



Self-Care Strategies for
Back-to-School Stress



boystown.org

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES



This self-care guide was created to help your family thrive as you navigate the emotional challenges that come with returning to the classroom this fall.

The ongoing virus outbreak means the school day will have limitations, restrictions and precautions. Such inconveniences, both large and small, have the potential to frustrate and irritate. So whatever stress or anxiety your child has about being back at school, those feelings will be amplified by additional health and safety worries.

The activities and exercises described here will empower your child to cope with and overcome negative thinking and nagging fears while...

- Reducing stress.
- Building resiliency.
- Encouraging healthier habits.
- Reclaiming a sense of calm and control.

Engaging and wide-ranging, these strategies appeal to girls and boys, introverts and extroverts, the circumspect and the adventurous. Share them with your family now so everyone can give their bodies and their minds all the love and attention they deserve.

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The Power of Art

Artistic expression relaxes the mind and lifts the spirit. Here are a few creative activities that have the power to relieve stress, calm emotions, bring order to chaos, boost self-esteem, increase happiness and take away fear.

Shoe Box Therapy

Shoe box therapy allows you to acknowledge sad feelings and work through your emotions, so you don't get stuck in sadness or self-pity all day. Soon enough, your days will seem a little happier.

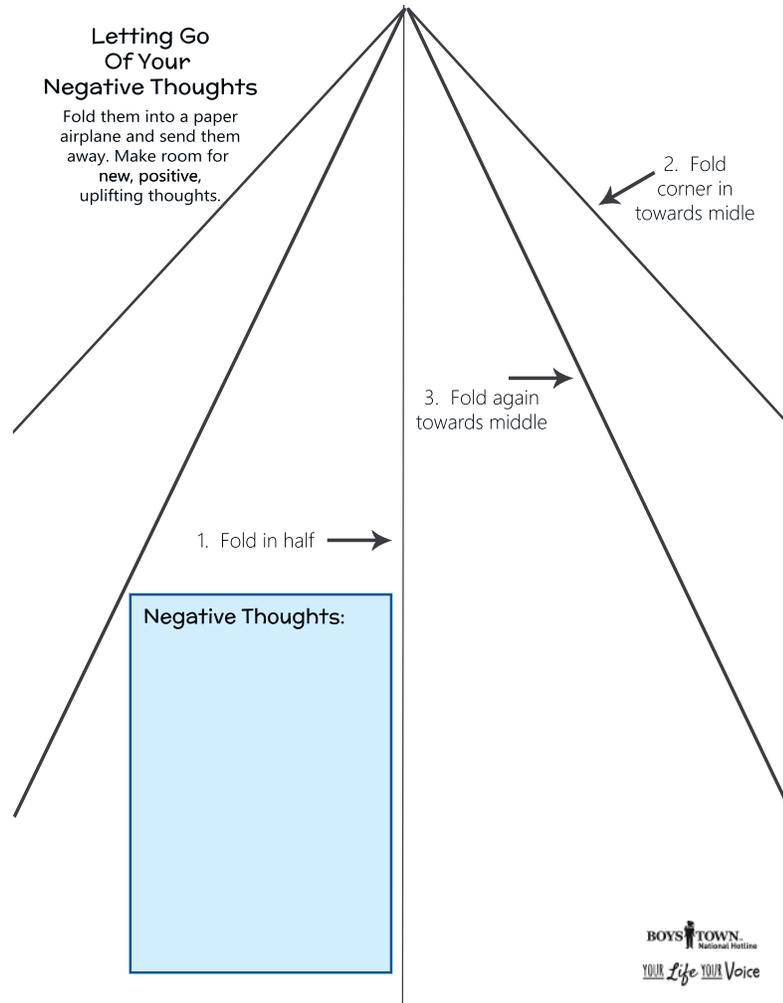
1. Turn a shoe box into a memory box by placing pictures, mementos or notes related to the things you miss most inside.
2. Every day, for 15 minutes, look at the items in the memory box. Smile, laugh or cry if you need to.
3. After 15 minutes, put the box away, dry your tears and get on with the day.

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Paper Plane Project

Send your negative thoughts packing by putting them on a paper airplane and sending them on a one-way trip to oblivion. Then you'll find the space you need for positive, uplifting thoughts.



1. Use a blank piece of paper (write your negative thoughts on the paper)
2. Fold in half
3. Fold corner in towards middle
4. Fold again towards middle

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Word Art

This is a fun, imaginative exercise that can be done as a family activity or on your own.

