

# HELPFUL TOOLS FOR COPING

It is important that these tools are practiced outside of counselling time.

## Tips for Better Sleep:

Sleep is crucial while in counselling as it allows time for your mind to process feelings and emotions.

- ❖ Set a routine around bed time- try to go to sleep and wake up at similar times each day
- ❖ Try to avoid emotionally stimulating material a half an hour before going to sleep. This can include: TV shows, books, movies or podcast that increase emotional response
- ❖ Avoiding caffeine 6 hours before bedtime
- ❖ If thoughts are keeping you awake: write out concerns and solutions for each concern.

## Tips for Coping with Nightmares:

- ❖ Write out a different ending to the nightmare
- ❖ Reassure yourself of physical safety i.e. Turning on the lights, checking the locks
- ❖ Focus on another task i.e. Reading a book, listening to relaxing music or watching a soothing television show.
- ❖ Talk with a friend or partner who is supportive

## Tips for Coping with Anxiety:

- ❖ Take deep breaths counting to five every time you inhale and exhale
- ❖ Try a relaxing activity such as : a warm bath or guided meditation
- ❖ Get moving: if you are sitting try to get up and stretch, go for a walk or exercise
- ❖ Practice positive self-talk. You may be experiencing negative self-talk. Write down negative thoughts and try to challenge them with more positive messages.

## Tips for Coping with Flashbacks and Dissociation:

- ❖ Remind yourself of date time and current location – this will connect you to the present instead of the flashback
- ❖ Remind yourself that you are safe and the traumatic event is not happening now.
- ❖ Eat a sweet or sour candy. This will allow you to focus on the sensations in your mouth and relax your body.
- ❖ Talk with a supportive friend, family member or partner



## CHANGING HABITS:

Change is always difficult because it requires altering habits. However, if you want to improve the quality of your life, you may want to consider making one small change each week. The concept of baby steps leads to major lifestyle changes over time. These changes can result in your increased health during this stressful period of your life and an increase in overall satisfaction with your life. Effective coping and healthful life choices increase your sense of competence. This has a positive effect on your sense of self which promotes more healthy choices.

### **Coping strategies that counteract stress include:**

- [Diet](#). Eating a healthy diet improves your energy and your health. What you eat affects your mood. Pay attention to your intake of coffee, sugar, and fats as these alter energy levels. Healthy eating habits will provide your body with the nutrition it needs. Healthy eating habits also enhance your sense of self as you choose to take care of yourself.
- [Exercise](#). Adding more exercise to your life will improve your energy and your health. The more stress you experience in your life, the more tired you may become. It is at those times that you need to exercise the most. This may require forcing yourself to make a wise choice and take care of your body and your emotions in this way, but it is worth it. You will feel better and increase your resistance to illness.
- [Assertiveness](#). Assertive responses are thoughtful and planned, not impulsive and spoken from your emotions. When you use your rational mind to plan your approach to a conflict situation or a difficult communication, you ultimately feel better about your behaviour. The goal is to present with self-confidence, respecting the other person, and respecting yourself.
- [Journaling](#). Journaling is an effective way to deal with stress. Write down your thoughts and feelings on a daily basis. Write it all down, no matter what it is. Journaling can get out feelings of anger and relieve you of hostile emotions that affect your heart and health. Daily journaling is an outlet for creativity, discovery, and release from painful emotions. Automatic writing is a form of writing in which you set an amount of time and write whatever comes into your mind. You can find clues in your writing about your unspoken thoughts and feelings.
- [Poetry](#). Poetry is another form of writing that allows you to write your thoughts and feelings in a form that is creative and satisfying, as well as relieving. You can put the feelings on paper in whatever form you choose. You can learn about poetry as an art form. You can condense the feeling into the fewest words, finding metaphors that express your feelings.
- [Meditation](#). The practice of meditation quiets your body, mind, and emotions. It has been proven effective in reducing stress, improving the immune system, and increasing health. Sitting meditation, walking meditation, standing meditation, and yoga are types of meditation exercises.
- [Prayer](#). Many find prayer/spirituality works. Recent research shows the healing effects of prayer. Praying can achieve a sense of calmness.
- [Music](#). Music is healing. You can release your emotions through movement to an upbeat melody or crying to a sad ballad. You can sing your pain. You can sing your hope. Listening to music can alter your emotions.
- [Recreation](#). Recreation of whatever type gets your mind off your problems and allows you to release the stress. Recreation re-creates you.

## A WORD ABOUT NEGATIVE OR INEFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES:

The goal is to survive the crisis without making the situation worse. Sometimes people choose ways to deal with stress and make an already difficult situation much, much worse.

### Examples of choices that give into the stress and make the situation worse:

- ❖ Increasing alcohol consumption - getting drunk
- ❖ Misuse/abuse of mood altering drugs - methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, marijuana, prescription drugs.
- ❖ Unrestrained anger - striking out at others with words, instead of taking care of yourself and your anger through effective coping skills.
- ❖ Giving in to depression - closing the curtains, staying in bed, neglecting your family
- ❖ Gambling - like other choices that make the situation worse, gambling is a temporary escape resulting in negative consequences.
- ❖ Sexual risk-taking - may feel good and boost self-esteem for a short time, but is a temporary escape.

**REMEMBER:** The goal is to counteract the stress and **SURVIVE THE CRISIS!** We recognize counselling is hard work. Make time for yourself outside of counselling to participate in activities for self-care. These are activities that recharge your batteries; make you feel refreshed or relaxed.