

Weather THE *Storm*

Understand, embrace &
regulate your emotions

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Introduction

Like the weather, our emotions and internal experiences can change constantly.

'Weather' you are feeling great, just okay, or a little bit blue, remember the sun will always rise again. The weather can change, and so do our emotions.

Try taking some time to practise self-care, and you'll be equipped for every emotional weather no matter what life hands you.

Start your journey!

Understanding Emotions

When a storm enters your sight, the sky darkens, and you may feel gloomy inside.

The links below address some common feelings. Our feelings come and go. Similarly, a storm will naturally dissipate after it rains intensely. Let's learn more about these feelings to better cope with them.

The storm will be over soon, pinky promise.

Understanding Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure (Every Mind Matters, n.d.). It's hard to avoid stress, things can trigger stressful feelings and responses no matter big or small. While it is often uncomfortable and frustrating, let's respond in ways such that we can keep our cool.

Stress affects our mind and physical state. Hormones are released to increase our heart and breath rate.

Everyone, including 'strong' and 'successful' people, experience stress from time to time. You may feel stressed while giving a presentation, attending placement, or taking an examination. Stressful situations vary in degree, just like how there are varying weather signals Typhoon Signal No. 1, No. 3, No. 8 or even No.10.

Interestingly, stress does not always come from a negative place. Positive stress can come from challenges that take you to a new place. These include being a freshman in university, starting a new job, or moving out. Life changes or stepping out of your comfort zone can be super scary, but you're already doing great.

The Value of Stress

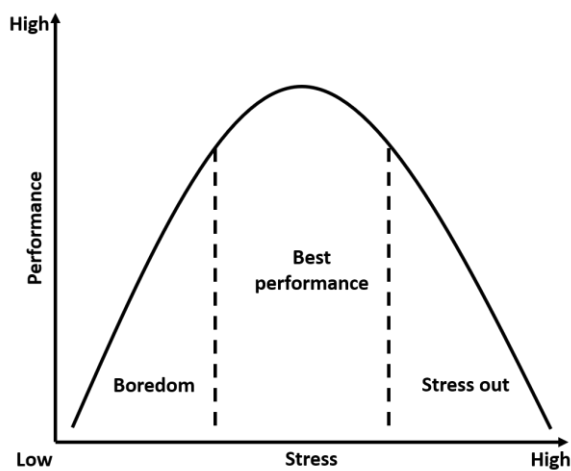
Too little stress makes life too easy breezy.

But...

Too much stress can be a sign of burnout.

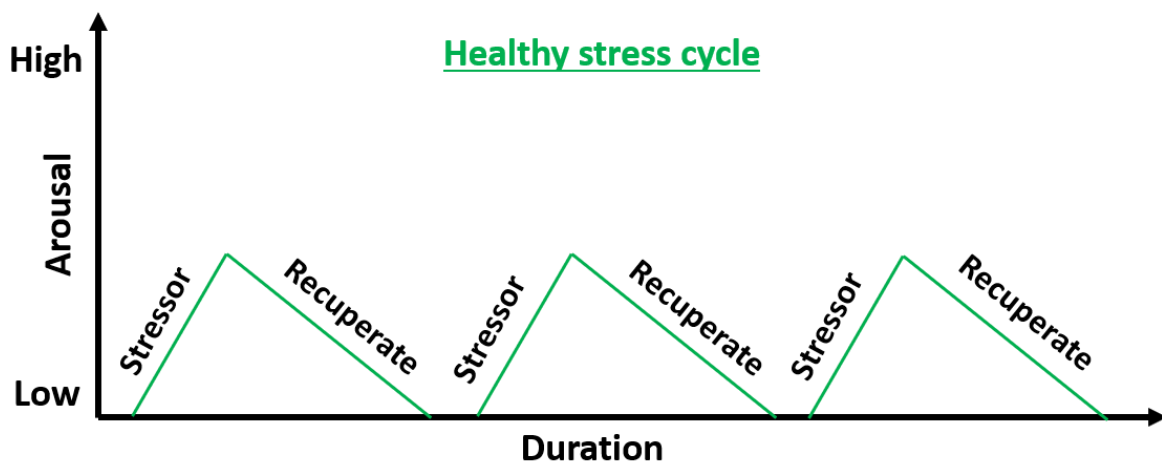
At the optimal range of stress, your body and mind have sufficient capacity to deal with challenges and you feel confident about giving your best shot and exploring life to its fullest.