1. When doing it as a family, ask everyone to jot down several things they like or admire about each family member. The more words or phrases (5 to 10), the better. If doing it for yourself, write down what you like best about being you.
2. Be thoughtful so it doesn't become too silly or superficial. Words like "kind" "big heart" and "selfless" are meaningful.
3. Compile all the compliments about each individual by going online to WordArt.com, a free, simple-to-navigate site for creating word clouds. Click on "Create Now" to begin. First, remove the default words ("word," "cloud" and "art") in the "Filter" column by clicking on each word and hitting the "Remove" button. You'll replace these default words with phrases written about a family member or yourself.
4. In the "New Word" text box, type a family member's name or your own. (You'll want the name to be first, or at the top, so it will be in the center of the word cloud.) After typing the name, use the "Tab" key to get a "New Word" text box and then type a word/phrase about the individual. Hit Tab again for a new text box and repeat until you've listed every word/phrase that was written to describe yourself or a family member.
5. Play around with size, shape, layout, color and font options until you have something that best reflects your taste or the personality of the individual. Then click "Visualize" to see the list of words transform into a word cloud. (The site includes tutorials, if needed).
6. When you're satisfied with how it looks on screen, print, frame and hang the word cloud on your bedroom wall or door as a reminder of all your strengths and positive qualities.

More creative self-care activities online include...

Mandala Maker

<http://mandalamaker.online>

Find your inner artist and ease your anxiety by creating funky abstract and geometric designs.

Drawing

<http://weavesilk.com/>

Forget all your woes and use your feelings to create awesome, mind-blowing digital art.

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Finding Clarity and Calm with Journaling

Journals are like power tools for your life. They help you cut through your emotions so you can make good decisions and reach your goals. The process of journaling can improve your mood, decrease stress, help you solve problems without overthinking them, boost your self-confidence and focus your goals. Start today with help from any of these activities!

88 Journal Topics

When it comes to journaling, don't over think it. Start from where you are and put on paper whatever comes into your mind. Be honest. Record what you think and feel, not what you believe you ought to think and feel. Trust your flow, no matter what comes out.

A journal has nothing to do with good writing, grammar or spelling, and everything to do with self-exploration. The journal is simply a tool. Whether you use words or artwork, avoid being perfect, rewriting, erasing, editing, or being critical of what you write. Just be yourself!

Pick a topic and write as much or little as you want that day. For an online version of this list which you can customize and print, visit: <https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/tip-88-journal-topics.aspx>

- Things I'm Grateful For
- Ways I can take care of myself
- Things I'm good at
- Things I like about myself
- Goals for the next week
- Goals for the next month
- Goals for the year
- Goals for my life
- Questions I want answered
- Ways I sabotage myself
- How to improve my life
- Things I've accomplished
- Things I'm stressed about
- Things I'd do if I had time

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88 Journal Topics (*continued*)

- Things I need vs. things I want
- What I want in a relationship
- What I have to offer in a relationship
- Fears I am having right now
- Things that scare me
- Reasons to save money
- Things I miss
- Ways I can make money
- Ways to make a difference
- Jobs/careers I'd like to have
- Things I would do if I were a multimillionaire
- Things I believe in
- Qualities I am proud of
- Things I value in life
- Ways I help others
- Things that turn me off
- Places I would like to visit
- Things I find hard to share
- Things I'm disappointed about
- Ways I can control my anger
- Ways I can be a better friend
- Things I love
- People I love
- Places I love
- Things to do to help me feel better
- Ways to connect with nature
- Skills I have
- Feelings I am having right now
- Things my parents say to me
- Things I wish my parents would say to me
- Ways in which I'm generous
- Things I want to do
- Things I'd like to learn
- Ways to be more productive
- Ways to be more organized
- Gifts I would like to give
- Favorite movies
- Things I'd like to learn from my grandparent
- Things I'd like to hear
- Things I want my child to know about me some day
- What would I do if someone gave me \$1,000
- Words that describe me
- Coping skills that I use
- Decisions I made that turned out well
- Expectations others have of me
- Expectations I have of myself
- Favorite quotes or bible verses

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88 Journal Topics (*continued*)

- Things I'd save if my house was on fire
- Things I want to tell my mother
- Things I want to tell my father
- Excuses I make for myself
- Things I need/want to control
- Fears I have about giving up control
- Who to turn to if I need help
- Answered prayers
- People I'd like to meet
- Favorite books
- People I admire
- Tasks I've been procrastinating
- Memories from my past
- Things that inspire me
- Things I haven't finished
- Things I'm glad I've done
- Things I'll never do again
- Rules to live by
- Concerts I would like to attend
- People to forgive
- People I want to forgive me
- Things to forgive myself for
- Ways to be healthier
- Things that make me cry
- Things that make me laugh
- Songs that help me feel better
- Lessons I have learned

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How to Journal

Write about the things that will help you with making sense of your life. Remember, there is no right way to complete a journal. You may want to write more about your feelings, the events of your day or your goals for the future. Whatever topic you choose, write with an open heart. Get creative! Experiment with how and what you write. Again, there is no right way – only what fits for you.

