

# Stress Toolkit

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Life in today's complex society can be stressful for everyone. If you are a member of a minority community such as the LGBTQIA, that usual amount of stress may be compounded by other factors like discrimination, stigma, loneliness, fears etc.

How to cope with this stress?

## Coping strategies:

Coping with stress can be divided into two types of coping strategies, both of which are equally important and both of which can be learnt with some practice.

## Problem focused coping:

Problem focussed coping involves looking for ways to get rid of or control the stressor.

The 5 step problem solving method is a tool that helps to arrive at solutions in an easy and effective way.

### Step1

Define the problem in a concrete manner

Example- I lost my job after coming out and I'm broke. I need to find a way out of this mess - abstract

I need to find out what legal options there are to challenge the discrimination, and/or what options I have to handle my living costs- concrete

### Step 2

Brainstorm for all possible solutions. DO NOT think of feasibility of the solutions at this point, simply list out all the possibilities

Example:

Option X: Reach out to NGO "ABCD"

Option Y: Contact Lawyer to file a case for discrimination

Option Z: Apply for a job at company G

Project Aparajit Mann is attempting to collate the different options available for various situations and we will be making it available the moment it is ready. Until then please feel free to reach out to us at the contact provided.

### Step 3

List out the positives and negatives of each possible solution

Option X:

<b>+ves</b>	<b>-ves</b>
Will cover the cost for legal aid	Process can take a long time

Option Y:

<b>+ves</b>	<b>-ves</b>
Fantastic lawyer	Can't afford

### Step 4

Assign weightage to each positive and each negative according to its importance or value in your life at present and add up the points to find out which solution has the most weightage of positive v/s negative value.

Example:

Option X:

<b>+ves</b>	<b>-ves</b>
Will cover the cost for legal aid <b>[10]</b>	Process can take a long time <b>[8]</b>

Option Y:

<b>+ves</b>	<b>-ves</b>
Fantastic lawyer <b>[9]</b>	Can't afford <b>[10]</b>

Option X total: 10-8=2

Option Y total: 9-10=-1

## Step 5

Implement the solution with the most weightage.

In the example, we would implement Option X.

## Legal Resources:

<http://orinam.net/resources-for/lgbt/legal-resources/dealing-with-extortion/>

<http://orinam.net/not-legal-doesnt-mean-illegal-queer-situation-india/>

## Mental Health Resources:

[iCALL's crowdsourced list of Mental Health Professionals We Can Trust](#)

[Aparajit Mann Mental Health Public Resources](#)

## Emotion focussed coping:

Often we may find ourselves in situations where the stressor has already had a considerable emotional impact on us which we need to cope with. Also there may be times when the stressor itself is out of our immediate control. Problem focused coping may help us to find solutions for a future repetition of a similar kind of stressor but in the immediate moment we do need to focus on just coping with all the emotional distress the stressor has caused. For example, if we constantly face discrimination at work, we may find it difficult to focus on the work at hand leading to poorer performance, and more stress. At the present moment it may be impossible to eliminate the discrimination completely (we may be actively searching for a solution as a part of problem focussed coping) but meanwhile it IS possible to maintain one's emotional balance using the following tools, so as to ensure that one doesn't get dysfunctional as a result of the pressure. Adding one more kilo to the weight on a weight-bearing beam may make little difference to the total load but may yet be enough to cause it to break. Similarly, a small stressor such as a shirt not being ironed properly by the ironing person might otherwise be a small stress but when it comes along with the already present big stress of discrimination at work, the effect it has gets multiplied to the existing amount of stress.

## Mindfulness

One of the very effective tools for emotion focussed coping is Mindfulness. This is a stress management tool that helps us to ride the waves of emotion rather than get drowned or overwhelmed by them.

To be in a mindful state simply means, choosing to focus on the present moment with non-judgmental awareness. Just like any other skill, Mindfulness too is to be learned and practiced in a step by step and consistent manner for the effects to show. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction is an eight week training program (started by Jon Kabat Zinn) that anyone can start at home with just a few freely available Youtube video links and a book called Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat Zinn.

