

Mental Health Cheat Sheet

Pay attention to: exercise, sleep, nutrition, limiting substance use ...and more exercise

Meditation, but only if it works for you – 5 minutes is better than zero minutes, but for more tangible benefit, try 20 or 25 minutes daily

Spend time in nature – watch the changing sky & the sunlight through the leaves, listen to the sounds of water

Have something to look forward to – small things daily, medium things weekly, and the big event once a year or a lifetime

Explore the aesthetic emotions – seek healthy pleasures of the senses: images, sounds & music, scents, touch

Practice the attitudes of mindfulness - **curiosity** (what are you feeling?, thinking? approach thoughts and emotions with curiosity, even if not pleasant); **acceptance** (accept the sensations, feelings, thoughts of the present moment); **non-judgment** (don't judge the thoughts or the feelings as good or bad, and don't judge yourself for thinking or feeling them); **non-identification** (you are not the thought you may be thinking in the moment, or the emotion you may be feeling at the moment) (credit to Kevin Griffin)

Tips for dealing with worry and rumination:

- See if there is a belief or an emotion asking for attention under the ruminative thought – accept it without judging it or yourself for having it. Simple acceptance may help reduce the rumination.
- Examine your beliefs about the process of worrying & rumination: if part of you believes that worrying may be helpful (e.g., will prevent a situation, will prepare you for a situation), or that analyzing and re-analyzing a problem will lead to a solution, it will be more difficult to stop worrying & ruminating
- Practice mindfulness-based thought stopping: label the thought as a worry – don't engage with its content, accept the thought without judgment & then gently but firmly direct your attention to the breath. This is an attentional training practice & it will take time before you become proficient – be patient with yourself
- Sing a song, recite a poem, say a prayer or some other meaningful phrase – this will occupy the verbal centers of your brain and make it more difficult to worry or ruminate
- Don't believe everything you think

Tips for dealing with distressing emotions:

- If the emotion is too intense, it may be best to first reduce its intensity through exercise or some type of activity that dissipates its energy
- Check in with yourself to see if the emotion you are feeling is a reaction to another emotion (for example, anger may often be a reaction to a more vulnerable emotion, such as fear, shame, sadness, sense of helplessness). If so, try to feel the more vulnerable emotion – this may help dissipate it
- Notice if you are doubting your emotional reaction (e.g., asking yourself “Should I be feeling x?” or seeking validation from others). If so, accepting whatever you are feeling, even conflicting feelings, may make you feel better. Remember that accepting that you are having an emotion does not mean you should act on it or express it – accepting feeling angry does not mean you should express the anger. Acceptance is an internal process

Do something nice for someone else or for the world – try to shift your focus outside of yourself