- Try making a Visual/Art Journal. Some people will draw a picture or doodle as their only daily entry. Others like to add art to their writing. Get out the markers, paint, photos, and stickers. You can even combine things like ticket stubs, or magazine pictures to make collages.
- Favorite song lyrics, quotes and Bible verses can be used to inspire your entries. You may try composing your own poems or songs.
- Use your journal to make lists, goals or work out decisions.
- Tell a story.
- Allow yourself to vent/write out your strong feelings as a release and then shred them right away. This will give you a chance to get your feelings out without harming anyone or making anyone feel bad. However, while you are writing you may find that your feelings become less intense and easier to manage.
- When your thoughts seem overwhelming to the point that you are not able to concentrate enough to write, just write a single sentence or word. Trace the letters and doodle around them until your feelings calm down.
- Try writing “un-mailed” letters (to express feelings or to communicate with others by reading them aloud).
- Write as if you are having a conversation with the journal itself or with another person.
- Write your thoughts in cursive, or with your non-dominant hand. While the analytical side of your brain is busy thinking about the proper way to write the letters, your creative side is free to come up with all sorts of ideas and dreams.

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How to Journal *(continued)*

However you decide to journal, make it fun. This is not an assignment, rather something that you “get to do.” You may discover things that you never would have known, if you hadn’t taken the time to reflect on your experiences and beliefs.

And whether you decide to review your entries as you go or opt to do it later, take the time to go back and re-read your journal occasionally to see your progress.

To get started, find a notebook or app that you like. Decide a time when journaling will be most optimal for you. Then just start writing. Let your feelings go. Stick with it!

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What Are Your Strengths and Outstanding Qualities?



MY JOURNAL PAGE

Today's Date



➤ What was good about today?

➤ What went bad?

How did it make you feel?

➤ Who did something nice for me/what was it?



Goals For Tomorrow:

[1.]

[2.]

[3.]

YOUR Life YOUR Voice

www.yourlifeyourvoice.org

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Brain Dump

Write out the ideas, dreams, fears, worries, hopes, desires and “projects” that are swimming around in your head. This will allow your brain to release those jumbled thoughts. They will be safe on the paper, and your brain doesn’t need to keep them swirling about, replaying them so you don’t forget them. Writing out your thoughts will give your brain a rest. It will clear your mind so you can focus on one task at a time.

Steps to make your brain dump successful...

Write

1. Write down everything that is swirling about. This is not the time for judgement. Every thought is okay. There are no bad thoughts or good thoughts. No smart thoughts or dumb thoughts.
2. Just write, don’t slow down for neatness or spelling.
3. If your thoughts are so jumbled that you’re not sure where to start, try to start with a category prompt and write out as many things as you can think of:
 - Things that you need to do
 - Things that scare you
 - Things that you feel angry about
 - Things that make you sad
 - Goals you have for today
 - Goals you have for next week
 - Goals you have for next year
 - Things that bum you out

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Sort

1. Circle the things that encourage you.
2. Put a square around the things that you need to do today.
3. Cross out the thoughts that you're able to release, or you don't need.
4. Underline the things that you need to talk to someone about. This could include problems that you are not sure how to handle on your own, intrusive thoughts that could harm you, or hurt feelings you have from a stressed relationship.

Review

1. Take a couple of minutes to mindfully think about the circled items. Be grateful for the things that encouraged you today.
2. Number the square items so you know what you will do first.
3. If the things that you crossed out come back to your mind, firmly (and out loud if you need to) tell them, "I can't spend time thinking about you, today is not your day."
4. Figure out who you can talk to about your underlined items. If you are not sure who to turn to, call the Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-3000) and talk to a caring counselor.

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The Attitude of Gratitude

It can be really tough to think of things you are grateful for when everything in life seems to be going wrong. Countless studies show that for many people, finding a bit of thankfulness each day can actually increase happiness levels and decrease depression. By developing an Attitude of Gratitude, you can feel more fulfilled and joyful each day.

So how do we develop an Attitude of Gratitude?

- 1. Count Your Blessings:** Make a list of all the ways you are blessed. Don't just think about the blessings in your head, actually write and count them. Start with the big things and work towards smaller things.
- 2. A-B-C List:** If you are struggling to think of things you are thankful for, use the alphabet as a guide. Go down each letter and come up with a blessing for each one.

