

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH 2021



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TOOLS²THRIVE OUTREACH TOOLKIT



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FOREWORD

During the past year, we at Mental Health America have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the numbers of people experiencing mental health problems. In November 2020, the CDC reported that 44 percent of us were dealing with either depression or anxiety. While historically data shows us that 1 in 5 adults will experience a mental health problem, these days it certainly feels like it's 5 in 5.

Nearly 3 million people have taken an MHA mental health screening during the past twelve months. A million were experiencing depression and hundreds of thousands more were experiencing either anxiety or psychosis. Young people are bearing the brunt of the pandemic, but these mental health impacts cross all generations.

But let us not only focus on dark facts. Let's shine a little light in the darkness.

This year's Mental Health Month toolkit – based once more on the theme of Tools 2 Thrive (especially during a pandemic) – will help us do just that.

Six topics comprise the toolkit – Adapting After Trauma and Stress, Processing Big Changes, Getting Out of Thinking Traps, Radical Acceptance, Taking Time for Yourself, and Dealing with Anger and Frustration. Together, these tools help us develop and employ the resiliency that will take us to brighter days.

When MHA started Mental Health Month in 1949, we did so to communicate the importance of mental health to overall health. Our insights about the factors that lead to mental health for all – including embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all we do – have grown since then. There are things we must do to change the world around us. And there are things we can do for ourselves along the way.

This year, thousands will celebrate this month by using this toolkit. Thank you for joining the effort. Thank you for doing your part to promote mental health for all. And thank you for taking care of your own mental health needs, too.

Together, we live and thrive.



Paul Gionfriddo
President and CEO



RESOURCES

RESOURCES FROM MHA:

ADAPTING AFTER TRAUMA AND STRESS

Podcasts:

- [Past Trauma Affects My Relationships](#)
- [I'm Exhausted from Explaining My Trauma](#)

Article:

- [Is All Trauma the Same?](#)

Webinars:

- [Protective Factors for Healing From Trauma In BIPOC Communities](#)
- [Owning Your Feelings & Moving Through Emotional Discomfort](#)

PROCESSING BIG CHANGES

Podcasts:

- [Dealing with Change](#)
- [I Don't Want to Change](#)

GETTING OUT OF THINKING TRAPS

Podcasts:

- [Why Am I So Hard on Myself](#)
- [Stopping Stupid Thoughts](#)

Webinar:

- [Strategies for Healthy Emotion Regulation During Uncertain Times](#)

PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Podcast:

- [Does Being Positive Make You Happy?](#)

TAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF/SELF-CARE

Podcasts:

- [How Do I Love Myself](#)
- [How Do I Find Balance in My Life](#)

Articles:

- [6 Ways to Practice Self-Compassion](#)
- [8 of the Best Meditation Apps](#)

Webinar:

- [Cultivating Gratitude To Support Wellbeing](#)

Worksheets:

- [Self-Care Checkup](#)
- [Daily Wellness Chart](#)
- [Guided Journal](#)

DEALING WITH ANGER AND FRUSTRATION

Podcasts:

- [I Get Mad at Little Things](#)
- [How to Tell Someone You're Mad](#)
- [I'm Really Angry at the World](#)

COVID-19

A wealth of articles, webinars, blogs, and podcasts about how to deal with the mental health struggles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic can be found at mhanational.org/covid19.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Resources mentioned below come from MHA's trusted partners, supporters, and associate members.

BetterHelp: BetterHelp is an online counseling platform that matches you with a licensed therapist who you can video call, live chat, or exchange messages with. Check out their article: [What Is Radical Acceptance And How Can It Help Me? Learn How To Use Radical Acceptance To Your Advantage](#)

Brightline: Brightline is the first comprehensive behavioral health solution designed to support kids, teens, and parents across a range of common family challenges.

ChoicesInRecovery.com: Support and information for people with Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective, and Bipolar Disorder and their caregivers, including [Strategies for Success](#) that can be used daily by people living with mental health conditions.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Clinic at Rutgers University (DBT-RU): DBT-RU is a research and training clinic that provides comprehensive Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) services to individuals in the community. Be sure to watch their [Radical Acceptance](#) video.

DRK Beauty: DRK Beauty is a well-being and mental health digital platform that helps womxn of color discover and craft their own unique well-being journey. We blend a powerful mix of community, content, programming, and services that speaks to the psychological, spiritual, and physical needs of our community, ultimately empowering them to blossom, all through a convenient app.

Equoo: Equoo is a game that teaches individuals psychological skills in a fun and captivating way to deal with emotional and mental stressors in a healthy and productive fashion.

