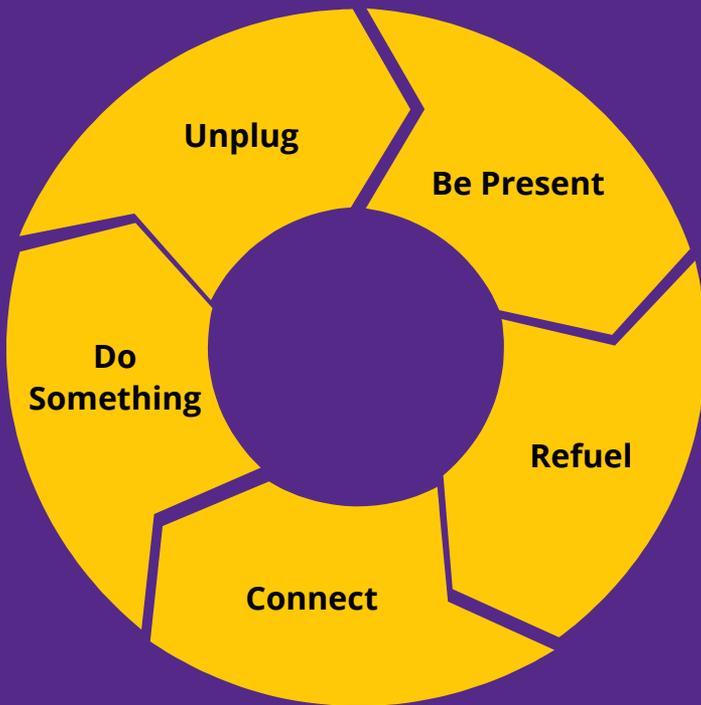


Election Stress Kit

Tips and Resources to Cope with
the Current National Discourse



Brought to you by Western Illinois University's
University Counseling Center (UCC)

Unplug

Limit your consumption of social media and the 24-hour non-stop images. It's important to stay informed, but creating boundaries is important.

Stay informed, but know your limits:

- Monitor how you feel after news consumption. Feeling preoccupied or even upset by national events may be a sign to cut back on your news intake and limit social media discussions.
- Consider scheduling a short block of time in the morning and one in the evening to catch up on news without checking for every new update during the day.
- During “digital breaks,” take time to focus on something enjoyable, such as a hobby, exercising, being in nature or spending time with family and friends.
- Check out the video **“How to Cope with Election Season Stress”** for some more tips for “unplugging” during a stressful election time.

Be Present

Use reflection to recognize your inner thoughts and feelings. Be curious and non-judgmental and give yourself permission to feel the way you do. Although avoiding can be useful, “stuffing” or ignoring strong emotions can have negative impacts.

Consider practicing self-compassion as you work through challenging or uncertain times. Try some of these exercises compiled by Dr. Kristin Neff, a renowned researcher of self-compassion, at selfcompassion.org.

Grab your phone and your earbuds and head outside for a guided mindful walk to de-stress.

Self-Soothing

Self-soothing is a quick and effective way to reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

- **Sight:** Low lighting, soothing colors, sleeping masks, coloring books, Pinterest collages
- **Sound:** Calming noise, ASMR videos, nature sounds, guided meditations, binaural beats
- **Touch:** Soft things, cuddle things, massage, hot/cold shower, heated/weighted blanket
- **Smell:** Aromatherapy, fresh air, candles/incense, comforting smells
- **Taste:** Strong flavors, warm drinks, eat slowly, nostalgic flavors

Listen to nature and [soothing Tibetan singing bowls](#).

Grounding

Grounding strategies can help us get in touch with our bodies and surroundings in the present moment. Pause what you are doing and pay attention to what you can see, hear, smell, and touch in your environment.

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Top Meditation Apps by Overall Downloads in the U.S. for 2018

1.  Calm
2.  Headspace
3.  Insight Timer
4.  Aura
5.  Simple Habit
6.  Breethe
7.  10% Happier
8.  BetterMe
9.  Pacifica
10.  Abide

The UCC would like to acknowledge that mindfulness originated in Eastern spiritual traditions, namely Buddhism, and has since been popularized in Western countries in ways inconsistent with its original purpose.

Refuel

Focus on restoring yourself with rest and healthy food. Drink water and try to limit caffeine. Move a little every day. Take a walk; look at the sky; be in nature. Journal or meditate. Make art or watch funny videos. Read something fun.

Balance

A national election during COVID? Focusing on your well-being is more important than ever! Trying to keep a balance in most areas of your life will help you roll through challenging days more smoothly and keep you on the road to wellness!

