



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Managing Political Stress

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Regardless of your political beliefs, it is safe to say that we are living through unprecedented circumstances in our nation's history. With over 200,000 lives lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, profound disruptions in our daily lives, and an increasingly polarized political climate, many Americans are experiencing significantly elevated levels of stress.

According to the American Psychological Association's Stress in America survey for July, 77% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans said the political climate was a significant source of stress. 47% of workers say the 2020 election has distracted them from doing their jobs.

People deal with stress in many different ways. Some of these ways are healthy and proactive, like exercising and meditation and some are unhealthy, like engaging in rumination or negative coping habits such as substance abuse. Moderate levels of stress can be good when managed. A lot of stress, however, and particularly chronic stress, can negatively affect our emotional and physical health in many ways. If you experience any of the following physical or emotional symptoms, you may be experiencing political induced stress:

- A higher blood pressure than usual
- Weight gain or loss
- Anxious or worried feelings
- Drastic mood changes

- Sleep struggles
- Increased consumption of alcohol

Being proactive about stress management can make a difference in the direction that your stress takes, and help prevent a downward spiral of hopelessness that feeds upon itself. The good news is that many techniques can help with stress management in general, and be helpful for political stress in particular.

Effective Methods to Manage Political Stress

- 1. Monitor your exposure to political content.** Stay informed, but know your limits. Consider how much news you take in and how that information is affecting you. If you are preoccupied with national events and it is interfering with your daily life, this may be a sign to cut back on your news intake and limit social media discussions. However, completely cutting yourself off from any political news is not recommended as that may provoke an anxiety response while wondering what news you are missing.

One strategy to lessen feelings of political anxiety is to schedule a short block of time in the morning and one in the evening to catch up on news without checking for every new update during the day. Another option is to take "digital breaks," while focusing on engaging in something enjoyable, such as a hobby, exercising, or spending time with family and friends.

- 2. Be mindful of where and when you share your political views.** While educating or sharing thoughts on a certain political topic may promote engaged citizenship, it can also create negative consequences. Expressing opposing views can be

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divisive, and these disagreements can occur not only between acquaintances but between close friends and especially family members. Many people don't like to "agree to disagree" but would rather try to convince people with opposing views that their views are "incorrect," which can backfire particularly when political views are discussed.

On the other hand, during a stressful or difficult time, children in the home may benefit from adult oversight or guidance. Some children may be struggling to understand the current political climate, and if you sense your child is one of them this may be a great opportunity to have an engaging, balanced conversation about current events.

- 3. Be open to other points of view, especially during holiday gatherings.** Political conflicts can be particularly stressful. If the topic of political differences arises at work or during holiday gatherings, avoid heated discussions and try to identify commonalities within your different views. Sometimes different views can come from similar underlying principles. Be open to hearing the other person's story, and maybe even validate how they are feeling. When we frame our thinking this way, it can be easier to tolerate or understand people with different views. If you find it difficult to discuss political issues calmly and constructively, it may be best to disengage from the conversation.
- 4. Find meaningful ways to get involved in your community.** Identify issues that are important to you, and research organizations that work on those issues. Contact them and see how you can join their efforts. You could also consider getting involved in local politics, where it can be possible to see the direct impact of your efforts. Attend a city council meeting or a town hall meeting to listen to and share your ideas with elected officials. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper or participate in a peaceful protest. Taking active steps to address your concerns can lessen feelings of stress.

- 5. Pay attention to self-care.** Because stress can have a physical and emotional impact on your overall health, find activities you enjoy to help you recharge and reduce your stress, such as exercising, listening to your favorite music, spending time with close family and friends that share your beliefs; meditating, breathing exercises, or whatever you find helpful. It's important to prioritize getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, and avoiding ineffective coping mechanisms such as alcohol and substance use.
- 6. Distract yourself by watching a funny movie or picking up a new hobby.** Allowing yourself to engage in pleasurable, stress-free activities can go a long way in buffering the effects of stress. Try your hand at art, learn to play an instrument, or spend more time in the garden. Watch your favorite comedy with your partner or a good friend. Laughing can be one of the most effective antidotes to relieve stress.

Please know that you are not alone. Your First Choice Health EAP program is available 24/7 to provide professional support when you need someone to talk to, request a referral for free EAP counseling sessions, or seek additional services to help ease your stress during these volatile times. Your First Choice Health EAP program can be accessed by phone at (800) 777-4114 or at www.firstchoiceEAP.com using your organization's unique username.