

OWNING YOUR FEELINGS



It can be easy to get caught up in your emotions as you're feeling them. Most people don't think about what emotions they are dealing with, but taking the time to really identify what you're feeling can help you to better cope with challenging situations.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Allow yourself to feel. Sometimes there are societal pressures that encourage people to shut down their emotions, often expressed through statements like, "Big girls don't cry," or "Man up." These outdated ideas are harmful, not helpful. Everyone has emotions—they are part of the human experience—and you have every right to feel them, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic status, race, political affiliation or religion.



Don't ignore how you're feeling. Most of us have heard the term "bottling up your feelings" before. When we try to push feelings aside without addressing them, they build strength and make us more likely to "explode" at some point in the future. It may not always be appropriate to process your emotions at the very moment you are feeling them, but try to do so as soon as you can.



Talk it out. Find someone you trust that you can talk to about how you're feeling. You may find that people are eager to share about similar experiences they've had or times that they have felt the way that you are feeling. This can be helpful, but if you're really only interested in having someone listen, it's okay to tell them that.



Build your emotional vocabulary. When asked about our feelings, most people will usually use words like bad, sad, mad, good, or fine. But at the root of "good, bad, sad, mad, or fine" are many words that better describe how we feel. Try building your emotional vocabulary by writing down as many "feeling" words as you can think of and think of a time that you felt that way.



Try journaling. Each night write down at least 3 feelings you had over the course of the day and what caused them. It doesn't need to be a "Dear Diary" kind of thing. Just a few sentences or bullet points to help you practice being comfortable with identifying and expressing your emotions.



Consider the strength of your feelings. By thinking about how intense your emotions are, you may realize that what you thought you were feeling at first could better be described by another word. For instance, sometimes a person might say they are stressed when what they are really experiencing is something less severe like annoyance, alternatively anger might really be a stronger, deeper feeling like betrayal.



See a mental health professional. If you are taking steps to be more in touch with your feelings, but are having trouble dealing with them, mental health providers like counselors and therapists have been trained to help. Some free or low cost options are also available. Your employer might have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that offers a limited number of free counseling sessions, and your Human Resources department can help you access this resource. If you don't have an EAP through work, the leaders of religious organizations like churches, synagogues and mosques often have experience with counseling.

FAST FACTS



The English language has over 3,000 words for emotions.¹



People who are good at being specific about identifying and labeling their emotions are less likely to binge drink, be physically aggressive, or self-injure when distressed.²



When school-aged kids are taught about emotions for 20-30 minutes per week their social behavior and school performance improves.³

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It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

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WHAT'S UNDERNEATH?

Taking the time to slow down and identify what we are really experiencing can help us feel better and can improve our communications and relationships with others.

Using the prompts below, think of a specific action (this could be something you did, or something someone else did) or event and fill in the blank to identify what's underneath. The feelings list on this page can help you build your mental collection of feelings. This type of activity takes practice, but once you start doing it you'll find it easier over time.

I FELT BAD WHEN _____

(ACTION OR EVENT). BUT WHAT I WAS
REALLY FEELING WAS _____,
_____, AND _____.

I FELT SAD WHEN _____

(ACTION OR EVENT). BUT WHAT I WAS
REALLY FEELING WAS _____,
_____, AND _____.

I FELT MAD WHEN _____

(ACTION OR EVENT). BUT WHAT I WAS
REALLY FEELING WAS _____,
_____, AND _____.

I FELT GOOD WHEN _____

(ACTION OR EVENT). BUT WHAT I WAS
REALLY FEELING WAS _____,
_____, AND _____.

I FELT HAPPY WHEN _____

(ACTION OR EVENT). BUT WHAT I WAS
REALLY FEELING WAS _____,
_____, AND _____.

POSITIVE FEELINGS

Admiration

Adoration
Affection
Appreciation
Delight
Fondness
Pleasure
Regard
Amazement

Affectionate

Caring
Friendly
Loving
Sympathetic
Warm
Doting
Tender
Attached
Compassionate

Confident

Bold
Courageous
Positive
Fearless
Optimistic
Encouraged
Powerful
Proud
Trusting
Secure
Brave
Empowered

Excited

Enthusiastic
Delighted
Amazed
Passionate
Aroused
Alert
Astonished
Dazzled
Energetic
Awakened
Eager
Charged

Exhilarated

Blissful
Ecstatic
Elated
Enthralled
Exuberant
Radiant
Rapturous
Thrilled

Gratitude

Thankful
Grateful
Moved
Touched
Appreciative
Recognized
Indebtedness

Included

Engaged
Understood
Appreciated
Accepted
Acknowledged
Affirmed
Recognized
Welcomed
Connected
Supported
Heard
Respected
Involved