Happify: Happify brings you effective tools and programs (via the web and an app) to help you take control of your feelings and thoughts using proven techniques developed by leading scientists and experts who've been studying evidence-based interventions in the fields of positive psychology, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy. Check out their video, [How to Defeat Negative Thinking](#).

IDONTMIND: IDONTMIND is a mental health awareness campaign and lifestyle brand working to get people talking about their minds and to generate positive messaging about mental health. Check out their [online journal](#) for articles on all things mental health.

Lyf: Lyf is a social media app where users share highly personal aspects of themselves without the fear of judgment. Lyf users receive support during some of their most grueling, challenging, confronting or even "embarrassing" stages of their lives from other people who have no preconceptions about their fellow Lyfers. Lyfers have the opportunity to connect with and chat to others on the same life paths or journeys; whether it's a struggle or celebration, in Lyf, you aren't alone.

Make Sure Your Friends Are Okay: Through merchandise and social media, Make Sure Your Are Okay is building a community of like-minded people who want to help us get the world talking.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): NCTSN was created to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events. Be sure to check out their [Pause, Reset, Nourish \(PRN\) to Promote Wellbeing](#) handout.

notOK App: The notOK App® is a free app that takes the guesswork out of asking for help when you're feeling vulnerable.

OPEN Mental Health: Stories and advice from people who either live with mental health issues or care for someone who does.

PositivePsychology.com: PositivePsychology.com is a science-based online resource of courses, techniques, tools, and tips to help you put positive psychology into practice. Be sure to check out their [radical acceptance worksheets](#), including [Focus on the Present for Radical Acceptance](#).

Postpartum Support International: The mission of Postpartum Support International is to promote awareness, prevention, and treatment of mental health issues related to childbearing in every country worldwide.

PsychHub: PsychHub is the world's largest online platform for mental health education with revolutionary Learning Hubs to take you from knowledge learned to behavior changed.

PsychoSocial: PsychoSocial is a mental health multimedia business created by mental health professionals in a joint effort to raise mental health awareness and destigmatize mental illness. Check out their handout on [Positive Affirmations](#).

Supportiv: Supportiv is a digital peer-to-peer support network that enables people to process, cope with, heal from, and problem solve mental health (anxiety, depression) + daily life struggles (loneliness, family pressure, parenting challenges, relationship conflicts, work stress) in safe, professionally moderated micro-community chats.

This is My Brave: This is My Brave is an organization that works to bring stories of mental illness and addiction out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

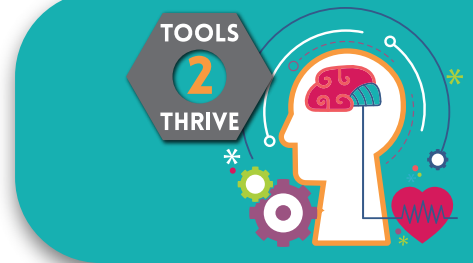
This Way Up: This Way Up provides online courses that teach practical, psychological skills designed to help you manage difficult emotions, tackle unhelpful thoughts, and gain control over symptoms of anxiety and depression. Be sure to check out their handout, [Calming Your Emotions During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

wikiHow: wikiHow is an online community consisting of an extensive database of how-to guides. Check out their course, created in collaboration with MHA: [Boost Your Well-Being: wikiHow's Healthy Mind Masterclass](#).

YogaPose: YogaPose is the largest free digital library of yoga poses searchable by symptom. As a form of holistic healing, we are utilizing yoga as a form of alternative medicine to help or ease the symptoms of both mental and physical illnesses. Users are able to search the Yoga Pose database of comprehensive yoga poses based on the ailment they are experiencing. Each yoga pose profile features an easy-to-follow Yoga Pose video, medical information, and related flows.

Youper: Youper uses Artificial Intelligence to deliver evidence-based therapy techniques to support people's mental health anytime and anywhere.

ACCEPTING REALITY



Sometimes in life we end up in situations that we just can't change. Radical acceptance is all about fully accepting your reality in situations that are beyond your control. This doesn't mean you approve of the situation, are giving up, or that it isn't painful. You are still allowed to (and should!) feel however you feel, but by accepting that it is what it is, you give the problem less power over you and you can begin to move forward.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Notice when you're fighting against reality. The first step in accepting reality is gaining awareness that you're resisting it. It may seem like this would be easy to spot, but there are actually a lot of subtle ways that people push against reality. If you're feeling bitter or resentful, wishing things were different, or thinking about how life isn't fair, you might be fighting reality.



Remind yourself that you can't change what has already happened. Before you can make peace with reality, you have to acknowledge that there's no going back to the way things were. Doing this may be challenging and painful, but by identifying what you can and can't control, you can turn your energy towards coping with the things you can't change.



