Sometimes events unfold in ways that can leave us struggling with a range of complex thoughts and emotions. The way that they play out can feel like an assault on our beliefs and values. It can trigger feelings of outrage, frustration, and powerlessness. There can be an unsettling disruption to our sense of stability. We can worry about the future and what might happen next. We may be left feeling distressed, disillusioned or defeated as we move forward with daily life.

Managing difficult emotions

You may not have the power to “fix” this situation, but there are things you can do to ease the emotional distress. It's important to bring stress levels down in order to work through thoughts and emotions, as well as to be able to respond in meaningful ways.

Recognize that there’s no right or wrong way to feel. The stress you feel tells you that this matters to you. We'll each respond to that in our own way. It can feel necessary to hold onto anger. You may need to vent or speak out. You may feel numb or exhausted. You may feel apprehensive about outcomes, and yet you may also have some hopeful feelings. It's okay to be where you are.

Allow and express your emotions. Journaling your thoughts, feelings, and concerns can be a useful way to reflect on what you’re feeling and why. Talking about them with others can also be a chance to share ideas for how to respond or feel better. You might want to take a break from others who are highly emotional or aggressive about their viewpoint. They may make it harder for you to regain a sense of calm.

Manage your media intake. Use multiple sources to gather information and vet them carefully to get information that’s accurate and complete. Be aware that repeated exposure to stressful details, polarizing coverage, and reactive online comments can be emotionally exhausting. Notice how you are impacted and limit viewing or social media scrolling as needed.

Shift your mindset

The following strategies may help you build up your sense of stability and manage the stress as you work through difficult or conflicting emotions.

Give yourself permission to take a time out if you notice that your emotions are being triggered by your thoughts. The technique of intentionally shifting to a neutral focus for a time may be of help. Consider activities that pull your attention away from distressing thoughts. It may be physical activity, something creative, reading words of inspiration, connecting with others, or something else that will work for you. It doesn’t mean you don’t care, it’s simply a way to bring stress levels down.

Focus on what you can control in your own environment. When difficult events are out of our control, life can feel chaotic. Keeping to routines can help create feelings of stability. The structure and predictability of simple daily activities can help us to feel more grounded. Completing tasks, even something small, such as washing the dishes, can be reassuring.

Try to bring balance to your thoughts. Difficult current events can co-opt our thoughts and leave us feeling that the world is a challenging or unfair place that we’re powerless to affect. Take time to think about actions and efforts that have made a positive difference, for you personally and in the world at large. Consider instances where people stood up for and supported one another.
Consider how you could respond in a meaningful way. Finding positive ways to make a difference can give you a way forward instead of feeling at the mercy of the situation. Considering what’s possible – specific to current events or in general – can be empowering. Talk with others to come up with ideas for what could make a positive difference in this moment. Supporting others can be a meaningful way forward. That may be lending a hand to an individual or a public show of solidarity.

Be kind to yourself and others

Remember the power of self-care. It can be easier to be resilient when you’re well, strong, and energized. This means eating nutritious foods throughout the day. It includes staying hydrated, exercising, and getting restful sleep. Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation may be helpful. Avoid using alcohol, drugs, or other unhealthy methods of coping. Make room in the day for activities that lift your spirit.

Lean into your support network. Turn to people who care about you. Reach out to others who will understand and be willing to talk about and help you process what you’re feeling. This can reduce internal pressure and help you move forward. Others also bring different perspectives to the issues, giving you a broader base from which to navigate what’s happening.

Be respectful. When talking with others who have different viewpoints, assume the other person is speaking with positive intent. Choose your words thoughtfully, with compassion, while still speaking your truth. Recognize that there is a difference between sharing your perspective and reactively defending your position. Stay in control of your emotions.

Talking with your child

Consider if/how you wish to communicate about current events with your child. Discussing this topic can be a very personal decision, for many reasons. However, avoiding or downplaying a topic that they know is charged can make events feel worrisome. Think about what you want to share and how to do that at an age-appropriate level. You might ask them what they’ve heard as a place to start. Prepare for a range of questions.

Monitor your child’s exposure to news stories. Be ready to address what they are seeing and hearing. A general rule of thumb is to offer only as much information as they request. But know that an older child may press for a more in-depth discussion.

Be aware that your child is watching you to understand how to process this experience. Be honest with words, feelings, and actions, but be mindful of how you are communicating them. It can be unsettling for a child to feel that you’re overwhelmed.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help.

If you’re struggling with your thoughts and feelings, you may want to seek help or support services. Your EAP can help you get connected. We’re available 24/7.