Intrigued

Absorbed
Fascinated
Interested
Charmed
Entertained
Captivated
Engaged
Engrossed
Curious
Surprised

Joyful

Cheerful
Festive
Lighthearted
Upbeat
Glad
Merry
Elated
Delighted
Jubilant
Hopeful
Tickled
Pleased

Peaceful

Calm
Quiet
Trusting
Fulfilled
Steady
Collected
Composed
Comfortable
Centered
Content
Relieved
Mellow
Level
Restful
Still
At ease
Satisfied
Relaxed
Clear
Reassured

Refreshed

Stimulated
Replenished
Exhilarated
Reinvigorated
Revived
Enlivened
Restored
Liberated
Lively
Passionate
Vibrant
Rested

NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Afraid

Nervous
Dread
Frightened
Cowardly
Terrified
Alarmed
Panicked
Suspicious
Worried
Apprehensive

Agitated

Bothered
Uncomfortable
Uneasy
Frenzied
Irritable
Offended
Disturbed
Troubled
Unsettled
Unnerved
Restless
Upset

Angry

Furious
Livid
Irate
Resentful
Hateful
Hostile
Aggressive
Worked up
Provoked
Outraged
Defensive

Anxious

Shaky
Distraught
Edgy
Fidgety
Frazzled
Irritable
Jittery
Overwhelmed
Restless
Preoccupied
Flustered

Confusion

Lost
Disoriented
Puzzled
Chaotic
Uncertain
Stuck
Indecisive
Foggy
Dazed
Baffled
Flustered
Perturbed
Perplexed
Hesitant
Immobilized
Ambivalent
Torn

Disconnected

Lonely
Isolated
Bored
Distant
Removed
Detached
Separate
Broken
Aloof
Numb
Withdrawn
Rejected
Out-of-place
Indifferent
Misunderstood
Abandoned
Alienated

Disgust

Appalled
Horried
Disturbed
Repugnant
Contempt
Spiteful
Animosity
Hostile
Bitter

Embarrassment

Awkward
Self-conscious
Silly
Mortified
Humiliated
Flustered
Chagrined
Ashamed
Put down
Guilty
Disgraced

Envy

Jealous
Competitive
Covetous
Resentful
Longing
Insecure
Inadequate
Yearning

Helpless

Paralyzed
Weak
Defenseless
Powerless
Invalid
Abandoned
Alone
Incapable
Useless
Inferior
Vulnerable
Empty
Distressed

Pain

Remorseful
Regretful
Disappointed
Guilty
Grief
Miserable
Agony
Anguish
Bruised
Crushed

Sadness

Heartbroken
Disappointed
Hopeless
Regretful
Depressed
Pessimistic
Melancholy
Sorrowful
Heavy-hearted
Low
Gloomy
Miserable

Stress

Overwhelmed
Frazzled
Uneasy
Cranky
Distraught
Dissatisfied
Weighed down
Overworked
Anxious
Shocked
Frustrated

Tired

Bored
Fatigued
Exhausted
Uninterested
Worn out
Fed up
Drained
Weary
Burned out
Lethargic
Sleepy
Depleted

Vulnerable

Insecure
Exposed
Unguarded
Sensitive
Unsafe
Inferior
Weak
Judged
Inadequate

FINDING THE POSITIVE AFTER LOSS



At some point in our lives we will all experience loss. It may be the end of a relationship, being let go from a job, losing a home, or the death of a loved one. It is natural to go through a grieving process. By looking for opportunity in adversity or finding ways to remember the good things about who or what we've lost, we can help ourselves to recover mentally and emotionally.

TIPS FOR GETTING BY



Try to see your experience as strength. When bad things happen they can be painful to go through, but as you continue to live your life without the person, thing, or situation you once had, you become a stronger person. Going through a loss and learning to carry on helps give you the skills to deal with tough situations in the future.



Learn from others. You are not alone! There may be support groups in your community to help you get through whatever loss or tragedy you've gone through. If you're not ready to talk about things face-to-face or can't find the right kind of support group, the internet is full of places where people gather online to talk about their shared experiences. Share your story. Ask questions about how other people got through tough times to remind yourself that if they can do it, you can do it too.



Look for opportunity amid adversity. Sometimes loss opens us up to new possibilities. You may feel guilty or selfish at first for exploring these thoughts, but there is nothing wrong with looking for ways to improve or change your life after something tragic has happened. The end of a romantic relationship or death of someone that you had been caring for may free you up to spend more time with friends or pursue interests that you've been putting on the back burner. If you've lost your home to disaster, you might consider relocating to that place you've always dreamed of living.



