

How to Cope with Change

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Change. None of us is a stranger to it. As Benjamin Franklin stated, “Change is the only constant in life.” Despite our familiarity with change, it can still catch us off guard and catch us by surprise. In recent months, we have all been faced with the challenge of how to cope with the changes brought on by the pandemic.

As students, you have dealt with the sudden change of going from receiving your education in a school building to in your home. Many students have struggled to adjust to this change for good reason. Spending so much time at home can lead to boredom, increased conflict with family members, sadness about not being able to see friends, grief over cancelled school activities, and in-home distractions leading to procrastination on schoolwork and possibly even suffering academic performance.

Adjusting to these changes involves learning how to cope with your emotions elicited by the changes. Some emotions you may be experiencing include anxiety, overwhelm, disappointment, sadness, boredom, and grief. Below are strategies you can use to cope with your emotions:

- **Problem-Solving:** For problems within your control to change, solving your problems is often the best way to feel better emotionally. Here are some steps you can take:
 1. *Identify the problem.*
 2. *Brainstorm solutions to the problem.*
 3. *Ask a trusted other for additional solutions (options).*
 4. *Evaluate your options.*
 5. *Decide on the best solution.*
 6. *Determine how to implement the solution.*

7. *Implement your choice.*

- **Use a skill called “emotional self-validation,” which has three steps:**
 - *Acknowledging your emotion.* “I feel sad.”
 - *Allowing your emotion.* “It’s okay to feel sad.”
 - *Understanding your emotion.* “I understand why I feel sad given that I miss my friends.”
- **Practice a deep breathing exercise.**
 1. Breathe in deeply from your stomach for 4 seconds.
 2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
 3. Exhale for 6 seconds.
 4. Repeat until you feel a sense of calm.
- **Listen to or play calming music.**
- **Do artwork or make a craft.**
- **Take a hot bath or shower.**
- **Talk to a trusted and supportive person in your life about your thoughts and feelings.**
- **Pray and meditate on Scripture.**
- **Focus on a calming scene in your mind or in a picture or photograph.**

Engage your five senses to more fully experience the scene. For example, imagine a beach scene:

 - Vision: What do you see? The sand, ocean, seagulls...
 - Hearing: What do you hear? The waves, wind...
 - Taste: What do you taste? The salt from the seawater...
 - Smell: What do you smell? The aromatic sea air...
 - Touch: What do you feel? The sand beneath your feet, the hot sun on your skin...
- **Use soothing self-talk.**
 - “I’m okay.”

- “I know I can get through this because I have gotten through other difficult times in my past.”
- “I’m choosing to be kind and compassionate towards myself just like I am towards my friends.”
- “Even though I am struggling with _____, I still completely and deeply love and accept myself.”
- **Show an act of kindness.**
 - Call a friend to encourage him or her.
 - Write a thoughtful note to a family member.
 - Send a card to someone you know in a nursing home.
- **Do something fun!**
 - Call a friend.
 - Watch a funny movie.
 - Play games with your friends online.
 - Video chat with a group of friends.

What would you add to this list? Consider making a list of your favorite coping strategies to reference when you feel emotionally distressed. This list can be helpful given that we often forget what can help us when we initially experience a change in our lives. Think of the list as your coping skills toolbox to carry along with you throughout your life as you adjust to changes big and small. And remember that you can cope with life’s stressors and come out stronger on the other side.