A- animals

B- bed

C- chocolate

.....

Y- your youth (your whole life is ahead of you!)

Z- zoo

- 3. Three Things:** Think of three things you are grateful for each day. You might choose something that is a constant in your life, something specific to that day, or something as simple as the sun shining that day.
- 4. Gratitude Journal:** Start a journal to keep track of all the things you are grateful for. During tough times, go back and read through your previous entries and focus on the blessings you indeed have.
- 5. Be Grateful for Yourself:** Take the time to recognize all the unique things that make you you! Think of the things you have accomplished (big or small), your talents, and people who you may have helped because you stayed true to yourself.

Once you can appreciate yourself, your ability to see things more positively will grow.

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More online journaling activities include...

Your Blessing's List

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/JournalPages/BlessingsList.pdf>

When things are going wrong, remember what's going right.

What about Me?

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/JournalPages/whataboutme.pdf>

Find your truth by taking an honest look at yourself.

Jar of Sunshine

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/JournalPages/Jar-Of-Sunshine.pdf>

Light up your life when things seem dreary and gray.

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Gain Peace by Staying Present and Practicing Mindfulness

Staying present and focusing on the “here and now” can provide comfort when everything else in life seems out of control. Use these exercises to ease your anxieties and find the inner peace you deserve.

Just Park It

How a lesson learned in Driver’s Ed is valuable for your life!

If you become distracted while driving your car, pulling over to take care of the issue is likely the safest thing you can do. Whether you need to make a phone call, look at a map, or stop for a bathroom break – take care of your present needs before you resume driving to your destination.

Pulling over to take care of the distraction doesn’t prevent you from getting to where you are going, it just helps you get there safely.

The same is true for life. There will be times when things seem overwhelming, emotional or distracting, and you may need to “park it” for a moment and take a break. In life, taking a break to regroup not only allows you to deal with any problems that are distracting you, but it also gives you time to take care of yourself. Pausing for a bit to deal with issues doesn’t mean you are signaling defeat, it’s simply part of the journey.

Next time an emotion or problem distracts you from your goals, don’t be frustrated with yourself or give up. Instead, pull over, park your car and take a deep breath. Identify your feelings, address your needs and ask for help if you need it. After you have taken care of the distraction, you can continue on to your destination.

You are in charge. You are the driver of your life. You decide when you need a break. Even if you have to adjust your timeline, you really haven’t lost anything. Instead, you made a smart decision that will help you stay safe and successfully reach your goal.

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Guided Imagery (or Daydreaming with a Purpose)

When dealing with anxiety or stress, a person can start to feel overwhelmed to the point that it affects different aspects of life, such as sleep, mood or the ability to focus. Guided imagery, also known as visualization, can be used as a stress management or a grounding technique.

1. Get comfortable on a couch, chair, your bed or somewhere you can relax.
2. Start out with some deep breathing to help calm your mind and body. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. If you're struggling to slow your breathing, try breathing in for three seconds, holding it for three seconds, and breathing out for three seconds.
3. Picture your happy place in your mind. This can be any place that you genuinely enjoy being or a place that brings you peace. (Locations might include the beach, the park, a mountain, football field, basketball court, a farm, a church, a garden or a fictional place.)
4. Once you have your happy place in your head, you're going to engage your senses and identify everything that you can see, hear, smell, touch and taste. Get into as much detail as you can. The more specific you get the more focused you get.

Here is a short example:

Imagine yourself sitting on the beach at the lake. You look up, and the sun warms your face. You can see the waves in the water, the clouds in the sky, the people and boats all around you. You can hear the laughter of kids playing, the sound of the wind blowing things around you, and the sound of the boats driving around in the distance. The sun is warm on your skin, and you can feel the sand between your toes. The smell of sunscreen, nature and the water are in the air. You can even imagine tasting your favorite snack or drink.

The goal of guided imagery is to relax both your mind and body, and to promote positive thinking. Think of it as daydreaming with a purpose. An added benefit is that it can be done anywhere and at any time you feel the need to center yourself and be present in the moment.

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10 Ways to Stay Grounded

If you're struggling with anxiety or having flashbacks to painful memories, try an exercise called "grounding" to help you stay calm.