Remember the good times. When you've lost something you love, it is almost automatic to focus on the pain that you are feeling about your loss. By remembering the good times you had in a certain place, with a pet, or with a person, you're practicing gratitude for having had those experiences. It can be even more helpful to have someone else who is sharing your loss join you in reminiscing. Maybe you'll even be able to share a laugh together.



Do what makes you happy. Pampering yourself can help you remember how to feel good after dealing with a negative or tragic situation, and bring you back to a place where you can appreciate all the positive things that life has to offer. You might choose to do something exciting or something relaxing—it's all about doing whatever you love.



Find ways to honor your loss. By memorializing the loss of a loved one, you help keep their memory alive. You may choose to create a fundraiser for a special cause in their name, plant a tree in one of their favorite places, hang their pictures in your home, create a memorial web page or Facebook page, do some of the activities they enjoyed, or even get a tattoo that reminds you of them.



Don't be afraid to get help. It's perfectly normal to have trouble adjusting to life after something bad has happened to you, but if you find it's been weeks or months and you can't seem to function or just don't know what to do to feel better, it's time to get help. Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you can get a referral for a mental health professional from your primary care provider, or if you don't have insurance you can look for services with payment assistance at findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Sources

¹WebMD. (2019). *Grief: Beyond the 5 Stages* conducted by AmeriSpeak. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/special-reports/grief-stages/20190711/the-grief-experience-survey-shows-its-complicated>.

²Ibid.
³Ibid.

FAST FACTS



You are not alone! Nearly 60% of people have experienced a major loss in the last 3 years.¹



Healing takes time. Following a loss, nearly half of people said it took up to 6 months for their strong feelings of grief to lessen.²



You might literally hurt. Over $\frac{2}{3}$ of people who went through a life-changing event had physical symptoms while they were grieving.³

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LOOKING FOR GOOD

Changing the way we see negative situations, reframing common negative thoughts, and practicing gratitude have been shown to reduce sadness and anxiety. This worksheet walks you through different ways to rethinking situations or thoughts.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION YOU ARE FACING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL BAD? OR WHAT IS A COMMON NEGATIVE THOUGHT YOU STRUGGLE WITH? _____

REFRAME

EVEN THOUGH THE SITUATION IS HARD, IS THERE SOMETHING YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM IT OR SOME OTHER SILVER LINING? IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND CHANGE THE ORIGINAL THOUGHT, WHAT'S A HEALTHIER THING YOU CAN SAY TO YOURSELF?

For instance, if you've just lost a loved one after they have been extremely sick, does it feel healthier to think about their death as an end to their pain?

GRATITUDE

ARE THERE OTHER THINGS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU ARE THANKFUL FOR?

This doesn't have to be related to the situation above. For instance, you can be thankful for your good health, having a stable home to live in, or a recent promotion at work.

REMINDE YOURSELF

HOW CAN YOU REINFORCE YOUR REFRAMED THOUGHTS AND REMIND YOURSELF OF WHAT YOU ARE THANKFUL FOR? MAKE A LIST OF WAYS.

Example: Copy what you've written in the boxes above onto post-it notes and stick them in places around your house as visual reminders.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



It's possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone. It's the connections we make with other people that help enrich our lives and get us through tough times, but sometimes it's hard to know how to make those connections.

TIPS FOR CONNECTING



Connect with others at places you already go to. There are places that you go to over and over again - these are great places to strike up conversations and start to make friends. At work you might ask a co-worker to join you for lunch or to grab a cup of coffee. If you have kids involved in extracurricular activities, you probably see the same other parents attending their practices or dropping them off each time. If you go to the gym at the same time each day, you may notice others who are on the same workout schedule.



Use shared experience as a topic of conversation. Use your current situation as a topic to talk about. Maybe you're stuck waiting in a long line, or you noticed someone is wearing a shirt from a place that you've been. Hometown sports, local news and events, or even the weather can also get a conversation going.



Give compliments. If you're struggling to figure out what to say to someone to strike up a conversation, try starting with a compliment. You can comment on a person's outfit, tattoo, or a piece of jewelry that you like and maybe ask them where they got it. Use their response to continue the conversation, for example if they tell you they got it at a certain store, ask where that is.



Make time to be social. Going to work and taking care of life's other daily responsibilities is time consuming and many of us feel exhausted by the end of the day. While it's tempting to just sit on the sofa and zone out in front of the TV, that time can be spent in a more meaningful way. Set aside at least half an hour each day to connect with other people outside of work.