Embrace your feelings. You might still be angry, scared, overwhelmed, or lonely – that's okay. Accepting reality includes everything that you're feeling, too. When you accept these feelings and let yourself experience them without any judgement, you can work through them in a healthy way.



Pretend that you're accepting reality. Even if you're still struggling to fully accept reality, think about what it would look like if you *did*. How would you act if you simply accepted things as they are? What would your next step be? Changing your behaviors and actions to reflect "pretend acceptance" can help you to actually shift your thoughts.



Relax your body. If you're feeling stressed or are pushing against the reality of your situation, there's a good chance your body is tense. This is often associated with resistance and keeps your mind on high alert. Physically relaxing your body can help you feel more ready to accept what is reality. Try yoga, taking a hot bath or shower, deep breathing exercises, or getting a massage to help you relax.



Use coping statements. These are sentences that remind you that different, healthier ways of thinking are possible. Repeating them can help you get through difficult moments – you can focus on just one or make a long list of your own. Some examples are: *It is what it is. I can't change what has already happened. I can accept things the way they are. I can only control my own actions and reactions.* If it helps, write your coping statements on Post-It notes and put them in places where you will see them multiple times a day, or set an alarm/create an event on your phone with a coping statement to pop up with a reminder every now and again.



Know that it takes practice. Radical acceptance is a great tool to cope with hard situations that we can't control, but it can take a while before it comes easily. Don't get down on yourself if you don't master it immediately. Start by trying it out in smaller situations, like when you're stuck in traffic or your internet is acting up during a call. By practicing radical acceptance on a daily basis, it will be easier to use as a coping tool when bigger, tougher challenges come your way.

FAST FACTS



Practicing radical acceptance has been shown to reduce feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety.¹



Acceptance coping skills are linked to lower rates of mental illness and suicide.²



Radical acceptance can reduce distress in dealing with negative thoughts or events.³

TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN IS ONE WAY TO WORK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. VISIT MHASCREENING.ORG TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

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ADAPTING AFTER TRAUMA AND STRESS



We all face trauma, adversity, and other stresses throughout our lives. When people think of trauma, they often think of things like abuse, terrorism, or catastrophic events (big 'T' trauma). Trauma can also be caused by events that may be less obvious but can still overwhelm your capacity to cope, like frequent arguing at home or losing your job (little 't' trauma). Trauma of any kind can be hard on your mental health but working on becoming more resilient can help you feel more at ease.

TIPS FOR HEALING



Process your thoughts. During and after experiencing trauma, it's common to go into survival mode and not have energy to wrap your head around what happened. It may feel safest to bury painful feelings and avoid confronting them, but acknowledging what happened and how it has impacted you is an important part of healing. When you feel ready, take time to think about how you've been affected (and be proud of yourself for pushing through).



Connect with people. The pain of trauma can lead some people to isolate themselves, but having a support system is a crucial part of wellbeing. Emotional support helps us to feel less alone or overwhelmed by what's going on or has happened in our lives. Talking to someone who has gone through a similar experience or someone who cares about you can be validating - and help you feel more able to overcome the challenges you're facing.



Don't compare your experience to others! We often question our own thoughts or experiences, and you may convince yourself that what you experienced wasn't a big deal because "others have it worse." Everyone experiences trauma differently, and no one trauma is "worse" than another. If it hurt you, then it hurt you - and your feelings and experiences are valid.



Take care of your body. Stress and trauma impact your body and physical health just as much as your mind. Listening to your body and giving it what it needs will help you heal. This includes eating a nutritious diet, getting enough sleep, staying hydrated, and exercising regularly. Moving your body is especially helpful in trauma healing¹ - aim to do it every day, even if it's only a few minutes of stretching.



Know it will take time. There is no set timeline for how you "should" heal. Remove the pressure of needing to bounce back quickly and focus on taking it one step at a time. Remember: recovery isn't linear, and it's normal to have bad days and setbacks. It doesn't mean you're failing - it's just part of the process.



Give yourself grace. Dealing with trauma and stress is no easy feat, but it's still common to get frustrated with yourself and what can sometimes be a slow recovery process. Try to catch when you hold yourself to unreasonable standards - instead of angrily asking yourself "why am I acting like this?!", think about how impressive it is that you keep going, despite what you have faced.



Don't feel ashamed to ask for help. It's easy to compare how you're feeling to how you *assume* others who have been through similar experiences are feeling, and you may get down on yourself because it seems like everyone else is doing just fine. What others experience and how they cope doesn't matter in your journey - if you feel like you need (or want) help, it's important to get that as soon as you can.

