

## **Intentionally Coping Well In Times of High Stress**

In times of high stress, whether you are aware of it or not, coping takes a lot of emotional energy. You want to spend your coping energy wisely, so that the effort you put forth has the most impact in coping well. It can be helpful to take a moment and be intentional about your coping strategies.

- Have a realistic view of coping. You are looking for what helps, even temporarily or a little bit, to shift how you are experiencing this time. You will likely need to have a range of strategies to care for yourself and build your emotional health.
- Start with what works for you. It is always easiest to start with a tried and true coping strategy that you have found helpful in the past. Is there something that worked for you in the past that you have stopped doing? Could you try it or some variation of it now?
- Have different “go-to strategies” ready for when you need them.
  - Have strategies that fit for different levels of energy and motivation. For example, going on a run takes a higher level of energy, while watching or listening to something you like takes less effort.
  - Have strategies that keep your baseline level of stress low on a daily basis. If you are at the maximum level of stress to start the day, there is no room for what may arise. These baseline strategies are routine things you do daily or weekly. Some examples might include getting enough sleep, exercise, connecting with supportive people, or creative activities. What matters is that the strategy works for you personally to keep your baseline stress level lower.
  - Develop brief strategies to calm and center during stressful moments. When you notice you are at a higher level of stress and have 5 minutes, what do you do to calm and center? Examples might include deep breathing exercises, focusing on the present moment, or a 5-minute walk in nature.
  - Have strategies that care for all parts of yourself, such as ways to calm your body, ways to soothe your feelings, calming thoughts, and ways to connect with any spiritual beliefs you may hold.
- Be open to try something new, especially if your usual coping strategies are not possible or working now.
- Evaluate your efforts. Make it a point to notice what feels even slightly soothing, calming, enjoyable, and healthy for you in this time. Are there strategies that may not feel 100% calming in the moment, but really shift how you feel afterwards?
- Be self-compassionate. Don’t add another layer of stress by telling yourself how you “should” feel or cope. Be really kind with how you treat yourself and the messages you give yourself in this time.
- While reading this list, you might be thinking of 20 things that would be helpful to you. Especially if you are coping with a lot, there may not be emotional energy to do 20 things right now. Start with just one way you will intentionally care for yourself and add more strategies as you are ready. Right now, pause and identify one thing, no matter how small, that you will work into your schedule today or this week to intentionally care for your emotional health.
- Don’t hesitate to contact EAP if you would like to work with a counselor on developing coping strategies. We are here to support you in this time. You can contact the EAP by emailing [eap@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:eap@austin.utexas.edu) or calling 512-471-3366 to schedule an appointment.