



Election Anxiety: It's a Thing

As we are round the corner to the end of 2020, many of us are wishing this year would hurry up and end. What a year: a pandemic, continued racial injustice and acts of racism, a historic hurricane and fire season, and a stressful and contentious election. Any one of these things would be stressful or overwhelming on their own. In 2020, we have experienced all four of these significant stressors simultaneously. No wonder we are tired and anxious.

Election anxiety is real. We are sitting in what some are calling a deep political divide, and many are feeling anxious and uncertain about the outcome of the election, including the timing. A prolonged period of uncertainty is possible. The news cycle highlights the attack ads and tries to predict what will happen over the next few weeks and months. This amplifies the uncertainty and anxiety already present due to living the past eight months in a pandemic. It is okay if you aren't at your best right now; this is a complicated time. While much of this feels out of our control, there are a few things you can do to navigate these uncertain times.

Recognize and Name the Feelings

Reflect on what thoughts or feelings are coming up for you. Try this prompt. What is this moment in time asking me to make space for? How does uncertainty show up in my body?

Name the uncomfortable emotion: This can help reduce the perceived power of unsettling emotions. Use your breath to help manage the feelings. As you inhale for a count of four, name the emotion you are experiencing then exhale slowly for a count of six and imagine blowing out that emotion. Pause and notice any changes in your body and welcome back comforting, calming feelings.

Identify what stirs up big emotions. If you begin to feel your emotions intensify beyond what you think you can handle, bring your attention back to the present. Use your five senses to notice what is around you. This sends the message to your brain that you are safe and brings you back to the present.

- *Sight.* Try choosing a color and locate every object in the room that is that color. Look around the space you are in, even if you've been there 1000 times... Is there anything new that you've never noticed before?
- *Sound.* Music can also be a helpful tool to manage your feelings. Try humming a song such as happy birthday. You can create a playlist of songs that you are able to sing along to. Make one for each emotion or mood.
- *Touch.* Notice different textures around you. Notice the rug or floor beneath your feet or the seat on your chair or couch-is firm or soft.

- *Taste.* Try mindful eating. For instance, if you like chocolate, eat it slowly, taking a moment to notice... Is it bitter or sweet? Crunchy or smooth?
- *Smell.* Light a candle and notice the smell as you watch it flicker. Use your favorite smelling lotion and take a deep breath in. Cook or bake your favorite recipe and let the aroma fill your home.

Demonstrate Compassion to Yourself and Others

Take a moment to acknowledge yourself with love and kindness. Self-compassion is vital when things feel beyond our control. Self-judgement rarely makes this better. Self-compassion allows us to extend compassion to others.

Focus on what you can control. Make a list of what you can control and what is most important to you about this election. Get involved in a cause that you feel passionate about. Taking action to create the world you want to live in comes in daily small, consistent and are not determined solely by who is elected president.

Seek comfort from your support network. Your family and/or friends can be supportive in many ways. Some people in your support network may be listeners, some may be doers, and others may provide comfort. Figure out what your need is and who is most able to meet that need.

Create a Plan for Coping

Limit news and social media exposure. The election results will not change, even if you keep checking the news hoping for a new result. If you are feeling overwhelmed or are spending increased amount of time on news channels or social media, it may be a good idea to limit how much exposure you are getting. Designate a specific time of day to check the news or set a timer to limit the length of your exposure.

Consider how you will talk with family who may have different opinions. Family and friends may have different opinions and those opinions may be strong. Prepare for how you will engage and respond to political discussions. Have a phrase prepared to help exit the conversation. Engage your breath to keep yourself grounded and calm.

Create a routine. Routines are predictable and can help us feel safe and grounded. Create a routine for your day that includes time to take care of you through healthful eating, movement and rest. Just as important is connecting with community. When we have an intentional routine, we don't have to expend energy figuring out what's next.