



Managing (Di)Stress for Parents and Carers

Headspace App (or online) - The section 'Weathering the storm' is a collection of meditation, sleep and movement exercises for the current global crisis and is free for all.
<https://www.headspace.com/covid-19>

Calm online (or App) - The section 'Calm Together' is a collection of meditations, sleep stories, movement exercises, masterclasses, journals, music and practices to find ease. All the resources in this section are free to use, and to share. (In the App look for the boxes with no padlock in the corner.)
<https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>

Label your emotion - The part of the brain that can label or name an emotion is the same part that 'feels' the emotion. Labelling is proven to reduce the intensity e.g. by saying "I feel angry" can help us feel less angry.

Physically remove the tension - If we feel tense in the arms, shake our arms; if we feel tight in our chest, stretch and expand or breathe deeply.

Breathing exercises - Breathing exercises can help us feel more centred or in control. Tip: Our body cannot stay angry when deep breathing! There are lots of different exercises on this link, try them and see which ones works best for you.
<https://www.nwbh.nhs.uk/healthandwellbeing/Pages/Breathing-Techniques-.aspx#>

Smells - Certain smells can bring comfort and can help to calm us down. Using candles, incense, hot drinks, a specific fabric conditioner, or certain foods, can help us to create particular smells in our home. This can help us to feel calm and settled.

Taste - Chewing gum and boiled sweets can help to ground us because they give us something consistent to focus on. Small studies have shown that chewing gum can actually help us to reduce our anxiety levels at times of high-stress. Boiled sweets can often remind us of simpler times; the taste and sensation of sucking on them can help to take us back to those times.

Warmth - Having something warm can help us to feel calm. It can help us to relax. A warm drink (particularly if it's caffeine-free), a warm bath, a heat pack, or a hot water bottle can all help us to feel warm, cosy, and calm. (Pets can be a great comfort too.)

Let yourself cry - When our anxiety builds and builds, we sometimes just need to let it out, and crying can be a great way to do that. Sometimes we feel like we 'shouldn't' be crying, and try to hold it in. But crying is a really natural thing to do. We all need a good cry every now and again – it can be incredibly cathartic.

Fool your brain! - This exercise from Feel Good CIC is really quick and effective at lifting our mood if we really go for it! We usually clap when we're happy so it fools our brain into feeling positive. Eventually we can just imagine we're doing the exercise and it will still work.

➔ Rub your hands together three times, then clap three times, repeat three times.



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Grounding techniques - When our mind is racing, grounding brings us back to the here-and-now and is very helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or anxiety. It is a great way to calm down quickly.

5-4-3-2-1

5 – things you can see (you can look within the room and out of the window)

4 – things you can feel (the silkiness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair, what does your hair feel like? What is in front of you that you can touch?)

3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside, when you are quiet and actually listening things in your room constantly make a noise but typically we don't hear them)

2 – things you can smell

1 – thing you can taste (This can just be your tongue or take a small bite of something and let it swirl around your mouth for a couple of seconds, really savouring the flavour)

Hold Something and Really Focus On It

Hold an object in your hand and really bring your full focus to it. Look at where shadows may fall on parts of it or maybe there are shapes that form within the object. Feel how heavy or light it is in your hand and what the surface texture feels like under your fingers. This can be done with any object you have lying around or one of your favourite objects.

Distract Yourself

There are several ways to distract your mind so it stops thinking about whatever it is that is worrying you and focuses on something that isn't emotionally driven. Here are two quick ways to do it:

- Pick a colour. How many things in different shades of that colour can you see around the room or out of the window? Still feeling stressed? Pick another colour.

- Count backwards by 7, starting at 100. It isn't that easy and needs you to concentrate. This one can also be helpful to do when you are finding it hard to sleep.

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TIP - Let Your Adrenaline-Fuelled Energy Out

Sometimes you just can't concentrate enough to do any of these grounding exercises because your body seems too pumped full of adrenaline fuelled energy. If this is happening to you, it is good to kick-start the calming down process by doing something physical first to get that pent-up energy out and then come back to your favourite grounding techniques.

- Run on the treadmill/elliptical if you have one at home
- Run up and down the stairs
- Take a brisk walk or run outside
- Cleaning up the kitchen, house or garden channels that extra energy into something useful
- Dance around the house while listening to loud music

When you are physically spent, you can return to trying these techniques to calm down your mind.