Grounding involves becoming more aware of where you are in the moment, creating a safe place in your mind and calming your emotions. There are lots of ways to try grounding. Here are several you can try to help you get started:

- 1.** Look around the room that you are in. Name the objects in the room aloud or in your head. You can even walk around the room and pick them up or touch them if it helps keep you calm.
- 2.** Start moving. Exercise, stretch, or take a walk or go running. Pay attention to your surroundings – objects, smells and temperatures.
- 3.** Keep a "worry stone" in your pocket. Rub on it if you find yourself becoming tense and focus on something that will help keep you calm. This is also a discreet way to manage anxiety in public.
- 4.** Count to 50 or recite the alphabet very slowly. Sing a song (out loud or in your head), recite a poem, personal mantra or prayer.
- 5.** Start a game of "categories." Choose a category and list off as many things as possible in that category. Some ideas: vacation destinations, words that start with the letter "B," celebrities, U.S. states or your favorite things.
- 6.** Look at a picture of people who care about you or a place that has meaning. Observe the details in the picture, connect with positive feelings you may have had in that moment.
- 7.** Run your hands under cool water, hold a cool washcloth, or take a shower or bath.
- 8.** Listen to music that helps you to calm down or that reminds you of something positive.
- 9.** Wrap yourself in a favorite blanket; hold a stuffed animal, pillow or other comfort object.
- 10.** Recognize your current place and time. Repeat to yourself where you are, the day and date, the season, your name, your birthdate, your age, etc.

As you go through this process, try to push away any negative thoughts that enter your mind. If one method doesn't work, move on to another. It is also helpful to practice grounding when you are not feeling anxious, so you're better prepared to stay calm when the anxiety starts creeping up again.

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Just Breathe

Everyone says it... 'Just breathe, you will feel better.' What do they mean? How is breathing going to help? You are upset. You breathe every day. In fact, you are breathing right now, and it doesn't seem to be helping... you're still freaked out!

When you focus on your breathing, it forces your stressors or anxiety to take a back seat. Mindful breathing is a totally different form of breathing. It can help you get your thoughts back on track and ultimately feel better. Some people use mindful breathing only when they are stressed, but others find it to be a great way to relax and practice it on a regular basis.

Here are some reasons why you might want to try mindful breathing:

1. It makes way for clear thinking and increases creativity.
2. Thinking about your breathing helps to release tension. When your tension is reduced, your energy levels automatically increase.
3. It helps your body detoxify – your immune and digestive systems will thank you.
4. Working on your breathing helps to reduce anxiety. With fewer anxious thoughts, you might even be able to study and sleep better.
5. It can help improve relationships. It allows you to think before you speak, and we could all benefit from that.

So how do you do it? There are actually many techniques, so pick one that works best for you.

Basic:

- Inhale deeply through your nose
- Hold the air in for three counts
- Exhale through mouth pushing all the air out
- Repeat

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Alternate Nostril Breathing:

(Nadi Shodhana)

- Place your finger along the side of your nose, closing one nostril
- Inhale
- Move your finger to the other side of your nose, closing the other nostril
- Exhale

(This type of breathing is well known for helping to increase mental awareness. It may not be the best thing to do during the middle of class, but you could try it in your room while studying for a big test.)

Short Burst Breathing:

- Inhale long and slow through your nose
- Gently exhale through your mouth, releasing short bursts of air
- Repeat

Progressive Relaxation:

- Breathe in and tense your toes, breathe out while you relax your toes.
- Work your way up your legs, and on through your whole body, tensing and relaxing all your muscles.

“Happy Place” Breathing:

Picture yourself in a happy place, a place where you enjoy being. Think about all the things that you like and then engage all of your senses: the smells, the temperature, the way the air feels, the sounds that you hear. Picturing yourself breathing the air in your happy place can allow you to reset your focus and give you a break from your current situation.

The next time you feel stressed, give one of these breathing exercises a try. It just might help you gain the perspective you need.

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More online mindfulness resources...

Combat Your Covid Anxiety

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/11-Ways-To-Combat-COVID-Anxiety.aspx>

Constant worry and anxiety are unwelcome and unhealthy. Learn how to cope with uncomfortable emotions.

Be Kind to Yourself

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/Be-Kind-to-Yourself.aspx>

See how easy it is to practice self-kindness and why you need to start now.

Know Your Emotional Timeline

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/emotional-timeline.aspx>

Are you stuck on the past or obsessed about the future?

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Stress-Busting, Attitude-Adjusting Exercises

Life would be so much easier if we could simply wish our worries away and then, poof, they're gone. Unfortunately, nothing is ever that simple. But these exercises are the next best thing. They're like washing your hands, but for the mind. Use them to get relief from fear, anger and frustration.

Managing Your Stress

When you start to feel overwhelmed, try taking a preventive approach to working through your stress rather than drowning in it.