FAST FACTS

#2

Among people who took a screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, past trauma was the second most reported cause for mental distress among screeners after loneliness.²

3x

People who have been through trauma are 3 times more likely to experience depression.³

53%

Of people who took a screen at mhascreening.org in 2020 who scored with moderate to severe symptoms, over half (53%) reported past trauma as one of the three main contributors to their mental health problems.⁴

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Sources

¹Ivan de Kamp, M. M., Scheffers, M., Hatzmann, J., Emck, C., Cuijpers, P., & Beek, P. J. (2019). Body- and Movement-Oriented Interventions for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 32(6), 967-976. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22465>

²Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org), 2020.

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⁴Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org), 2020.

DEALING WITH ANGER AND FRUSTRATION



In challenging times, you may find that you have little patience with other people or get upset over minor things. Anger and frustration are complicated emotions that often stem from other feelings, like disappointment, fear, and stress. Taking some extra steps to decrease your overall tension can prevent your feelings (and the reactions that they cause) from spiraling out of control.

TIPS FOR COPING



Pause before reacting. When you feel yourself getting mad, take a moment to notice what you're thinking, then take a few deep breaths or count to ten in your head. By giving yourself even just a few seconds before reacting, you can put some emotional distance between you and whatever is upsetting you – and you might even realize that you're actually tense because of something else.



Change your surroundings. Anger can make you feel trapped. Whether you're mad at someone in the same room as you or just angry at the world, sometimes physically relocating yourself can help you start to calm down. Go to another room or step outside for a few minutes of fresh air to help disrupt the track that your mind is on.



Get it all out. Keeping your feelings bottled up never works, so allow yourself time to be angry and complain. As long as you don't focus on it for too long, venting can be a healthy outlet for your anger. You can open up to a trusted friend or write it all down in a journal. Sometimes it feels better to pretend to talk directly to the person (or situation) that you're angry at – pick an empty chair, pretend they're sitting in it, and say what you need to get off your chest.



Release built up energy. Anger is a high-energy emotion, and we store that energy and tension physically in our bodies. Exercise is a great way to get rid of extra energy and can improve your mood. Some people find grounding exercises (like meditation or deep breathing) helpful to calm intense feelings, while others prefer more high impact activities like running or weightlifting. Think about what you usually do to decompress, like taking a hot shower or blasting your favorite music and use the tools that you know work for you.



Get organized. When things around you feel chaotic, it's often a lot easier to get frustrated and snap at people. Dedicate a few minutes each day to tidying, planning, or reorganizing. Implementing a routine can also help you feel more on top of things by adding structure and certainty to your daily life.



Eliminate stressors if possible. Sometimes there's no way to completely get rid of a big problem, but there's often more than just one issue contributing to your frustration. Things like an overwhelming workload or unhealthy relationship can make you feel on edge. Pay attention to how and why you're feeling stressed and see if you can make small changes to improve a challenging situation to make it less burdensome.



Manage your expectations. Negative feelings often stem from people or situations not meeting your standards or assumptions. It's frustrating to feel let down but recognize that you can't fully predict anyone else's behavior or how situations will play out. Shift your mental framework so that you aren't setting yourself up for disappointment.



Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you're working to cope with your anger but feel like you can't get it under control, it's time to get some extra support. Anger can fester and become explosive if not resolved. A number of mental health conditions can manifest as anger, so this may actually be a sign of depression or anxiety – treating an underlying condition can help heal your anger as well.

FAST FACTS



Of people who took an anxiety screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 71% felt easily annoyed or irritable at least half of the time or nearly every day.¹



Of people who took a bipolar screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 82% reported being so irritable that they shouted at people or started fights or arguments.²



One poll found that 91% of respondents said that they feel people are more likely to express their anger on social media than they are face-to-face.³

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Sources

¹Proprietary data. MHAScreening.org. 2020.

²Ibid.

³IBM Watson Health-NPR Health Poll. November 1-14, 2018. <https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/2YQ8NLD5>

GETTING OUT OF THINKING TRAPS



It's easy to fall into negative thinking patterns and spend time bullying yourself, dwelling on the past, or worrying about the future. It's part of how we're wired – the human brain reacts more intensely to negative events than to positive ones and is more likely to remember insults than praise. During tough times, negative thoughts are especially likely to spiral out of control. When these thoughts make something out to be worse in your head than it is in reality, they are called cognitive distortions.

COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Overgeneralization: Making a broad statement based off one situation or piece of evidence.

Personalization: Blaming yourself for events beyond your control; taking things personally when they aren't actually connected to you.

Filtering: Focusing on the negative details of a situation while ignoring the positive.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Only seeing the extremes of a situation.

Catastrophizing: Blowing things out of proportion; dwelling on the worst possible outcomes.

Jumping to Conclusions: Judging or deciding something without all the facts.

Emotional Reasoning: Thinking that however you feel is fully and unarguably true. **Discounting the Positive:** Explaining all positives away as luck or coincidence.

