



B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

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This week...

Coping with stressful news

It is hard to comprehend, even process, Russia's attack on the Ukraine and the resulting humanitarian crisis that's escalating in the wake of war. For most of us who have lived peacefully in North America our entire lives, it is a shock to our systems to see such suffering and destruction unfolding on our TVs and social media links.

As the war continues, we may find ourselves thinking: *How did we get here? What does this all mean? Or, maybe, What does this mean for my life? What can I do about it?* Of course, these questions and concerns deepen if you have connections with people directly involved in the conflict.

When the news first broke, I took a path of avoidance. Despite my usual desire to stay on top of current events – I am never one to be an 'ostrich' – I found that my nervous system was at such a point of fatigue, after two years of COVID, that not watching the news

became a survival tactic. Now, in small doses, I do read updates and try to understand what is happening.

Some people may take the opposite approach, taking in all the information they can from a variety of sources. However, this tactic comes with its own dangers.

I invite you to listen to this helpful 13-minute podcast: [*When the bad news is endless, here's how to cope with your anxiety*](#). You will learn how the brain processes this type of information and how to find the right balance between staying informed and managing your anxiety. It introduces a quick five finger breathing exercise that only takes a minute, but can really help you release some tension!

This link also has some great visuals that summarize the podcast – *those of you in secondary schools* might be interested in sharing these with your students!

How to Manage Anxiety

Often, managing our anxiety comes down to two key objectives:

- Look for what you can control
- Seek comfort where you can

What can I control?

From way over here in British Columbia, how can we feel that we have any control over what is happening overseas? Here is a [news link](#) sharing how you as an individual can help, and the key organizations involved.

How to Seek Comfort

Here are some suggestions for managing anxiety and calming your nervous systems when triggered by stressful news:

Breathe. If you feel your body contracting, or start feeling overwhelmed, step away from whatever you're doing and take a deep breath. *Check out that five finger exercise in the podcast!*

Get moving. Do something that feels good for your body and helps you get out of your head. Anything from exercising to deep cleaning your home – or trying a new hobby!

Nourish yourself. The kitchen is a safe space for many of us. This weekend, try a new recipe, make a traditional family favourite, or just lose yourself in kitchen organization.

Stay connected. When the news is scary, it's easy to get lost in our own heads. Reach out to loved ones instead. That could look like sitting down to write a letter to a relative, spending time with neighbors, or playing (or creating!) games with family.

If your children are struggling to understand what is happening, or what war even is, [here are some age-appropriate resources](#) for your kids or students at school.

Manage your Media Intake

1. **Avoid triggering topics in the news.** When a personal connection exists with content in the news, it can heighten the stress that you feel. Take a break from those news sources that contain triggering content for you. You can mute triggering words and phrases on certain social media platforms.
2. **Limit your news consumption.** There is a colossal amount of information available at your fingertips with smartphone news apps and alerts. Developing obsessive habits of consuming news and information can be dangerous for your mental health.
Remember that it's OK not to be plugged into the news 24/7. By turning off your alerts or checking the headlines just once or twice a day, you may be able to feel more grounded and prioritize yourself and loved ones.
3. **Be cognizant of your social media use.** Social media can intensify the effects that you feel from news and overload you with information. There will always be a new item on your social media feed, which will be especially true if you ingest more information about a specific topic. Try to exhibit self-control when it comes to social media use and consider deleting apps to give yourself a mental break.
4. **Practice good stress management.** Consistent stress management practices can be an easy and effective way to help mitigate news anxiety. Regular exercise, sufficient sleep, and proper nutrition can all help combat stress. If you find that your phone is causing you anxiety, turn it off and live unplugged for short periods of time.
5. **Understand that it's normal.** Anxiety from the news is a very common phenomenon nowadays. Times of uncertainty tend to be very anxiety-provoking for people.

Our repertoire of [ReFresh](#) articles includes many ways to help calm our nervous system and bring us comfort: reference the [ReFresh](#) page on our website to see which back issue may be helpful to you right now.

See here for more tips: Stressful News Cycle Tips: [13 Ways to Protect Your Mental Health](#).

Sources

NPR Life Kit | [5 ways to cope with the stressful news cycle](#)

Northwestern Medicine | [5 Ways to Cope With the News](#)