Not all connections have to be done in person. While spending time with someone face-to-face helps to create the strongest relationships, phone calls, text messaging, emails, and video chats can maintain friendships when distance or time constraints get in the way of hanging out.



Accept invitations. If someone asks you to go somewhere or do something with them, accept their invitation. When you turn people down over and over, they may stop inviting you. It may not be your favorite place or activity, but you can use the time to build your friendship and suggest things you like better for the next time you get together with that person.



Pay attention to what other people are interested in. For instance, you may notice a family portrait or a pet's picture on a coworker's desk. Ask them how old their children are, or what their pet's name is - and show genuine interest in their answers. Ask follow up questions and if appropriate, share something relevant about yourself, like how many children you have or the name of your pet.



Organize activities. If there is something that you are interested in doing, ask someone else (or a group of other people) to join you. It can be hard to make the first move, but it may end up that someone else wanted to do the same thing all along and was waiting to find out who else was interested. Don't be discouraged if schedules don't cooperate sometimes. Keep making invitations!

FAST FACTS



Research shows it can take 50 hours for someone you don't know that well to turn into a true friend.¹



During the week, Americans watch an average of 2 ½ hours of TV per day, but only spend half an hour per day socializing.²



The number of friendships you have early in your adult life and the closeness of those relationships can influence your wellbeing 30 years later.³

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Sources

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ELIMINATING TOXIC INFLUENCES



Certain people and situations in life can trigger us to feel badly about ourselves or engage in destructive behaviors. Identifying the toxic influences in our lives and taking steps to create boundaries or a new life without them can improve mental and physical health over time.

TRAITS OF TOXIC PEOPLE



Manipulation. Toxic people are often very good at manipulation. They may seem to be genuinely interested in your company and getting to know you at first, but will eventually use the knowledge they gain about you to try and get you to do what they want. They will often twist your words or make you feel guilty to get their way.



They make you feel bad about yourself. Insults are the most direct way that toxic people can make you feel bad, but most of the time the ways they affect your self-esteem are more subtle. When you are feeling happy or proud of yourself, they will find ways to “rain on your parade” or downplay your achievements. They might also act like they are smarter than you to make you feel dumb or insignificant.



Being judgemental. Everyone can be judgemental from time to time, but a toxic person is judgemental almost all of the time. They see things in black and white and criticize anything that they don't agree with or approve of, instead of considering the circumstances or the feelings of other people.



Negativity. Some people just can't seem to see the good in life. They will find something bad about everything and aren't able to find joy in anything. Being around someone like this can make it hard for you enjoy yourself and be positive. Sometimes it can be easy to confuse the symptoms of depression for negativity, so it is worth having a conversation with someone to determine if they need help getting through depression or if they are truly being toxic.



Passive aggression. These behaviors are a way that people express their discontent without having a conversation about their problems. This type of hostility is less obvious than anger and can be shown in a number of different ways. Some forms of passive aggression include snide comments, sabotaging the efforts of other people, and purposefully doing something or *not* doing something to make things inconvenient for someone or get them upset.



Self-centered. Toxic people care mostly about themselves. They don't think about how their actions affect others and believe they are better than everyone else. Someone who is self-centered is focused on getting what they want and is unlikely to compromise or consider another person's point of view.



Difficulty with anger management. Someone who has trouble managing their anger will make you feel like you are walking on egg shells every time you are around them. The littlest thing can trigger them into a fit of rage, and often nasty, hurtful things are said while they are in this mental state. There may be apologies the day after, but often they are insincere and the toxic person will repeat their angry, hurtful behaviors soon after.



Controlling. One of the most dangerous traits of a toxic person is controlling behavior. They may try to restrict you from contacting your friends or family, or limit resources like transportation or access to money to restrict your ability to interact with the world around you. If you are in a situation where someone is trying to restrict your movements or communication, this is domestic abuse and requires immediate action. Call 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-799-7233 for TTY, or if you're unable to speak on the phone, you can log onto thehotline.org or text “LOVEIS” to 22522.

FAST FACTS



An average of 80% of Americans have experienced emotional abuse.¹



Approximately ⅓ of U.S. employees have, or have had a toxic boss according to a 2018 survey from Monster.com.²



Toxic friends are common. 84% of women and 75% of men report having a toxic friend at some point.³

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Sources

¹Carney, M.M., Barner, J.R. (2012). Prevalence of partner abuse: Rates of emotional abuse and control. *Partner Abuse*, 3(3), 286–335.

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DETOXING YOUR LIFE

This worksheet will help you think through ways to create healthy boundaries so you can get rid of toxic influences in your life.

