

COPING AFTER COMING TO A NEW COUNTRY



People who have been forced to leave their country have often experienced very difficult things. These can include but are not limited to war, violence, threats, and lack of food and water. These experiences often cause feelings like fear, anger, sadness, and sorrow. It is common to have these feelings while also feeling relieved or glad to be safe. These feelings may last for a short or long time.

Coming to a new country is also hard. The language, food and culture are different. People are often separated from their family and friends. They may be looking for work and are worried about how to pay for their rent and other expenses. Caregivers may be happy that their children are safe but also worried about raising their children in a new country.

Having so many worries and having to learn and do many new things can cause stress. Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope. Stress is both physical (we feel it in our bodies) and emotional (it affects our mood). Stress can change how we think, feel and act.

When people do specific activities stress, it is called coping. Coping can improve how people feel physically and emotionally, and help people better think, make decisions, and function so that they can manage the many demands of life and family.

ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE HELPFUL IN COPING WITH CHANGE AND STRESS

STICK TO A ROUTINE

People may be coming from situations that were very unpredictable and this disrupted their family routine. Re-establishing a routine can help people feel safer and more empowered. Routines are especially important for children after a big transition, as knowing what to expect eases anxiety for children and helps them feel more in control. Routines can also create structures that allow families to engage in a common activity with a shared purpose.

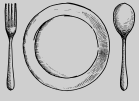
EXAMPLE OF A ROUTINE



Going to bed and waking up at the same time



Bedtime routines



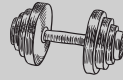
Having a set time for meals



A specific day to clean and do laundry



Having a set time or day for worship



Having a set time or day to exercise

MAKE SURE YOU GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Sleep is essential to helping your body and mind refresh and recharge. When people get enough sleep it helps their brain function so they can pay attention, take in new information, and make decisions. Sleep improves mood, and helps people have enough energy to get through the day and to do all the things they need to do. Some tips for good sleep include:

- **Be consistent** - Go to sleep at the same time each day and wake-up at the same time. This helps your body get into a routine.
- **Avoid large meals before bedtime** – Large meals will need to be digested by the body leading the body and brain to be more active, making it harder to sleep.
- **Avoid caffeine before bedtime** – Caffeine is a stimulant, meaning it causes the brain and body to be activated. Caffeine is commonly found in coffee, black teas, and sodas. People should avoid having caffeine four to six hours before bedtime.

DRINK ENOUGH WATER

Water is needed to help the body and brain function. When our body is dehydrated (not having enough water), our blood pressure may go up and our heart rate may increase. This can make feelings of anxiety even more difficult and confusing.

MOVE YOUR BODY EVERY DAY

When people move their body, or exercise for at least 15 minutes a day, it helps reduce stress, and also improves sleep and mood. There are lots of things you can do to move your body, like taking long walks, stretching, dancing, and much more. Do what feels good to you and your body!

BREATHE

When we get stressed, our breathing becomes shallow. Shallow breathing increases our feelings of stress. When we breathe deeply, it sends a message to the brain we are safe, which helps us relax. The brain sends the message to the rest of the body. When we breathe slowly and deeply, it helps us feel in control, safe, more aware of ourselves and our surroundings. Several times a day, or during times of stress, try to take 3 deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose while counting to three in your head, and then breathe out through your mouth while counting to five. You can also do this while you are doing other activities, such as praying or cooking. Deep and slow breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress and it doesn't take much time.

TAKE TIME WITH OTHERS

One of the best things to do to help with stress is to spend time with people you care about and love. This could be watching a movie with family, reading to a child, walking with a friend and more. Doing something pleasurable with people who we care about and who care about us, helps protect us from stress.

DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Think about what has helped you feel calmer in the past. This could be praying, reading, singing, listening to music, talking to a friend and more. If you have something that works for you, try to carve out 15 minutes a day to do it.

T Make a list of all the things that work for you. Circle the ones that work best or that you have access to at any time. Use the ones you circled to make a plan for how you are going to cope the next time you feel overwhelmed. Write the plan down on a piece of paper or record it on your phone. The next time you feel stressed, carry out your plan.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOU MAY NEED MORE HELP

Coming to a new country is hard and it is common to feel many difficult emotions. Most times, people feel better over time and as they settle in to their new community and find a routine. Sometimes; however, people may need more help getting over a difficult time. Depending on what supports are available in your area and what you are experiencing, this help could be talking to a professional about what you are feeling, joining a group with people experiencing the same types of things, reaching out to a religious leader, or something else.

People should think about reaching out for help if they are:

- Having difficulty doing the things they need to do in life, like going to work or taking care of themselves or their family
- Finding that their mood and emotions are getting worse over time
- Having such difficult emotions and memories that it is very hard to sleep, or that they are sleeping all the time
- Feeling sad or worried every day for most or all of the day
- Not leaving their home or avoiding spending time with friends and family
- Feeling very tired, having headaches, stomachaches and body pain for which doctors cannot find a reason
- Having constant bad memories and emotions that are very upsetting and are making it hard to think, concentrate and get through the day
- Feeling numb or empty inside, like they can't connect to others or feel love and affection
- Coping in a way that harms them, like drinking too much alcohol, doing drugs, getting in fights, or having angry outbursts
- Feeling like it's too hard to keep trying each day or so unsure about the future that they would rather stop trying at all
- Wanting support for any other reason

IF I NEED HELP, WHO CAN I CONTACT?

You can contact your caseworker, resettlement agency, doctor, a religious leader, community leader, or someone else you trust. When you reach out, tell them what you are thinking and feeling, and what kind of support you think would be most helpful to you. If you don't get help the first time, keep trying. Sometimes it takes reaching out to multiple people before you can get the right support.

If someone is feeling like life is not worth living or they are having thoughts of harming themselves, they should call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

REMEMBER

It takes great strength and bravery to leave your country and to start over in a new place. It is also hard and takes time. Remember you are not alone. It is OK to reach out for help. Taking care of yourself and reaching out for support when you need it, can help you manage the stress so that you achieve the things that are important to you and your family.