealing method for motivating participants to explore information about themselves - including their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors - in a relatively short period of time.

- **Reproducible** – Because the guided self-exploration activities can be reproduced by the facilitator, no more than the one book needs to be purchased. You may photocopy as many items as you wish for your participants. If you want to add or delete words on a page, make one photocopy, white out and/or write your own words, and then make photocopies from your personalized master.

- **Participative** – These guided self-exploration activities help people to quickly focus their attention in the self-reflection process and to learn new and more effective ways of coping.

- **Motivating to complete** – The guided self-exploration activities are designed to be an energizing way for participants to engage in self-reflection and learn about themselves. Various activities are included to enhance the learning process related to developing important social and emotional competency skills.

- **Low risk** – The guided self-exploration activities are designed to be less risky than formal assessments and structured exercises. They are user-friendly, and participants will generally feel rewarded and motivated after completing these activities.

- **Adaptable to a variety of populations** – The guided self-exploration activities can be used with many different populations and can be tailored to meet the needs of the specific populations with whom you work.

- **Focused** – Each guided self-exploration activity is designed to focus on a single coping issue, thus enhancing the experience for participants.

- **Flexible** – The guided self-exploration activities are flexible and can be used independently or to supplement other types of interventions.
Chapter Elements

The *Coping with Chaos Workbook* is designed to be used either independently or as part of an integrated curriculum. You may administer any of the assessments and the guided self-exploration activities to an individual or a group with whom you are working, or you may administer any of the activities over one or more days. Feel free to pick and choose those assessments and activities that best fit the outcomes you desire.

The first page of each chapter begins with a Table of Contents annotated with ideas and examples for the facilitator.

**Assessments** – Assessments with scoring directions and interpretation materials begin each chapter. The authors recommend that you begin presenting each topic by asking participants to complete the assessment. Facilitators can choose one or more, or all of the activities relevant to their participants’ specific needs and concerns.

**Guided Self-Exploration Activities** – Practical questions and activities to prompt self-reflection and promote self-understanding are included after each of the assessments. These questions and activities foster introspection and promote pro-social behaviors and coping skills. The activities in this workbook are tied to the assessments so that you can identify and select activities quickly and easily.

The activities are divided into four chapters to help you identify and select assessments easily and quickly:

- **Chapter 1: Disorganization**
  This chapter helps participants explore how a lack of organization in personal and professional life leads to feeling a sense of chaos.

- **Chapter 2: Control of Chaos**
  This chapter helps participants explore how well they are able to control the effects of chaos in their lives through limiting distractions, staying organized, and maintaining influence of their lives despite outside forces.

- **Chapter 3: Juggling Multiple Roles**
  This chapter helps participants explore their effectiveness in juggling multiple roles and finding balance among the roles they play.

- **Chapter 4: Time-Pressure**
  This chapter helps participants identify and explore the impact that poor time management skills is having on their overall level of life chaos.

**Thanks to . . .**

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  - Profile Interpretation
  - Declutter Your Life
  - My Master To Do List
  - Learning to Say “No”
  - To Toss or Not to Toss
  - Organize Your Space
  - Simplify Where and When
  - What They Look Like
  - Delegating Responsibilities at Home
  - Delegating Responsibilities at Work
  - Organizing Myself
  - My Goals
  - Organizing Made Easy
  - What’s Your Organizational Style?
  - Getting Your Life Organized

## Control of Chaos

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  - Scoring Directions
  - Profile Interpretation
  - Calm in My Life
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  - The Frenzy with My Work or Volunteering
  - What Chaos Looks Like to Me
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Disorganization

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EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Why I Keep It</th>
<th>Why I Think I Can Toss It or Give It Away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: old computer printer</td>
<td>In case mine breaks</td>
<td>It is not compatible with my current computer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Master To Do List ........................................... .18

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need to Do at Home</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: I need to clean out my garage.</td>
<td>June 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning to Say “No”. ........................................... .19

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person to Whom I Can’t Say No</th>
<th>Tasks I Am Asked to Do</th>
<th>How I Can Say No in a Polite and Assertive Way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: My friend Sherry</td>
<td>She often asks me to get the mail for her even though it is one of her responsibilities.</td>
<td>Sherry, I don’t mind helping you with the mail if it’s an emergency, but mail delivery is one of your responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To Toss or not to Toss ........................................... .20

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Why I Have Kept It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stack of old magazines</td>
<td>Coffee table</td>
<td>To look at recipes later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After participants have completed the activity, remind them to clean up their computer desktops.

Organize Your Space ........................................... .21

Suggest that participants begin with the area(s) of their life and career that are the least organized.
Table of Contents and Facilitator Notes

Simplify Where and When Possible ..................................................... 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Why It Is Okay to Dispose of It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing collection</td>
<td>Bedroom closet</td>
<td>Have not worn those clothes for years and I can give them to the needy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What They Look Like .............................................................. 23

Ask for a volunteer to write about or draw on the board what he/she thinks organization and disorganization looks like to her/him. Then, distribute handout.

Delegating Responsibilities at Home ....................................... 24

After the participants have completed the handout, ask for volunteers willing to share what they would like to delegate to make their lives less chaotic.

Delegating Responsibilities at Work ....................................... 25

After the participants have completed the handout, ask for volunteers willing to share what they would like to delegate to make their lives less chaotic.

Organizing Myself ........................................................................ 26

Ask for volunteers to define what the phrase ‘organizing myself’ means to them personally. Then distribute handouts.

