

Emotional Support Ukraine

How to Manage Difficult Emotions

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How to Support Others: Panic Attacks, Trauma & Suicide

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There will be time for crying and time for rage, and
time for the kind of response that will make a positive difference.
The most powerful skillful response is acceptance,
with resilience through courageous action.

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How to Manage Difficult Emotions

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Purpose

To provide guidance in the form of tips and simple exercises for individuals and coaches to use to manage stress and trauma in themselves and to help others around them.

Intention

To go beyond reactivity to responsiveness

- Establish presence and calm in the face of situations in which there is great uncertainty
- Be present for others
- Manage trauma and suicidal thoughts

Managing Extreme Circumstances

*“The bad news is you’re falling through the air, nothing to hang on to, no parachute. The good news is, there’s no ground.”—
Chögyam Trungpa*

Things are unfolding moment to moment. We are faced with extreme, instable, chaotic, surprising, and disorienting situations. BANI (brittleness, anxiety, non-linearity, and incomprehensibility) is an acronym that you can use to help find ways to handle it.

- Brittleness refers to no longer being able to rely on past experience - being in new and uncharted situation. It is brittle because rigidity sets in - wanting to hold on to the way things were
- Anxiety is caused by facing the unknown and lacking control. Beyond anxiety there is existential fear - will I and those I love survive?

- Non-linearity, the realization that we are in a highly complex situation with multiple dimensions moving in multiple directions. This feeds anxiety and incomprehensibility
- Incomprehensibility - we can't get the mind around the situation unless we use intuition and accept the freedom of not knowing.

Acceptance and Resilience

To manage extreme circumstances:

- 1) Accept, "go slack", stop resisting, allow things to be how they are and
- 2) cultivate resilience, confidence that you can handle anything that comes and bounce back.

Acceptance does not mean being passive. It means being realistic about what you can change and not change. It means putting yourself in a position from which you can act most effectively. Acceptance enables resilience.

Calm - Centering in the Eye of the Storm

To cultivate acceptance and resilience calm the body and mind to give yourself a platform from which you can feel and acknowledge your emotions, and act responsively, optimally.

"The cyclone derives its power from a calm center. So does a person." Norman Vincent Peale

Each of us has an *eye of the storm*, a calm center that is not a center at all. It is a state of mind, an experience of being present, aware of what is going on internally and externally. It is the peace that is the quiet beneath the waves of the ups and downs of thoughts and emotions. Your calm center is always present, though often covered over by the waves.

Techniques for Calming and Relieving Stress

Below are techniques to relieve stress and calm yourself down so you can be responsive to your situation.

If you find them effective, as a coach or friend, you can share these techniques with others. But keep in mind that to be helpful, share with others without pushing your 'truth' onto them.

These techniques are experiential. Don't think about them or analyze why they work. Just do them and see what happens. Pick one and try it a few times to see if it works for you. If you like what happens do it again and again.

These techniques do not require a special quiet place, though a quiet place where you won't be disturbed is helpful. They can be practiced for a few minutes, or longer, if you can manage that. Eyes may be open or closed. There is no special posture, though being comfortably erect, seated or standing is recommended.

Practicing to calm yourself lets you know that you have the power to control your emotions.

Moment to Moment Mindful Awareness

Some techniques can be practiced for a brief moment, anywhere, whenever you remember.

Whenever you feel the need for a moment of rest, a moment of stepping back into your calmness, bring attention to the sensations of your body.

- You can simply touch the tip of your thumb and your index finger and feel the sensations of that moment.
- If you are standing or walking, feel your feet against the ground
- If seated, then feel the weight of your body against the seat
- Feel the air against your skin,
- Feel the sensations of your breath.
- Relax – 'Go slack' allow everything to be as it is.

Then engage in your situation without being lost in emotions and yet letting them be fully felt.

Tapping

Tapping is a technique that you do on yourself to bring calm, enable you to manage your emotions, relieve stress and anxiety, and promote healing. There are many variations that help to calm the mind by effecting your brain's amygdala and your limbic system.

Here is a link to a five-step process guide <https://www.healthline.com/health/eft-tapping#treatment>

Here is a link to a video that shows you how to use tapping and self-affirmation to calm anxiety

Nick Ortner's *Tapping Technique to Calm Anxiety & Stress in 3 Minutes* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02bN4JFx10Y&t=267s>

Ball holding - Sensing Subtle Energy

The Ball Holding technique uses sensations between your hands to calm you and give you a sense of your subtle energy and personal power. Movements are slow and relaxed.