WHAT IS THE THING THAT YOU NEED TO STOP OR GET OUT OF YOUR LIFE?

This can be a person, behavior or situation. Example: I want healthier relationships.

DESIRABLE OR HEALTHY

Examples: I want someone who encourages me, someone who is patient.

UNCLEAR

Examples: Having fights where we yell, talking over each other.

TOXIC OR UNACCEPTABLE

Examples: Hitting each other, cussing at each other, name calling.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

WHAT CAN YOU SAY TO GIVE YOURSELF A PEP TALK? Examples: I deserve to have healthy relationships. I choose me.

WHAT CAN YOU SAY TO THE TOXIC INFLUENCE TO SET BOUNDARIES? Examples: It is not ok for us to do this. I want us to get better and these are what is ok for you to do and what is absolutely not ok for you to do.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AND SAY TO REINFORCE YOUR BOUNDARIES OR CREATE HEALTHY DISTANCE?

Examples: if you do (this), I'm going to leave. If you do (this) I'm going to walk out and take a break.

CREATING HEALTHY ROUTINES



Work, paying bills, cleaning, cooking, shopping, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking care of children are just some of the things millions of Americans do each day and it is easy to be overwhelmed. It can feel impossible to get everything done, let alone take care of yourself – especially if you're already struggling with a mental health concern like depression or anxiety. By creating routines, we organize our days in such a way that taking care of tasks and ourselves becomes a pattern that makes it easier to get things done without having to think hard about them.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Create the routine that is right for you. We don't all have the same schedules or responsibilities and some of us struggle with certain parts of daily life more than others. All healthy routines should include eating a nutrition-rich diet, exercising, and getting enough sleep, but no two routines will be exactly the same. In fact, your routine may not even be exactly the same every day.



Start small. Changing up your day-to-day routine all at once probably won't end up with lasting results. Pick one small thing each week to work on. It could be adding something new and positive, or cutting out a bad habit. Small changes add up.



Add to your existing habits. You probably already have some habits worked into your routine, like drinking a cup of coffee in the morning. Try adding new habits to existing ones. For instance, if you want to read more, you could set aside ten minutes to read while you have your coffee (instead of drinking it on your drive to work).



Make swaps. Think about the things you do during the day that aren't so healthy and swap them with better behaviors. For example, if you feel sluggish in the afternoons and eat sugary snacks for a quick pick-me-up, try taking a brisk walk instead to get your blood pumping and endorphins flowing. Or if you find yourself having a few alcoholic drinks after a long stressful day, try sipping hot tea instead.



Plan ahead. When life gets hectic, you may be tempted to skip out on the new parts of your daily routine. By doing things like prepping meals ahead of time, picking out an outfit the night before work, or having an alternate home workout option for the days you can't make it to the gym, you help set yourself up for success even when you're hurried.



Make time for things you enjoy. Even if it's just 15 minutes a day, set aside time to do something you find fun or relaxing—it will release chemical messengers in your body that are good for your physical and mental health.



Reward yourself for small victories. Set goals and celebrate when you reach them. Have you added exercise to your weekly routine and worked out every day as planned for the last couple weeks? Treat yourself! Watch a movie you've been wanting to see or try out that new video game.



Don't beat yourself up if you miss a day. Making life changes can be hard and you might forget to do something that is new to your routine every once in a while. You don't have to be perfect, just try to do better the next day.

FAST FACTS



When it comes to diet, sleep and exercise, having good, strong routines is linked to improved mental and physical health.¹



People with more daily routines have lower levels of distress when facing problems with their health or negative life events.²



It takes an average of 66 days for a behavior to become automatic (a habit), but for some people it can take as long as 8 ½ months.³ Don't give up!

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PLANNING YOUR ROUTINE

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR ROUTINE?

Examples: exercise, reading, quality time with my kids

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF YOU ACCOMPLISHING YOUR GOALS OR TASKS ABOVE?

Examples: working overtime, needing new glasses, too tired

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WHAT ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO ADDRESS THE BARRIERS YOU WROTE DOWN IN THE BOX TO THE LEFT?

Examples: start with a 30 min walk, go to bed earlier

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Use this calendar to lay out things you can change and incorporate into your schedule. The calendar can include specific things you want to incorporate into your routine (like a specific exercise), or changes you need to make to reduce barriers (like going to bed early). Use the support column to think of people or things you can use to help you accomplish your goals.

