



Navigating Difficult Situations and Conversations



MENTAL HEALTH TIPS FOR FAMILIES

www.mind.org.hk



Uncertainty and instability in the world around us can have a **BIG** impact on our mental well-being. No matter where you are - home, school, social settings, or elsewhere - stressful situations that might provoke different opinions can lead to difficult conversations and feelings of frustration. However, there are ways that we can protect our own and others' mental well-being in difficult times..



DISAGREEMENTS

Disagreements are a normal part of all relationships, especially if the subject is an emotional one. So, we need to find a way to address differences while being **respectful and diplomatic**. If your friends, classmates, or social groups have different opinions from you on issues you feel strongly about, try and avoid getting into situations where you come into direct disagreement with them.

If you do enter a disagreement, even if it seems difficult, do not do the following:

- **Criticise** (attack the person's character)
- **Show contempt** (insults and nonverbal signs such as eye rolling)
- **Shut down** (refuse to speak)
- **Act defensive** (seeing yourself as a victim)

LET'S TALK

Here are some tips for talking to family members when there is a conflict:

Where you can, avoid discussions of topics that are likely to upset you. Talk to your family about other shared interests or history, instead of/as well as the things that you are disagreeing over.



DEALING WITH DISAGREEMENTS:

Try not to get pulled into difficult conversations, but if you do find yourself in a confrontational situation:

- Take a step back and listen, understand and empathise, without judgement.
- If you disagree, be aware of your facial expressions, tone of voice, hand gestures, and body language to make sure you are sending the right message.
- Take some time (maybe just a few seconds) to cool down before you respond, this will allow for a calmer and less emotional conversation.
- Try to calm things down by carefully listening to the person.
- Separate the stories from the facts, and try not to let others' opinions impact your view.
- Find some common ground, even if you disagree overall.
- Preserve your family relationship as much as you can.
- Respect your family member as a person with their own opinions, as feeling heard is often more important to people than winning an argument. Remember your relationship to that person – are you parent, child, sibling? How do you normally interact?

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

- If you accept their point of view, this does not mean you agree with it. It means that you can understand and respect their opinion. Focus on the positive with empathy and sensitivity (“I understand how you feel”).
- Emphasize the problem, not the person – depersonalize any comments (talk about the facts; avoid “what is your position?” or “why do you think that?”). This is sometimes especially difficult to do with family members, but it is really important.
- Ask open ended questions to show interest in their point of view (“can you explain that to me?” or “what happened to make you think that?”). Do not make assumptions.
- Be open to negotiation and compromise. You may not be able to end the disagreement, but work on maintaining trust and keeping your family relationship respectful and loving.
- **If you still feel stressed, you can also:**
 - Reach out for support --call a trusted friend or another family member about how you feel. Sharing your thoughts may reduce your stress.
 - Give yourself a break from the situation – if you can, leave the home or spend time with a friend instead for a while.
 - Make sure not to blame anyone (or yourself) if the situation cannot be controlled. Try not to feel defeated, and try to move past the issue for the time being.

KEEPING YOUR BELIEFS ON TRACK

During challenging times, you may be pulled into a situation where your family members have strong opinions and you choose not to take sides. This can be really tough when you are all living under the same roof.

- Go out for food, get an ice cream, or walk to another relaxing place, where you can calmly listen to opposing views without feeling threatened, outside of the family home.
- Try not to feel pressured to react, take sides, or agree with anyone's viewpoint.
- Make your relationship stronger by speaking up for yourself, being honest, expressing your needs, and keeping your own viewpoint.
- Try to keep mealtimes conflict free zones, where you enjoy each other's company.

Remember that it may not be possible to find a solution to the argument. Keeping the conversation respectful is a more realistic outcome. You can also try the following:

- Adopt a gentle manner without attack or threat.
- Show interest in the other person.
- See the other person without judging them.
- Engage with an easy manner, with some humour.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Being mindful of your mental health when considering how you speak with your friends, classmates, or social groups about their views is crucial. Check in on yourself and others at www.howokayareyou.com.

SWITCH OFF SOMETIMES:

It may feel as if people around you are constantly sharing stories as well as news, tweets, photos, and videos on social media. Remember, these stories are often just one point of view.

- Step out and take a breath before you respond (or don't respond).
- Avoid excessively checking social media and the news.
- Try moving key apps away from the home-screen of your phone for a while.
- Turn off notifications from key apps.

THE BIG PICTURE:

Try to avoid making major decisions when you are distressed. You may feel angry, guilty or fearful, or believe that you should be stronger and support your own opinions. Although these are normal reactions, they can be pretty draining. **Accept your feelings** and check the facts from a reliable source before you make any changes. **Talk to trusted friends and family** about how you are feeling, and ask for their advice before you move forward.

MANAGING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH



WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

Conflicts arise when we disagree over opinions, values, beliefs, desires, or actions. It is normal to feel sad, helpless, angry or distressed when we hold different views from those we care about. This is especially common when there is prolonged conflict, such as the current situation in Hong Kong. When this occurs, it is really important to recognise and accept your feelings - do not ignore them.

HOW AM I FEELING?

Being aware of your emotions and thoughts can give you the perspective you need to continue with your day. Take a minute to notice what thoughts are going through your mind, how you are feeling in your body, and whether there are any behavioural urges on which you want to act. All of these things may give you clues about the emotions underneath them.