- Stand or sit comfortably erect
- Eyes may be open or closed
- Take two or three breaths
- When you feel ready
- Hold your hands close together facing one another but not touching, as if you were holding a small delicate rubber ball between them
- Relax any unnecessary tension in your hands
- Feel a sensation between the tips of your fingers - a slight subtle tingling
- If you don't feel anything just relax your shoulders and arms and take a few quiet breaths. Don't look for the energy, let it appear.
- When you do feel the energy sensation between the tips of your fingers, begin to move your hands apart as if the ball you are holding is expanding and gently pushing your hands apart.
- Feel the energy between you hands
- If the energy sensation stops, move your hands closer together until you feel it again
- From that point move your hands closer together making the ball smaller
- and then before they touch slowly move them back out.
- For a few minutes let the ball slowly expand and contract, moving your hands in and out while feeling the energy between your hands
- Let the ball grow as large as it will while you still feel the energy, bring them back in until they are almost touching.

Take Five Breathing

With this simple technique you can calm your body and mind in a few minutes. It is good for children and adults. The Take Five Breathing engages you visually, with physical sensation and with the breath to bring you to the present moment, free, at least for a moment of the fight, freeze or flee reaction.

Calm Your Anxiety in 2 Minutes - Rachel Richards shows how to do it in this short video at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zhhLG3GW-8&feature=youtu.be>

The technique is:

- Use the index finger of one hand to trace the outline of the other
- Start at your wrist
- Trace up and over your thumb and up and over each finger
- As you do so, breath in through the nose as you trace up, pause, exhale out through the mouth as you trace down.
- Note how you feel when you are done.



One time may be all you need though you may have to do it more than once to get a full result,

You can guide your children or friends and family through the process.

Mantra - AHHH; Fang Sang,

Mantras are sounds and phrases that elicit physical and mental responses. There are thousands of them. Say them out loud or to yourself. Let the sound come from deep inside as if it was coming up from your belly.

A useful mantra to bring a sense of deep relaxation and put you in touch with your scenter is ‘AHHHH’. Very simple and natural. It is the sound you make from deep inside when you relax.

Affirmations

Affirmations are phrases you say to yourself to promote healthy mental and physical results. At first, they may seem silly and contrived, but as you use your affirmation it sets in and effects the way you feel and how you behave.

Here are some you can use, or you can make up your own: “I am powerful.” “I am strong no matter what happens.” “I am ready for anything.” “We shall overcome.” “I am healthy.” “My life and what I do has meaning.” “The inner light within me radiates outward and warms those around me.”

Mindfulness Meditation with Body and breath awareness

The basic mindfulness meditation exercise uses awareness of the body and breath as a means for cultivating concentration and mindfulness.

Body and breath awareness brings your attention to the present moment and allows you to observe your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and everything else that is occurring within and around you.

The practice is to choose a point of attention, a focal point, to use as a touchstone to come back to whenever you realize that you have become distracted (and you will become distracted.) The point of attention can be anything for example, the sensations of the breath or body, a sound, or a visual image. To start, use the sensations of the breath as your point of attention. If that is not comfortable you can use physical sensations.

The focusing helps you to reach what is called calm abiding. When you are settled in, abiding calmly, you are in a state that allows you to be mindful even though thoughts and feelings are running wild.

Don’t make it a chore that creates more stress in your busy life. Treat it as you would any new activity that promises to make you happier, healthier, and more effective. Improvise, there are no hard and fast rules.

The Practice

The practice is simple but not necessarily easy. It requires relaxed effort, kindness to yourself, and perseverance:

Bring your attention to the sensations of your body – feel your body against the chair or cushion, the air against your skin,

Feel your head and face from the inside. Feel your head balanced on your neck, your shoulders gently back and down. Feel the sensations of your torso, your pelvic area, legs.

Feel the sensations of your breath, wherever it is most prevalent for you, the rising and falling of your chest and abdomen, the air passing through your nostrils. Nothing special, no need to force anything, just let your body breathe.

For a few moments, breathing in, imagine the breath filling your body, relaxing and energizing it. Breathing out, feel the release of tension. Notice any tension and let the breath relax it, without forcing it.

Then drop the imagining and just breathe. Accept the way you are in this moment.

