

STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

Coping with a Crisis

No one will ever live a life so fortunate as to escape living through a crisis. Traumatic events such as job loss, divorce, sexual assault, or the death of a loved one can throw a life into upheaval and create a dangerous mix of grief, anger, depression, and hopelessness. This can lead to permanent psychological and emotional harm if not dealt with in a healthy and constructive manner.

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Webster's Dictionary defines crisis as "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending." Crises are not necessarily about trauma, but human reaction to it. Because all individuals have different psychological make-ups, an event that creates a crisis for one individual may not create one for another.

As often noted, the Chinese word for crisis actually combines two individual characters that closely represent "danger" and "opportunity." A crisis creates a crossroads in an individual's life that can either lead to personal growth or transition to greater dysfunction.

HOW DO I COPE WITH MY CRISIS?

The most important action that you can take when experiencing a crisis is reaching out for support from friends or family. A crisis not only creates the need to talk through your feelings, it also has a way of

making everyday tasks difficult to accomplish alone. When loved ones offer their time and support, take it. A heartfelt thank you is all that is necessary in return. Do not allow guilt or pride to prevent you from receiving the help you need. Consider whether informing your employer of your circumstances and asking for needed time off or other accommodation is necessary to help you cope and recover. Refusal to look for, or accept support, is a mistake and can make it more difficult to gain the advantage resulting from a crisis.



Because of the disruptive nature of the types of events that trigger crises, adhering to your existing daily schedule will help you to maintain a sense of normalcy and calm. Structure is key. Sticking to your regular routine helps combat the physical and psychological effects of a crisis. Sitting down to eat for every meal, even if you are not hungry will help to keep your food intake at healthy levels. Going to bed at the same time every night will help to combat insomnia. Stay away from mood altering use of substances during this period, as they can delay the healing process or even compound your problems,

regardless of whether abuse or addiction is a issue for you.

Big decisions often accompany a crisis. It's a good rule to delay important life decisions like changing jobs or selling your home in the face of crisis.

A crisis that remains ongoing signals a need to consult with a mental health professional. An objective source of such help will provide relief, and enable you to make effective decisions as you go forward.

Contact the UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center for information on free, confidential counseling services.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M EXPERIENCING A CRISIS?

You are experiencing a crisis when an event causes you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with its repercussions. Events that trigger a crisis are not always external. An internal event such as a new psychological awareness that challenges or destroys an important personal belief can trigger a crisis.

The following are indicators that you may be experiencing a crisis. Not all individuals experience every one.

- » Sadness
- » Anger or rage
- » Hopelessness
- » Confusion
- » Fear
- » Guilt
- » Mood swings
- » Forgetfulness
- » Withdrawal from friends and family
- » Flashbacks to the crisis event
- » Inability to concentrate
- » Disrupted sleep patterns or insomnia
- » Lack of appetite
- » Fatigue

