

First-AID for Difficult Emotions

In times of great loss, you may be confronted with unfamiliar or very intense emotions. A natural response is to keep a lid on them, but sooner or later suppressing emotions takes a physical and emotional toll. Try this First-AID plan for handling difficult emotions, and hopefully they will lessen and healing can begin.

Accept Whatever You Are Feeling.

There is nothing wrong with any feeling you have, whether it is relief, envy, guilt, anger or rage. Not accepting your feelings, however, creates tension and an inner tug of war. Pay attention to physical cues; they are often the first sign of suppressed feelings—a lump in the throat, a knot in the stomach, a tensed jaw.

Identify Your Feelings.

Try to be specific about what you feel. “I feel bad” is fairly vague, whereas “I feel discouraged about the slow progress I’m making,” is more helpful. When you name your feelings, you’re less likely to feel overwhelmed by them. Some common emotions after loss are sadness, despair, loneliness, fear, relief, guilt, and anger.

Do Something With Your Feelings.

- Cry—let the dam break.
- Walk, run, or go to the gym.
- Beat a pillow or punching bag.
- Find a secluded place to yell.
- Tear up an old phone book or catalog.
- Talk to someone who can listen without judging.
- Depict your feelings with crayons, magic markers, or paint.
- Write about your feeling, even if it’s anger towards God or the one who died. This isn’t dishonoring of them; rather it helps you gain release.
- Tell others, when you’ve calmed down, how you feel when they offend you. For example: “I felt hurt when you said I should clear out his closet.”

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Checklist of Stress Symptoms

Listed below are common symptoms of stress. Mark those you have experienced during the past several months: A-Always, F-Frequently, and O-Occasionally. If you mark "A" or "F" to several of these, seek new ways to manage stress, and do consult your healthcare provider for symptoms that worsen or persist.

Headaches_____	Difficulty sleeping_____	Fatigue/Exhaustion_____
Nausea/Indigestion_____	Under or overeating_____	Bowel problems_____
Lump in throat_____	Aching muscles_____	Tension/Anxiety_____
Irritability_____	Depressed mood_____	Forgetfulness_____
Inability to focus_____	Worrisome thoughts_____	High blood pressure_____
Skin flare-ups_____	Minor accidents_____	Frequent colds/flu_____
Heart racing_____	Worsening of existing medical conditions_____	
Other _____		

12 Ways to Manage Your Stress

First, make a list of the things that trigger your stress. Then, do something about the things you CAN change or eliminate. Finally, learn to deal successfully with the things you CANNOT change. Here are 12 ideas to get you started:

1. Take a walk or engage in some form of regular exercise, if you are able.
2. Write down three things you are thankful for at the end of each day.
3. Get things off your chest by talking to a trusted friend or writing in a journal.
4. Play calm background music to help create a peaceful environment at home.
5. Resist too much caffeine, alcohol and sugar.
6. Relax your standards. The world won't end if the dishes aren't done.
7. Inhale as you count to 4; Exhale as you count to 4. Continue for 4 minutes.
8. Take a "mini-vacation" as you focus on a peaceful picture in your mind.
9. Do at least one thing each day that you enjoy.
10. Keep a to-do list rather than rely on your memory.
11. Don't sweat the small stuff, and choose your battles carefully.
12. Repeat the serenity prayer: *Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference .*