

# FIRST AID KIT FOR YOUR MIND



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ENGLISH

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ALSO AVAILABLE IN:

Español  
中文

Filipino  
Tiếng Việt

한국어  
Lus Hmoob



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LISTOS CALIFORNIA:

[ListosCalifornia.org](https://ListosCalifornia.org)

# MENTAL READINESS FOR TOUGH TIMES

Stress in life is unavoidable. It is natural to become stressed during times of personal trouble with family, work, school, relationships, money or health. But normal life stress can spike during a catastrophe, like a pandemic, wildfire or earthquake. After a disaster or very stressful event, you may have strong mental, emotional or physical reactions.

You already know to have a first aid kit ready for when someone gets hurt, or a **Go Bag** packed if you need to evacuate. Did you know you can also take healthy steps now to prevent or reduce harm to your mental health? Think of these tips as a **“First Aid Kit” for your mind.**

There are five simple things you can do.



1.

Know your  
signs of  
stress.



2.

Learn what  
helps you  
feel better.



3.

Get help  
when you  
need it.



4.

Learn how  
to recover.



5.

Help others  
in need.



## 1. KNOW YOUR SIGNS OF STRESS

Everyone reacts to stress differently. But there are common signs of trouble. Check in with yourself during high-stress times, like during a pandemic or after a really bad fire, quake or flood. When life gets too hard, which of these signs are most common for you?

- ☐ Unusual, long-lasting sadness, anger or mood swings
- ☐ Avoidance of family, friends or coworkers
- ☐ Changes in sleeping, eating or drinking habits
- ☐ Stomach aches, heartburn or other new-to-you digestion problems
- ☐ Unexplained, new-to-you aches and pains
- ☐ Getting upset at things that usually don't bother you
- ☐ Feeling confused, "in a fog" or unable to focus on daily tasks
- ☐ A worsening health problem, like asthma, heart disease or diabetes

**Check off or make note** of the ways you show stress.

[illegible]

# PEOPLE AT EXTRA RISK

Some people are at higher risk for poor mental health when hit with chronic stress, great hardship or life-changing catastrophes. For example, older adults are at higher risk than younger adults. Women are twice as likely as men to become depressed.

Anyone who has experienced one or more of these challenges should look out for signs of stress overload. Which ones are familiar to you?



- ☐ Conflict with family or friends
- ☐ Life changes like divorce, moving, losing a job
- ☐ Loneliness, particularly in elders
- ☐ High stress jobs (essential workers, first responders)
- ☐ Serious illness
- ☐ Violence or other trauma
- ☐ History of childhood trauma such as abuse, neglect or family conflict
- ☐ Death of a loved one
- ☐ Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- ☐ Living in poverty/constant money problems
- ☐ Living with disabilities
- ☐ Racism, homophobia and systemic injustices
- ☐ Being bullied or unsafe, particularly kids and teens
- ☐ Gender identity issues
- ☐ Addiction or misuse of alcohol or drugs
- ☐ Family history of mental illness



**Check off or make note** of the ways you may be at higher risk.

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

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If you notice signs of stress in yourself or others, you don't need to feel alone or embarrassed. Everyone struggles in tough times. Signs of extreme stress do not mean you, or someone you love, is weak, and they aren't something to hide. In fact, **it helps to talk about it**. Mental strain is a very human challenge and sharing your concerns openly can free others to share their burdens, too.

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You may not know it to look around. But nearly **one in five adults, right now, is living with a mental health condition**. That's millions of people! Anxiety and mood disorders are the most common. As with any illness, some mental health problems are mild and some are more severe.

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Most people struggle when important parts of their lives feel dangerous and out of control. It is not surprising that **some people will experience poor mental health or mental illness during times of high stress**.

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**Some people naturally face greater risks of health disorders** but it has nothing to do with character or strength. It may be due to their brain's chemistry or other brain health conditions. And just as other common health conditions run in families, like heart disease, asthma and diabetes, family genes can also impact mental health.

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While most of these biological factors are beyond our control, understanding them allows you to prepare to take care. Having a **first aid kit for your mind** can help prepare you to prevent or manage a mental health challenge.



## 2. LEARN WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER

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There are simple things you can do to better handle whatever life throws at you. They include social support, regular exercise, good sleep, healthy eating and focusing on your feelings. Using these stress-busting strategies is like giving first aid to your mind.



### HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Stay close to people who support you and care about you. That may be family or friends, people you work with, a mentor you look up to, or a faith leader such as a priest, pastor, rabbi or imam. Offer your support, too.

- ✓ Whenever possible, make time for family and friends.
- ✓ Find ways to connect with people you cannot see in person.
- ✓ Avoid people who make you feel bad, sad or mad.
- ✓ Tell family and romantic partners what you need to be well.
- ✓ If service to others makes you feel good, find ways to give.



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### BRAIN CARE

Doctors use terms like “mindfulness” to describe caring for your brain. For some, this may be daily prayer, meditation, or yoga. The point is to slow down, focus on what you’re feeling, and not react to what’s happening around you.