With the sensations of your breath as an object of attention, notice any thoughts (and there will be thoughts), feelings, sensations, sounds, smells, visual images – anything that occurs in or around you. Just notice. Notice the desire to grasp onto a thought or feeling. Experience them as if they were clouds passing in the sky

If you become lost in thought, distracted (and you will become distracted) as soon as you notice that you have become distracted, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of the breath.

Continue noticing, recognizing, and returning

There will be thinking. Don't worry about it or try to stop it. Just notice.

Don't worry about spacing out or losing focus. It is natural and will happen. Whenever you notice that you have been lost in thought, asleep, or "spaced-out", bring your attention back to your object of focus and begin again – just noticing.

Don't get upset with yourself if you get lost a lot. This is natural. Celebrate the moment of realizing that you have been distracted. That moment is a major event. It is a moment of awareness. Some say a moment of enlightenment. Coming back to the object of focus exercises the mind to increase concentration.

The more you practice the less frequently you will get lost and you will notice it more quickly when you do.

Manage Emotions: The RAIN Technique

RAIN is a technique for managing emotions. RAIN stands for **R**ecognize what has come up. **A**ccept it. **I**nvestigate to see how it feels in the body. **N**on-identifying with the emotion.

The entire process promotes not identifying. As soon as there is the presence of mind to recognize the emotion, there has been a stepping back - a mental shift into the awareness of what is happening internally and externally. Then there can be acceptance. Acceptance is based on the idea that whatever is, is. You *cannot* change the past. You *cannot* change the immediate present. **You *can* influence the future.**

Accepting an emotion is more than a moment of intellectually saying "Ok, I am experiencing anger" to yourself and moving on to investigating. Accepting implies being with the feelings without having to do anything about them. It's not scratching the itch. Being with, though not wallowing in.

Recognition and acceptance alone are enough to allow the emotion to lose its power as your perception of it changes. The emotion may not immediately disappear, but you have space between it and you. It has become an interesting phenomenon, an object of mindfulness. You can mindfully observe the emotion and the way it operates, investigating to create more space by identifying, though not analyzing, the physical sensations you are experiencing.

Stepping back in this way gives you the ability to avoid the thoughts of past and future that feeds the emotion and keeps it going.

Assisting Refugees

There is a huge flow of refugees arriving in cities where they seek shelter and support from family and friends who have settled outside of Ukraine. Some have no family or friend connections. Some do not speak any language but their own, making communication difficult. All are under extreme stress, facing great uncertainty.

Compassionate action begins with self-compassion. On an airplane, safety instruction says in case of emergency put your oxygen mask on before you help others with theirs.

Make sure you are on solid ground. The more you are calm and centered, the more effective you will be.

The best you can do is to help others to help themselves. To help is to do something to make things easier for another. To *assist* is to add your effort to theirs. The goal is to enable those in need to make the best of their situation and become self sufficient.

Give a man a fish, he eats for day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

There are many ways you can help:

- Donate money, food, clothing
- Offer shelter in your home
- Advise people as to where they can get assistance
- Volunteer with groups providing refugee services
- Help people to become calm and centered by sharing techniques with them
- Think thoughts of loving kindness – wishing that all beings may be safe, happy, healthy, and free of suffering

Offering Shelter

Taking in people is an act of compassion. It relies on cooperation and understanding by everyone involved.

Some tips:

- Be aware of the emotional and physical burdens being experienced by everyone involved, including yourself
- Be aware that relationships may be strained as new personalities enter your homelife
- Collaborate and communicate to have mutual understanding of ground rules and expectations

- Be flexible and patient
- Reach out to community
- Become aware of and reach out to social supports from local government and non-governmental agencies
- Seek or start up refugee support groups
- Avoid acting out of "survivor guilt" or pity
- Take care of yourself so you can be there for others.

Avoid Hatred

It is easy to get caught up in hatred of the enemy and the desire for revenge. Do the challenging work of being kind and compassionate to everyone. Feel your feelings about your enemy or those who are oblivious of what is going on, but don't let them drive your behavior. Avoid the never-ending cycle of hatred.

Let love of country, community, freedom, and family be the motivator of your action, not hatred of the enemy.

Remember that when you see through your emotions, biases and beliefs, the other person is just another being who may be deluded into thinking the false is true. Open communication if you can.

Discrimination based on anything leads to more violence and abuse. Fight against it.

