

Wellness Tip

Emotional First-Aid Kits for Tolerating Emotional Distress

Just like first-aid kits have a variety of materials available to ease our pain when we suffer a physical injury, it can be helpful to create an emotional first-aid kit to reach for in times of emotional distress or crisis.

You can create an emotional first-aid kit by filling a small box or other container with items you find grounding and soothing. When choosing your items, you are encouraged to have at least one item for each of your senses. Items could include things like:

- a scented lotion you enjoy
- fidget toys to play with
- comforting pictures or saying to look at
- your favorite hard candies to suck on
- a scented candle to light
- a music playlist jotted down which you can play and sing along with
- fabrics that are delightful to touch
- nail polish to brighten up your fingers or toes with
- crossword/sudoku books to work through
- a can of your favorite fizzy water to savor
- a small stuffed animal to cuddle
- mementos from your life to handle that spark delight, laughter, or warm feelings
- a pair of fuzzy socks you can pull on
- colorful pens and a notebook/sketch pad to play around with
- tea bags that you can brew up and enjoy

Everybody is different, so get creative and think through which items could help soothe your frayed system.

You are encouraged to put together your emotional first-aid kit now so as not to be caught off-guard needing it available – yet unmade – in times of distress. And feel free to make as many as you want, storing them in places where you may find you need them!

When you are in moments of emotional distress, choose one or more items from your kit to experience mindfully. Be fully with that item while you enjoy it – attend to and notice the sensations it provides. While these items won't necessarily solve the stressor causing you pain, they are designed to improve the moment and help your system down-regulate. From there you can make choices about how you want to approach the stressor.

If you would like to talk with someone about how to manage emotional distress, or for any other questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Medical Student Counseling Center to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment:

osac-mscc@uiowa.edu | 319-335-8056 | 1240 MERF

Check out the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Remember, life is really hard at times - be gentle with yourself!

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Pronouns: she/her