

+ COPING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

During times of uncertainty, it's especially important to focus on taking good care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. It may feel like you have little control over events that impact your life. While this may be true, you do have control over how you react. The goal is to try to find constructive ways to cope.

Mental coping strategies

- + **Get the facts from reliable sources** to learn more about the problem, rather than relying on the rumor mill to provide accurate information.
- + **Take a problem-solving approach.** Write out your specific concerns and questions. Think about what resources you need in order to get answers. It helps to put things in black and white, because it gives you a fact-based look at the situation, and also gives you a greater sense of control.
- + **Recognize that you have the ability to form a plan,** though you may never have to use it.
- + **Talk it out.** Brainstorm problem-solving ideas with loved ones to get their input and ideas.
- + **Shift your focus to the here-and-now** needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and the things you need to get done. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the "what if" that scares you.
- + **Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most. Your interpretation of what's happening can grow more alarming and less objective.
- + **Read inspirational writings** to find meaning in what is happening. The context in which we see our life experience makes all the difference.

Remember your strength

We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We form expectations for the future based on that. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our balance, and our worlds are shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your balance. Keep reminding yourself of the strength that is within you.

- + **Remind yourself of your abilities.** Self-statements such as "I have always figured out some way to land on my feet" get you back in touch with the fact that you're steering your own ship.
- + **Rely on your spirituality.** Turn the problem over to your higher power for guidance and strength. We know that the human spirit is very strong. Survivors of concentration camps have taught us that developing a certain mental focus helped them endure hardships far beyond what we will have to endure.
- + **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the near future?

Emotional coping strategies

- + **Reach out to people who care.** Talk out your thoughts, feelings and fears with loved ones.
- + **Spend time in enjoyable activities** with friends and family.
- + **Write out your feelings.** You're dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss – the loss of expectations and assumptions. There's a grief process that comes along with loss, and that process consists of stages of shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. Those stages are not smooth and orderly. They surface, retreat and resurface in a disorderly fashion. Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you understand and manage them better.
- + **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.** Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion, such as fear, hurt, or feeling of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling anger, search for the deeper emotion, and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
- + **Be cautious not to take out your anger** on friends and relatives. It'll be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they're feeling attacked by you, and snapping at them will cause you to feel worse about yourself. As stated above, talk with them about the emotions which underlie your anger, and ask for their cooperation and support.

Physical coping strategies

- + **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- + **Exercise** is excellent for stress management and will also help you sleep better if you complete it no later than three hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- + **Eat** well-balanced and regular meals.
- + **Choose activities that allow you to relax** when off work (fish, read, quilt, paint, hunt – whatever you like to do).
- + **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope

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