

Our bodies' stress response systems are outdated and don't always help us respond appropriately to modern dangers. If you were walking in the forest and a bear attacked you, your body would go into survival mode. Your choices would be flight (run away), fight (run at the bear and defend yourself), or freeze (play dead.) Those options work well when faced with bear attacks but they may not be as effective when dealing with stress from your job, your relationships or day to day challenges.

Name your bears.

Write down what you are most stressed about right now. Circle the biggest bear (stressor).

Where do the bears bite?

How do you notice that you are under stress? What does your body feel like?

Your current options.

When faced with your bears, what do you typically do? Place a star next to the option you use most.

When I fight I _____

When I go into flight I _____

When I freeze I _____

Is that working?

How do your current coping mechanisms serve you? What problems do they cause?

What could you try?

List a few stress responses that might serve you better.

How might that feel?

What would be different if you used the new strategies?



Distress Tolerance

Crisis Survival

Practice these skills for tolerating painful events, urges, and emotions when you cannot make things better right away. You don't need to do everything at once. Choose the ones that you seem to be the best fit for you at the moment

Distracting: Wise Mind A.C.C.E.P.T.S

Activities (read, walk, work out)

Contributions (take care of something)

Comparisons (read about disasters and suffering)

Emotions (opposite emotions – comedies, music)

Push away (leave the situation mentally)

Thoughts (count numbers, colors, crossword puzzles)

Sensations (hold ice, snap rubber bands)

Body Chemistry: TIP

T: change body Temperature

I: Intense exercise

P: Progressive relaxation (tense and relax your muscles)

Self Soothe: the 5 Senses

Vision: make a shrine, look at art, take pictures, look out the window, watch movies

Hearing: uplifting or loud music, listen to nature

Smell: light vanilla candles, apply lotions, bake bread

Taste: chocolate, mints, candy / altoids, tea / coffee

Touch: bathe, pet animals, be in nature, fold clothes

I.M.P.R.O.V.E. the Moment

Imagery (picture the Sea Ranch, Land's end, walk through your house)

Meaning (create purpose in the moment, make it into a metaphor, draw it, find themes, categorize)

Prayer (open up to wisdom, read inspirational quotes or scriptures)

Relaxing actions (massage, change facial expressions)

One thing at a time (focus entirely on what you are doing now, follow your body)

Vacation (go to a park, read in a hammock, go for a drive)

Encouragement (tell yourself "I am doing the best I can.")

Self- Care Suggestions

I recommend at least one small act of self-care daily and one bigger one every week. It's also important to identify some techniques to help you soothe yourself when you notice yourself becoming overwhelmed.

During the crisis:

Whether you are in the middle of a cluster or trying to survive a violent outburst, it's important to keep your cool.

- Practice deep breathing. If you aren't hyperventilating, stick a peppermint in your mouth and focus on how the cool air feels in your throat.
 - Grab a stress ball and squeeze as hard as you can.
 - Create a mantra to chant during the hard moments. This is a short, meaningful phrase that you can cling to when everything feels chaotic.
 - Imagine something fantastical. Sometimes I take a cue from the old TV show, Scrubs and imagine something wild happening in the midst of the chaos. Maybe the person screaming suddenly starts to shrink until they are two inches tall, and thus much less intimidating. Or I might imagine actual thunder and lightning coming out of her fist and then Thor getting mad at her for stealing his schtick. Typically the wilder and more irreverent the better.
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Daily

On a daily basis, we need to take a few minutes to recharge. If this starts to feel like another overwhelming item on your to-do list, you're doing it wrong. It's just about giving yourself a chance to recover from life. That means that it's especially important when life feels like a beating.

- Reach out to a friend. The temptation is to just scroll mindlessly through social media but that's numbing. You can use technology but chat with a specific person or group in a way that makes you feel connected.
 - Take care of your body. Go for a walk or exercise. Take a shower(!) and use a delicious smelling soap. Get some sleep.
 - Spend a few minutes alone with a hot or cold beverage.
 - Listen to an online mindfulness exercise. (you can find some for free at self-compassion.org/category/exercises/)
 - Watch videos of baby pandas or dogs or cats. Whatever random thing makes you smile, give yourself permission to enjoy it for a few minutes.
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Weekly

If you're going to spend a little money on self-care, this is where that might happen but it doesn't have to. I pay to get my nails done because it makes me happy. I have friends who get regular massages or take time out for hobbies. Lots of parents with special needs kids are short on time, money and childcare. It's important that we understand our limitations while finding ways to care for ourselves in spite of them.

- Read whatever feeds your soul. Whether that's scripture, horror, trashy romance or a comic book, indulge in reading that you enjoy.
 - Go on a date night. Sometimes that might mean eating cold pizza in the back yard at 2:00AM but find some time to reconnect with your partner.
 - Find a hobby. I did mixed martial arts for a few years after Alyssa was diagnosed and it kept me sane. I know parents who do glass making, crafting, a whole variety of sports and other pursuits.
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Don't give in to the message that you have to give up every part of yourself during this season. Instead, give yourself permission to try something new and make your own mental health a priority too.



Emotion Journal

Date: _____

Important happenings today: _____

I feel mad because: _____

I feel sad because: _____

I feel glad because: _____

I feel afraid because: _____

I feel guilty or ashamed because: _____