One of the keys is to find the "right" dose of stress and to keep yourself within a healthy cycle of stress.

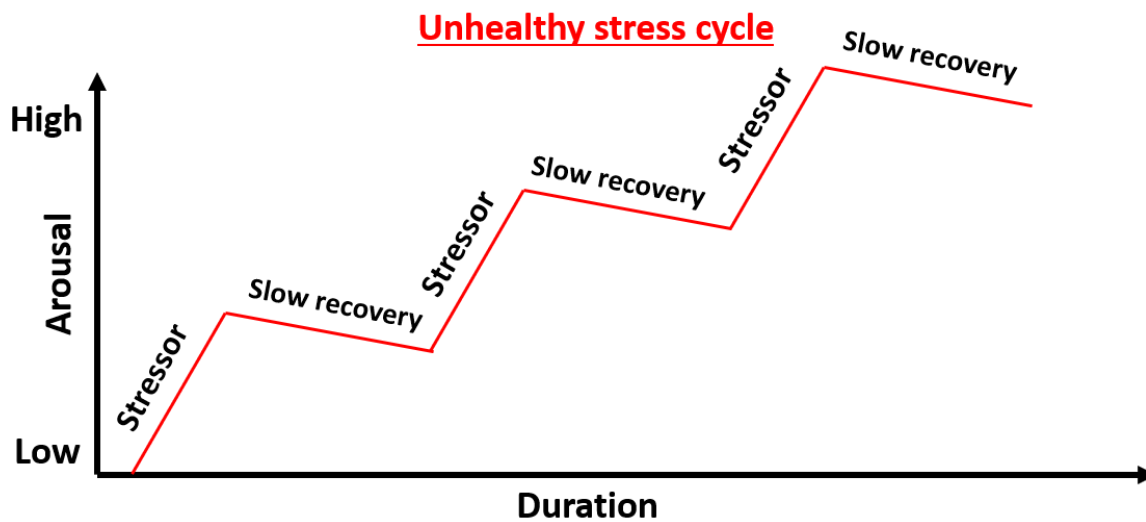


Cycle of Stress

Healthy cycle of stress - your stress responses are relatively manageable with descending peaks. You find ways to stay safe and secure, and to keep your life going until the storm ends.



Unhealthy cycle of stress - your stress responses pile up over time and become more challenging to handle. You start to develop persistent physical and psychological symptoms. The end of a storm seems very far away.



When to Get Help?

If you notice that your stress level persists at a significant degree and is starting to affect your study, relationship, and daily life, **it's time to get help.**

Make an appointment with CEDARS-CoPE counsellors, we're here for you.

Related Websites

- [What is stress | From the American Institute of Stress](#)
- [Stress and burnout - How to spot the signs | From NHS](#)
- [The good stress: How eustress helps you grow | From the American Institute of Stress](#)
- [Stress and anxiety | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [How to cope with exam stress? | From Counselling and Person Enrichment Section, Centre of Development and Resources for Students](#)

Understanding Sadness

What is sadness?

Sadness is a reaction to the loss of someone or something important (Paul Ekman Group, n.d.). We all feel sad from time to time. Do you remember the last time when you felt sad?

Maybe it was your last heartbreak? Your most recent course with a bad grade for your GPA? Your last cry with sad songs playing on repeat?

The Value of Sadness

Sadness makes us human, and it's healthy to feel sad once in a while. There are sunny days, and there will be rainy days as well.

Sadness prompts us to pause and reflect. You feel sad because you have lost something you truly cherish or desire. It's a process to dig deep and uncover the actions you can take to satisfy your goals, to give you the motivation to stay consistent and work towards finding your purpose in life.

Tears are just as valuable as joy and laughter. It's OK to reach for some tissues if you're sad.

Common Reactions to Sadness

"Be strong and tough"

"Stop crying"

Sadness is uncomfortable to deal with, it's commonly seen as a problem, and our usual tactic is to avoid it or find distractions.

Some short-term 'band-aids' include:

- trying to get rid of the feelings
- distractions or self-indulgence, e.g. gaming, shopping, drinking.

These strategies may bring us short term relief. Sometimes they work. Sometimes they don't. As sadness persists or recurs, it may be a signal that something deeper is tickling you.

Instead of avoiding it, why not try something new?

When to Get Help?

