

Managing a Crisis

A crisis is a terrible situation that you can't readily make better. You're likely to feel overwhelmed during a crisis – that simply means you don't know what to do.

There are four basic steps to managing a crisis:

1. **Find a solution if possible.** Sometimes it turns out what you thought was a crisis was really a solvable problem. However, if there is no solution, it's best not to frustrate yourself by trying to fix what can't be fixed.
2. **Accept your emotions.** This is not easy to do. Allowing your emotions to come and go, while staying focused and attentive to the world around you, can build distress-tolerance skills that help ward off depression. Psychologists call this technique mindfulness (read more at www.moodtreatmentcenter.com/mindfulness.htm)
3. **Change your space.** Sometimes accepting emotions is too difficult. If that's the case, focus instead on physical changes which can bring relaxation or distract you from the worry. A physical activity which engages your mind (such as sports, bike-riding, crochet, gardening) can help. Other ideas are in the list below.
4. **Avoid things that can make it worse.** It may not be possible to change the situation, or accept your emotions, or improve your environment. Remember that there are always things you could do that only make it worse – and just avoiding those is the most important part of surviving a crisis.

When you're in the thick of a crisis, it can be hard to think straight and remember what helps and what makes it worse. It's a good idea to build a list so you won't have to jog your memory every time. Psychologists have developed an acronym (ACCEPTS) to help remember ideas:

- A – Activities that are easy and engrossing
- C – Contribute to others, find ways to engage in the needs of someone else
- C – Comparisons are helpful when it promotes gratitude (consider how things could be worse)
- E – Emotions; promote positive emotions through music, art, etc.
- P – Passing By; visualize thoughts passing by, such as on signs held by a marching band
- T – Thoughts; Find a comforting, stabilizing thought and fill your mind with it
- S – Sensations that Soothe; Take a hot bath or shower, massage, stretching

It's a good idea to keep your own personal list to return to when a crisis hits. We've collected things that other clients found useful and printed them on the back.

Steps to Take in a Crisis (*Sample list*)

- Take a hot bath or cold shower
- Go where you are alone and can smoke but won't be tempted to drink
- Completely change your environment (if inside, go outside; if sitting stand up and move; if in the dark go where there's light)
- Go for a walk
- Put ice on your skin
- Clean out some clutter
- Go swimming
- Play a board game or other game
- Watch comedies
- Shop for something very inexpensive, and spend a long time looking for it
- Avoid: breaking things, blaming spouse, alcohol

There are more ideas at:

www.moodtreatmentcenter.com/active.htm