



## Managing political anxiety

Political conflict and change are normal features of life, but in times of heightened tension and polarization, they can cause widespread anxiety. The more closely a person's political stances are tied to their core values and beliefs, the more they may worry about the consequences of elections and other political changes.

This year in particular, political anxiety is added to baseline levels of worry already elevated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. How can you manage your anxiety in times of political conflict and change while also remaining engaged in positive ways?

### Stay informed, but set boundaries on your news intake.

- If you find the news to be emotionally upsetting, set limits on how much you take in. Set aside a short block of time in the morning and early evening to catch up on political developments.
- Resist the temptation to check the headlines constantly throughout the day. Turn off non-emergency alerts from news feeds, and limit your exposure to political exchanges on social media.

## Be respectful in conversations about politics.

- Be open to listening to and learning from the views of others. Share your own views, when appropriate, in respectful and thoughtful ways. A good way to hear another person and be heard is to share the life stories behind their (and your) views and opinions.
- Be mindful of your surroundings when you express your political views. It's generally not appropriate to debate political differences at work, for example, or to force a political conversation on a coworker. Even when you have an interested listener, be aware of who else is within range to hear your conversation and who might be offended or upset by your views.
- Political discussions among family members or friends with different views can also become emotional. Given how difficult it is to change a person's views, consider whether it's worth risking important relationships to have those conversations. It may be better to focus on shared interests.
- If a conversation about politics becomes heated and unproductive at work or socially, politely step away from it or change the subject. Resist the temptation to get in the last word.

## Get involved.

- One of the most important actions you can take to maintain a sense of control in a turbulent world is to get involved. When you take positive and responsible action, it helps your community and society at large. It also helps you overcome feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.
- Find opportunities to volunteer in your community or for a cause you care deeply about.
- Engage in small acts of kindness to neighbors or people in need.
- Attend a city council or town hall meeting to listen and learn about local issues.
- Volunteer to help with a political campaign.
- Sign up to help your local election board as a poll worker.
- Educate yourself on an issue you care about and find ways to help organizations working to make a difference in that area.

## Take care of yourself.

- **Take time to enjoy family and friends.** This is important even when you can't be together in person. Supportive social connections are key to maintaining physical and mental health.
- **Get enough sleep.** Follow a consistent bedtime routine, and avoid the stimulation of screen time, alcohol, or caffeine as bedtime approaches.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Incorporate plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Include fish, poultry, and nuts for protein. Avoid packaged foods and foods with added sugar.

- **Be physically active.** Include a walk or other activity in your daily routine. Physical activity is vital to staying healthy and has an important calming effect.
- **Pursue interests and hobbies.** Engage in activities that give you pleasure and absorb your full attention. Take an online class to learn a new skill or delve deeper into a lifelong passion.
- **Find ways to laugh.** Watch a funny movie or TV show. Spend time with friends who can make you laugh. Humor is wonderful medicine to counter worries.
- **Avoid ineffective and potentially harmful coping mechanisms.** This includes alcohol or substance abuse.

## Seek help.

If stress feels overwhelming and anxiety, sadness, anger, or other emotions make it hard to cope with your daily routine, seek help. Some emotional challenges are too big to tackle by yourself. A trusted friend may be able to help as a sounding board and sympathetic ear. Or you might benefit from the help of a professional mental health counselor or therapist. For help, contact your company's employee assistance program, which specializes in addressing mental health and other life challenges.

---

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY WORKPLACE OPTIONS; REPUBLISHED WITH PERMISSION, OCTOBER 2020.

Morgan, H. (2020, September). Managing political anxiety (C. Gregg-Meeker, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.