

“What can we do to get through this?” As a licensed clinical psychologist, I have been hearing this question amid despondency about the recent election results. This is especially true from Millennials. I hope my insights and suggestions can be useful to a larger audience when so many feel angry and distraught.

Recovering from Post-Election Distress: 10 Ways to Move Forward.

Some of you may be feeling fine about the election. This is for those of you who are not. There are numerous articles about what you can do politically. This is about the emotional side of things.

Maybe you volunteered for the campaign or wish you had. You spent countless hours on Facebook, posting articles and your passionate thoughts. You had high hopes for the election, never expected this would happen, and now you are crushed. You may be stunned, disheartened, angry, feel powerless, sad, numb. That is completely understandable. The question is what to do next.

1) Self-care

The sooner and more frequently you mitigate the impact of the election, the better. Stress is the body's response to a perceived threat. It's not meant to be sustained over time. When you're worked up every day, things break down. Stay in your routines. Push yourself out the door. Limit excessive intake of upsetting news and posts. Commit to your physical and mental health to help dilute the intense negativity you are experiencing.

2) Service

After Bush was elected, a popular saying among opponents was “Don't mourn, organize.” During the AIDS epidemic, the motivating words were “Silence = Death.” One way to deal is to act. We may not know where the country is heading, but we can decide where we are personally heading. You have power to create change; that was not taken from you. Get involved.

3) Perspective.

Take a step back and try to see this as part of a larger timeline in history. This is especially true for Millennials. You came of age with Obama; you have seen an African-American President and the legalization of gay marriage. There were terrible things too, but many of you felt a sense of hope and alignment with the leadership. You might not have experience pushing through disillusionment. But chat with older people. Ask them about Gore 2000, the civil rights movement, Vietnam. Ask your grandparents about the Depression or women getting the vote. This country has a lengthy track record of people enduring hard times or joining together when outraged. We toughed it out and we worked for change.

4) Anxiety versus Reality.

We need to stand on the firm ground of the present to get through this. Anticipatory anxiety is often worse than what actually happens. And when it is not, it can deplete our ability to handle things. Focus away from fear. Fear immobilizes. Thinking too far ahead can be overwhelming. Stop “what-if-ing”. Just get through each day and focus on what you know for sure. Put one foot after the other and try to stay on track.

5) A Worldview and a Sense of Purpose Can Provide Guidance.

When people have a mental framework that includes a way to process difficult events, they tend to fare better. This can be from any perspective - cultural, spiritual, philosophical, or personal. Viewing oneself as an agent of change and not a victim can also help. Find a way to look at this that is not overwhelming.

6) **Seek Role Models** in literature, the arts, and history. Remember occasions when you or someone you know had hardship and got through it. Look for people who have dealt with adversity and setbacks. Check out their quotes or biographies and learn from them.

7) Disappointment And Anger Can Be Channeled Into Positive Action.

Utilize your emotions in a positive way. Keeping it inside will make it fester or deplete you. Lashing out helps no one. Negative feelings can fuel everything from creative pursuits to political action.

8) Support and Connect.

People who have support are more resilient. Take time for solitude if you need that, but don't neglect your relationships right now. Cast a wide net. Some of your friends will be more helpful than others. And for those who disagree with you, research conflict resolution techniques so you can respond without feeling or causing defensiveness and anger. Decide if it's worth the emotional cost to engage. Some people are simply not going to change their minds. For closer relationships, remember the things that brought you together before the election did not vanish with it. And you can always treat people the way you want to be treated.

Some people find solace and inspiration in religious or spiritual settings, so if that was a comfort in the past or it sounds appealing, check it out.

Consider speaking to a licensed mental health professional. They are trained to help people manage feelings and get through difficult times.

9) Visualize.

Ask any sports psychologist: Picturing success in tangible detail is more effective than worrying about failure. It also elevates mood and increases confidence. (And is it really serving you to imagine things getting worse?)

10) **Coach yourself** with realistic optimism. Create another voice to counter the pessimistic one in your head. It's bringing you down. Thoughts and feelings are intimately linked. Brain research shows that repetition of thoughts can help them become more automatic over time.

Think ahead to how you want to remember yourself during this period. Be that person. Tell yourself what is true: You will get through this. So will our country. It will take time, work, vision, and joining together. But you have power to create change, both in how you feel and what you do. Many things are uncertain, but your inner strength and ability to contribute have not been altered. Now is the time to use them.

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