

Political Unrest Causing Stress? Five Steps to Help Cope.

Are you finding yourself stressed or worried about the storming of the US Capitol and other recent political events? If so, you are not alone. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, 77% of Americans report the “future of our nation” as a significant source of stress. However, we can better protect ourselves from the emotional impact of our current political environment by strengthening our awareness, preparation, and self-care.

Why are politics so stressful?

There are several reasons politics can feel so stressful. Elections introduce uncertainty about political outcomes and transitions. Some people worry about the impacts to their lives or communities as new political agendas are put in motion. Politics create interpersonal conflict. We are social creatures who depend upon each other, and conflict within our social groups – friends, family members, co-workers, and even strangers – can threaten our sense of belonging. Current events have also threatened our sense of safety. Given the divisiveness of our political climate and the prevalence of civil unrest, it is no surprise that what we have all just witnessed in Washington has generated acute stress for many people.

Five steps to cope with political stress

1. **Limit your news consumption.** The 24-hour news coverage is designed to keep you on high alert, waiting for the next “big story” to be revealed. Don’t take the bait. Instead, find one or two news sources you trust to stay informed – but **limit your time with them!** It is OK to find out about news after it breaks. Pay attention to your mood and physical reactions while consuming the news; if you feel anxious, agitated or angry, these are cues to turn it off.
2. **Take a social media break.** Like the 24-hour news cycle, social media is designed to stimulate strong (mostly negative) emotional reactions. Studies have shown that social media use is linked to increased feelings of stress, loneliness, and depression. Limit your use of social media to once a day **at most or** take a break from it altogether.
3. **Focus on what you can control.** Most of what is happening in national and global politics is out of our personal control. Turning our attention to ourselves, our friends, families, and local communities can help us be empowered and productive. Focus on your personal wellbeing by engaging in things you enjoy such as hobbies, exercise, and time with friends. If you enjoy being politically active, find one or two meaningful causes to which you can donate your time or money.
4. **Live your values.** One way to impact politics *and* decrease stress is to make sure our daily lives are closely aligned with our values. Values are fundamental beliefs that guide behaviors. With a clear sense of our own values, it is easier to maintain focus on what we find important and what we can control.
5. **Seek community.** Find people you trust to share your thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Make sure they are people who will listen without judgment. Rely on friends, family, or community groups who can help you laugh or find distractions during stressful times.

If you are experiencing stress related to our evolving political environment, please know that you are not alone. **PAS**, your Employee Assistance Program, is **available 24/7** with **free** and **confidential assistance** from an experienced team of counselors. All calls are answered live by licensed, Master’s level clinicians. You can reach PAS by calling 800-356-0845 or going to www.paseap.com to chat live with a counselor.