

LAFAYETTE

COUNSELING CENTER

Tips for Managing Sociopolitical Stress

Remind yourself that you are not alone.

It's important to acknowledge collectively that this can be a stressful and uncertain period of time. We're all trying our best to balance competing personal and academic responsibilities. There are no "right" or "wrong" emotions. Begin by simply being aware of and naming the emotions you feel. You might then remind yourself that others are experiencing similar feelings and challenges. The idea of shared humanity is more important than ever in cultivating hope and resilience.

Limit the amount of time you are on social media.

Focusing on divisive political turmoil can be a major contributor to daily stress. Media content is designed to keep people engaged 24/7. It often promotes conflict to maintain interest by presenting the most polarizing examples. Consume reliable and diverse media. Consider turning off push notifications. Give yourself permission to unplug periodically. Consider reading rather than watching your news to exercise greater control over what you are ingesting and to regulate exposure to information or images. Even small breaks from your phone can provide relief and help you feel more rejuvenated.

Have a self-care routine in place.

Nourish your body with healthy foods. Stay hydrated. Avoid substance use. Maintain a consistent sleep/wake schedule. Intentionally incorporate movement in any way you can. Routine exercise boosts your mood and provides a physical outlet for anxious energy. Spend time outdoors. Practice deep breathing. It can also help to reflect on what you feel grateful for each day. Gratitude offers perspective which helps us focus on good experiences, feel better about ourselves, and build stronger relationships. Positive affirmations are another way to help foster hope and resilience during difficult times.

Maintain a hobby that is separate from the election.

Hobbies that absorb your mind can allow you to obtain a break from your thoughts and feelings about the election. Creative outlets provide the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings. Hobbies that require physical exertion provide stress relief.

Surround yourself with positive, supportive relationships.

Social connection helps to reduce stress. Sometimes when we feel worried or overwhelmed we tend to isolate; remind yourself to lean into the power of connection. Spend time engaging in enjoyable activities with family and/or friends. Turning to others for emotional support enhances coping as does providing support to others who are struggling. Consider identifying an election buddy for mutual support. It's ok to limit your time and set respectful boundaries with people who initiate unproductive conversations.

Take an active role in causes you care about.

Select causes that align with your values. This can help ground you and provide direction when coping with uncertainty in other areas of life. Get involved in ways that are meaningful to you. Channel feelings of stress into ways that can make a difference such as donating your time or helping with fundraising efforts for a cause that is important to you. Engaging in productive projects enhances feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, identifying and writing about your core values, not only boosts distress tolerance, but mitigates the effects of stress on decision-making and behavior. Writing a few sentences about your core values before a stressful event reminds you what you truly care about and allows you to act in ways that support those values.

Focus on what you can control.

It's possible we might not know the outcome of the election on Election Day which adds more uncertainty to our daily lives. It is important to take time to acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings this may elicit but avoid dwelling on things you can't control. Setting a daily limit on checking for the outcome may be useful in managing anxious feelings. In addition, it is normal and appropriate to take some time to grieve if the final election results are not what you had hoped. It can be helpful to remember that you are not alone in your experience of disappointment. It is equally important to remain engaged in your daily routines as much as possible. Consider prescheduling a few enjoyable activities in the days following the election.

Create a plan for managing difficult dialogues.

During an election season, strong emotions may arise as we discuss differing points of views, values, and beliefs with those close to us. Many holidays and events immediately follow the election. Devise a plan for how to navigate these situations to help alleviate stress. Remember that family gatherings are about celebration and bringing people together. Initiate activities that help to build connections such as cooking or preparing food together, sharing fond memories, playing cooperative games, spending time together outside, or engaging in projects with children who may be present. Identify a quiet space to obtain a break and take a few deep breaths if conversations become too intense or unproductive.