- **Take breaks:** Break up a task by walking away and relaxing for a few minutes.
- **Socialize:** Spend time with friends and family; being around people is a good distraction.
- **Exercise:** Any kind of physical activity is great for your brain and your body.
- **Start a journal or diary:** Pour your heart out; your diary won't judge you.
- **Prayer:** Praying puts you in touch with a higher power and can be a source of support and strength.
- **Breathing exercises:** Some people remember it like this – “good air” in through the nose, “bad air” out through the mouth.
- **Listen to music:** It's a good way to work through your feelings and clear your mind.
- **Hobbies:** Creative outlets and interests help you to express yourself and take your mind off worries.
- **Visual imagery:** Identify your “happy place” and imagine yourself there.
- **Meditation:** Deep meditation will change your heart rate, your breathing and even your brain chemistry – it helps settle the mind and soothe the spirit.

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- **Pet therapy:** Animals can be excellent mood boosters.
- **Retail therapy/shopping:** Go to the mall or shop online. You don't even have to buy anything.
- **Aromatherapy:** An air freshener or scented candle can help create a calm and positive atmosphere.
- **Laughter:** Find something that makes you laugh, or at least smile!

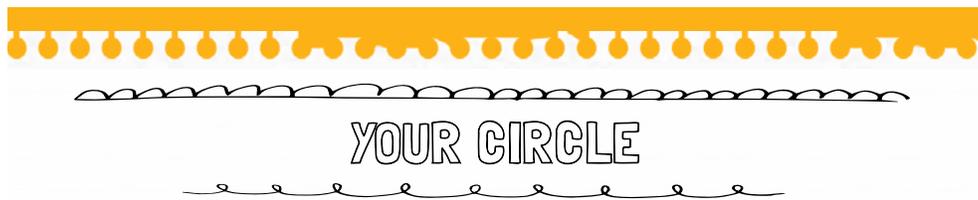
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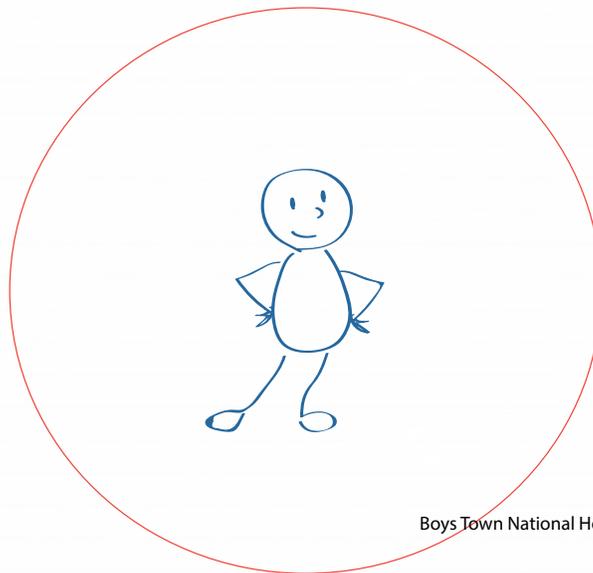
My Stress Circle of Support

Before things get stressful, it's important to map out and identify who you're going to go to for help if you're not able to keep yourself safe or if you just need some extra support. Knowing who to talk to ahead of your stressful time allows you to get immediate support when you need it most.

Once you have mapped out your circle of support, put it in a special place that's handy for you.



Before things get stressful, it is important to map out who you are going to go to for help if you are not able to keep yourself safe or if you just need some extra support. Knowing who to talk to ahead of your stressful time allows you to get immediate support when you need it most.



Boys Town National Hotline - 1-800-448-3000



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One Step at a Time

Have you ever been so completely overwhelmed with the things you need to get done, that you don't even know where to start? Maybe you have tried to make a to-do list in order to attempt to get organized, but some of those tasks just never seem to get done.

Try breaking some of the big tasks down into smaller steps. Maybe you are overwhelmed with your homework and school activities. Rather than shutting down, break your tasks up to make them more manageable, like this...

Multiple school assignments:

- Make a list of your assignments.
- Put due dates on a calendar.
- Prioritize by due date or get the easiest assignments out of the way first.
- Schedule time to get the work done and stick to the schedule.
- Work on multiple assignments in one sitting by only doing part of each.
- Check tasks off the list.

Break assignments into smaller portions:

- Do a portion of assigned questions each night rather than all at once.
- Do one portion of a research paper each night: research the topic, develop an outline, and write one section at a time.
- List each portion of assignment separately so you can mark them off as you go (i.e. Algebra problems 1-10, Algebra problems 11-18).