"Should" Statements: Making yourself feel guilty by pointing out what you should or shouldn't be doing, feeling, or thinking.

TIPS FOR CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS



Reframe. Think of a different way to view the situation. If your negative thought is "I can't do anything right," a kinder way to reframe it is, "I messed up, but nobody's perfect," or a more constructive thought is "I messed up, but now I know to prepare more for next time." It can be hard to do this when you're feeling down on yourself, so ask yourself what you'd tell your best friend if they were saying those things about themselves.



Prove yourself wrong. The things you do impact how you feel – what actions can you take to combat your negative thoughts? For instance, if you're telling yourself you aren't smart because you don't understand how the stock market works, learn more about a subject you understand and enjoy, like history. If you feel like no one cares about you, call a friend. Give yourself evidence that these thoughts aren't entirely true.



Counter negative thoughts with positive ones. When you catch your inner dialogue being mean to you, make yourself say something nice to balance it out. This may feel cheesy at first and self-love can be hard, so don't give up if it feels awkward in the beginning. Name things you love, like, or even just don't hate about yourself – we all have to start somewhere!



Remember: thoughts aren't facts. Your thoughts and feelings are valid, but they aren't always reality. You might feel ugly, but that doesn't mean you *are*. Often times we can be our own worst enemies – other people are seeing us in a much nicer light than how we see ourselves.

Sources

¹Proprietary data. MHAScreening.org. 2020.

²Ibid.

³Matthews, G., Wells, A. (2000). Attention, automaticity, and affective disorder. *Behavior Modification*, 24, 69-93.

FAST FACTS



Of people who took an anxiety screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 64% felt afraid, as if something awful might happen at least half of the time or nearly every day.¹



Half of people who took a depression screen at mhascreening.org in 2020 felt that they were a failure or had let themselves or their families down nearly every day.²



One study found that 85% of what we worry about never happens at all, and in the 15% of times where worries came true, 79% of people handled the difficulty better than expected, or learned a valuable lesson.³

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PROCESSING BIG CHANGES



Change is a guaranteed part of life. It's something everyone experiences at one point or another — good or bad. Sometimes that change happens in big ways when we aren't expecting it or aren't prepared for it. These types of situations can make navigating your path forward really difficult. By providing yourself with tools for processing change, you can adapt more easily.

TIPS FOR PROCESSING CHANGE



Focus on what you can control. One of the hardest things about big change is how helpless it can often make you feel. At some point, you'll probably have to accept the change that you're experiencing and then focus on what you can control within that. For example, you can control how you react to situations, how you start each day, or how nice you are to yourself and others. It can be comforting to know that there are still things that you have control over, even when other things are changing.



Write out your feelings on paper. When you're processing big changes, your brain may feel like it's constantly racing. It's easy to feel overwhelmed with all of the things you're feeling and thinking. Instead of holding it all in your mind, allow yourself to release it. Writing things down is one of the best ways to do that. Start a journal—jot down a quick list of your thoughts and feelings or write a letter to yourself or someone else. Just get it all out onto paper.



Keep up your self-care where you can. When so much of your life feels different and overwhelming, it's tempting to want to stay in bed or on the sofa and avoid what's bothering you. However, it's important to keep up your normal habits as much as possible, especially when it comes to protecting your mental health. The changes you're facing may mean a totally different routine, but incorporating the small, familiar self-care habits that you know work for you — even if it's something simple like showering or taking a walk after dinner — can give you the mental clarity to process the big changes.



Find support. With any change that you're facing right now, there's a good chance that someone else has felt the exact same way that you're feeling too. Depending on what you're struggling with, you may be able to talk to friends or family about it, find an online support group, or open up to a mental health professional. Whoever it ends up being that you turn to, having someone who can listen and provide support can help you through any transition you're working through.



Tune into the good. No matter what kind of change has come into your life, there is most likely some grief that coincides with processing it. Even a seemingly good change like getting a new job can have you grieving the day-to-day interactions you had with coworkers where you used to work. Let yourself grieve, but also try not to get stuck spiraling into the fear, anguish, and negativity that those changes may bring. Instead, try and retrain your brain to think of the positives in your life by doing things like practicing gratitude, focusing on the small things that bring you joy, or reframing challenges as opportunities.



Make plans. It's okay if you aren't an incredibly organized person, but when you're processing big changes, it can be helpful to focus on planning. You don't have to stick to your plan perfectly; just starting small with what your day or week is going to look like can help get rid of that uncertainty that comes with change.



Think of your strength. Big changes tend to challenge and test you, but it's likely that you'll grow from all of the things that you're facing. Remind yourself as often as possible that you are strong and capable and can make it through whatever challenges you're facing (and that you've made it through some tough changes in the past). Maybe even say it out loud to yourself to really let it sink in. With each passing day, you're building resilience.