ACTIVITY	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUPPORT

HOW CAN YOU REWARD YOURSELF FOR SUCCESSFULLY MAKING NEW THINGS PART OF YOUR ROUTINE? Example: if I walk for 30 min, 3 times per week for 2 weeks, I can treat myself to a dinner out.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

SUPPORTING OTHERS



While 1 in 5 people will experience a diagnosable mental health condition in their lives, 5 out of 5 people will go through a challenging time that affects their mental health. There are simple things that every person can say or do to help the people in their life who are struggling to get through the tough times.

HOW TO BE HELPFUL



Practice active listening. Active listening is different than just hearing what a person has to say. A good active listener puts everything aside and gives their complete attention to the person who is talking; asks open-ended questions to get more details about the topic that is being discussed (ex. "And how did that make you feel?"); and takes moments throughout the conversation to summarize what they've been told and make sure they are understanding clearly.



Don't compare. If a friend or loved-one is going through a tough situation and they come to you for support, you might feel tempted to tell them about something that happened to you and how you were able to get through it. It's okay to share about similar experiences, but be careful not to compare because it can make someone feel like their pain isn't valid. For instance, if they are telling you about a breakup, don't mention how you had a much harder divorce. Focus on what you did to cope with feelings of loss or loneliness.



Ask what you can do. It can be tempting to assume what would be helpful to someone who is struggling, but it's always better to ask them what they need from you. If you ask and get a response like, "nothing, I'm fine," offer up a few suggestions for things you would be willing to do (without being pushy). For instance, you could offer to come sit with them and watch a movie, cook them a meal, or pick up a few things for them at the store.



Keep your word. If you have offered your support to someone and told them you would do something, keep your word. When a person is struggling, the last thing they need is to feel abandoned by someone else. If you absolutely can't honor your promise, make a sincere apology and find another time that you can do what you said you would.



Don't judge. To be truly supportive of someone, you need to put your personal opinions and biases aside. They may be struggling because of a mistake that they made, or you may think that they are overreacting, but you will never know what it is truly like to be that person in this moment, and criticism is not helpful to their recovery.



Offer to join them. When someone is going through a time of sadness or uncertainty, their emotions can take over and leave them feeling paralyzed and unable to take care of life's obligations. Offering to go with someone to help them take care of responsibilities like walking the dog, going to the grocery store, attending doctor appointments, or picking up the dry cleaning can help them feel a sense of accomplishment and lift their spirits.



Know when more serious help is needed. Sometimes the support that you can offer won't be enough. If you notice that your friend or loved-one continues to struggle after weeks or months, they may be showing signs of a mental health condition and likely need professional help. Don't be afraid to encourage them to seek help from a mental health professional and offer to help them find a provider if needed. If someone you care about is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, seek help by calling 911 or going to the closest emergency room. Trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 by texting "MHA" to 741-741 or calling 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

Sources

- ¹Ozbay, F., Johnson, D. C., Dimoulas, E., Morgan III, C. A., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress: from neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry* (Edmont), 4(5), 35.
- ²Inagaki, T. K., Bryne Haltom, K. E., Suzuki, S., Jevtic, I., Hornstein, E., Bower, J. E., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2016). The Neurobiology of Giving Versus Receiving Support: The Role of Stress-Related and Social Reward-Related Neural Activity. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 78(4), 443–453. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000302>
- ³The Trevor Project. (2019). National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health. New York, New York: The Trevor Project.

FAST FACTS



A strong social support system improves overall mental health outcomes and the ability to bounce back from stressful situations.¹



One study found that providing support to others increased activity in the part of the brain associated with rewards.²



For young people who came out as LGBTQ, those who had at least one accepting and supportive adult were 40% less likely to attempt suicide.³

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.



STARTING A CONVERSATION

If you think someone that you care about is struggling it can be hard to start a conversation with them about what is going on in their life. If a face-to-face talk is too intimidating, you can start with a text message or an email.

Use the prompts below to help you think through what specifically has happened, or what you've noticed about your friend or loved one that has caused you to be concerned about them.

Start the conversation when there is an open window of time to have an in-depth discussion, and you won't have to cut the conversation short to take care of other obligations. Plan to set aside at least 30 minutes to an hour.

FOR THE PAST (DAY/WEEK/MONTH/YEAR/ _____), IT SEEMS LIKE YOU HAVE BEEN FEELING (UNLIKE YOURSELF/SAD/ANGRY/ANXIOUS/MOODY/AGITATED/LONELY/HOPELESS/FEARFUL/OVERWHELMED/DISTRACTED/CONFUSED/STRESSED/RESTLESS/UNABLE TO FUNCTION OR GET OUT OF BED/ _____).

