

learn how to handle tough times



“It’s OK to feel not okay – tough times happen for everyone. The fact that you’re reading this shows that you’ve noticed things aren’t so great, or that a friend or family member’s not feeling so great, and you want to do something proactive or different...”

Liam – hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Developing your own positive ways to handle tough times can help develop your self-awareness, build confidence and leave you more resilient – all helping to keep your headspace healthy.

Developing your personal coping strategies

There’s no doubt about it, life can be hard sometimes. From relationship issues, to work and study stress, to days when we don’t feel great – we all go through stressful and emotional periods.

When that happens our coping strategies kick in – these are things that we’ve learnt over time that help us feel better. Some people naturally use ways of coping that are helpful – like journalling, meditation or speaking with friends. But for some of us, the way we cope can leave us feeling worse in the long term. We may stop doing things we enjoy, use alcohol and other drugs or disconnect from friends and family.

So, where should you start if you want to learn new ways to cope with difficult times? The important first step is to reflect on how you react to stress – taking time to understand *what* you do and *why* you do it. This builds your self-awareness. It can help you learn things about yourself that will help you handle tough times in the future. The more you understand yourself, the better you will be at applying more helpful strategies that *work for you*.

Learning new and positive ways to handle tough times can:

- improve your self-awareness
- give you a sense of achievement
- build your confidence
- lift your energy
- improve your motivation.

Develop your own healthy coping strategies

- **Notice how you respond in tough times.** Pausing for a few seconds before you engage in any type of coping strategy gives you the power to choose how you'd like to respond, rather than reacting automatically.
- **Reflect.** Think about whether your current coping strategies are helpful. This is not easy to do, and can take some practice. It might help to give yourself some time to ponder these questions, and write down anything that comes up:
 - How do I respond in tough times?
 - Do my thoughts or feelings influence what I do?
 - Is the way I respond useful or not?
 - Why do I think I respond in that way?
 - How can I approach the challenges differently?
- **It's never too late to begin.** It doesn't matter how long you've been having a tough time, there's always time to learn new coping strategies.
- **Make it work for you.** Your plan for dealing with tough times might be very different to someone else's. That's OK! Everyone is different. Coping with stress and emotion is individual.
- **Get support.** It can help to let those closest to you know your new coping strategies. That way, if you're distressed and struggling to think clearly, they can support you through your new plan.
- **Take notice.** Learn to notice how you handle these challenges and pay attention to whether the strategies are useful. Growth can come from how we manage the challenges that life throws at us. Noticing the benefits will help motivate you to try new ways, and help build your resilience.

Ideas for how you can handle tough Times differently

- journaling
- using artwork to express your feelings
- writing down what you find difficult and potential ways to handle it differently
- catching up with friends and family
- deep breathing
- disconnecting from social media for a while
- spending time in nature
- practising being kind to yourself
- meditation
- exercise (even a short walk can be helpful!)



"There are so many ways that you can do self-care, and for everyone that's different. I found goal-setting, or even schedule management, really helpful. Young people have a lot of stuff going on, they're trying to find work, keep active, keep up with study or work and it can get pretty hectic quickly, if you keep it all in your head.

Something as simple as having a diary – where you can plan out your days – can really help. It also just helps relax your mind from trying to keep everything in your head.

If you're able to do these positive things as part of your daily schedule, you can lean on this when you're feeling stressed. It's a lot easier to start when you're feeling OK, rather than when you're feeling really low."

Liam, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you go through stressful periods, it's a good idea to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Having your own plan for looking after yourself in times of stress is important. Things like exercise, eating well and spending time on your relationships are also good for your mental health.

Regardless of your situation, there are lots of options to help you cope and you're never alone.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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