

Follow the News Without Spiraling into Despair

Name your emotions. Take action. Know your limits. These seven mindfulness-based strategies can help you stay grounded while caring deeply about the world.

The following is excerpted from the article, “How to Follow the News Without Spiraling into Despair,” by Jenny Taitz of The New York Times, July 7, 2022.

Following nonstop news in an era of gun violence, war and political divide can become overwhelming. And amid our many ongoing challenges, it’s understandable to feel sad, angry and anxious.

But it is possible to anchor yourself if it feels as though you’re slipping into despair about the state of the world. Here are seven mindfulness-based strategies to stay grounded.



1. Label your feelings.

Credit...Derek Abella

If you can precisely [label the emotion](#) you’re experiencing in the moment, you can reduce its power in [your body](#) and [brain](#). Name whatever emotion you are feeling, whether it is sadness, fear, anger, disgust or guilt — and how intensely you’re experiencing it. Say it aloud, use a mood tracking app, or write your feelings down in a journal.

Try not to wait until your [feelings have peaked](#), though. Make it a habit to name your emotions as they come. Tracking their intensity offers you a chance to slow down before you reach a boiling point and lose yourself in [worrying or ruminating](#), snap at someone or reach for a substance mindlessly.

2. Allow yourself to feel emotions too.

If you try to avoid your feelings, they will get more intense, said psychologist Melanie Harned. When you’re emotionally affected by a news story, take a moment to notice what you’re thinking, doing and feeling in your body. Choose what would be most helpful in the moment — whether that’s creating a window to feel your emotions for a few minutes, without trying to change them, or, if you’re in the middle of a pressing task, plan to revisit painful news at a time you can grieve.

3. Practice different types of empathy.

In his work to reduce burnout among humanitarian aid workers, Dr. Everly encourages [perspective taking](#), or trying to understand the world from another’s point of view in the moment, instead of

absorbing yourself in their emotions, blurring the line between what they are experiencing and your experience.

One [study](#) of more than 7,500 physicians found that understanding and acknowledging patients' emotions reduced burnout, while overly identifying with their patients' experiences predicted emotional exhaustion. It takes practice, but if you observe yourself feeling engrossed, try taking a few breaths and then shifting into a more cognitive form of concern, as opposed to fully participating in suffering.

4. Take action.

By considering ways to help others, you'll take back some control in a world that can feel overwhelming while [improving your own well-being](#). Purposefully and repeatedly doing work like donating, [volunteering](#) or engaging politically has been shown to reduce a person's [risk of slipping into depression](#) and [boosts happiness](#).

5. Rethink your words.

It can feel natural to use dramatic statements like "I'm broken" when something terrible happens. That is especially true on social media, where extreme language might be validated by other people's "likes" or comments. But our words and interpretations have a powerful impact on how we feel and behave.

While it's helpful to allow ourselves to honor our feelings, our emotions escalate in intensity when we overstate circumstances that are already painful. So consider replacing thoughts like, "The world is falling apart," with "I need to do something to improve X."

6. Invest in a joy practice.

Resilience, the ability to function after a stressful event, often hinges on [adding positive emotions](#) and actions to your day to improve your ability to cope with challenges. Connect with people who inspire you and schedule hobbies that may excite you. Protecting your mental health isn't selfish; it enables you to be the best version of you, not the burned-out version, said Dr. Everly.

Beyond adding activities that foster happiness, practice attending to the moments when positive emotions naturally arise in your day, whether that's your morning coffee or spending time with someone you love.

7. Honor your limits without losing sight of the problems and the pain.

Think about specific times of day when you want to keep up with the news, rather than endlessly scrolling or keeping it on in the background. Taking a break doesn't mean you don't care; it's about hitting pause so you can return to facing challenges in the world and trying to make a real difference.

Give yourself permission to feel pain and joy, without getting stuck. That is how to let your emotions contribute to real healing. Dr. Harned reminded me of an analogy that [Marsha Linehan](#), a psychologist and pioneer in mindfulness-based behavioral therapy, teaches: You can visit a cemetery without building a house there.