

COPE BETTER, STRESS LESS

Proven strategies to help
you keep calm in times of
intense stress

Our body's relationship with stress

Most people experience stress, worry, or anxiety from time to time—but the pandemic has had a severe, detrimental impact on our overall mental wellbeing, with many feeling burnt out or overwhelmed.

Continued stress and anxiety can negatively impact our mental and physical health. In the short term, that can mean chronic headaches, upset stomach, difficulty sleeping, fatigue, low energy, lack of focus, and changes in eating habits. In the long term, that can mean an increased risk for many serious health problems, like heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, addiction, and more.¹

Basically, stress and anxiety can affect every single major system of the human body.

But here's the good news: There are science-backed tricks that can help you manage stress.

Here's how to coach yourself calm and build resilience, even in the most stressful situations.



Everybody reacts to stress and anxiety differently. And if you're experiencing any abnormal symptoms or feeling out of sorts, it's best to consult with your healthcare provider.

First, you've got to acknowledge and accept your feelings

This will set the foundation for navigating through stressful situations. Ignoring feelings only makes them last longer and can:

- 1 Prevent us from achieving major life goals
- 2 Make us more dishonest than we'd like to be—with others and ourselves²
- 3 Trap us in a state of anticipation where we're continually expecting to feel the emotion we're trying to avoid²
- 4 Lead to unwanted physical side effects like the ones we previously mentioned

When you're feeling stressed or anxious (or any emotion, really), acknowledge that's how you're feeling and accept it. The best way to do this out loud or in your head is to say, "Stress is happening. I am feeling stressed." Once you've accepted what you're feeling, you may feel a bit lighter, like you're no longer pushing against that feeling.

Once you acknowledge and accept what you're feeling...

Then, you've got to navigate through it

There are many techniques you can use to coach yourself to a calmer state when life's been a little more life-y than usual.

A quick note: If you haven't tried one of these techniques before, giving them a go might feel a little strange. Give these techniques an honest try. The only thing you have to lose is stress!

“Emotions are the same as feelings; they're mental and physical responses to how we perceive situations. Give yourself permission to experience it fully, as trying to push away a feeling only amplifies it. Just acknowledging the emotion can actually lessen its intensity.”

— Dr. Dana Labat, PhD

Accepting an emotion doesn't mean you're weak. It means you're human. We all experience emotions—both positive and negative. So, don't get down on yourself for feeling whatever you're feeling.



Technique #1: Linguistics shifting

The simple act of referring to yourself in the third person can be a quick, easy way to help you control your emotions. (Kind of wild, but hear us out.)

What it's great for:

In-the-moment stressors, like kiddos having temper tantrums in the middle of dinner, water pipes bursting at 2 a.m., or the Wi-Fi cutting out in the middle of that important work meeting.

How it works:

Let's say your name is Taylor, and you just spent all day working on a big work project. When you went to save your work, your computer crashed, and you lost it all. Understandably, you start to panic. You realize you need to calm down a bit so you can approach the situation with a clear head, so you:

- 1 Close your eyes.
- 2 Take a deep breath.
- 3 Coach yourself through the situation, referring to yourself by your name. You might say: "Anxiety is happening. Taylor feels anxious. Taylor is going to continue breathing and see if there is a backed-up version of her work saved somewhere. If there is not, Taylor is going to take a deep breath and email her boss and explain what happened. Then, Taylor's going to write down everything she remembers about the work she's done on this project and start again."
- 4 Take another deep breath and start following the plan you laid out.

Why it works:

It may sound strange but speaking to yourself in the third person allows you to work through a stressful scenario, just like a trusted best friend or partner would.

When we refer to ourselves using "I" (as in, "I need to finish this project"), we tend to feel overwhelmed by the current moment. Feeling overwhelmed in a moment full of negative emotion prevents us from having proper perspective on it.

Simply referring to yourself by your name can make a huge difference in how quickly you're able to return to rational thought and move past the situation with a clear (and calm) mind.





It might feel a little strange the first few times you try this, which is why it's a good idea to practice before you feel like you need to use it. Practice makes it better, and when it comes to your mental health, a little practice goes a long way.

Technique #2: Temporal distancing

Using this technique, you can coach yourself through a stressful period in life by zooming out and shifting your focus on the bigger picture.

What it's great for:

Situations you've been feeling stressed or anxious about for a while now, like a big move or a strained relationship.

How it works:

Let's say you've been trying to sell your house. It's been on the market for a few months. You haven't had any luck, and you're feeling stressed.

When you think about the situation and start to feel yourself spiral into "what if..." or "why me":

- 1 Pause for a few seconds.
- 2 Take a deep breath.
- 3 Think back to another time when something stressed you out.
- 4 Reflect on that time and remember that it's in the past. Sit with the fact that it's over and no longer has a hold on you.
- 5 Once more, recall the thing you're feeling stressed about now—in this case, selling your house. Realize that the same logic applies to all stressful situations in your life. You've overcome hard things before, and you'll overcome this stressful situation, too.

Why it works:

When we're in the midst of a stressful situation, it can be hard to see how we're ever going to find our way out of it. The more stressful the situation, the more all-consuming the feelings of anxiety, frustration, and unease can be.

Temporal distancing helps us remind ourselves that whatever stressful time we're in will pass. It lets us reframe our current situation as a challenge that we can overcome, instead of seeing it as a permanent problem.⁴

Be gentle with yourself.

As we all begin to establish a new normal, above all else, do your best to be kind to yourself. Adapting to the current state of everything is going to feel strange and scary sometimes. And it's OK if it takes some time and practice.

Just remember to acknowledge your feelings and, if you're feeling up to it, try out these two techniques. With a healthy mindset and these "coach yourself calm" strategies at the ready, you can navigate—and thrive in—the world.



1 https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-symptoms-effects_of-stress-on-the-body#2

2 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/201009/emotional-acceptance-why-feeling-bad-is-good>

3 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0963721419861411?cookieSet=1>

4 https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~adp/rasclab_v1/uploads/this_too_shall_pass.pdf

