

Keep Cool in a Crisis

If you're going through a crisis, your view of the world probably isn't too rosy. Sudden, sometimes unexplainable events, like loss of a job, death of a loved one, or illness or injury, throw people into an emotional abyss. It's a crowded abyss, too: The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that in any six-month period, nearly 30 million Americans face some kind of crisis.

Much of the stress triggered by a crisis arises from our perception of the event—whether we view a crisis as a challenge or a threat, an opportunity or a ticket to doom. Here are some skills that are useful for putting crises into perspective and surviving with minimal damage to emotional health.

- Visualize the future in positive, healing ways. Imagine yourself feeling good again and being happy. When people imagine themselves behaving in a particular way, the likelihood that things will turn out as expected increases.
- Learn to physically relax, using any of the techniques described at the beginning of this chapter. It's hard to feel tense when your body is completely relaxed.
- Be realistic when you describe your situation to yourself and others. Avoid exaggerating or using emotionally charged words like “never,” “always,” or “hate.”
- Take one day at a time. Set goals you can measure and achieve, and don't demand too much of yourself.
- Don't allow yourself to get bogged down in self-pity, but be willing to accept help from others. Love, friendship, and social support are powerful coping tools for managing stress.\

Remember, you're not alone. Whatever you're going through, others have experienced and survived. You will, too.