

Coping Strategies

The stress response is your body's way of letting you know that you need to adapt to changes in your environment. Learning how to effectively manage the stress response can help you build resilience. Here are some strategies that can help you improve your mood and your ability to solve problems.

How do you know when you're experiencing the stress response?

Consider your thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and physical symptoms.

Address the stress response:

1. Reframe the stress response: "My body and brain are getting me ready to face this challenge. I am getting ready for an important task."
2. Identify the source of your stress response: "Why am I feeling this stress response?"
3. Make a plan: Use past experiences or brainstorm new ways to approach a difficult situation. Discuss the situation with friends and family and ask for help, if needed.
4. Apply your solutions to the problem.

For example:

- If your studies are the source of your stress response, you can access support and resources to develop your learning strategies at the learning centre on your campus.
- Feel like you have too much to do and don't know where to start? Consider your approach to how you are managing your time. The learning centre on your campus can offer support on time management.

This handout is adapted from *Coping Strategies Handout* by University of British Columbia Student Health and Wellbeing staff. <https://wellbeing.ubc.ca/coping-strategies-handout>. This handout is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license \(CC BY 4.0 license\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

There are also things you can do on a daily basis to help you feel ready to face the various challenges in school, work, and life:

Take care of the basics:

- Focus on getting enough sleep.
- Fuel up on healthy foods.
- Exercise – walk, stretch, go to the gym, dance, or do yoga.

Make time to unwind:

- Create art or write – draw, journal, write poetry or a compassionate letter to yourself.
- Curl up on a couch with a book.
- Enjoy a hot beverage with a friend or family member.
- Listen to comforting music.
- Spend time on your favourite course.
- Remind yourself of your strengths. (I'm good at)
- Garden – grow something, bring flowers into your room, visit a local garden.
- Laugh – read a funny book, watch a comedy.
- Try muscle relaxation exercises.
- Find a quiet, safe space, such as a garden, park, or library where you can relax.

Stay connected or get involved:

- Call friends or family when you need to talk.
- Build a support network – contact old friends or join a club.
- Have fun and meet new people by volunteering in your community.
- Connect with individuals with similar experiences and interests.

Reduce your stress response in the moment:

Try this breathing technique. It can help bring your heart rate back to normal so you feel a little more relaxed. Here's how you do it:

If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

- Step 1:** Inhale (preferably through your nose) for a count of 4.
- Step 2:** Hold your breath for a count of 4. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.
- Step 3:** Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 4.
- Step 4:** Pause for a count of 4 (without speaking) before breathing again.

Repeat this process as many times as you can. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

Practising mindfulness can also reduce the stress response. Apps such as Headspace, Calm, and Insight Timer provide guided or unguided mindfulness options.

Where to seek more help

Online Self-Help and Proactive Resources

- **Foundry** (www.foundrybc.ca) offers resources and self-help ideas for young people aged 12 to 24. You can use the app to drop in or schedule a virtual counselling appointment, find peer support, join a youth group or caregiver group, or browse the library of tools and resources.
- **Mindshift** (www.anxietybc.com/mobile-app) is a great app and website; it includes relaxation techniques.
- **HeretoHelp** (<https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>) offers strategies and resources to help people take care of their mental health and use substances in healthier ways.

Crisis Help

- **Mental Health Support Line:** 310-6789 (no need for area code)
- **Here2Talk:** 1-877-857-3397 – a 24-hour phone and chat counselling support service for B.C. post-secondary students that offers free, confidential counselling and community referral services via app, phone, and web (<https://here2talk.ca>)
- **BC Suicide Line:** 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE or <https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/>)
- Local hospital emergency department

What are two strategies would you like to try?

1

2