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Get the idea? This same principle can work with your life goals, and even with your relationships. Maybe you're frustrated with your relationship with Mom or Dad. "Fixing your relationship" is a pretty lofty goal and would be hard to know where to start, so think about what some steps might be to work toward that goal. You might come up with a list like this one...

Get Along with Parents:

- Be home on time.
- Check in and let your parents know where you are.
- Say please and thanks.
- Pick up after yourself.
- Try to use a pleasant tone of voice.
- Don't argue or talk back.
- Get up for school in the morning on your own.
- Give a compliment.
- Do a chore without being asked.

Focusing on doing the little things can help you accomplish bigger tasks and goals in your life. Get out a notebook or use a notes app on your phone and try this approach the next time you're overwhelmed with a long list of things you need to do!

Drop the Bag of Bricks

Imagine if someone gave you a bag filled with 50 pounds of bricks and told you to carry it around all day. How would you feel after five minutes of carrying the bag? Ten minutes? Two hours? Ten hours?

At first you would probably be fine, perhaps walking a little slower than usual, but you'd be able to handle the load. As the day carried on, however, your back would start to hurt, blisters would begin forming on your shoulders, and your legs would start to shake. By the end of the day you would most likely not be able to stand, completely paralyzed by the weight of the bag that you carry. Imagine if you had to carry this bag for an entire week? A month? How about for a year?

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Breaking Under the Load

Most people wouldn't consider carrying around a bag full of bricks for any amount of time. Yet how many people carry around their problems, thinking about them hour after hour, day after day, year after year? The more a person carries around their worries, the more likely their bodies and minds will break under the load. So if this is something that you do regularly, how do you fix it? How do you take care of yourself so you aren't carrying your problems around with you 24 hours a day?

The Solution

The solution is simple, and it's the same advice you would give someone struggling to carry a bag of bricks: Put the bag down.

How do you do that? Every day, you simply take one hour to relax or do something special for yourself. Set a timer if you must! Maybe this is the hour before you go to bed, or as soon as you get home from school or work. The important thing is that you set aside time every day for yourself. It's okay to stop doing chores, to put down homework, to not worry about this friendship or that relationship. Not only is it okay, it's necessary to remaining balanced. For your own sake, make sure you remember to put the bag down every single day of your life!

So today, PUT THE BAG DOWN for a while and allow yourself time to relax and just have fun!

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES



Avoid a Stressful Lifestyle

We all know that too much stress is bad for you, but how do you avoid it? The path to a more stress-free life might be easier to find than you think...

- Strive to do your best.
- Stay out of pointless drama. When you hear someone spreading rumors or gossip try to head the other way.
- Eat right.
- Manage your time. Be realistic on how long it takes you to get ready in the morning. If you're not sure, time yourself. Set your alarm the night before. Give yourself time to get ready without rushing around and being late.
- Learn to be assertive.
- Work with others. In the adult business world this is called being collaborative. It's an important skill for all ages, on the playground and in the board room.
- Accept the things you cannot change. So you're really looking forward to an outdoor activity this weekend, but the weather forecast keeps changing. You can't change the weather, but you can hope for the best – and have a back-up plan just in case!
- Accept criticism. This means that you can learn from the pointers that your teacher gives you or your coach's suggestions on how you can improve.
- Respect diversity. There are many people in the world, and we can learn valuable lessons from their wisdom and experiences.
- Take control of the way you look at things. Is the glass half-empty or half-full? When things get bad, look at the bright side or view it as an opportunity. It will give you the courage and hope to keep moving forward.

A final tip for avoiding a stressful life: Avoid using substances or other negative ways of coping with your stress. When people are stressed out and overwhelmed, they will sometimes turn to quick (and ultimately negative) ways to cope. These things may provide temporary relief but, in the end, they usually create more stress and bigger problems. Instead, focus on positive coping skills and self-care to get lasting relief from the stress you're facing.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES



20 Questions

Life can feel impossible sometimes. Things can get so overwhelming that you might want to crawl into your bed and never leave the safety of your covers. Or maybe your thoughts are more serious, and you've considered ending your life to escape your situation. No matter what you are going through, just know that you can get through this.

Here are 20 questions to ask yourself if you are feeling hopeless, helpless, or just down in the dumps.

