

War Anxiety: Dealing with Rational Fear

Many people have been experiencing intense feelings since the possibility of international conflict has been raised. You may be feeling anxiety, fear, hope, shame, pride, anger, loss of control, outrage, disillusionment, grief, lack of safety, concern for others, and powerlessness. Some of these emotions may be particularly strong because of feelings leftover from past experiences. For example, recent losses may sensitize you to the potential losses that will be incurred by the war. In addition, if you were currently coping with life stresses, the war may have added a stress beyond your coping capacity. The current conflict may also pose troubling moral dilemmas. Many people feel responsible for the actions of our country while not having much power individually to impact national decisions.

It is normal to be experiencing a wide range of emotions at this stressful time. Be aware that such intense feelings will cause physical and mental strain. You may feel generally fatigued and be having difficulty concentrating, sleeping, and eating normally. Many people may find themselves crying or getting angry more easily. In fact, you may direct irritation or aggression at people or things that usually would not bother you. Stressful times require us to be easier on ourselves when we may behave differently than we prefer. In fact, it is important to be extra caring of ourselves at this time.

People have many ways of coping with stress, some of which are more effective than others. Some effective ways of coping with war related emotions are:

Physical: Normalizing disrupted patterns

- * Sleep regular hours; to facilitate sleeping:
- * drink warm milk before bed
- * avoid caffeine after 3 PM and alcohol before bed
- * eat something light before bed
- * get up at a regular time no matter how well you have slept, however, if you need a nap, take one, but try to stay active during the day
- * read or listen to something relaxing before bed
(this means no strenuous exercise and no war news!)
- * Eat a balanced diet at regular intervals
even if you are not hungry, eat a little at each mealtime
- * Exercise moderately each day. A brisk walk will do.

(Stress prepares people physically to fight or flee. Regular exercise discharges this energy more productively when fighting or running will not solve the problem. Without such release, the energy may be turned inward creating fatigue or turned outward creating conflicts in your relationships.)

Emotional/Spiritual: Managing our feelings and dilemmas

Recognize what you can and cannot control. We may not have much control over the war activities, but we can control many things in our daily lives. One way people try to gain a sense of control is by gathering information about the war. Unfortunately, sometimes having more information can increase stress. It is wise to monitor whether media exposure has a positive or negative impact on you and how much is right for you. And for those of you who do not want to hear about the war, listening to the radio or watching T.V. may involuntarily expose you to frequent updates, therefore you may want to engage in other activities for entertainment. Other ways to gain control over your life are:

- * create a schedule of study and recreation and stick to it
- * talk about your feelings, but avoid talking solely with persons who are only negative and pessimistic
- * express your opinions but avoid heated arguments
- * recognize that thoughtful people of goodwill may come to very different conclusions from yours
- * be mindful that international students are also under stress and hold a variety of political perspectives, some that may be similar to yours
- * expect to be respected
- * express yourself creatively (singing, dancing, cooking)
- * do something fun; laughing at serious times is OK
- * escape in healthy ways (video games, movies, hikes, NOT overeating or abusing drugs or alcohol)
- * reach out to family and friends
- * pray or meditate
- * seek out religious or spiritual communities
- * seek support groups or counselors if you continue to feel distressed

Political and Social Action: What can you do?

Depending on your political stance, you may choose to participate in rallies, letter writing, and organizing idea exchanges on campus. You may choose to help others through taping music for military personnel or providing support to persons coping here in the U.S. There are many forms of activism. Remember that involvement may be time consuming, upsetting, and tiring as well as rewarding. Be sure to care for yourself by keeping balance in your life.

Developed by Iowa State, adapted by UT VSWS.