Coping With Political and Legal Decisions That Feel Threatening

A legal or political decision that you believe violates human rights or your personal freedoms is likely to stir up strong reactions. You may feel a mixture of emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness. Here are some tips on coping during this time.

1. Identify and accept how you are feeling

Acknowledging your feelings (rather than ignoring or denying them) is important. Any decision or event that suggests a loss or violation of rights creates uncertainty and a sense of threat and losing control. Feeling angry and scared in response to this is normal. You will likely find it helpful to name how you are feeling and reflect on why. Ask yourself, "How am I reacting right now?" and "Why am I reacting this way?"

2. Address the stress reactions you're having now

Fear and uncertainty cause physical responses—your body prepares to protect you and the result is tension and arousal. Look for ways to use and express this energy, rather than only trying to contain it. This can help restore some equilibrium. You may find it particularly helpful to involve your body or creativity—get some exercise, cry, scream underwater or into pillows, create something, or organize something.

3. Learn more

Learn more about the decision and/or surrounding events so that you are well-informed about what has happened and how you may be able to take action. Read some relevant articles published by sources with a reputation for balanced and quality reporting. Look for answers to any questions you have.

4. Take action

When you are well-informed and understand what is fueling your own reactions, you will be better placed to take purposeful action that helps restore some sense of control. There may be multiple ways you can do this, including donating, demonstrating, protesting, sharing your own story, offering practical help to those in need of support, and having conversations with those around you and in power about these issues.

5. Limit news consumption and social media use

There is a difference between "learning more" and compulsively surfing social media or the news. Monitor and limit your time on social media and reading news. Past a certain point, exposure to a other's anguish and outrage is likely to intensify your own sense of helplessness and grief in unhelpful ways.

6. Connect with other people

Others within your community are also likely to feel angry and upset. Talking to other people who are like-minded can help you feel less isolated and overwhelmed. Speaking to a counselor or other mental health professional may also help. Ask how others are doing if you can (especially those who are vulnerable to the impact of these events) and be trustworthy and supportive with regards to what they may tell you about their own feelings and experiences.

In many situations, managing your distress at these events is likely to be an ongoing process. Repeat all tips as necessary.

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