YOU SEEM TO BE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR (BREAK-UP/DIVORCE/JOB STRESS/JOB LOSS/NEW JOB/DEATH OF A LOVED ONE/HOUSING ISSUES/DEATH OF A PET/RECENT HEALTH DIAGNOSIS/FRIENDSHIP FALLING APART/RELATIONSHIP/FINANCES/ _____).

I'VE NOTICED YOUR (CHANGES IN APPETITE/CHANGES IN WEIGHT/LOSS OF INTEREST IN THINGS YOU USED TO ENJOY/LACK OF ENERGY/INCREASED ENERGY/INABILITY TO CONCENTRATE/ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE OR ABUSE/SELF-HARM/SKIPPING MEALS/OVEREATING/GUILT/PARANOIA/LACK OF SLEEP/SLEEPING TOO MUCH/RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR/OVERWHELMING SADNESS/ANGER/RAGE/ISOLATION/CUTTING/TALK OF SUICIDE/ _____).

TALKING TO YOU ABOUT THIS MAKES ME FEEL (NERVOUS/ANXIOUS/HOPEFUL/EMBARRASSED/EMPOWERED/PRO-ACTIVE/SELF-CONSCIOUS/GUILTY/ _____), BUT I'M TELLING YOU THIS BECAUSE (I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU/IT IS IMPACTING OUR RELATIONSHIP/I AM AFRAID/I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO ELSE TO DO/I DON'T KNOW IF ANYONE ELSE HAS TALKED TO ABOUT THIS/ _____).

**I WOULD LIKE TO HELP YOU (TALK TO A DOCTOR OR THERAPIST/TALK TO A GUIDANCE COUNSELOR/FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO/TALK ABOUT THIS LATER/CREATE A PLAN TO GET BETTER/TALK ABOUT THIS MORE/FIND A SUPPORT GROUP/ _____).
WHAT CAN I DO?**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



It's possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone. It's the connections we make with other people that help enrich our lives and get us through tough times, but sometimes it's hard to know how to make those connections.

TIPS FOR CONNECTING



Connect with others at places you already go to. There are places that you go to over and over again - these are great places to strike up conversations and start to make friends. At work you might ask a co-worker to join you for lunch or to grab a cup of coffee. If you have kids involved in extracurricular activities, you probably see the same other parents attending their practices or dropping them off each time. If you go to the gym at the same time each day, you may notice others who are on the same workout schedule.



Use shared experience as a topic of conversation. Use your current situation as a topic to talk about. Maybe you're stuck waiting in a long line, or you noticed someone is wearing a shirt from a place that you've been. Hometown sports, local news and events, or even the weather can also get a conversation going.



Give compliments. If you're struggling to figure out what to say to someone to strike up a conversation, try starting with a compliment. You can comment on a person's outfit, tattoo, or a piece of jewelry that you like and maybe ask them where they got it. Use their response to continue the conversation, for example if they tell you they got it at a certain store, ask where that is.



Make time to be social. Going to work and taking care of life's other daily responsibilities is time consuming and many of us feel exhausted by the end of the day. While it's tempting to just sit on the sofa and zone out in front of the TV, that time can be spent in a more meaningful way. Set aside at least half an hour each day to connect with other people outside of work.



Not all connections have to be done in person. While spending time with someone face-to-face helps to create the strongest relationships, phone calls, text messaging, emails, and video chats can maintain friendships when distance or time constraints get in the way of hanging out.



Accept invitations. If someone asks you to go somewhere or do something with them, accept their invitation. When you turn people down over and over, they may stop inviting you. It may not be your favorite place or activity, but you can use the time to build your friendship and suggest things you like better for the next time you get together with that person.



Pay attention to what other people are interested in. For instance, you may notice a family portrait or a pet's picture on a coworker's desk. Ask them how old their children are, or what their pet's name is - and show genuine interest in their answers. Ask follow up questions and if appropriate, share something relevant about yourself, like how many children you have or the name of your pet.



Organize activities. If there is something that you are interested in doing, ask someone else (or a group of other people) to join you. It can be hard to make the first move, but it may end up that someone else wanted to do the same thing all along and was waiting to find out who else was interested. Don't be discouraged if schedules don't cooperate sometimes. Keep making invitations!

FAST FACTS



Research shows it can take 50 hours for someone you don't know that well to turn into a true friend.¹



During the week, Americans watch an average of 2 ½ hours of TV per day, but only spend half an hour per day socializing.²



The number of friendships you have early in your adult life and the closeness of those relationships can influence your wellbeing 30 years later.³

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT **MHASCREEING.ORG** TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

¹Hall, J. A. (2019). How many hours does it take to make a friend? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(4), 1278–1296.

²US Dept. of Labor. (2018). American time use survey. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/tus>.