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FAST FACTS



People that journaled about significant events reported more satisfaction with their lives and better mental health over those that did not.¹



Strong social support from family members following significant life events seriously lessens depression symptoms in teens and has a lasting positive effect in dealing with life changes.²



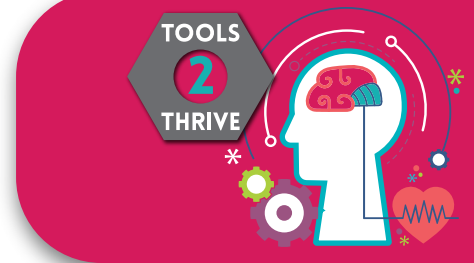
Adults who avoid problems struggle more with depression later on than those who actively approach problems with coping strategies.³

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TAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF



There are always a handful of roles that each of us are juggling. If you are a parent, a student, an employee, a caretaker, someone struggling with a mental health concern, or are just feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of day-to-day life, the idea of taking time for yourself may seem unimaginable. Sometimes it can be difficult to even take basic care of ourselves - but there are small things that can be done to make self-care and taking time for ourselves a little bit easier.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



Accept yourself as you are. Remember that you are running your own race. Try not to compare your life and what it looks like right now to anyone else's. When you start comparing yourself to others, it's easy to feel inadequate, which makes it hard to even take the very first step in self-care. Instead, try your best to accept the person that you are and where you are in life right now.



Focus on the basics. Sometimes being an adult is not easy and it can feel impossible to get even the littlest things done. Taking time for yourself doesn't necessarily mean treating yourself to special things. One of the most important things you can do is focus on steps to ensure you're living a healthy lifestyle. Showering and brushing your teeth every day, eating nutrient-rich food, moving your body, and getting good sleep are all building blocks of good self-care.



Find what makes you happy. If you're caught up in taking care of all of your responsibilities — rather than taking care of yourself — you may not even really know what kind of self-care you need. What works for someone else may not work for you. Take time to think about what things you can do to make yourself feel happy or accomplished and include them in building the self-care routine that makes the most sense for you, your schedule, and your health overall.



Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is one of the best ways to make the most out of any amount of time that you do have to care for yourself. Take a few slow, deep breaths, focus on each of your senses, and try to be fully present in whatever you're doing. Not only does mindfulness reduce stress, it also has the power to help you slow down and really take care of yourself — even in the midst of all of life's challenges and responsibilities.



Make small goals. Unfortunately, taking time for yourself doesn't just happen overnight, so try to be patient. Instead of putting pressure on yourself to immediately have the perfect self-care routine established, set small goals that you want to accomplish for yourself. Focus on small, daily tasks like wanting to take a 15-minute walk outside each day, or journaling for 10 minutes every night — rather than a complete overhaul of your life, all at once.



Set some boundaries. Sometimes, the only way to really be able to make time for self-care is to lessen the amount of time or energy that you are giving away to other people. Having the sometimes tough conversations with people that set boundaries around your time, your emotions, your things, your other relationships, your health, and your opinions can give you an opportunity to devote more time and effort to yourself and your own mental health.



Remember that you are not alone. Everyone struggles to take time for themselves, so try not to get down on yourself for not having everything perfectly balanced all of the time. As circumstances change, you'll probably have to rethink your routines and how you use your time many times throughout your life. There will always be people that understand where you're coming from and are willing to help. Ask your friends and family for help when you need to take some time for your mental health. They may even be able to offer you some guidance on how they manage self-care and take time for their own well-being.

FAST FACTS



On average, people only spend 15 minutes a day on health-related self-care.¹



Self-care is proven to reduce stress and anxiety levels while increasing self-compassion.²



Of people who took a depression screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 73% felt tired or said that they had very little energy at least half of the time or nearly every day.³

TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN IS ONE WAY TO WORK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

¹Yaribeygi, H., Panahi, Y., Sahraei, H., Johnston, T. P., & Sahebkar, A. (2017). The impact of stress on body function: A review. *EXCLI Journal*, 16, 1057–1072. <https://doi.org/10.17179/excli2017-480>

²Shapiro, S., Brown, K., & Biegel, G. (2007). Teaching Self-Care to Caregivers: Effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on the Mental Health of Therapists in Training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1(2), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105>

³Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). 2020.

PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Many times bad things happen and we have no control over the situation. We can't change people's behaviors or the reality of what is happening, and these experiences are painful. Radical acceptance is a practice that helps us evaluate situations and work to reduce the emotional burden of the reality of the situation like resentment, anger, hatred, or shame. Use the following prompts to help you practice radical acceptance.

WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU? Use the following lines to write down your thoughts.

UNDERSTANDING REALITY

1. Look at the above statements. Is there something here that is a reality you *have to* accept (vs a judgement or opinion)? For instance - "It shouldn't be this way." Write it here.

2. Think about this reality and just sit with it. For instance - "This is what happened. It can't change. It is what it is."

3. What happened, or what events led to this reality? ("This is how things happened").

ACCEPTING REALITY

1. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your thoughts? What can you tell yourself to help you accept this reality? Imagine what it feels like to accept it.

2. Imagine how you'd change your behaviors or actions if you accepted this reality? Imagine how the world would feel if you could let go.

3. Think about this reality. Can you accept it in your body? Where are you carrying the resistance to accept this reality? Do you carry that weight in your shoulders or your back? Is there tension or physical pain? Can you practice feeling your emotions in your body and then practice releasing them from your body?

4. Do you feel disappointment, sadness, or grief right now? Sit with that, acknowledge it, allow yourself to feel these feelings and understand it is ok and expected to feel disappointment, sadness, or grief. Write down anything specific about these thoughts and feelings.

5. Despite the pain of this reality, what makes life worth living? Remind yourself of those things here.

6. If you find yourself struggling at this point, write down some pros and cons of accepting or not accepting this reality. Then start back at #1 above for your next troubling situation.

PROCESSING TRAUMA AND STRESS

After a traumatic experience, it can be helpful to get your thoughts outside of your head. Writing down your experiences can help you gain perspective about your situation and help to reduce how distressing they are. Use the lines below to jot down anything that comes to mind related to your traumatic experiences.

When you've experienced multiple traumatic experiences, or carried trauma for a long time, it can shape the way you see yourself, the world, and others. These changes in beliefs are there to protect you from future harm, even when threats are gone. They can change the way you relate to others, whether or how you take risks, or how you feel positively about yourself.

HOW HAVE YOUR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES SHAPED THE WAY YOU SEE:

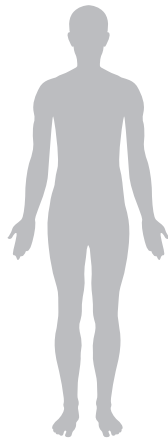
YOURSELF?

OTHERS?

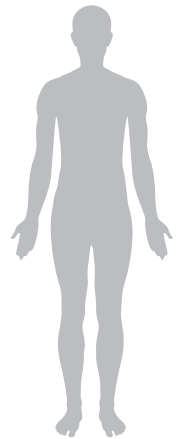
THE WORLD?

Reflecting on your writing experience above, do you notice how your body has changed in response to your feelings? Use the space below to identify the feelings you experience while reflecting on your story and draw lines to the corresponding area of your body where you experience that emotion.

FEELINGS



FEELINGS



Practicing grounding techniques can help you get unstuck from your mind and your body. Use the *Keep Your Mind Grounded* worksheet to learn and practice staying grounded as a coping skill for your unwanted thoughts and feelings. Use the *Stopping Stupid Thoughts* worksheet to reflect on and change the beliefs above.

Both worksheets, as well as others, can be accessed at screening.mhanational.org/diy.

MANAGING FRUSTRATION AND ANGER

Anger and frustration are both common emotional responses that everyone faces. However, if these feelings become too intense, they can lead to both mental and physical distress, and cause problems in relationships. This worksheet can help you identify the emotions and thoughts behind your anger and frustration, and help you determine what you need to feel better.

DESCRIBE THE EVENT AND IDENTIFY SPECIFIC THINGS SOMEONE SAID OR DID THAT BROUGHT ON YOUR ANGER OR FRUSTRATION.

LIST OUT ANY EMOTIONS THAT WERE UNDERLYING YOUR FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION OR ANGER.

For a list of emotions, visit <http://bit.ly/emotionsunderneath>

WHAT PARTS OF THE DESCRIPTION ABOVE ARE FOCUSED ON FACTS, ACTIONS, OR BEHAVIORS (AND NOT A JUDGEMENT OR OPINION)? WRITE IT DOWN.

Take some time to think about what needs to happen for you to be less angry. Focus on what you can do and what you need others to do.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FEEL BETTER?

WHAT DO YOU NEED SOMEONE ELSE TO DO TO HELP YOU FEEL BETTER?

Remember - we can only control our own actions. However, writing down what you need from others can help you advocate for yourself.

THE NEXT TIME YOU FEEL ANGRY OR FRUSTRATED, WALK YOURSELF THROUGH THESE SAME STEPS TO HELP YOU PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS. ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

WHAT HAPPENED? → WHAT DO I FEEL? → WHAT DO I NEED?