Trauma Management

“Trauma is a natural emotional response to a terrible event ... Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.”¹

Trauma can result in panic attacks and depression, in extreme cases there may be suicidal thoughts. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that is triggered by a terrible event. Its symptoms may be flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about what has happened

To work on yourself or with Others

This simple method helps to manage traumatic emotions by helping you to step back to identify their trigger

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma#:~:text=Trauma%20is%20an%20emotional%20response,symptoms%20like%20headaches%20or%20nausea.>

First, use a stress relief or centering technique to calm down. Once you have emotional self-control:

1. Write out a narrative timeline of the traumatic event. Put it out on paper (or at least orally) so you can look at it and realize that it is in the past. You can look at it objectively so that it no longer “owns you.” Doing this helps to avoid longer term symptoms by not carrying the immediate emotions with you.
2. Share your timeline with someone you trust – a friend, family member, or professional – and who can listen without judgement. You are not seeking advice or solace. You just want to say what you have experienced so that it relieves you from holding on to it.
3. Share the method with others so they may find a way to free themselves from the long-term effects of trauma.

Note that the emotions will not go away immediately, they will subside over time as you consciously acknowledge and review the events that caused. Emotions are natural and the negative ones are difficult to experience, but to avoid long-term effects it is necessary to accept them and not push them away. Pushing emotions away, trying to bury them, deny them, or avoid them by lashing out at others or hiding leads to long-term physical and psychological effects.

Guidelines follow

Below there are guidelines for working with others experiencing panic attacks and suicidal thoughts. These are contributed by Dr. Ralf Friedrich, PhD.

These are guidelines to help you in these troubled times. Use your intuition, empathy and compassion to offer assistance. If you are not a trained expert in these matters, you can certainly help but do not take on more than you are comfortable with.

Although you can offer support, you are not responsible for the actions or behaviours of someone else, and cannot control what they might decide to do or how they feel.

Take a tip from the airlines – they tell you to put on your own oxygen mask before trying to help others with theirs. Calm down and assess what you can do to add value.

How To Support Others During A PANIC ATTACK²

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is an abrupt surge of intense fear or discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes. During the attack, some of the following symptoms will be present³:

- Palpitations, pounding heart, or rapid heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort

² Mental Health First Aid Australia. Panic attacks: MHFA Guidelines. Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2021.

³ Adapted from DSM-5, APA 2013; Mental Health First Aid Australia. Panic attacks: MHFA Guidelines. Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2021;

- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Dizziness, light-headedness, feeling unsteady or faint
- Chills or heat sensations
- Numbness or tingling
- Feelings of unreality (derealization) or being detached from oneself
- Fear of losing control or 'going crazy'
- Fear of dying

How Can I Support Someone Who Is HAVING A PANIC ATTACK?

Consider their safety

- Encourage them to move to a safe space
- Don't stop them from what they are doing unless it puts them or others at risk of harm
- If they're driving when the panic attack occurs, ask them to pull over
- If at any stage you need to leave, try to find someone else who can check on the person

Reassure the person and find out what they need

- Reassure the person that they're safe
- Tell them that a panic attack is not life threatening and will pass
- Reassure them that they're not 'going crazy'
- Let them know that there's nothing to be ashamed of
- Ask the person directly how best to assist them

- If you know that they've had a panic attack in the past, ask them what helped
- If they don't know what they need, reassure them that it is okay
- Look at their body language to guide you

What To Do

- Acknowledge that what they're experiencing is uncomfortable, terrifying and stressful.
- Acknowledge that their terror feels very real to them.
- Speak to them in a reassuring but confident manner.
- Give them some space, so that they do not feel crowded. Try to create a space around them if there are other people present.
- Remove anything that is obviously causing the person distress.
- If there are people present who are not being helpful or respectful, or are causing the person discomfort, ask them to leave.

What Not To Do

- Do not dismiss or ignore the person's panic attack.
- Do not minimise their symptoms or what they're experiencing, e.g. Do not say things like "Don't panic", "Don't over-react", "There is nothing to worry about", "Just calm down".
- Do not criticise them for having a panic attack or for their behaviour during the panic attack.
- Do not express pity to them.

How might someone react to a potentially traumatic event?

Symptoms of acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder:

- Re-experiencing the trauma
- Avoidance behaviour
- Increased emotional distress
- Overly blaming themselves or others
- Reduced interest in others and the outside world
- May not be able to fully remember the event

How should I talk with someone who has experienced a potentially traumatic event?

- Try to remain calm when talking with the person
- Communicate with the person as an equal
- Show them you are listening by being patient
- It is important not to tell the person how they should be feeling
- Avoid saying things that discourage them from expressing their feelings
- Tell the person that everyone deals with such events at their own pace
- Reassure them that their reactions are understandable under the circumstances

⁴ Mental Health First Aid Australia. Traumatic Events: MHFA Guidelines (revised 2019). Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2019.