³Carmichael, C. L., Reis, H. T., Duberstein, P. R. (2015). In your 20s it's quantity, in your 30s it's quality: The prognostic value of social activity across 30 years of adulthood. *Psychology and Aging*, 30, 95–105.

COVID-19 AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

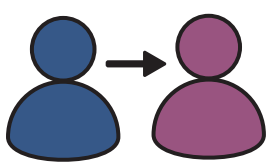
While we are familiar with viruses like the common cold and the flu, the coronavirus (COVID-19) is new and presents a situation that none of us could have imagined a few short months ago. The fact that it is extremely contagious has resulted in business closures, social distancing, and quarantine measures which have disrupted our daily lives. It is more important now than ever to pay attention to mental health during this time of isolation and uncertainty.

YOUR CONCERNS ARE VALID

There are many reasons that you might be concerned or worried about COVID-19. Some of the most common are:



Getting sick



Passing the virus onto others, especially those that are high-risk



Adjusting to a new reality for an uncertain amount of time



Taking care of and supporting your family



Concern about the health of your friends and family



Financial stress



Not being able connect with friends and family the way you're used to



Shortages of certain common supplies

REALIZE WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

One of the most frustrating things about COVID-19 is that so much about the virus and the limitations on where you can go are out of your control. However, there are things that you can control, and focusing on those things can provide you with some comfort. Some of the things you can control include:

YOUR MIND AND BODY



- Keep a healthy diet
- Exercise at home
- Get enough sleep
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol excessively
- Take care of your mental health
- Maintain self-care and personal hygiene

YOUR IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT



- Your house, your bedroom, your closet, your kitchen – now is the time to clean and get organized
- Make responsible choices about when to leave the house and only go out if necessary
- Limit the number of people you come into contact with
- Work from home if you are able to

WHAT YOU CONSUME



- Don't overdo your news and information intake
- Get your information from reliable sources like the CDC or WHO
- Watch TV, movies, and videos that make you feel good

HOW YOU PREPARE



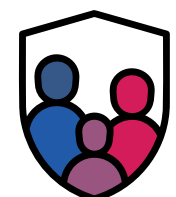
- Keep 2-4 weeks of food on hand
- Avoid overstocking on supplies that are in high demand so other people can have enough of the essentials too
- If you take medication, get refills and keep a month's supply at home if possible

HOW YOU PROTECT YOURSELF



- Regularly wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid greeting people by shaking hands, kissing or hugging
- Keep 6 feet of distance between you and anyone who is coughing or sneezing

HOW YOU PROTECT OTHERS



- Stay home if you are sick aside from getting medical care
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces

SIGNS OF ANXIETY

It is normal to be worried and stressed during times of crisis. While worry is a part of anxiety, people with anxiety tend to experience more exaggerated feelings of worry and tension. Some common symptoms include:



Uncontrollable worry or dread



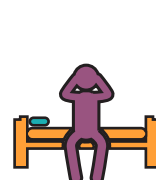
Stomach and digestion problems



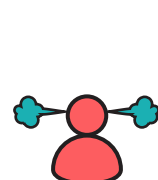
Trouble with concentration, memory, or thinking clearly



Increased heart rate



Changes in energy and difficulty sleeping



Irritability and/or restlessness

In extreme cases of anxiety, people may experience a panic attack. Panic attacks are often mistaken for heart attacks at first, but usually go away when people are able to talk to someone else to calm their fears and practice deep breathing.

MANAGING ANXIETY

There are small things that everyone can do while practicing social distancing or self-quarantine to help reduce the amount of anxiety they are experiencing.

Ask someone to be your support buddy. Call, text, or video chat as needed.

Exercise at home

Use resources like online support groups or the Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741741)

Set boundaries with your phone

Use a mindfulness or meditation app

Set a timer for every hour to get up and stretch or take a walk

Create a new routine

Take 10 deep breaths when you feel stressed

WHEN ANXIETY WON'T LET UP

If you're taking steps to manage worry and anxiety during the COVID-19 crisis but they don't seem to be helping, there are additional resources you can take advantage of.

Mental Health Screening

If you feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit mhascreening.org to check your symptoms.

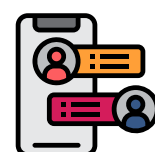


It's free, private, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Crisis Hotlines and Textlines

If you experiencing emotional distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, crisis counselors are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746.



If you are in crisis or thinking about suicide, get connected to a local crisis center and get in touch with someone immediately.

Call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or text "MHA" to 741741.

Find more information and resources about COVID-19 and mental health at mhanational.org/covid19.



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