(For more information look up the resource doc at <https://goo.gl/WR1Xzw> )

Other emotion focussed coping strategies are (just like in a workshop one needs different tools to deal with different situations, in the workshop of emotional life too one needs different tools for the different situations that come up and the particular mood we may be in at that time)

## Relaxation techniques

- Deep belly breathing- Sit comfortably with back relatively erect not rigid or stiff. (try to do this without leaning back against the backrest of the chair, but if you cannot, then use a straight backed chair) Place a hand on your stomach and take a deep, long and slow breath. A good way to ensure slow breathing is to inhale for a full three seconds, pause for one second holding the breath and then exhale for a count of three seconds and pause one second after the exhalation before taking another in-breath. The hand on the stomach helps keep track of whether the stomach is expanding outwards gently with each in breath and receding inwards on each out-breath.
- Progressive Muscular Relaxation- This is the practice of progressively tensing (for a count of 5 or 10 whatever is more comfortable) and then relaxing (keep the count same for the relaxation as for the tensing) each muscle group of the body. You could start with the hands (making a tight fist for a count of 5 and then relaxing it for a count of 5) then go to the forearms, biceps, shoulders and neck, jaws, eyes, forehead, chest, stomach, lower back, pelvis, thighs, calves, and feet.
- Guided Imagery - Come up with a detailed picture of a place that feels safe and happy to you. Remember that this is your imaginary place so it can have anything! Most people find natural scenes to be most relaxing but that's just a suggestion not a rule. Tips- make the image as vivid as possible using all your senses (hearing the chirping of birds or sound of rain, how the grass feels under bare feet, smell of the flowers or moist earth after the first monsoon shower, the various colours that you see around you etc.) You could either read it out and record your voice or get someone else to read it out for you so that you have your own little relaxation tool which you can carry on your phone and listen to between meetings or when times get a bit rough.

(For more information on any of the above tools look up the resource doc at <https://goo.gl/WR1Xzw> )

## Make time to pamper yourself

- Take a long warm water bath using products that have a mild and pleasant fragrance (specific fragrances are said to have specific effects e.g. lavender may have some anxiety relieving properties but you could also just experiment and just choose any fragrance that you like)
- Learn some basic self massage skills online and get some self massage tools or go for a relaxing time at a massage parlour every once in awhile
- Soaking the feet in hot (as hot as is comfortable for you) water with some salt added to it often helps to soothe the body as well as the mind. You could also add a bit of shampoo or body wash and use a foot scrubber to make it a “do it yourself” pedicure!

## Keep a regular sleep-wake schedule

- Your sleep wake routine has a direct effect on mood
- Regular and sound sleep is essential for maintaining good concentration and memory with in turn affect the day to day life and consequently, mood.
- It is possible with a bit of effort to reprogram your biological clock. For most people, sleeping at an earlier time than usual is more difficult than a later time. Often, it is easier to sleep at a later time every day until the biological clock is reset. For example, if you sleep at 2 AM every night now, then you could take a few days leave, and sleep at 4 AM the first day, then 6 AM the next day, and so on, until you are sleeping at an earlier time than before.

### Resources Link:

<https://goo.gl/WR1Xzw>

## Expression of Emotions

Finding a way to express all the pent up emotion of rage, sadness, fear, loneliness etc. is of immense help since emotions that are caged up inside us cause huge problems sooner or later. (For more on emotions check the resources at <https://goo.gl/WR1Xzw>)

### Art

- The aim in this use of art is very different than that of art which is meant for exhibition. Of course after you express yourself you could totally decide to exhibit it, however, exhibition as the primary aim may hinder true expression of emotion (though this may differ from person to person).

- This use of art isn't about how well or how badly you draw or paint. It is the use of various mediums to express how you are feeling; for example, you could be very angry and express that by slashing the page repeatedly with a pen!
- Use of mediums like clay, play-doh, kinetic sand etc can be very satisfying as they stimulate our sense of touch. (Some people may find that they are able to express themselves through touch better than through words or image-on-paper kind of art)
- After the expression you could choose a time (either immediately after if you feel upto it or later if that feels more appropriate) to reflect on it yourself, or talk about it with a trusted buddy or therapist. This part of the activity is where we are able to put words to the feelings. While doing so what often happens is that we may suddenly realise things like the underlying causes of that particular emotion (or set of emotions) which could then be dealt with in various ways (as per the situation and the person).

## Music and Dance

- Music, either listening or playing/singing can be a very satisfying way to release emotions. I often use singing to express various emotions, in fact i have playlists assigned to various moods.
- Dance or simply moving the body to express feelings physically is something i recently saw in a very interesting article (which i hope to be able to find again and put up as a resource asap! Feel free to reach out in case you want to discuss this further)