

Coping with a Crisis Using the S.T.O.P. Technique

Objective

To effectively cope with a crisis using the S.T.O.P. technique.

You Should Know

You might think of a crisis as a sudden unexpected incident or disaster, such as a car accident, natural disaster, death in the family, or another tragic or cataclysmic event. A crisis can sometimes be obvious, such as a job loss or divorce. In other cases, a personal crisis might be less apparent but can still lead to dramatic changes in your behavior, feelings, and mood.

When you experience a crisis, you will probably have intense feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) can help you overcome and release negative thoughts and feelings to reduce avoidant coping strategies – while maintaining your values. If you are coping with a crisis, whether it is emotional or situational, there are things you can do to cope and enhance your well-being. The S.T.O.P. technique is one way to manage crises:

1. **S**low your breathing. Take some deep breaths and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and out. This will help to anchor you in the present.
2. **T**ake note of your experience. Notice what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. Observe if your thoughts and feelings are overwhelming you. Do not allow them to carry you away.
3. **O**pen up around your feelings and thoughts, breathing into them and making space for them without holding onto them or pushing them away. See them for what they are rather than attaching to them.
4. **P**ursue your values. Connect with your values by asking yourself, “Who do I want to be in the face of this crisis? What do I stand for? How would I like to act so I can look back and feel proud of my response?”

This worksheet will help you use the S.T.O.P. technique to cope with a crisis.

What to Do

Describe a crisis you are currently experiencing.

Would you benefit from help, assistance, support, or advice? If so, what friends, neighbors, or family members can you contact? What professionals can you arrange to see? Include names and phone numbers.

Have you ever experienced anything similar? If so, how did you respond in a useful or helpful manner? Is there anything you learned from that experience that you can apply now?

Is there anything you can do to improve the situation in any way? Are there any small steps you can take right now? What are the smallest, simplest, easiest steps you can take:

in the next few minutes? _____

in the next few hours? _____

in the next few days? _____

Note: the first step might be to practice mindful breathing or write an action plan.

If there is nothing you can do to improve the situation, are you willing to practice acceptance while engaging in the present moment? Describe how can you spend your time and energy constructively.

Now, spend a few minutes practicing steps 1, 2, and 3 of the S.T.O.P. technique. Describe your experience.

Next, connect with your values. How do you want to respond to this situation? What are some values-driven steps you can take? What personal strengths can you develop? How can you grow from this experience?

Remember to be compassionate with yourself. Ask, "If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling, how would I treat them? What might I say or do?"

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn about yourself during this exercise?

Did the S.T.O.P. technique help you cope with the crisis? Why or why not?

Has the situation improved? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?
