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# Self-care: Finding tools to handle difficult emotions

By Rebecca Irvine  
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## Summary

Learning to self-soothe when experiencing emotional challenges helps improve general well-being.

Meditation and massage are also relaxation techniques used frequently by health care professionals, but they can be just as effective at home. Other DIY relaxation tools suited for helping with difficult emotions include aromatherapy, breathing techniques and involvement in quiet interests.

"I find that activities like drawing, small decorative household projects or even simply hanging pictures, have always been relaxing," states designer James Spiers of Gilbert, Ariz.

### 3. Socializing

Surrounding oneself with nurturing people is a tool well-suited for depression, loneliness or sadness. Connecting with others, especially those who have previously helped someone through good times and bad, can be just what a person needs when he or she is feeling down.

"Whenever I have had a rough day I try to get my husband to take me out on a date, or I will see if some friends want to have a girls' night out. It never fails to make me feel better," shares Amber Adams, mother of four from Mesa, Ariz.

For some, getting motivated to interact with others may be a challenge, but there are still ways to find social support. In his book "The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome," Dr. Tony Attwood, a practicing clinical psychologist, suggests a variety of ideas for those who struggle with socializing, including interacting with a pet, use of social media and giving service.

### 4. Mental reframing

Many people have an ongoing negative internal dialogue. They frequently think thoughts such as, "I can't do it," or, "I'm a loser." This negativity stems from both conscious thoughts and unconscious assumptions or beliefs. Negative "self-talk" is a bad habit and can contribute to ongoing feelings of anxiety or depression.

Temple Grandin, American doctor of animal science, struggled with chronic negative self-talk until an aunt

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challenged the pattern by providing examples of positive things Grandin had in her life.

In her book "Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspective of Autism," Grandin noted, "It perked me up when I compared the pictures in my head ... and concretely helped me understand that some of my thoughts were illogical and not based on fact."

Disputing one's self-talk means challenging the negative or unhelpful thoughts. This strategy of reframing can help change a person's perspective on a given situation to give it a more positive or beneficial meaning. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones by using milder word choices (e.g., "dislike" instead of "hate"), challenging assumptions, and striving to learn from personal experiences.

**5. Distraction tools**

Some people, when stressed or feeling an intense emotion, simply need to get their mind off of their troubles. Like the feisty Scarlett O'Hara from "Gone with the Wind," they decide to think about it "tomorrow."

Reading or listening to a good book, involvement in a hobby (such as genealogy), writing, planning a vacation, watching a movie and volunteering are some of the distraction tools commonly used.

Parents may need to help direct children toward activities that will effectively engage young minds in a healthy way. Distraction tools such as television, computers and video games should be timed and thoroughly supervised. They have been shown to negatively impact a variety of brain functions, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics announced at the group's annual convention in Boston in 2011.

Life is full of challenges and difficulties. At times, the intensity of anger, sadness, anxiety or discouragement may negatively impact physical and psychological health. Learning to self-soothe through healthy behavioral choices can help many improve their general well-being.

*Rebecca Irvine teaches communications at Mesa Community College. She is the author of several books, including MTC at Home (Covenant 2014) and Follow the Prophets (Covenant 2013).*

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