

Life Lines

Improving Your Quality of Life — One Step at a Time



How to deal with difficult emotions – our own and others'

Strong emotions can sometimes overwhelm and consume us: a friend betrays a confidence leaving us feeling hurt; a co-worker takes credit for a project we did and we feel bitter; or, our carelessness results in someone being hurt and we're experiencing guilt and regret.

If we allow these or other troublesome emotions to dominate our thoughts and feelings, we could pay a heavy price: our self-esteem, personal relationships, or physical health may suffer.

It may not always be easy, but it is possible to move through difficult emotional states and feel better. The strategies below are a good start. However, if you find yourself struggling with strong emotions and are unable to let them go, it is always wise to seek professional assistance.








TIPS

- Determine what you are feeling.** Saying you feel bad or upset is too vague – maybe you are feeling irritated, mad, anxious, afraid, sad, hurt, or lonely. Knowing what feelings you are experiencing will help you work through them.
- Take a time out.** If you are with others, and it would not be appropriate for you to express intense emotions at that time, excuse yourself for a few moments: "I need a couple of minutes to collect my thoughts. I'll be right back."
- Discuss your feelings or situation with close friends or family members.** Ask them to listen to your concerns and provide a different perspective on the situation.
- Look for the lesson.** If a situation has upset you, ask yourself: "What has this taught me about myself or about life? How can I change my thinking or actions, and perhaps experience a different outcome if this happens again?"
- Be kind to yourself.** This is a good time to practice self-care. Organize something you enjoy that will help you feel better – perhaps a hot bath or a nature walk. Exercise works wonders when it comes to releasing negative emotions.
- Write down your feelings in a journal.** The process of journaling can help you stop ruminating, lower distress levels, and bring closure to the events that have affected you, and your feelings.
- Remind yourself that your feelings will change.** You have not always felt this way. Think about previous situations when you felt intense emotions and were able to work through them. Remember that time is always healing.

When friends or family members experience difficult times it is natural to open our heart and want to provide emotional support or advice. It can be painful to watch someone we care about suffer, and sometimes we may not always know how to respond appropriately and effectively.

Here are some tips to help you assist someone you care about. The goal is for both of you to be able to navigate through difficult emotions while maintaining perspective.

TIPS

-  **Let them manage it on their own terms.** It is natural to assume that your friend will deal with things and react the same way you do. It is important to keep in mind that you are not them, and they are not you. Their experience is uniquely theirs.
-  **Keep quiet.** If the person is grieving or feeling sad, the best response may be to say little and simply listen. Showing compassion by putting your arm around them and letting them cry says more than words, and may be all that is required of you.
-  **Maintain appropriate boundaries.** When someone struggling with difficult emotions asks for your help, be clear about what you will or won't do. Be firm and don't allow them to persuade you to do something you are not comfortable doing.
-  **Don't attempt to psycho-analyze.** Encourage the person to talk about what has upset them, and if appropriate, help them reframe the situation in a more positive light. However, be careful not to attempt to solve or fix the problem – letting them know they've been heard and understood is usually the most beneficial response.
-  **Don't judge or make assumptions.** It's difficult to offer someone compassion if you feel negatively towards them or the situation. Put yourself in their shoes, and as best you can approach them with an open mind and heart.
-  **Temper your emotional response.** Sometimes when people are feeling miserable or outraged they want you to agree with them – “misery loves company.” Try not to feed into the situation and instead respond as calmly as you can with a positive message.
-  **Suggest a creative outlet.** When the time is right, if the person has any hobbies or passions, then suggest they immerse themselves in them for a while to help with the healing process.

We want your questions,
comments, and suggestions.
lifelines@
homewoodhumansolutions.com

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