DEALING WITH THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Going to the worst-case scenario (aka catastrophic thinking or thinking the worst) is one of the most common thinking traps we fall into. Thinking about the worst-case scenario can help you feel like you're preparing to protect yourself from getting hurt in the future or to imagine what is the worst thing that can happen so you can reflect and know you can survive no matter what.

Unfortunately, problems come up when you have worst-case scenario thoughts and you're not aware of them enough that they control you, vs you controlling them. This pattern of thinking can result in circular thinking (or ruminating) in ways that pull you into a rut, bring your feelings down, make depression worse, cause you to avoid your responsibilities, and increase anxiety.

EXAMPLES OF WORST-CASE SCENARIO THOUGHTS:



Use the lines below to list out any and all worst-case scenario thoughts you find yourself having. Don't worry about whether it's "truly" a worst-case scenario thought...if it's bothering you and you want to jot it down, jot it down.

LOOK AT THE THOUGHTS ABOVE. PICK THREE THAT STAND OUT THAT YOU WANT TO ADDRESS. WRITE THEM BELOW.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

QUESTION EACH THOUGHT BY EXPLORING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

- Are you sure the thought is true or will happen?
- Is there any evidence it is true?
- Is there evidence that it is not true?
- Is the thought more rooted in your feelings or reality?
- If it is reality, are you able to cope with it? Have you coped with it before?

FINDING HEALTHIER THOUGHTS

Looking at the three thoughts above, what do you need to say to yourself or how can you change the above thoughts so that you feel better instead of worse? These are called "reframed thoughts."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Write your reframed thoughts on paper or post its and put them where you are most likely to struggle with worst-case scenario thinking. Examples include by your bed, in the bathroom, in your car, on your phone, or in a journal.

DEALING WITH CHANGE

Change, both good and bad, is an inevitable part of life. By taking time to think through the change you're facing, you can work to make both the change and the emotions around the change more manageable. Use this worksheet as a tool to process an existing or upcoming change that you are facing.

DESCRIBE THE BIG CHANGE YOU ARE FACING AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR LIFE.

LIST OUT ANY EMOTIONS THAT COME UP WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THIS CHANGE.

For a list of emotions, visit <http://bit.ly/emotionsunderneath>

WHAT WORRIES YOU ABOUT THE CHANGE?

WHAT EXCITES YOU ABOUT THIS BIG CHANGE OR WHAT POSITIVE THINGS CAN COME FROM THIS CHANGE?



WHAT ARE SOME ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE YOUR WORRIES AROUND THIS CHANGE?



WHAT ARE SOME ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO INCREASE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THIS CHANGE?

WRITE DOWN ANY SKILLS, ACTIVITIES, OR STRENGTHS THAT HAVE HELPED YOU COPE WITH CHANGE IN THE PAST.

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS, RESOURCES, OR SITUATIONS THAT EXIST TODAY THAT HELP YOU FEEL MORE CONFIDENT THAT YOU'RE GOING TO BE OK FOLLOWING THIS CHANGE?

PRIORITIZING SELF-CARE

When we have a lot on our plates or we are facing mental health challenges, it can feel easy to push our own needs to the side. However, making time for ourselves is essential to our overall well-being. Use this worksheet to help you better understand what is holding you back from taking time for yourself and your needs.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, BUT YOU CANNOT SEEM TO DO?

Write out some thoughts and expectations that are preventing you from doing the self-care that you need. Don't worry about whether these thoughts or expectations are true. Instead, write down anything that comes to mind.

THOUGHTS

Examples: I don't have time; my needs don't matter

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

EXPECTATIONS

Examples: I should be better at __; I would do __ if it helped me

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Pick one thought or expectation from either list above and re-write it here.

THOUGHT OR EXPECTATION

Focusing in on this specific thought or expectation, answer the following questions.

WHERE DOES THIS THOUGHT, OR EXPECTATION COME FROM? WHO SETS IT?

HOW DOES IT GET IN THE WAY OF TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF?

Now that you have answered the questions above, rewrite this thought so that it supports you and your self-care needs.

NEW THOUGHT OR EXPECTATION

Examples: If I do __ I may feel better; It is ok to take time for myself

While we only worked through one thought, we can use this process to evaluate how our negative thoughts and expectations prevent us from taking care of ourselves regularly. On a separate sheet of paper, follow these same steps with the other thoughts and expectations you listed in the first set of boxes.



LIFE CAN BE HARD.

**YOUR MENTAL HEALTH
DOESN'T HAVE TO
SUFFER.**

**GET INFORMATION AND
TOOLS THAT CAN HELP.**

VISIT [MHANATIONAL.ORG/MAY](https://mhanational.org/may) FOR TOOLS2THRIVE.

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HEALTH 2
MONTH 1**



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