

# What to do when you feel overwhelmed by life pressures



## What is stress?

When faced with a challenging situation or stressful event, our bodies respond by activating the nervous system and releasing hormones including cortisol and adrenalin.

These hormones bring about certain physical changes in the body, helping us to react appropriately and deal with the challenge presented. However, if the stress is ongoing and the physical changes do not subside, we may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope.

Life pressures that can cause us to feel overwhelmed and stressed include:

- Relationship difficulties
- Family breakdown
- Illness or injury
- Work pressures or job loss
- Bullying and harassment
- Traumatic events
- Death of a loved one - including pets
- Financial difficulties
- Homelessness
- Lack of support and isolation

## What are the signs of stress?

Below are some of the signs which indicate our stress levels are unhealthy:

- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Feeling hyperalert and anxious
- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches and muscle tension
- Upset stomach
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in mood
- Fatigue and exhaustion
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Thoughts of suicide
- Reliance on alcohol or other substances to cope

**People respond differently to stressful situations. Responses to stress will be determined by the situation faced, past experiences, personality, social support, access to resources and cultural background. What one person finds stressful, another may be more easily able to cope with.**

**Knowing yourself and how you respond to different situations is important as you can then learn to manage stress and seek help when necessary.**

## What to do when feeling overwhelmed?

Below are some practical strategies for managing stress when feeling overwhelmed by life pressures:

- **Identify the cause of your stress** – write down what is contributing to you feeling overwhelmed and stressed. You may identify one particular issue or have a range of things contributing to how you feel at this time. Prioritise the issues and leave smaller issues to be dealt with at a later time.
- **Review your current coping mechanisms** – identify how you have been coping to date. What tools and strategies have you found helpful? What things are you doing that are not helpful? Make any necessary changes to increase your ability to cope.
- **Talk to a trusted friend or family member** – talking through your issues with someone you trust can assist you to work through the issue and identify possible solutions.
- **Check your thinking** – often we put pressure on ourselves to be a certain way. Our thoughts directly impact our emotional state and can influence our behaviour. When our thoughts are negative and self-critical we may begin to feel overwhelmed. Instead of doing the things we need to do in order to deal with the stressful situation, we may in fact do things that are unhelpful.

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- Give yourself some positive feedback for the things you have been doing to manage. Consider if the expectations you place on yourself are reasonable and adjust them accordingly. Demonstrate compassion to yourself as you would to others in a similar situation.
- **Make a positive plan** – work out ways to deal with the situation or how to approach it step by step. Write down the actions that need to be taken to bring about some change. Start at the beginning and focus on one thing at a time. Recognise when you need help to bring about change.
- **Take care of yourself** – we need to be healthy in order to meet life’s challenges. Eating well, exercising and getting plenty of sleep are the basic building blocks of resilience. Take time out to engage in activities you enjoy and find rewarding. Engage in positive relationships with friends and family.
- **Access local support services** – there may be certain situations when you need to gain support from services in the community. For example, you may need to access counselling services when experiencing family and relationship difficulties or accommodation services if experiencing homelessness or domestic violence.



## Where to go to for support?

If in need of support, you may consider talking to your GP or health professional about your current situation. Your GP can check your general health and assess for any physical signs of stress. They can refer you to local health professionals based on your needs or visit the Lifeline Service Finder Directory at <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/service-finder> to search for local services and centres in your area.

Below are some of the places to go for information and support:

- Phone Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or chat to a Crisis Supporter online at [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au) (7pm – midnight every night)
- Mensline Australia: 1300 78 99 78 (24hrs)
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

**It is important to be able to identify when stress is affecting us in a negative way. Identifying the cause of our stress and making changes where possible is a good starting point.**

For 24-hour telephone crisis support call 13 11 14. For more information visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

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