



# Managing distress



Feeling distressed or in crisis can be very difficult. Although many people will experience some kind of hardship during their life, it is common to feel confused and overwhelmed when you are going through it.

If things start to feel overwhelming, talk to a professional – your GP or other health care provider.

If the distress is extreme, and you feel like you may be at risk or those around you may be at risk, reach out for immediate help. Below are numbers you can call in a crisis:

### Emergency Contacts

Emergency Services: 000  
NSW Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511  
Life Line: 13 11 14

There are also online options to consider when planning longer term support. Head to Health connects people to online and phone mental health services appropriate for their individual needs. For more information visit:

– [headtohealth.gov.au](https://headtohealth.gov.au)



## Tips to help you to distance yourself from difficult thoughts or feelings

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It can be useful to distance yourself from situations that are aggravating your distress, at least in the short run. See if any of the following help:

- Activities: Engage in an activity that you like. Go to the cinema, do some exercise, listen to music, watch a film you really enjoy or read a book.
- Contributing: Focus on doing something for someone else. Volunteer in your community, or help a friend in need.
- Take time out: Create physical or mental distance from the situation or person that is bothering you.
- Alleviate some of the stronger feelings: Hold ice, squeeze a rubber ball or listen to loud music.



## Find ways to look after yourself

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Be kind to yourself in moments of distress. Treat yourself the way you would treat a close friend going through a similar experience: be compassionate.

Engaging your 'five senses' can also be helpful:

### 1. What you see

Focus your vision on something you find soothing, for example, a flower, the waves of the ocean, the stars, or a favorite picture.

### 2. What you hear

Listen to sounds that you find soothing, for example, beautiful music, running water, sounds of nature, (including birds, waves, rainfall), or sing a favorite song.

### 3. What you smell

Try using your favorite smells to soothe yourself, for example, light a scented candle, bake biscuits or a cake, or smell the ocean breeze.

### 4. What you taste

Eat or drink something that you love. Take a moment to really taste it, and take a moment to savour this taste.

### 5. What you touch

Take a bubble bath, put on a textured shirt, brush your hair or stroke a pet animal.

Best of all, engage in an activity that uses multiple senses at once, for example, sit on the beach while watching, listening to, and smelling the ocean, and feel the sand between your fingers and toes.

Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or visualise a relaxing scene. Imagine your feelings or emotions as waves that come and go and change in intensity over time. These activities may help you to feel more alive and provide relief from your distress.

\* Information sourced from the Project Air Synergy Strategy factsheets

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## Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

+61 2 8627 8433  
caps.admin@sydney.edu.au  
[sydney.edu.au/counselling](http://sydney.edu.au/counselling)

Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building  
Opening hours: 9am to 4.30pm,  
Monday to Friday

### Crisis contacts

Ambulance/Fire/Police: 000  
Lifeline (24 hours): 13 11 14  
Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511