If you are finding it hard to smile freely—i.e., you are having

- (1) persistent low mood;
- (2) an increase in self-critical thoughts;
- (3) a decrease in motivation or interest in things you used to enjoy;
- (4) changes in sleep pattern and increased fatigue, and
- (5) difficulty concentrating, studying, or working.

It's time to get help.

[Make an appointment](#) with CEDARS-CoPE counsellors, we're here for you.

Related Websites

- [What is sadness | From Dr Paul Ekman](#)
- [What is low mood? Am I depressed? | From NHS](#)
- [What is low self-esteem? | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [Grief and bereavement | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [Loneliness | From NHS](#)

Understanding Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

"Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. " (American Psychological Association, 2021). Our brains have evolved to detect threats for us constantly. Anxiety can emerge when we face an incoming threat, but have so much fear inside that we don't feel ready to respond to them.

The Value of Anxiety

We feel anxious when we:

- face something or situations that we fear
- are about to do something important, new, and/or unfamiliar to us

Anxiety can be functional (in a good way), it

- signals perceived threats
- prompts us to prepare and plan by expanding our coping capacity
- prepares us to challenge ourselves and grow

Our ancestors survived because of the natural mechanism of anxiety.

Common Reactions to Anxiety

When we feel anxious, our brain may tell us to retreat.

"I can't do this presentation, I think it's best if I take a sick leave instead."

It is natural to think about exit strategies to shield ourselves from discomfort.

Moreover, our brains may keep sending threatening signals to us in the form of worries.

"What if I fail this examination?"

"What if I can't go on exchange?"

We may react in any of the following ways to free ourselves from anxiety:

- distracting ourselves
- preparing for possible situations
- seeking reassurance, such as checking or re-doing assignments until it "feels right/good"

When to Get Help?

When your anxiety is making your brain run too fast for your optimal pace, and you find yourself in a downward spiral—i.e. you are having

- (1) overwhelming anxiety with heightened alertness;
- (2) a stronger tendency to escape from tasks and situations;
- (3) racing thoughts and preoccupation with worries;
- (4) increased health problems (e.g. stomach aches, dizziness, fast heartbeat), and
- (5) difficulty concentrating, studying, or working.

It's time to get help.

[Make an appointment](#) with CEDARS-CoPE counsellors, we're here for you.

Related Websites

- [Overview of generalized anxiety | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [How worry works | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [The vicious cycle of anxiety | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [Perfectionism | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)
- [There's A Lot of Uncertainty Right Now – This is What Science Says That Does to Our Minds, Bodies | From University of California San Francisco](#)
- [Stress and anxiety | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia](#)

Embracing Emotions

You may have a constant urge to race against time. You may grab onto numerous opportunities before leaving campus and moving on to the working world.

But if you always shove your feelings aside, you are likely to miss a valuable piece of information about yourself which may help you climb higher, walk longer, or even produce more.

Have you ever thought that

“Emotions suck, I just want to ignore them and be productive.”

“I’m afraid of facing my feelings, I’m afraid of losing control.”

[See more common myths people have about emotions.](#)

Emotions may be a difficult matter to you. You may incline to suppress or push your “negative” emotions aside. However, it may stay longer than you expect.

Emotions are a natural part of life. Just like how we cannot fully control nature, we cannot command when the sun, clouds, rain, or wind appears in the sky.

Nevertheless, even the most frustrating weather is temporary. What we do is adapting to the changes of the weather. Do we share the same attitude when it comes to our emotions? Can we welcome both positive and negative emotions with open arms, and treasure them like they are precious messages about ourselves?

We have 3 tips on embracing your emotions. Start your habit by taking baby steps. You can learn to walk your path with your emotions in mind.

1. Observe Your Experience

Take a deep breath

A deep breath can slow down your body and mind. This is a good thing! We want to give our mind some space to feel our present state and to process emotions gently. The opposite would be reacting to urges with an “overheating” brain. Under this condition, we may be confused and lack the clarity to reflect on the situation or our needs. Let’s bring our focus back to the “now” instead of the past or the future by taking a deep breath.

Watch the video [“Let’s take a pause”](#).

Notice rather than judge your emotions

Try to “notice” your emotions (e.g. “I am feeling sad right now.”)

Rather than to “judge” them (e.g. “Oh no, I am feeling sad again, this is so bad, I don’t want this...”)