Our belief in our ability to respond to tough situations makes a difference in how we think, how we act, and how we feel about our environment. It can help our mental well-being to know that there are things we can do to cope when faced with a stressful event. Think back to when you overcame a difficult time and how you dealt with the situation. Use the same strategy -- continue to do what works well for you. You could also use the tips below to manage your mental health:

TIPS

- **If you are anxious, worried or stressed**, try to relax by practicing deep breathing or mindfulness, relax your muscles, go outside for a while, or think of calming images (such as your favourite TV show or your pet). Make sure to do things that make you feel comfortable.
- **If you feel distressed**, self soothe using as many of your senses as possible. Find pleasant sounds to listen to, things to look at, items to touch, and tastes to enjoy.
- **If you feel helpless** that you cannot control the situation, focus your attention on daily tasks that you can control such as making a hot drink or writing in a journal. Turn off social media and TV news, and put away your electronic device, especially before bed. Try joining a volunteer activity or helping a friend or neighbour, so you feel in control again.
- **If you feel angry**, say "STOP" to yourself before you respond in any way. Walk away and clear your head if you need to. You will be more effective if you are calmer.

- **If you feel sad**, take a few minutes to remove yourself from the situation. Focus your attention on something else to see things differently and feel hopeful. Soothe yourself with music, watching a comedy show on TV, or calling a friend.
- **If you feel overwhelmed**, remember that this is normal. As you face stressful situations, you may not be able to control your emotions, but you should try to control how you respond to your feelings. Talk to your family or trusted friends about how you feel – by letting go of your negative thoughts, you will feel more relaxed and relieved.

KEEP YOUR ROUTINE:

One of the best ways to stay mentally well is to stick to a routine. This allows you to feel in control of life in times of uncertainty. Experiment with a routine that works for you, and then discuss it with your family so they can support you. Healthy routines should include at least two of the following:

Exercise: Move your body each day and feel the way that it responds to exercise. Exercise helps elevate your mood and lower stress.

Diet: Eat regular, balanced, nutritional meals.

Sleep: Ensure regular sleep (7-8 hours per night) and wake times. Try and create a relaxing bedtime routine. If you can't sleep, get out of bed and read for a while until you start to feel drowsy.

Social interaction: Spend time connecting with friends or other family members who make you happy.

Extras: Make sure that you treat yourself to things that you love from time to time; this will soothe distressing feelings.

5 WAYS TO WELLBEING



*Developed by the New Economics Foundation

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If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that help is available.

For emergency support please contact:

- **Emergency line:** 999
- **The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multi-lingual):** (852) 2896 0000
- **Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):** 2389 2222
- **Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):** (852) 2382 0000
- **More crisis support services can be found here:** [mind.org.hk/find-help-now](https://www.mind.org.hk/find-help-now)
- **More non-urgent support services can be found here:**
<https://www.mind.org.hk/community-directory/>

ACUTE STRESS REACTION

It is normal to have strong emotional or physical reactions following a distressing event. Witnessing a traumatic experience, (an event that causes a threat to our safety and potentially puts our own life or the lives of others at risk) either in person, or on TV/social media, can lead to an acute stress reaction.

If you think you might be affected:

- Seek help from your family, friends, and your community.
- Follow the tips to maintain your well-being.
- Try and reduce your exposure to the news and social media messages.
- If you are in education, consult school well-being guidelines, support hotline, on-site social worker or counsellor.
- If you work, check if your workplace has well-being guidelines, support hotline, or Employee Assistance Program in the human resources department.

After such an event, you may feel changes in your mental health such as: reoccurring negative thoughts and feelings; mood swings, including anger, guilt, or sadness; and difficulties concentrating on tasks or sleeping. **If these symptoms persist for more than 8 weeks and these tips do not work to relieve your distress, you may want to seek professional help and support.**

Learn how to check in on others by visiting Mind HK's site: www.howokayareyou.com



#HowOkayAreYou
#你有幾OK

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ABOUT MIND HK:

Mind HK, established as "Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited," is a **registered S88 charity (91/16471)** committed to **improving awareness and understanding of mental health in Hong Kong**. We collaborate with other local and international mental health charities and provide online support and training programmes, based on global best practice, to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem and equip them with the resources they need. Through collaborative research, Mind HK is leading the way in understanding mental health problems in the city and providing its population with the right support and resources.

MIND HK'S MISSION AND VISION:

- To ensure **everyone in Hong Kong living with a mental health problem has the recognition, support and respect they need to make the best recovery possible**.
- To provide partnership, collaboration, training, innovation and best practice to facilitate the work of all those involved in improving mental health in Hong Kong.
- To lead, promote and support the destigmatisation and transformation of community mental health care so that Hong Kong can become a global leader in the field and a model for other Asian cities.
- To research and audit these strategies and share them internationally.

MIND HK'S POSITION STATEMENT:

- **Anyone in Hong Kong who needs help with their mental health can be assured that they are entitled to the full support of Mind HK** irrespective of their gender, race, background or beliefs.
- To be effective and credible, **Mind HK operate as a neutral and impartial humanitarian charity without any political affiliations or other conflicts of interest**.
- The work we do, especially our research, is dedicated to improving the health of vulnerable groups and maintaining the best mental health possible for all of Hong Kong.
- We hope that anyone reporting or commenting on our work will respect and support our independence and neutrality.

We would like to thank all of our volunteers, local NGOs, and experts, who have volunteered their time to help curate and review these booklets. This booklet has been produced by Mind HK, with the support of the Samaritans and the Samaritan Befrienders. Special thanks to the Research and Impact Initiative on Communication in Healthcare (HKU RIICH) for helping review these documents. If you have any ideas or resources, which you think may be useful for us to share, please email us at media@mind.org.hk.



In collaboration with:



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