Talking about the person's experiences

- Listen non-judgmentally
- Tell them that it is okay to cry or express any feelings they are experiencing
- Reassure them that people do not consciously choose how to respond in these situations
- Be aware that the person may experience survivor guilt
- Develop a narrative of events on the day of the trauma as soon as possible

What Not To Do

- Do not force the person to talk about a potentially traumatic event or their feelings about it.
- Do not probe for details of the event.
- Do not interrupt them to share your own feelings and experiences.
- Do not compare their experience of trauma with anyone else's.
- Do not minimise their experience, e.g. "It could have been worse", "You'll be alright" or "You should be over that by now".
- Do not offer religious solace by saying things like "God has reasons".
- Do not say anything to imply that what has happened was the person's fault or that they should have reacted or done anything differently at the time of the event.

Signs a person might be suicidal

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Hopelessness
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped, like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol and drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family or society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic changes in mood
- No reason for living, no sense of purpose in life

How should I talk with someone who is suicidal?

⁵ Mental Health First Aid Australia. Suicidal thoughts and behaviours: MHFA Guidelines (revised 2014). Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2014.
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How should I talk with someone who is suicidal?

It is more important to be genuinely caring than to say ‘all the right things.’

- Be supportive and understanding of the person, and listen to them with undivided attention.
- Suicidal thoughts are often a plea for help and a desperate attempt to escape from problems and distressing feelings.
- Ask the person what they are thinking and feeling.
- Reassure them that you want to hear whatever they have to say.
- Allow them to talk about these thoughts and feelings, and their reasons for wanting to die and acknowledge these.
- Let the person know it is okay to talk about things that might be painful, even if it is hard.
- Allow them to express their feelings (e.g., allow them to cry, express anger, or scream). The person may feel relief at being able to do so.
- Remember to thank the person for sharing their feelings with you and acknowledge the courage this takes.

Listening Tips

- Be patient and calm while the person is talking about their feelings
- Listen to the person without expressing judgment, accepting what they are saying without agreeing or disagreeing with their behaviour or point of view
- Ask open-ended questions (i.e. questions that cannot be simply answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’) to find out more about the suicidal thoughts and feelings and the problems behind these
- Show you are listening by summarising what the person is saying
- Clarify important points with the person to make sure they are fully understood.
- Express empathy for the person.

What Not to Do

Do Not

- ... argue or debate with the person about their thoughts of suicide
- ... discuss with the person whether suicide is right or wrong
- ... use guilt or threats to prevent suicide (e.g. do not tell the person they will go to hell or ruin other people's lives if they die by suicide)
- ... minimise the person's problems
- ... give glib 'reassurance' such as “don't worry”, “cheer up”, “you have everything going for you” or “everything will be alright”
- ... interrupt with stories of your own
- ... communicate a lack of interest or negative attitude through your body language
- ... 'call their bluff' (dare or tell the person to 'just do it')
- ... attempt to give the person a diagnosis of a mental illness.

Do not avoid using the word ‘suicide’. It is important to discuss the issue directly without dread or expressing negative judgement.

Demonstrate appropriate language when referring to suicide by using the terms ‘suicide’ or ‘die by suicide’, and avoiding the use of terms to describe suicide that promote stigmatising attitudes, e.g. ‘commit suicide’ (implying it is a crime or sin) or referring to past suicide attempts as having ‘failed’ or been ‘unsuccessful’, implying death would have been a favourable outcome.

Safety Plan

A safety plan is an agreement between the person and the first aider that involves actions to keep the person safe.

The safety plan should:

- Focus on what the person should do rather than what they shouldn't
- Be clear, outlining what will be done, who will be doing it, and when it will be carried out
- Be for a length of time which will be easy for the person to cope with, so that they can feel able to fulfill the agreement and have a sense of achievement
- Include contact numbers that the person agrees to call if they are feeling suicidal, e.g. the person's doctor or mental health care professional, a suicide helpline or 24-hour crisis line, friends and family members who will help in an emergency.

Find out who or what has supported the person in the past and whether these supports are still available. Ask them how they would like to be supported and if there is anything you can do to help, but do not try to take on their responsibilities.

Although you can offer support, you are not responsible for the actions or behaviours of someone else, and cannot control what they might decide to do.