- ✓ Set aside five minutes each day for quiet, mindful time.
- ✓ Be “in the moment” without thoughts of the past or future.
- ✓ In the shower, close your eyes, slow your mind and relax your body.
- ✓ Eat slowly, paying attention to smell, taste and texture.
- ✓ Pause briefly every few hours and take deep breaths.



## 2. LEARN WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER

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### DAILY EXERCISE

Daily physical movement and other types of activity are good for your body and good for your mind. Aim for 30 minutes of activity each day, even if you fall short or need a day off. It doesn't have to be done all at once.

- ✓ Set aside even short bursts of time to exercise each day.
- ✓ If you're mobility challenged, chair exercises can reduce stress.
- ✓ Walk more often and take stairs whenever you can.
- ✓ When using the phone, try walking while talking.
- ✓ If you track your steps, try to increase your daily total.



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### GOOD SLEEP

You already know that stress can mess with your sleep! And getting a good night's sleep helps reduce stress levels. Make sleep a priority and you will gain better energy, memory and focus, and feel less irritable or depressed.

- ✓ Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
- ✓ Aim to wake up at the same time every day, even weekends.
- ✓ Avoid big snacks, caffeine, and alcohol before bed.
- ✓ When possible, make where you sleep quiet, dark and cool.
- ✓ Try deep breaths, meditation, or prayer to relax before sleeping.



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### EAT RIGHT

Stress makes you crave foods with lots of sugar, salt and fat. But eating those foods, or using too much alcohol, can make you feel worse. Alcohol seems to relieve stress, but it actually makes your brain even more depressed.

- ✓ Try to eat a healthy breakfast every morning.
- ✓ Replace some soda or juice drinks with water.
- ✓ Keep regular mealtimes when you can.
- ✓ Replace some high-sugar, high-fat foods with fresh fruit.
- ✓ Limit alcohol to prevent problems that increase stress.



# 3. GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

With some illnesses or injuries, you can't recover with the help of a friend or a first aid kit. You need professional help. The same is true for your mind. There are times when you may need someone with special training.



## SIGNS IT'S TIME TO ASK FOR HELP

- ☐ You are overwhelmed by long-lasting grief, sadness, or worry.
- ☐ You can't get restful sleep or you sleep too much.
- ☐ You find yourself being unusually hostile or behaving violently.
- ☐ You are misusing alcohol or drugs.
- ☐ Your personal care and cleanliness decline.
- ☐ You get no pleasure from things you used to enjoy.
- ☐ You see or hear things that aren't real.
- ☐ Your mood swings wildly from depressed to very high energy.
- ☐ You have panic attacks with chest pain and trouble breathing.
- ☐ You have flashbacks of a traumatic event.
- ☐ You have intrusive thoughts you cannot control.
- ☐ You feel numb or disconnected from life.
- ☐ You find yourself thinking about suicide or self-harm.



**Check off or make note** of the signs you recognize.

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# 3. GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

## HOW TO GET HELP

If you have a **health care provider**, tell them what you are feeling and ask for help.

If not, **call someone who is trained to help you** find confidential mental health support.



If you have **Medi-Cal**, mental health services are provided through County Mental Health Plans.

**tinyurl.com/MediCalMH**



California's counties have **24/7 mental health hotlines**. They will help anyone in a crisis find mental health support near you. If you have internet access, you can find your county's phone number here: **tinyurl.com/CountyMH**



Most California counties have **2-1-1**, **a number you can dial from any phone** and get help finding mental health care near you. Operators can speak many languages.



A parent can request a free mental health evaluation for a **child in public school**. The child may also receive free in-school mental health services.



Many **faith communities** offer free counseling for people concerned about their mental health, or the health of their loved ones.



**For suicide prevention information, please see back page.**

# 4. LEARN HOW TO RECOVER

Destructive events like a wildfire, earthquake, flood or life-threatening illness can trigger stress and worry, even after they're over. If you've just come through a natural disaster, severe illness or any personal trauma:



Remember that it's normal to have good and bad days.



Make a plan to handle important tasks one at a time.



Reconnect with your most important people as soon as you can.



Avoid reminders that make you "re-live" a traumatic time.



Resist watching too much news or talking endlessly about the event.



When you don't want to talk about it, tell your family and friends.



Regularly check yourself for warning signs that you might need outside help. Get trained help if you have:

- ✓ Intense or unpredictable feelings
- ✓ Unusual thoughts or behavior changes
- ✓ Strained personal relationships
- ✓ Stress-related physical symptoms



# 5. HELP OTHERS

While learning about a First Aid Kit for the Mind, you may have recognized things about yourself. And you may have thought about someone else who could be struggling with extreme stress or a mental health condition and how you might help.

There are many ways you can support someone who needs mental health aid. Many people heal faster when they have the love and support of others. Every person will be different, but here are some steps you can take that could help someone.