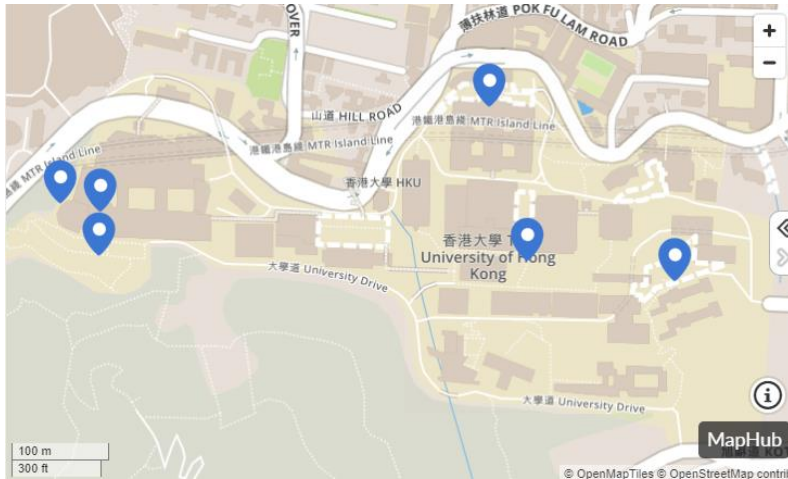
Start practising

Practise mindfulness by feeling each moment with intention:

- [5 Simple Mindfulness Practices for Daily Life](#) | From Mindful
- [Oxford Mindfulness Centre Audio & Video Resources](#) | From University of Oxford
- [Guided Meditations](#) | From UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
- [JC Panda Videos and Audios](#) | From Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong
- [newlife.330 YouTube channel \(Cantonese\)](#) | From New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
- newlife.330 Mobile App ([Android](#), [iOS](#)) (Cantonese) | From New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Find a spot on the HKU campus

There are a lot of [beautiful spaces](#) just a short walk away from the classroom:



More about mindfulness:

[Mindfulness](#) | From NHS

[What is mindfulness?](#) | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

2. Clarify Your Needs

If you prefer embracing your emotions through reflecting on or analyzing them, try asking yourself these questions to uncover the hidden messages behind your emotions:

- Why am I having strong emotions or reactions to this event? Why is it so important to me? What function does it serve? What does it say about my values?
- What is missing now? What does the loss/uncertainty mean to me? What do I need at this moment if I wish to support myself better?
- If I can change something, what do I wish to do about it? What is within my control and what is not? What can I really do to transform my emotions to actions that align with my values?

3. Prioritize self-care

Most of us are quite good at taking care of other people. Let's switch it up and be nicer to ourselves!

Start to be your own closest friend. Exercise self-compassion and take good care of your emotions.

There's nothing inherently good or bad about if it's raining or shining. If a storm hits, you can stay indoors or choose to walk out with an umbrella to keep yourself safe and well.

More about self-compassion:

[CoPE Together: Self-compassion](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

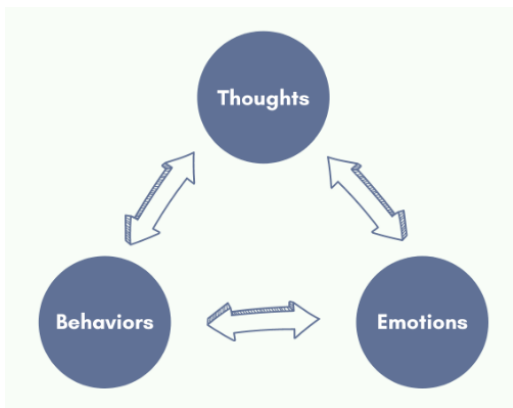
[Self-compassion.org](#) | From Dr. Kristin Neff

[Self-compassion](#) | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

Regulating Emotions

Your [emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are interconnected](#). Improvement in one aspect may lead to changes in other aspects.

With what you have read in understanding and embracing your emotions, you may have developed skills to notice and understand more about your thoughts and behaviours without pushing them away. Here are 10 other suggestions for you to get started if you are looking for ways to manage your emotions:



1. Acknowledge Your Troubles

Take a few moments to ask yourself what is bothering you before you decide on how to deal with it:

- Are you feeling distressed about any specific event that has happened (e.g. major life changes, admission to university, exam, breakup), or has this been ongoing in your life (e.g. chronic family problems)?
- Are you feeling distressed about yourself or your life (e.g. thinking negatively about yourself, feeling like everything must be perfect)?