- 1.** Did you take a shower today? If you have not bathed yourself in the past 24 hours, go do it right now.
- 2.** Have you eaten anything healthy in the past few hours? Candy bars and soda don't cut it. Go eat something that can give your body healthy energy, like a banana, a handful of nuts or a piece of cheese.
- 3.** Have you had any water to drink in the past hour? Being dehydrated can make anyone feel terrible. Go drink some water.
- 4.** Did you get enough sleep last night? If not, take a nap. Go to bed an hour or two earlier tonight. Sleep is critically important for good mental health, so make sure you're getting enough on a daily basis.
- 5.** Have you gone on a walk in the past 24 hours? Not just a walk to the bathroom or fridge, but a walk that lasts around 30 minutes. Take a stroll around the block or find a trail to follow.
- 6.** Is it daytime, and are you dressed? Take off your pajamas and get cleaned up. Wear something that you really like, such as a dress, nice shirt or your favorite pair of shoes. Put on make-up. Shave.
- 7.** Is it nighttime, and you can't sleep? Go get your pajamas on. Fill your bed up with blankets, pillows or stuffed animals. Put all electronics away, and then lay down with your eyes closed for 15 minutes. It might help to turn on a noise machine, fan or an hour-long YouTube video with the sound of rain falling.
- 8.** Do you feel unproductive? Think of a small thing you can do today (i.e. make your bed, respond to an email, fold a load of clean laundry, do a homework assignment). Set a timer for how long you think it should take, then see if you can beat your guess. The timer will keep you motivated and make the task slightly more fun.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES



- 9.** Any recent medication changes? If you've been put on (or taken off) of a medication, missed a dose, or have been switched to a generic brand, this can really throw your body and mind for a loop. Wait a few days and see if things improve, but if they do not, give your doctor a call and let them know.
- 10.** Do you feel unattractive? Go back to question 6, then take a selfie. Be your own best friend and identify at least two things from the picture that you like about yourself.
- 11.** Did you sing today or dance today? If not, turn on a song you know by heart, move to music and sing at the top of your lungs.
- 12.** Do you feel frozen by a major decision you have to make? Put your major decision on the backburner for a few hours and focus on the tasks you need to accomplish for the day. Give yourself permission not to think about the decision while you work on the things you need to get done. At the end of the day, jot down your thoughts about your decision. Repeat this process until things become clear to you. The right decision will come to you at the right time.
- 13.** Have you hugged someone recently? If not, it's time to go approach a friend, parent, sibling or even your pet to get a hug. You may be surprised at how some basic physical contact can turn even the worst day around.
- 14.** Have you given someone a compliment in the past 24 hours? If not, go do it. This could be on social media or in person. Look for a quality that you admire and then let them know.
- 15.** Do your friends know what you're going through? If not, call them right now and tell them. It's important that you let other people know how you're feeling.
- 16.** Are you focused forward, or do you dwell on the past? Past events and things in this moment may be painful – but what about in a month, a year, five years? You never know what wonderful things may be around the corner for you. Allow yourself to hope and dream; set goals and look at the road ahead instead of your rearview mirror.
- 17.** When is the last time you've told your story? It's important to write or talk about what you have been through. Write about your journey in a journal or via a blog.
- 18.** Have you exhausted yourself lately – physically, socially, emotionally or intellectually? Giving a lot of yourself to any activity can take a toll that might last for a few days. Think of yourself as a battery – you need time to recharge after you've used up your energy. Be gentle with yourself and take time to recoup. Maybe that looks like watching a funny movie, spending time alone or sleeping a few extra hours this week.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES



- 19.** Have you waited a week? When life starts to get you down, it's easy to feel like things have always been this way, even when that's not true. Today, it's important that you make a commitment to keep yourself going for a week, whatever it takes. If you are still feeling this way seven days from now, get help from someone you trust. You deserve to feel better and there is a lot of help out there for you. Never give up.
- 20.** Have you talked to a counselor recently? If you do not have a counselor, give one of ours a call (for free!): 1-800-448-3000. If you have a counselor, make an appointment and talk about what's going on in your life.

Adapted from: Sinope, "Everything is Awful and I'm Not Okay: Questions to Ask Before Giving Up."

More stress-busting resources...

11 apps and online tools

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/11-Stress-Busting-Apps.aspx>

Free online apps and tools to make you feel better, stronger, happier and healthier!

Step on the Stress Scale

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/JournalPages/How-I-Deal-with-My-Stress-Scale.pdf>

This scale will help you identify how you have been dealing with stress in your life.

99 Coping Strategies

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/JournalPages/99-Coping-Skills-Poster.pdf>

Increase your resiliency while reducing your anxiety. Choose the ones that work best for you!

Additional self-care strategies and other help is available at www.yourlifeyourvoice.org. You can even download an interactive mood app to your favorite mobile device. Animated emoticons will help you identify your mood and track your feelings. It's fun and free! And don't forget – the **Boys Town National Hotline is available to you 24/7. A caring voice will always be at the end of the line: 1-800-448-3000.**