## WHAT HELPS

- ✓ Look for openings to talk.
- ✓ Stick to one topic.
- ✓ Stay calm yourself.
- ✓ Ask if they just want you to listen.
- ✓ Ask how you can help.
- ✓ Listen more than you talk.
- ✓ Respect how they view their behavior and symptoms.
- ✓ Start with “I” statements: “I am worried” not “You are worrying me.”
- ✓ Reflect back what they share: “I hear that you are very unhappy right now.”
- ✓ If you can relate, share your own struggles but keep the focus on them.
- ✓ Express confidence in their ability to recover.
- ✓ If someone talks of hurting themselves or others, take action.
  - Remind them that asking for help is a sign of strength.
  - Urge them to talk to a healthcare provider or call a hotline.
  - If they refuse, call a hotline or provider yourself for advice.
  - Help them overcome barriers like who to call or how to pay.
- ✓ Get help for yourself to cope with the stress of an ill loved one.



# 5. HELP OTHERS

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## WHAT DOESN'T HELP

- ✗ Judgment, disappointment or criticism.
- ✗ Talking too much.
- ✗ Thinking you have all the answers.
- ✗ Forcing a talk or a solution they don't want.
- ✗ Making it about you.
- ✗ Making jokes or being sarcastic.
- ✗ Saying they are exaggerating.
- ✗ Telling them to change their attitude or "snap out of it".
- ✗ Telling them that everything will be OK or to pray the pain away.
- ✗ Blaming sin, demons or moral and spiritual failings.
- ✗ Telling them they are lucky their experience wasn't worse.
- ✗ Minimizing their illness, or suggesting everyone gets "crazy" sometimes.
- ✗ Expecting immediate results or improvement after your intervention.
- ✗ Promising to keep it secret.



# 5. HELP OTHERS: YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and teens often struggle after a disaster or other traumatic event. There are many ways adults can help them.

- ✓ Point out the people in the community helping them to recover.
- ✓ Limit exposure to news and social media about the event.
- ✓ Help them reconnect with family and friends.
- ✓ Re-establish familiar routines as soon as possible.
- ✓ Offer something positive to look forward to.
- ✓ Encourage their questions and expect to explain things multiple times.
- ✓ Be aware of how you discuss events when kids are listening.
- ✓ Don't erode trust by denying difficult facts to protect them.
- ✓ Watch out for physical or emotional signs of stress.
- ✓ Learn how to get help if your child experiences a severe reaction.
  - If a child shows unsafe behavior, or talks about hurting themselves or others, seek professional help right away.
  - Tell your child's healthcare provider or call **2-1-1** and ask for help.



## RESOURCES TO HELP KIDS UNDERSTAND MENTAL HEALTH

Each Mind Matters:  
Children and Schools

[tinyurl.com/EMMchildren](https://tinyurl.com/EMMchildren)

Support for Family Members  
and Caregivers

[tinyurl.com/MHcaregivers](https://tinyurl.com/MHcaregivers)

# HELPFUL INFORMATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

## California Office of the Surgeon General

[tinyurl.com/CAStress](https://tinyurl.com/CAStress)  
Stress Management Resources  
Helpful tips on managing stress for adults, parents and kids



## California Health & Human Services Agency

[tinyurl.com/CCHSyouthmentalhealth](https://tinyurl.com/CCHSyouthmentalhealth)  
Resources hub to find help to support children's mental health



## California Mental Health Services Division

[tinyurl.com/CalMentalHealth](https://tinyurl.com/CalMentalHealth)  
State mental health programs for children, youth, adults and older adults



## Take Action for Mental Health

[takeaction4mh.com](https://takeaction4mh.com)  
Resources from California's Mental Health Movement



## National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

[nami.org](https://nami.org)  
Many free resources for people with mental illness and those who love them, in both English and Spanish



## Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

[samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov)  
Federal agency offering referrals and resources to improve the lives of people living with mental and substance use disorders, and their families



## National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

[tinyurl.com/NIMHhelp](https://tinyurl.com/NIMHhelp)  
A federally funded research agency with evidence-based mental health resources in English and Spanish



## Additional Resources

For links to more mental health resources, visit [listoscalifornia.org/community-projects/mental-health/](https://listoscalifornia.org/community-projects/mental-health/)



# SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide can touch anyone at any time, but we're especially vulnerable during or after difficult events. If you are feeling overwhelmed, thinking of self-harm, or just need someone to talk to:

Call **988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

For **Text Crisis Line**, text **HOME** to **741-741**

**Spanish speakers** call **888-628-9454**

**Korean speakers** call **877-727-4747**

**LGBTQ+ youth** call **866-488-7386** or text **START** to **678-678**

Concerned about someone else? Learn the signs that someone may be at risk of suicide and how to help them.

**Know the Signs** (English)  
[suicideispreventable.org](https://suicideispreventable.org)

**Reconozca las Señales** (Spanish)  
[elsuicidioesprevenible.org](https://elsuicidioesprevenible.org)

**Suicide prevention resources for API communities** (Korean, Hmong, Lao, Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer) [tinyurl.com/APISuicide](https://tinyurl.com/APISuicide)



## Deaf and Hard of Hearing Suicide Prevention Hotline

For TTY Dial **711**, then **988**

Text **HAND** to **839-863**



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