

Coping Strategies for Caregivers

Feeling sad, stressed, or worried is normal right now. Whatever you are feeling is ok and you are not alone. These evidence-based strategies may help you during this difficult time.

DEVELOP SELF-AWARENESS of your feelings and state of mind.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNALS:

Monitor your sleeping, eating, physical cues (heart racing, frequent crying, increased aches and pains), thinking (ruminating, anticipating the worst), and social behaviour (conflict or withdrawal in relationships).

IDENTIFY YOUR TRIGGERS:

Write down the people, places, or activities you associate with feelings of worry, stress, or sadness now and/or in the past.

IDENTIFY YOUR HAPPY PLACES & SAFE SPACES:

Write down the people, places, or activities that you associate with feelings of calm, safety, or happiness now and/or in the past.

ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS

What can I control right now? Focus on that.

What am I afraid might happen? Challenge these predictions with evidence to the contrary or alternative perspectives.

What could a loved one, mentor, or inspirational figure say to me that could help? Consider creating an affirmation with key messages that you can place in your space, or use as a password or screen saver.

FOCUS ON THE PHYSICAL

Calm yourself with these simple exercises:

- 5 senses: Ask yourself 'what are 5 things I see, 4 things I hear, 3 things I feel, 2 things I smell, 1 thing I taste'?
- Box Breathing: Breathe in 4 sec, Hold for 4 sec, Breathe out 4 sec, Hold for 4 sec. Repeat 4 times.
- Progressive relaxation: Tense and release body parts including your hands, arms, jaw, face, stomach, and legs (<https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/tension-release-exercise/>).

Experiment with mindfulness and meditation. Try apps such as Calm, Headspace, or Stop, Breathe & Think.

Exercise daily to improve mood and concentration. Find an activity you enjoy and a buddy to keep you company (in the home or virtually).

TAKE ACTION

Prioritize self-care. Make time to eat well, get adequate sleep, and connect with people.

Seek opportunities to learn and engage in enjoyable activities and past-times.

Pick one or two things you are able to accomplish for your daily to-do list. Know that productivity is impacted for all of us during the pandemic.

Use a problem-solving strategy to guide you. For example, the P-A-S-T-E model helps to 1) Identify one PROBLEM 2) List possible ALTERNATIVES to solve the problem 3) Pick a SOLUTION or a combination of solutions you think will work 4) TRY out the solution for one week 5) EVALUATE how the solution is working. If it isn't, choose and try another solution from your list.

NEED MORE SUPPORT?

Here are some options to explore:

Bounce Back Ontario <https://bouncebackontario.ca/>

Wellness Together Canada: Mental Health & Substance Use Support <https://ca.portal.gs/>

211 Ontario can help you find the support that's right for you (<https://211ontario.ca/>)

Crisis Support can be accessed 24/7 by texting WELLNESS to 741741 or CONNECT to 686868, or by calling 1 (833) 456-4566 (Suicide Prevention & Support)