

WHAT DO I NEED RIGHT NOW?

Choosing the right stress-management coping skills



Since 2007, the American Psychological Association (APA) has commissioned an annual nationwide Stress in America™ survey to measure attitudes, perceptions, and implications of stress among the general public. According to the October 2022 report, Americans are facing a barrage of external stressors that are mostly out of personal control. This includes government and political divisiveness, historic inflation levels, and widespread violence. Work, along with social media, are also enduring sources of strain.

If it comes down to locus of control—the degree to which people believe that they, as opposed to forces beyond their influence, have control over the outcome of events in their lives—it's probably easier and more effective to learn techniques for coping with stress than trying to control external forces. As with most things, there isn't one "right" coping strategy for any particular stressor. Different things will work for different people. The key is to figure out which coping skills to use, and when to use them.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHICH COPING SKILLS TO CHOOSE?

The best way is to ask yourself: "**What do I need right now?**" Some of the most common reasons people turn to coping skills are discussed here.

To release emotion –Whether it's pent-up anger, sadness, or worry, people need coping mechanisms to let the steam out. When you need a physical release, try exercising, tearing up paper, or punching a pillow. For more psychosocial outlets, try journaling, talking to a friend, or creating art or music.



You may not control all the events
that happen to you, but you can decide
not to be reduced by them.

— Maya Angelou

To make emotions visible or concrete – Unlike a physical wound, emotional pain can be hard to see or explain. When you need to *show* how you are feeling in some visible or tangible way, try drawing/painting/scribbling (especially with colors that match your mood), writing poetry or stories. You can also write words on yourself, or put band aids on your body to symbolize the pain.

To gain control – Sometimes you have no control over the situation and just have to wait it out. When that happens, try something that helps you feel like you're in control, such as making lists, cleaning, organizing, and volunteering. Doing an activity you're good at might also help you to feel competent and in control.

To stop feeling – When feelings become too much, you may want something to take your mind off of them. One option is to try soothing activities like taking a hot shower, lighting a scented candle, taking a short nap, or focusing on deep breathing. Another option is to use distractions: watch a movie, play a game, read a book, listen to music.

To feel something – Some people get so overwhelmed with their situation that they feel nothing. While being numb to your feelings might be nice initially, most people eventually want to feel something. To do so, use coping skills that focus on sensations: holding an ice cube, splashing cold water on your face, lightly snapping a rubber band on your wrist, tensing and relaxing your muscles, or watching something that will make you laugh.

Whether you're experiencing everyday stress or a major life challenge, let the **Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance** help. The program provides you and your household members free, around-the-clock access to a range of stress management and work-life balance resources.

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