

QUESTIONS TO CHECK-IN WITH YOURSELF  
DURING an Election (insert stressful time here)

## **Article Study:**

“Eight Questions That Can Help You Survive Election Stress”

BY JEREMY ADAM SMITH, JILL SUTTIE | OCTOBER 14, 2020 w/ linked sources

These questions will help you make it through the election...and beyond.

### **1. What's happening in my body and mind today?**

- Is the election disrupting my sleep?
- Is it interfering with my ability to concentrate?
- Do I feel breathless, or feel any pressure in my chest?
- Is the election bringing back bad memories—for example, of abuse in your life?
- Do thoughts of the election intrude or arise when you wish they wouldn't?
- Do you find yourself thinking of the election even when you would rather be thinking about other things?

This allows you to name emotions like anger, grief, or anxiety—and naming them is the first step toward feeling more in control of your life.

### **2. If I'm feeling distress, what can I do to soothe myself?**

Try to avoid feeling bad about feeling bad about the election. Instead of pushing down any negative feelings, ask what you can do to soothe yourself. Therapist Linda Graham **suggests** these techniques for calming yourself down when everything feels like too much:

- **Breathing.** Deep belly breathing activates the parasympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system and slows down your reactivity. Breathing slowly, deeply, can de-escalate a full-blown panic attack in a matter of minutes. Remembering to breathe throughout the day de-stresses you, and helps you install calm as your real baseline, not stress as the new normal.
- **Hand on the heart.** Neural cells around the heart activate during stress. Your warm hand on your heart calms those neurons down again, often in less than a minute. Hand on the heart works especially well when you breathe positive thoughts,

feelings, images of safety and trust, ease, and goodness into your heart at the same time.

- **Meditation.** Sylvia Boorstein's book *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There*, speaks to our instinctive and socialized tendencies to do, to act (fight-flight). Following her instructions on compassionate mindfulness meditation is a gentle way to calm the mind and body and let things simply be, over time generating a steady inner calm that sustains you over the long haul.

### 3. Am I getting enough good news?

- What are good news stories you've heard?
- Look to places like the [Solutions Journalism Network](#)—an organization that encourages in-depth journalism, highlighting not just problems, but the people and programs finding solutions.

### 4. When do I feel good about the election?

Here's another way to counter all the negativity: Michael Steger suggests searching for evidence in the news, or in the world around you, that there are still good people.

- When do you find yourself tearing up, or smiling?
- Who is working for goals that you think are important, who seems to be effective and successful?
- Where are the solutions?
- Did you hear a speech that inspired you?
- Did you see a candidate do or say the right thing?
- When you find good news, then let yourself feel good about it.

### 5. What am I grateful for today?

- Focusing on what we're thankful for helps us be **more resilient** when times are tough. If we turn toward appreciating the good in our lives, it **lessens** our anxiety and depression, so we can stay calmer in the face of uncertainty. And it can **keep us** from burning out.
- Gratitude is also a premier social emotion that binds us to other people, strengthening our relationships. Cultivating it in ourselves inspires us to help others in need, even when giving help is costly to us—something we could use in these difficult times when we need to come together.

### 6. How can I connect with other people?

- In facing this year's election—and the barriers imposed by COVID-19—don't let your stress cut you off from others. [Allison Briscoe-Smith](#), a clinician at the Wright Institute,

suggests aiming to move “from self-care to community care.” In other words, yes, take care of yourself first, but when you feel strong enough, reach out to those in need—and ask, “What is one small, tangible thing you can do to help someone feel better today?”

## **7. In light of this election, what are some new ways I can use my special skills or talents to make a difference in the broader world?**

- What are you good at?
- What have you done that gave you a skill that can be used for a cause?
- What do you care about in your community?

## **8. What future would I like to see—and what steps am I taking today to make that future happen?**

- What healthy habit are you nurturing now that will be with you after the election?
- What do you have in your life right now because of this tumultuous time that you hope to still have in your life later?

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Those might seem like hard questions to ask yourself, and it might seem even harder, right now, to think of our collective well-being in the future. But, when we look to the future—a process scientists call “**prospection**”—the present moment actually becomes more meaningful. Though it might be hard right now to think beyond November 3, it’s worth trying. **Numerous studies** show that envisioning a positive future makes it more likely to come to pass—and prospection can make us more resilient in the present.

We don’t have a magic wand—and we don’t know what will happen on November 3. But we do know that there will be a November 4, and we know that we are all going to have to get out of bed and do what we can to make the world a better place, no matter who is in the White House. We might feel powerless, but we’re not. We can vote, we can donate money and march—and we can help the people whose lives we touch. And, maybe, four years from now, when we ask a neighbor or a coworker or a friend how they’re doing, they’ll be able to say, “Great!”

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