

Navigating Election Season: 20 Tips for Managing Stress and Creating Healthy Boundaries

As we near election day in November, individuals may find themselves grappling with heightened stress and anxiety. However, there are tips and useful resources available to help navigate the election season and maintain one's mental well-being.

In this Q&A, Magellan's Mary Walston, LCMHC, a counselor in the Military and Family Life Counselor program, offers practical strategies for mental wellbeing.

Q: What are effective strategies to manage stress and anxiety related to political discussion and news?

Mary Walston:

Limit Exposure by Setting Boundaries: Allocate specific times for checking news and avoid consuming political content right before bed to prevent sleep disturbances. Choose specific times of the day to check news updates. Avoid consuming news first thing in the morning or right before bed. Set a time limit for how long you spend reading or watching news each day (e.g., 30 minutes to an hour).

Curate Sources: Consider using news aggregators to filter the most relevant information. News apps can help filter and summarize the news, presenting the stories without overwhelming detail.

Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques: When you do consume news, focus on it fully rather than multitasking.

This helps you process the information better and reduces the feeling of being overwhelmed. After reading or watching the news, take a few minutes to reflect on what you've learned and how it makes you feel. Engage in regular mindfulness or meditation practices to center your thoughts and reduce anxiety. Use deep breathing techniques to calm your nervous system when feeling overwhelmed by political news.

Engage in Healthy Distractions such as Hobbies or Interests: Spend time on activities you enjoy, such as reading, gardening, or exercising, to shift your focus away from political stressors. Engage in non-political conversations with friends and family and participate in community activities that bring you joy.

Seek Professional Support: Consider talking to a therapist or counselor if political anxiety is significantly impacting your mental health. Join support groups or online communities where you can share your concerns and learn coping strategies from others facing similar challenges.

Self-Care Practices

Journaling: Use a journal to express your thoughts and emotions, which can be therapeutic and help clarify feelings.

Creative Outlets: Engage in creative activities like drawing, painting, writing, or crafting to divert your mind from stress.

Pampering: Take time for self-care activities such as baths, skincare routines, or massages.

Physical Activity

Exercise Regularly: Engage in physical activities like walking, running, or any form of exercise that you

enjoy. Exercise helps reduce stress and improve mood.

Nature Walks: Spend time outdoors in nature to disconnect from the digital world and relax your mind.

Q: What are some ways to respectfully disengage from political conversations that cause distress?

Walston:

Express Personal Boundaries

Simple Decline: Politely say, "I'd prefer not to discuss politics right now."

Set Clear Limits: Use statements like, "I understand this is important, but I find these discussions stressful and would rather not engage in them."

Redirect the Conversation

Change the Subject: Shift to a neutral topic by saying, "Let's talk about something else. How was your weekend?"

Shared Interests: Bring up a shared interest or hobby to steer the conversation in a different direction.

Acknowledge and Exit

Show Respect: Acknowledge the other person's viewpoint without engaging further, such as, "I see where you're coming from, but I need to step away from this conversation."

Graceful Exit: Excuse yourself from the conversation by saying, "Excuse me, I need to take care of something," and physically leave the space if possible.

Use Humor

Lighten the Mood: Defuse tension with a lighthearted comment like, “Politics can be heavy. How about we save the world later and talk about something fun?”

Time-Limited Engagement

Set Time Limits: If you feel obligated to engage, set a clear time limit: “I’m okay discussing this for a few minutes, but then I need to move on to other things.”

Scheduled Discussions: Suggest discussing political topics at a later time when you feel more prepared, saying, “Can we talk about this another time?”