Sleep

Is your sleep schedule irregular? Are you sleeping more than you want to be? Are you having trouble falling asleep? If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” you may benefit from these sleep hygiene tips and resources!

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>

Eating and Nutrition

For tips, guidelines, and health information, this is a **great resource!**

You can also check out the WIU food pantry.

Exercise

WIU Recreation Center offers a TON of FREE virtual group fitness classes for students!

See the calendar here:
wiu.edu/student_services/campus_recreation/fitness/group.php

Check out WIU Campus Recreation’s Facebook page for free video workouts.

Connect

Engage with supportive friends and allies. Talk about current issues, if needed, but be aware of when you're feeling overwhelmed. Not everyone will share your perspective, so it's OK to limit your topics and avoid heated conflict. Reach out to supportive services on-campus, including UCC.

Five Ways to Build Stronger Connections

1. Write a letter
2. Pick up the phone and call
3. Ask meaningful questions
4. Answer questions with honesty
5. Connect via video

Connecting Virtually

- Zoom dance party
- Netflix party
- House Party app
- TikTok challenges
- Virtual group workouts
- Amazing support groups for EVERYONE and all topics!
- Virtual book clubs
- Virtual karaoke on Google Hangouts

Spiritual Connection

Spirituality can be one way to connect with yourself, others, nature, or a higher power(s).

- **Loving-kindness meditation**
- Find local or online spiritual communities
- **Animal/Nature live cams**

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Why Connect?

- To decrease loneliness, stress, depression, and anxiety
- To acknowledge collective trauma and experience solidarity
- To experiencing love and belonging
- To give and receive care and compassion

Connecting...connecting...connecting...

Zoom fatigue is real, but sometimes it's our only option. So how do we connect without MORE stress? Try these tips:

- Establish "no screen" blocks of time in your day – times when you don't have classes, meetings, etc. (See "UNPLUG" section)
- While turning off your camera during class can be a relief, make sure you don't do it all the time. Leaving your camera on, even if you can only see your instructor and one other brave student, can help you feel connected and more focused on content.
- Avoid multi-tasking. Even though it can be tempting to use more than one device at a time or check emails and respond to texts while Zooming, focusing on the content of the meeting will actually give your brain a break! And we all need a bit more peace and focus right now!

Do Something

Channel what you're feeling into positive, meaningful activity. Be informed and proactive around issues that matter to you. Find ways to engage in your community through advocacy in ways that fit for you.

It can be challenging to stay motivated when everything around us seems chaotic and scary. But doing something – some action, no matter how small – can lessen some of the uncertainty.

What you do doesn't need to be political – taking a step to stand up for or stand in for a person or a cause or the environment means we're not powerless. Check out the ideas on this page!

- Activism, service and generosity are a few ways to promote a sense of empowerment and contribution when we may be feeling helpless.
- Want to have a voice in local or national politics? **Check this out** for ideas!
- Simply want to support a cause that you care about? You can volunteer locally or for a chapter of a national organization. Start here!
- Learn about Vision Boards **here**.

Connect with Your Values

Identifying what is important to us can be one way to foster motivation. Try one of the values card sorts below and then consider how you can express your values on a daily basis.

- **Online values card sort**
- **Printable version**

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Lean on Your Strengths

Knowing your strengths can help you address problems more effectively and engage in activities that generate confidence and purpose. Try taking the **VIA Character Strengths Survey** to identify your strongest traits.

Student Life at WIU

wiu.edu/student_services/ose/volunteer

Wholeness

Think about what makes you feel whole, grounded, or like you. It can be helpful to consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.



Additional Resources

Moving Forward Election Process Group Meetings

- Nov. 4 – University Union Sandburg Lounge, 2 p.m.
- Nov. 5 – via Zoom, 2 p.m. (contact HJ-Biggs@wiu.edu for link)
- Nov. 6 – MCC Board Room, 2 p.m.

Resources on Campus

- Academic Success
- Campus Rec Center
- Career Development
- Disability Resources
- International Student Support
- Learning Center
- Multicultural Center
- Office of Public Safety
- Student Development and Success Center
- Student Health Services

University Counseling Center

Visit wiu.edu/student_services/ucc. We are offering virtual individual and group services to students. You can reach us Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at (309) 298-2453. Follow the UCC on Facebook and Instagram!

Questions and concerns about mental health? Check out the [JED Foundation's Mental Health Resource Center](#).

NEED IMMEDIATE SUPPORT? Call 911

Thank you to our colleagues at other institutions for sharing their resources. Some information in this document was adapted from Michigan State University and California State University at Long Beach.