2. Rational Problem-solving

Our emotions attract our attention and consume our energy. They may be hinting to us that something may be pending for solutions. Step back for a while and think about what you can do with the

problem(s). Explore any creative possibilities that come to your mind. Do not ban or adopt immediately, before reviewing them altogether.

Sometimes, you may not find the best solution right away. It is better to give yourself options and experiment with them. Focus on ways that ease rather than aggravate the situation.

Check this out: [Problem-solving Self-help Guide](#) | From NHS

3. Try to Think More Flexibly

When we get emotional, we may jump to conclusions, think in a “black-and-white” or “should-and-must” manner. This affects our feelings, and we lose sight of what can be done to feel better.

Learn more with these links from Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia:

[Unhelpful thinking styles](#)

[How our thoughts influence our feelings](#)

[Challenging our unhelpful thoughts](#)

4. Worry When It Is Time to Worry

We all worry. But excessive worry can make us feel mentally and physically exhausted. If your worries interfere with your ability to focus on the task at hand, you could try to postpone your worry to a particular “worry period”. This way, you will be able to manage other important things first and deal with your worries in a better time.

Check this out:

[How worry works](#) | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

[Postpone your worry](#) | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

5. Try to See Uncertainty in a New Light

Are you seeking absolute control about EVERYTHING in life? Life throws us many surprises, just like how the weather forecast isn't always accurate. Unexpected things also provide us with new possibilities for learning. Accepting uncertainty liberates us from responsibilities that aren't ours to carry. Sometimes, this helps us move forward with life.

Check this out:

[Accepting uncertainty](#) | From Centre for Clinical Interventions, Department of Health, Western Australia

[Worried about returning to university during COVID](#) | From Student Space

6. Stay Active!

Staying active is a “behavioural medicine” and an esteem booster. As you keep moving, you reverse the cycle of inactivity and become energized for new beginnings. At the same time, you are gaining more sense of achievement and satisfaction from every little thing you have done. Try picking up enjoyable activities that you might have stopped doing for a while or try something new!

Check this out:

[Mental Health & Enrichment Information Behavioral Activation](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

[A fun list of 111 actions shared by members of the HKU Community](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

[Behavioral Activation Ideas](#) | From University of Washington

7. Learn to Relax Daily

We often focus a lot on achieving our goals and meeting expectations, instead of planning for good quality physical or mental rest. Relaxation is essential for us to restore and recharge before walking another mile. Just like muscle training, you will gain the best effects and benefits if you practise relaxation regularly. Find out which of the following techniques works the best for you:

[Progressive muscle relaxation](#) | From Mark Connelly

[CoPE Together - Slow Breathing](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

[CoPE Together - Self-soothing](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

[Multilingual Breathing Exercise for Relaxation](#) | From CEDARS-CoPE

8. Keep a Gratitude Journal

Sometimes we may focus on what is going wrong in our lives instead of on what is going right. Research suggests that counting our blessings may benefit our well-being and relationships (e.g., Krejtz et al.,

2016). Try writing down things that you feel grateful about each day—it can range from relatively small things (“I was able to catch that bus today!”) to relatively big things (“My professor encouraged me when I was nervous about my presentation.”). You may begin to notice and appreciate the good things in your life despite the presence of struggles and challenges.

Check this out:

[Gratitude Journal](#) | From The Greater Good Science Center, the University of California, Berkeley

9. Eat, Sleep, Exercise and Repeat

It might sound like nagging, but maintaining a healthy lifestyle is SUPER important. Our physical health and mental health are inseparable. Healthy eating, exercise, and sleep patterns can improve how you feel physically as well as mentally. Having a consistent routine allows us to feel a sense of regularity and normalcy, making life a little less complicated.

Check this out:

[Healthy Eating Tips](#) | From Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Tips for Better Sleeps](#) | From Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Physical Activity Basics](#) | From Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Centre for Sport and Exercise](#) | From HKU

10. Reach Out to Someone

When you are going through tough times, try not to withdraw from your social circle for too long. Try speaking to someone you trust about your concerns and how you feel. Nothing is better than listening ears and an open heart.

If you find your emotions too much to manage and/or they have affected your daily functioning, it may indicate that it’s time to seek professional help. For HKU students, you can [make an appointment](#) with CEDARS-CoPE counsellors to assess your needs.