

## Help for Coping with Disasters

When really tough and scary things happen, like disasters or really bad situations, our bodies and minds react in certain ways. This is natural and not something we can control. Sometimes, it's hard to handle these feelings during and after these events.

We have some tricks or tools to help you feel better. They come from things that doctors and therapists use to help people who have been through tough times. These tools can help you calm down when you feel upset and make your mind feel better.

Some of these tools work best when you're not in a scary situation anymore. But some people are still in tough situations even after they try their best to leave. So, you should use these tools when it feels right for you.

These tools can help you handle your thoughts and feelings when they're really strong. They won't make everything go away, but they can make things feel a little better and easier to handle. Give them a try and see how they work for you. If your feelings are too intense, it's okay to take a break or do something else for a little while.

If you try a tool and it makes you feel worse, stop using it and talk to a therapist if you can. They can help you figure out why it made you feel worse.

The first tools can help you when your body and mind feel really, really upset. The last two tools are good for after you've been through a tough time. They can help you feel better about what happened and not blame yourself.

You don't have to go through hard times by yourself. These tools are like emotional first aid, but they can't replace the help you get from your friends, family, or other good people. Sometimes, you might need therapy to heal from really tough situations, but these tools can help you cope better in the short term while you look for therapy.

These tools don't have anything to do with religion or politics. The last one comes from a Buddhist practice, but it doesn't have any religious stuff in it. It's just a way to make your mind calm and peaceful. If you have a religion, there might be other tools in your religion that can help you too.

People who have been through really tough times say that having something to believe in, a sense of connection, and being curious about what might happen next helped them get through it.

So, you're not alone, and there are things that you can do that might help, even when things are hard.

Sometimes, when really scary things happen, our bodies and minds react in certain ways. We might feel like something really bad is going to happen soon, or we can't see a future for ourselves. We could get really angry or sad, want to hurt someone or break things, have trouble sleeping, or not want to eat.

These feelings can make us feel like things around us aren't real, or we can't move or think clearly. We might even forget things or feel afraid all the time. Some people want to hurt others or themselves, and others can't feel any emotions at all. These feelings not their fault.

Our bodies might act funny too. We could have a racing heart, feel like we can't breathe, or have aches and pains in our stomach or chest. Sometimes, our body can feel numb, and we don't really know how it's supposed to feel.

These feelings are normal when something very scary happens, but they can get better over time. You might notice that your feelings get a bit worse when you're safe. That's not a bad thing; it means your mind is letting you feel more because you're not in danger.

It's important to know that there are people who can help you, like therapists, when you're ready. These techniques can help you feel better and work through your feelings.

Let's talk about some techniques that can help you feel better when you're upset or scared.

### **Careful Breathing**

Here's how you can use your breathing to help calm your body and feelings down:

- Find a quiet and safe place.
- Breathe in slowly, counting to 4 (or 6 if you can), and feel your tummy go out.
- Breathe out slowly, counting the same way, and feel your tummy go in.
- You can pause between each breath and count to 2-4.
- If you get dizzy, stop and distract yourself; your breathing should go back to normal.
- Practice this for at least a minute regularly, especially when you're feeling stressed or like things are too much.

These techniques can help you feel calmer and think more clearly. You can do them on your own or ask someone to help you. It's okay to use reminders like notes or alarms to remember to do them when you're really upset.

You can practice these exercises regularly, especially before and after stressful times, to help you feel better and think more clearly.

Remember, it's possible to heal and feel better after scary events, but it's hard to fully heal if you're still in danger. Be kind to yourself and take your time.

### **Feeling More Real**

Sometimes, when you're scared or sad, you might feel like things around you aren't real. It's a way your mind protects you. You can use these easy tricks to make things feel more real.

- Look around and say five things you can see.
- Listen to all the sounds. Notice what you can hear.
- Feel things that are touching your skin right now, like your clothes or the ground.

- Smell the air around you, what can you smell?
- Taste something to pay attention to your senses.

### **Butterfly Hug**

This is a trick that can calm your strong feelings and make your body feel better when it's too jumpy.

- Cross your arms and put your hands on your shoulders.
- Quickly tap each hand, one after the other, like a butterfly's wings, on your shoulders, like in the picture.

The feeling should get less strong. You might find yourself thinking about something else completely.



### **Body Scan**

This can help you to feel better if you are feeling sick or hurt somewhere. It is like paying close attention to your body to see how you're feeling. This can help you understand how your body feels and when it needs things like rest or food.

- Start by taking a deep breath and notice how you feel in your body.
- Think about your feet and legs, how they touch the ground and feel in your shoes.
- Move your attention up to your legs, how do they feel?
- Notice your hips, then your tummy, and chest. How are they feeling?
- Then, notice your arms, shoulders, and neck.
- Pay attention to how your body feels from top to bottom, try to hold this all in your mind at once. Don't worry if it's hard at first to do this. It will get easier with practice.

A simpler way to do this is to rub your hands on a table or your legs and feel how it feels, and then do the same with your feet on the floor.

### **Catching and Watching Your Thoughts**

Sometimes, when we go through really tough and scary stuff, it can make our thoughts all jumbled up and hard to handle. It's like when you feel really upset, and your thoughts can make you feel even more upset.

