

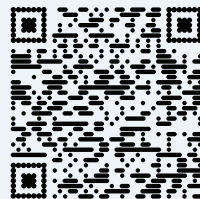


# Coping: Responding to stress on your own and with help.

Learn how to adapt your thoughts and behaviors to manage stressors.

## Coping strategies:

- **Read a book** you enjoy that engages your mind.
- **Exercise!** Take a walk, go for a run, lift some weights, do yoga, play.
- **Do “heavy work.”** Rake leaves, dig a hole, build something.
- **Listen to music and try singing along.** Singing lowers cortisol and releases oxytocin in your brain which relieves stress.
- **Visualize** a safe, calm, comfortable space, and go there in your mind.
- **Get outside**, focus mindfully on the nature around you, the smells, the sunshine on your skin.
- **Practice mindfulness or meditation.** Not sure how? Check out our QR code resource list.
- **Take a device break!** Scrolling may feel like a distraction, but it can actually be the opposite—anxiety-inducing.
- **Get 8 hours of sleep.** This may sound clichéd, but 8 hours of sleep regulates emotions, decreases anxiety, and helps the brain properly balance the memory of positive and negative emotions.
- **Create something.** Maybe it’s art, or baking, mounting a shelf or building legos.
- **Eat a balanced meal.** Grabbing what’s easy when we’re stressed doesn’t always help our brain balance, try some protein paired with good fats or some veggies for energy.
- **Try box breathing.** How? Breathe in through your nose for four seconds, hold for four, breathe out through your mouth for four, hold for four, repeat. Need a visual? Trace a box with your finger on paper, a table, or even your knee as you count.
- **Connect with people you love.** Who are the people who help you relax, who listen and validate, who help you laugh when things feel too much.
- Go to [tinyurl.com/srslyMandM](https://tinyurl.com/srslyMandM) or scan this QR code to learn more about mindfulness and meditation.
- **What makes you feel calmer?**



## When to seek external support:

### My ideas are working but I need more support.

- Contact your pediatrician or primary care provider.
- As part of your plan and in addition to therapy and long-term supports, you can contact your school’s counseling office or Project Success Coordinator to create a collaborative plan for in-school support.
- **Counseling offices:** for Chelsea High School, call **734-433-2243**. For Beach Middle School, South Meadows, and North Creek, call school office and request “**support services**.”
- Or email **Kristen Chandler, Project Success Counselor** (*substance abuse support*) at [kristen.chandler@trinity-health.org](mailto:kristen.chandler@trinity-health.org)



### I’ve exhausted my options and coping strategies aren’t enough.

- **Behavioral Health Navigators:**  
**Kathy Walz, LMSW, CPC** and **Anna Webber, LMSW**  
[BHNavigator@trinity-health.org](mailto:BHNavigator@trinity-health.org) • **734-680-5312**
- If your child already has a therapist, share your observations.
- If you need a therapist, connect with a pediatrician or Behavioral Health Navigator to discuss options and insurance coverage.



### My home is unsafe for my child or myself.

- Call **911** if there’s a threat/high risk of violence/harm to self/others or go to the local Emergency Department.
- Call **Washtenaw County CARES Crisis Team** at **734-544-3050** (24/7 support; can provide over-the-phone consultations for next steps or can come to your home if Washtenaw County resident.)
- Or call or text “**988**” for a 24/7 crisis hotline; free and confidential support.

**See other side of page** for more details on signs and symptoms of stress, what coping is and isn’t, and what other resources are available.



# What is coping?

Let's talk about what it is, what it isn't, and when to use it.

## How to recognize signs of stress and anxiety.



### Physical symptoms:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Stomach ache
- Muscle tension
- Fast heartbeat
- Lack of focus
- Sweating
- Picking/Fidgeting

### Emotional cues:

- Irritability, short temper or "bad" mood
- Racing thoughts (unable to slow down brain)
- "Small" stressors feel overwhelming
- Changes in mood/atypical expression
- Withdrawn

## In application: What coping is and what it's not.



Coping is the intentional action to adapt thought patterns and behaviors to *manage* stress.

- It's not an instant happy-fix.
- It requires patience and empathy for yourself or the loved one you're supporting.
- It's also a learning process; learning what works for you, your child, or your friend, and what doesn't work.

Maybe it doesn't feel like something is effective the first time, that's okay! Coping often requires skill-building (maybe you're not able to practice meditation with a focused mind on the first try, that's normal!).

## Who is coping for? And should I use it?



**Coping skills are for everyone!** They're not just reactive, they're proactive. Learning to apply coping skills preventatively can help manage our stress and improve stress tolerance so it doesn't reach the point of feeling overwhelming.

We may not be able to anticipate when anxiety-inducing or traumatic situations may occur, so if we're ready and practiced with healthy coping, we're less likely to default to behaviors that may feel effective in the moment but worsen our anxiety in the long-run.

## When to self-help and when to seek external support.



There is no "right time" to ask for help. You don't have to meet certain criteria or exhaust all your options to feel you deserve the chance to seek support. You don't have to build a case. You don't have to wait until things are "really bad." You also don't have to choose one or the other.

And if you're not sure what level of support you need or where to start, that's okay too. You can ask a therapist, your primary care doctor, or a behavioral health navigator where to begin.

## Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping



What are those thought patterns or behaviors you lean into when you're anxious? Sometimes, we try to cope and we don't have the tools to do it in a healthy way. Do you take a walk with your dog? Do you have a drink to take the edge off? Are you in a spiral of pessimism that "helps" you prepare for the worst case scenario but spikes your stress levels? Did you even realize these are all coping mechanisms?

Sometimes, we use unhealthy coping such as avoidance, sleeping too much, substances, acting out, scrolling on our phones, etc. Sometimes we need help identifying the healthy alternatives. **That's why we're providing a full list of healthy coping strategies on the other side of this resource.**

## How to support your kids, friends, family, colleagues in coping with stress and anxiety.



- Non-judgmental listening.
- Open communication and an empathetic mindset.
- Providing space for yourself and others to talk about the stressors.
- Doing basic needs "check-ins" to first evaluate if the person may be experiencing anxiety around basic needs like food, sleep, housing, or finances not being met.
- Establish routines to provide predictability and stability in the home.
- Validate concerns (whether its your own internal dialogue or someone you love).

See other side of page for coping strategies and external support resources you can access.

\*Cited Sources: MSU Extension, Cleveland Clinic, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health