



# Coping with a Crisis

**This handout offers more than 100 tips about how to cope during a crisis or a hard time in your life.**

**Try some and use the ones that work well for you.**

## **Distract Yourself**

Doing an activity or thinking about something else may help. See if any of these tips work for you.

### *Other Thoughts*

- Count to 10.
- Count how many colors are in a painting or some other object.
- Work puzzles.
- Watch TV.
- Read.

### *Opposite Emotions*

Be sure what you try creates different emotions than the ones you are feeling:

- Read emotional books, stories, or old letters.
- Go to emotional movies – watch scary movies or comedies.
- Listen to emotional music, sacred music, marching songs, or songs like “I am Woman” by Helen Reddy.
- Read joke books.
- Listen to funny CDs.
- Go to a store and read funny greeting cards.

### *Intense Sensations*

- Hold ice in your hand.
- Squeeze a rubber ball very hard.
- Stand under a very hard and hot shower.
- Listen to very loud music.

- Have sex.
- Put a rubber band on your wrist – pull on it and then let go.

### *Activities*

- Walk or do other exercise.
- Do one of your favorite hobbies.
- Clean the house.
- Go to events.
- Call or go see a friend.
- Play computer games or pinball.
- Work, play or watch sports.
- Go out for a meal, decaf coffee, or tea.
- Go fishing.
- Chop wood.
- Work in the garden.

### *Contributing*

- Do volunteer work.
- Give something to someone else.
- Make something nice for someone else.
- Do a surprising, thoughtful thing.

### *Leaving*

- Walk away from the situation for a while. Leave the situation mentally. Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation.

### *Blocking*

- Refuse to think about the painful aspects of the situation.
- Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while.

## **Self-Soothe**

### *Encourage Yourself*

- Cheerlead yourself. Repeat over and over: “I can stand it,” “It won’t last forever,” “I will make it out of this,” “I’m doing the best I can.”

### *Treat Yourself Gently and Kindly*

- Take a bubble bath.
- Light candles.

- Put clean sheets on your bed.
- Treat yourself to a meal at your favorite restaurant.
- Have a soothing drink such as tea or hot chocolate (not alcohol).
- Call a friend or relative.

***Create More Beauty in Your life***

- Buy something you can afford for yourself, such as 1 flower.
- Make an area in a room pretty.
- Go to an art museum.

***Soothe Yourself with Smells You Enjoy***

- Use perfume, lotion, air spray, lemon oil, or potpourri.
- Boil cinnamon.
- Bake bread, cookies, pie, or cake.

***Pray or Meditate***

- Open your heart to a supreme being, greater wisdom, God, or your own wise self. Ask for strength to bear the pain in this moment. Turn things over to God or a higher being.

***Look for Meanings***

- Find some purpose, meaning, or value in the pain.
- Remember, listen to, and read about spiritual values.

***Use Positive Thinking***

- Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find. Repeat them over and over in your mind. Make lemonade out of lemons.

***Use Comparison***

- Compare yourself to people coping the same as you or less well than you. Compare yourself to those less fortunate than you.
- Watch soap operas.
- Read about disasters or others' suffering.

**Change Your Body Responses**

- Try progressive muscle relaxing.
- Listen to a relaxation tape.
- Exercise hard.
- Drink warm milk.
- Get a massage.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

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- Get in a tub filled with very cold or very warm water and stay in until the water is tepid.
- Breathe deeply.
- Half smile.
- Change your facial expression.

### Use Imagery

- Imagine very relaxing scenes.
- Imagine everything going well.
- Imagine coping well.
- Make up a fantasy world that is calming and beautiful. Let your mind go with it.

### Focus

- Focus your entire attention only on what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in. Put your mind in the present.
- Focus all of your attention on physical sensations that go along with non-mental tasks such as walking, washing, or fixing something.

### Think About the Pros and Cons

- Focus on long-term goals and the light at the end of the tunnel. Recall times when pain has ended.
- Think of the positive outcomes of tolerating the distress.
- Imagine how good you will feel if you achieve your goals, if you do not act on impulse.
- Think of all the negative outcomes of **NOT** tolerating your current distress. Think about what has happened in the past when you have acted on impulse to escape the moment.

This material is adapted from *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder* by Marsha Linehan, copyright The Guilford Press.

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