But there's a cool trick that can help. It's called the "stream and leaves" exercise, and it's kind of like a game for your mind. It doesn't get rid of thoughts, but it makes them behave better and be kinder to you.

Here's how it works:

- Find a quiet and comfy place, and close your eyes for a moment.
- Picture yourself sitting by that stream. You can hear the water, smell the fresh air, and feel the warm sun on your back.
- Think about the thoughts in your head, the ones that make you feel all mixed up. Imagine them as leaves floating past you in a stream in a long line.
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Now for the fun part!

- Imagine that you pick up one of your thoughts and put it on a leaf. If it helps, you can actually act it out.
- Now, gently let the leaf float away on the stream. Watch it float away.
- Now pick up the next thought in your mind. Put it on a leaf, and let the leaf go.
- Watch it float away, disappearing down the stream.
- Keep doing this with your thoughts, one by one, placing them on leaves and watching them float away.
- It's important to keep catching the next thought. Your mind will keep making new thoughts to keep you busy.

Notice what happens. Do your thoughts slow down? Do they change in any way? Do you see any thoughts that keep coming back, like a habit?

If it's hard to imagine a stream with leaves, you can think of it like putting your thoughts in balloons and letting them float away, or like writing your thoughts on a screen and watching them scroll up and away.

This exercise helps your mind feel a bit calmer. It's not about making the thoughts disappear but about watching them go by without getting all tangled up in them. Sometimes they are easier to make sense of that way.

### **Catching and Breathing Your Emotions**

Sometimes, when something really tough happens, we can feel lots of strong emotions. These emotions can stick around like a bad smell. They can make it hard to think clearly and even affect the choices we make.

There's a neat exercise that involves colouring and describing your feelings, and then breathing through them. It's like a game to help with your feelings!

Here's how it works:

- Find a quiet spot, sit down, and just relax for a moment.
- Start thinking about your feelings. Imagine them as something you can see and touch, like colours or shapes in your body.
  - Where do you feel them in your body?

- Are they heavy or light?
  - Do they stay the same, or do they change? What does the outside of the feeling look like? Is it prickly or smooth, or spiky?
  - Is it hot or cold?
  - Is it moving or still?
  - Is there more than one part to the feeling you are noticing?
- Why not give the feelings a name? It's like giving them a nickname. You can call them anything you like, it's just important that they have a name.
  - Just letting them sit there. Make sure that you aren't trying to change your feelings, or make them go away, or getting upset at yourself for having them. Even if they feel bad, they're there for good reasons.
- Now, take a few deep breaths and imagine that you're making more room inside for your feelings. It can help to imagine your inside expanding like a balloon being blown up, while the feeling sits there inside the balloon.
  - Take a few more deep breaths and try to make space inside yourself for feelings of all types.

You can do this a few times if you like.

After you try this out, your feelings will probably feel easier. They might also change to different feelings, this happens sometimes when you let go and notice them without being afraid.

You don't need to struggle or feel bad about your feelings, you don't need push them away, or act on them. You can just let them be, and with a little help, they'll change on their own over time.

### **Strength Building Exercise: Getting in Touch with Your Future You**

This exercise is like building your inner strength. It's for people who have been through tough times, and can really help if they are feeling very alone. You are going to imagine your Future You, who is bigger, stronger, and wiser than how you feel right now.

- Imagine yourself in the future, like 5, 10, or 15 years from now, after you've faced and got through the hard things in your life.
  - Imagine that they are living a good life, part of a community and society. People look up to the Future You.
  - Picture this Future You feeling proud and strong because you've overcome your challenges. Try to really feel that Future You, almost like you are stepping inside their skin for a moment.
- Imagine what your Future You's life is like.
    - What do they do?
    - Do they have a job? Where do they live? Who are they important to? What do they do for fun?
  - What would your Future You say to help you right now?
  - Who and what can help you with getting to your Future You?

### **Musical Chairs for Emotions**

This exercise helps you understand and deal with tough emotions.

- Think about a time when you felt really sad or like you're failing at something.
- Find three chairs, or places to sit on the ground, arrange them facing each other.
- Imagine that each chair represents a different perspective on how you are feeling.
- Sit the first chair, and express your feelings. If your feelings could speak, what would they say?
- Imagine that a person you respect who you know cares about you is sitting in the second chair. Move to sit in the second chair and ask yourself, what would they tell you that could help?
- In the third chair, imagine your Future You sitting in the chair. Sit in the chair and say what you think your future You would say to help you with how you are feeling.
- This helps you look at your feelings from different angles and learn from them.

### **Meditation Breathing to Help Your Feelings**

This meditation helps you heal and feel better about yourself. It can also make you feel kinder and safer.

- Focus on your breath and let go of other thoughts.
- Think about the parts of you that feel hurt or carry pain, like fear and anger. Breathe in those feelings.
- Imagine them going into your heart. It doesn't cause you any pain or hurt you.
- Then, think about the strong and wise side of yourself. Breathe out their strength, joy, and wisdom to your heart.
- Keep switching between these two sides of yourself, breathing in the hurt into your heart, and breathing out wisdom, strength and joy.
- Although this might seem scary at first to think about trying out, it can feel like a comforting hug after a few minutes of breathing like this.

These exercises can help you understand your feelings and become stronger. It's okay to start with less intense problems and work your way up to more challenging ones.

Over time, you might feel like you understand life and other people more, and feel less scared.