

15 Ways to Cope During Stressful Times

1. **JUST BREATHE** slowly and deeply. Use your full lung capacity. Deep breathing can engage your parasympathetic nervous system to lower stress hormones and stop panic in its track! Try the 4-7-8 breathing technique: Breathe in through your nostrils, feeling your belly rise and ribcage expand, to a count of 4. Hold for a count of 7 and then breathe out slowly through your mouth to the count of 8.
2. **MOVE** take a walk, dance, practice yoga, run, whatever makes you feel good. Did you know that just 3 minutes of rhythmic, repetitive movement such as walking, can effectively 'reset' your nervous system? And you can 'move' from the comfort of your home- many gyms and yoga studios now regularly offer live or video classes. If you belong to a gym, find out if they are offering classes.
3. **GRATITUDE** write down what you are grateful for with as much detail as possible . It's amazing how effective this can be. Increase your ability to see the positive by listing 3 things you are grateful for from that day. Make this a nightly dinner activity or a way to wind down at the end of the day.
4. **WORRY LIST** make a list of all the things you are worried about. Now make a list of things you are NOT worried about. Take a look and see what your main concern is--if it is NOT in your control, cross it off the list, if it IS in your control , take steps to use coping or problem solving skills to ease your discomfort
5. **GO OUTSIDE** enjoy the beauty of nature and that which surrounds you, deeply breathe in some fresh air, hug a tree, listen to the birds singing.
6. **CATCH UP** on projects around the house, or tasks that have been sitting around for a while, keep busy. There is great therapeutic value in clearing space!
7. **MEDITATE**, practice mindfulness, pray, and use other tools to build your faith and resilience.
8. **CONNECT** with friends and family by email or phone, video, reach out, share personal stories. Take this opportunity to 'go viral' creatively.
9. **CREATE** to themes/colors of stress, fear, safety, change, hope, make a mandala, or complete a creative project that you've meant to get back to, keep an art journal or make an altered book; studies show how beneficial using your creativity can be to help us express, heal, and become more resilient in times of stress. Here are 2 ideas: Art Prompt : Using any materials you have on hand , draw a quick circle on a piece of paper, it doesn't have to be perfect. For around 15 minutes, fill in the circle with all you are feeling right now (fear , anxiety, anger, etc..) using color, shapes, words- whatever works for you. Then , step back from the image and dialogue with the image to understand what it needs right now to feel more safe, less angry or anxious, etc. Then , create another circle and fill it with what is needed. When finished , observe the two images together, and notice how your emotions may have shifted just by activating and containing through your art. Writing Prompt: 'Ransom' poetry exercise-Quickly choose several words or phrases from a magazine, cut them out and form a poem or prose- it doesn't have to rhyme!

10. **EXPLORE** the use of digital apps and podcasts focused on relaxation, stress management, mental wellness or any topic of interest; there are many available for free on your smartphone and can be additional resources for support.
11. **LIMIT SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWS** it can be helpful to schedule times to check on news from a reliable source/your social media a couple of times a day so you can stay informed- but not become overwhelmed
12. **SEEK** stories, quotes, people, music, films, etc.. That bring you hope even in times of darkness. Print our favorite quotes and leave them where you'll see them every day.
13. **REFRAME** worries with what you know for sure. Look at the facts/evidence.. It's human nature during times of stress for our brains to go to worst-case scenarios. The reality is that our worst-case scenarios rarely come true and, if the feared scenario does happen, we often find we are more resilient than we thought. We can reframe trying times. While our thoughts may not magically change our reality, they absolutely can change the lens through which we see our world in powerful ways
14. **PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION** manage Fight / Flight / Freeze reactions . These automatic responses protect us in times of crisis. Just like we don't choose to react in fight / flight / freeze, we also don't have control over which response gets triggered in us, whether it is fight (anger, yelling and aggression), flight (avoidance and withdrawal) or freeze (numbing and shutting down). The fight, flight or freeze reactions can also trigger a secondary shame response. You may be upset with yourself for yelling at a loved one or for shutting down and not being available to people who depend on you. So if you find yourself reacting from one of these places, have compassion and go easy on yourself and everyone else. Know that underneath anger, there is often much fear. No one wants to be at the whim of their survival responses. To take back more control, work on grounding to increase your self-regulation and decrease the chances that you will get triggered. Grounding means bringing yourself back to the present moment, to your body and yourself. Here are 4 ways to ground yourself:
- Notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can taste, 1 thing you can smell.
 - Find your connection with the earth. Even inside your home or workplace, you can imagine roots being sent through your feet deep into the ground while you stand. When seated, notice all of the places that your body makes contact with the world around you - your feet on the ground, your thighs on the seat of the chair, your elbows on the chair arms, your hands in your lap - and feel the support this gives you.
 - Give yourself a break whether that's by taking a warm salt bath, going for a walk or locking yourself away for an hour in a quiet room.
 - Find a helpful statement you can tell yourself in difficult moments. Examples include: I know I'll make it through this, I'm stronger than I think, It won't be like this forever, These feelings are just the waves and I am the ocean, I can ride this wave.
15. **DO NOTHING** revel in the stillness and solitude of "dolce far niente", the 'sweetness of doing nothing'. Enjoy this time of not having to rush around, have somewhere to go, a schedule to keep... Studies show there are many benefits of scheduling down time to just BE and not DO or prose- it doesn't have to rhyme!