

Tips for Coping with Political Stress

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Political events can be stressful and evoke upsetting emotions. A recent survey by the American Psychological Association found that 68% are stressed by the current political climate. With an increasing amount of demands on our time, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be easy to keep shuffling along and focus on crossing things off our never-ending to-do list, rather than dealing with our stress.

We understand that it can be hard for parents and caregivers to figure out how best to care for children in their lives during their own times of stress. For many people going through times of stress, it may be even harder to prioritize self-care instead of focusing on caring for others in our lives. When that stress starts to make it hard for you to focus on work, sleep soundly or to be mentally present with loved ones, those are signs that it's time for you to give yourself a break.

It is important to remember to take time to care for yourself as you do others. By practicing a little self-care, you can make sure your emotional and physical "gas tank" is getting refilled so that you have the power to keep going. Here are just a few suggestions to get you started:

Check in with yourself

Take a few minutes daily to check in on how you're feeling. Are you feeling stressed? Worried or feeling down? Irritated and snapping more than usual? Having a hard time sleeping or concentrating on work? These could be signs that you need to slow down and practice self-care. First thing in the morning, or right before bed, set a few minutes aside to check in with yourself and how you're feeling. Journaling, either with pen on paper or by using a free smartphone app, could be a helpful way to monitor how you're feeling.

Practice self-care

Limit media and social media exposure. "Doomscrolling" can amplify upsetting feelings and increase stress levels. It's tempting to want to know every update on an evolving news situation or to keep up with all the commentary, but sometimes it gets to a point where it's unhelpful or overwhelming. Take a break from media and the news and be more intentional about when to follow the news. For example, set limits by only watching one hour of news per day without spending additional time reading or scrolling online, or use your smartphone settings to set daily limits on screen time. You can also disable pop-up notifications from any news apps you have downloaded.

It is also important to be critical of news and be mindful of possible misinformation. Consider the source of the news and information you're receiving and consider any possible bias in reporting.



Engage in healthy habits. Habits that may seem small such as getting enough sleep and eating a balanced diet can make a significant impact on how you feel overall and may make it easier to tackle and handle stressful events when they occur.

Also, make time to stretch. Stress and worry like to creep into our bodies and make our muscles sore or tense. Even if you don't feel up to a full workout, make sure you are stretching every day to relieve that tension. If it's hard to remember to do this, practice the "Seventh inning stretch" and set a timer for 7 a.m. or 7 p.m. on your phone, and stretch for seven minutes each time it goes off.

Prioritize. Make a list of the things you need to accomplish, and then highlight the ones that are at a "Need to do today" level and get started with those. After you've checked off a couple items, reevaluate the list again and make sure everything else truly needs to be done ASAP. Repeat this process throughout the day, and then throughout the week. When we're under extra stress, we don't likewise need to be extra productive. Get the essential things done, but let the vacuuming wait a week, or hold off on starting a new project for now if your plate is already feeling full.

Make time for fun activities. Focus on engaging in a hobby or activity you enjoy. Prioritize spending a few minutes each day reading, connecting with friends and family, listening to music, creating art, running or dancing — whatever it is that sparks joy for you.

Remember to engage all five senses. You can do this by ordering a dish from your favorite restaurant, listening to music that brings up pleasant feelings, surrounding yourself with pleasant smells (if you don't have candles, try vanilla extract or fresh laundry), looking through photos of happy memories, and taking a warm shower (or if you're craving cold, put a damp washcloth in the fridge for a DIY chilled eye mask).

Take action. Anxiety is fueled not just by stressful events, but by the belief that we are helpless to stop these events. One strategy to reduce our anxiety is to find ways to take action.

If you are upset, disappointed or concerned, speak up! Call or write to your elected officials. Find ways to get involved in your community and with local politics, such as attending your local town halls. These activities may be virtual during the pandemic.

Check in on family and friends. Begin conversations within your community. Activism can itself be a form of self-care.

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