My Goals ..................................................................................... 27

Prior to distributing handouts, ask the group to define goals and how they help people. After some discussion, share the following definition: Goals give your life purpose and direction, and they serve to motivate you.

Organizing Made Easy ................................................................. 28

After handouts have been completed, ask for volunteers who would like to share and read their ideas.

What’s Your Organizational Style? .............................................. 29

After the participants have completed the handout, ask people to break off into Organizational Style groups to discuss their style and how they feel it works for them. Ask a representative of each group to announce to everyone their group’s consensus.

Getting Your Life Organized ....................................................... 30

After handout is completed, ask for a show of hands of people who already use the first suggestion on the page. Ask for someone to talk about it. Proceed with each of the suggestions on the page.
Disorganization Scale
Introduction and Directions

When you think of stress, you probably think of major life transitions such as losing your job, caring for an aging or ill parent, mourning the loss of a loved one, or experiencing a significant financial loss. Often it isn’t the big stressors that cause chaos, but little stressors adding up. A lack of organization in your personal and professional life will keep you feeling that sense of chaos.

For each of the items that follow, choose the response that best describes you. In the following example, the circled numbers indicate how much the statement is descriptive of the person completing the inventory.

3 = Very Much Like Me  2 = A Little Like Me   1 = Not At All Like Me

When I am at work . . .

1. I have too much to do . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 3 2 1
2. I do not prioritize my work efficiently . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 3 2 1

This is not a test. Since there are no right or wrong answers, do not spend too much time thinking about your answers. Be sure to respond to every statement.

Turn to the next page and begin.
Disorganization

Disorganization Scale

I. Organization at Work

(Work in this case can be a part-time job, full-time job, volunteer experience, home business or any other situation in which you do a job.)

3 = Very Much Like Me  2 = A Little Like Me   1 = Not At All Like Me

When I am at work . . .

1. I have too much to do .................................. 3 2 1
2. I do not prioritize my work efficiently................. 3 2 1
3. I feel overloaded with things I don’t like to do ........ 3 2 1
4. I have trouble managing my time ....................... 3 2 1
5. I can’t keep up with the changes ....................... 3 2 1
6. I have a difficult time saying “no” to co-workers ..... 3 2 1
7. I tend to be a perfectionist ............................. 3 2 1
8. I don’t use a To Do List ................................ 3 2 1
9. I have too many unwanted interruptions .............. 3 2 1
10. I don’t make the time to take breaks ................. 3 2 1
11. I do not use a planner to manage my time .......... 3 2 1
12. I am not as productive as I should be and it frustrates me .. 3 2 1
13. I have trouble keeping track of what I need to do .. 3 2 1
14. I don’t put things away, so I don’t know where they are .. 3 2 1
15. I rarely delegate tasks to others ........................ 3 2 1

I. TOTAL = __________

Continued on the next page
Disorganization Scale

II. Organization at Home

(Home in this case is the time you spend at home alone or with others living in the home.)

3 = Very Much Like Me    2 = A Little Like Me    1 = Not At All Like Me

When I am at home . . .

1. I have too much to do ................................................. 3  2  1
2. I do not prioritize my tasks efficiently  ......................... 3  2  1
3. I feel overloaded with things I don’t like to do. .................. 3  2  1
4. I have trouble managing my time .................................. 3  2  1
5. I can’t keep up with the changes .................................. 3  2  1
6. I have a difficult time saying “no” to others ..................... 3  2  1
7. I tend to be a perfectionist .......................................... 3  2  1
8. I don’t use a To Do List ............................................. 3  2  1
9. I have too many unwanted interruptions ........................... 3  2  1
10. I don’t make the time to take breaks ............................. 3  2  1
11. I do not use a planner to manage my time ........................ 3  2  1
12. I am not as productive as I should be and it frustrates me .... 3  2  1
13. I have trouble keeping track of what I need to do ............... 3  2  1
14. I don’t put things away, so I don’t know where they are ...... 3  2  1
15. I rarely delegate tasks to others ................................... 3  2  1

II. TOTAL = __________

Go to the Scoring Directions on the next page
Disorganization Scale
Scoring Directions

The Disorganization Scale is designed to measure how organized or disorganized you are at work and at home. For each of the sections, count the scores you circled for each of the two sections. Put that total on the line marked “Total” at the end of each section.

Then, transfer your totals to the spaces below.

TOTAL I. __________ =  Organization at Work

TOTAL II. __________ =  Organization at Home

Profile Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales Scores</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Indications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores from 36 to 45</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>If you score in the high range, you often feel very disorganized in that environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores from 25 to 35</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>If you score in the moderate range, you sometimes feel disorganized in that environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores from 15 to 24</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>If you score in the low range, you feel fairly organized in that environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By developing your organizational skills, you will begin to experience less chaos in your life. The following exercises are designed to help you become better organized at both work and home.
De-clutter Your Life

Many people hang onto things that they do not really need. What types of objects have you acquired over the years that you no longer need? List objects at home or work that you could easily give or throw away. (You can toss these, sell them, or give these items to a charitable cause.)

Think about the following questions in deciding what to dispose of:

- Do I need this item?
- Will I miss it if I don’t have it? How much?
- Have I used it in the last year?
- Will I need it next year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Why I Keep it</th>
<th>Why I Think I Can Toss it or Give it Away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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From the list above, what adds to the clutter in your life?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Do you keep a master to-do list of tasks that need to be accomplished for the week? If not, now is the time to begin doing so. In the spaces that follow, list the things you need to do at home and at work, and set a date for it to be completed.

### Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need to Do at Home</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
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### Work

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Need to Do at Work</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
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