

Overcoming Feelings of Helplessness and Overwhelm

With the world in a state of uncertainty, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless. News coverage of global events can be constant and fill ourselves and our loved ones with anxiety about the future. Worry and stress are a natural part of being human, but it can become a problem if it leaves you feeling exhausted and unable to turn off the worry and relax.

Below are some suggestions for overcoming feelings of helplessness and overwhelmedness in times of uncertainty:

Avoid 'Doomscrolling': Staying informed is important, but constantly reading difficult and negative news (also known as doomscrolling) can take a toll on our mental health. Limit time on social media and news platforms, especially before bed, and allow yourself time to process what you're feeling. When you are reading about what's happening in the world, try to find news from reliable sources, as there is a lot of misinformation on the internet.

Know that it's common to feel overwhelmed in times of uncertainty: It's perfectly natural to feel overwhelmed by what's going on in the world and to feel upset by other people's struggles. Acknowledge your feelings and worries and know that they are valid, and a natural response to challenging or frightening events. Show yourself compassion and treat yourself with kindness.

Manage feelings of helplessness by focusing on what you can do: Maybe this looks like volunteering, raising awareness about an issue that you're passionate about, or helping someone in your community. When it feels like you're powerless to change what's happening in the world, focusing on something small you can do to benefit those around you can be empowering.

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Take a Break: Try doing something fun, distracting or active to get your mind off your worries. When we are overwhelmed, we can feel paralyzed and have a difficult time moving forward or accomplishing what we need to do. Set aside time to do something that brings you joy—whether that’s exercise, creative pursuits like drawing or playing guitar, cooking, or spending time with pets. Your worries will be there when you get back, so you might as well take a break and do something enjoyable! Taking breaks from your phone and social media and getting outside is also great for mental health.

Speak to others about what you’re feeling: It’s likely that other people in your community and social circles are feeling similar. Talking about your concerns with others can help you both process your emotions and worries while also creating connection and resilience.

Challenge your Worries: It’s easy to get lost in worst-case scenarios and to let our minds run wild with “what ifs”. Are your worries realistic or are they very unlikely to happen? Take a moment to pause and challenge some of those thoughts. If your thought is a “what if” scenario, remind yourself that you are currently safe and your worst-case scenario is highly unlikely to happen. Sometimes it’s helpful to focus on what you’re grateful for, rather than the many things that make you upset and anxious.

Remember that it’s natural to feel overwhelmed and helpless when events in the world seem beyond your control. Being mindful about the news and media that you read or watch, taking breaks to do things that bring you joy, and challenging spiraling thoughts and worries are useful strategies. While it might seem like we can’t make a difference, focusing on the small things we can do in our own community can lessen feelings of powerlessness. Perhaps you can organize a fundraiser or check on a friend who is going through a hard time. When the world feels too overwhelming, connecting with others in our social circle and processing what we are feeling together can positively impact our mental health and help us become more resilient.

