

THE CAMPAIGN TO MANAGE ELECTION ANXIETY

Elections are essentially about making a choice about the future. In the voting booth, we voice our opinion about our leadership and policies we would like to see enacted with the hope our community will work with the elected officials to make the future brighter. In the United States, timely election results traditionally have assisted with the changes that would ensue.

In this latest chapter of American history, we have seen extremely close elections that take time to confirm. Not knowing the results and living with an extended period of the unknown can increase anxiety. Furthermore, intense political polarization has made discussions about the election and competing visions for our country a complicated and frequently uncomfortable experience as much for families as for entire communities. To complicate matters further, misinformation and disinformation make finding accurate news a challenging enterprise.



All of these factors contribute to what is now known as **“election anxiety.”** In a recent poll from the [American Psychiatric Association](https://www.psychiatry.org/american-association), more than 70% of Americans reported the upcoming election is causing them anxiety. Election anxiety can potentially harm relationships, foster confusion about what is taking place and generate distrust in the government and the electoral process itself.

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To address the uncertainty, stress and conflict that contribute to election anxiety, we offer some constructive ideas you can apply to your life, family, school and community.

Boundaries

Boundaries are limits we identify for ourselves and apply through our actions or communication. Setting boundaries allows us to feel secure and healthy in our relationships at work, home and school, and can look different ways. [Use this worksheet to think about your boundaries](#). Types of boundaries include:

Physical



Standing a couple of feet away when you speak to someone face to face or choosing to shake hands instead of hugging someone you just met.

Verbal



Asking someone who seems upset to lower the intensity or volume of their voice when speaking to you or asking them not to speak about a particular topic, like politics, in a specific setting.

Workplace

Limiting details and opinions you want to share with coworkers about your personal life.



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When navigating conversations around challenging topics like elections, consider how you can respect your own and others' boundaries.

What are your firm boundaries? How do you know when you need to take a break and stop the conversation?

What are your flexible boundaries? How do you actively listen and engage during these conversations?

How do your boundaries change when you're engaging in conversation with different people (e.g. family, friends, peers, coworkers)?

How do you know when you've pushed someone else's boundaries, and they are no longer comfortable? What can you do?

What can you do when a conversation comes up at an inappropriate or inopportune time?

Let's remember that even the voting booth has a wall and curtain to respect our boundaries as much as other people's.



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Media and Social Media

It is important to stay up to date on the news through reliable media outlets. But we can't spend all day reading the news. Consider the following to help you think about your media consumption during the election cycle — from the campaign to the vote (and results) to the transition.



Do you engage with multiple media outlets so that you have opportunities to understand multiple viewpoints?



What is your plan for checking the news that informs but does not agitate you?



Who can you connect with if you have seen or read something you need to discuss?

Social media can offer us incredible connections to others across the globe through online communities. Yet it also can be a negative space, especially with unregulated comments, posts and commentary that might be untrue, triggering and/or offensive. When uncertainty frames the election season, it is easy — and even tempting — to check continuously for updates, or “[doomscroll](#).” Doomscrolling can negatively affect our mental and physical health. Consider the following to help you think about your social media consumption during the election cycle.



What motivates you to engage on social media? Think about whether this encourages connection or fosters distance.



How do you know you need to take a break? What other healthy coping activities can you turn to?



The [News Literacy Project](#) and [AllSides](#) have materials for unpacking the news and navigating the information landscape that can be used in the classroom, the dining room or anywhere we get together.

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Supporting Yourself

When you are experiencing heightened anxiety, you have many ways to support yourself and regulate your system.

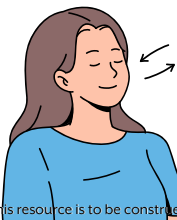
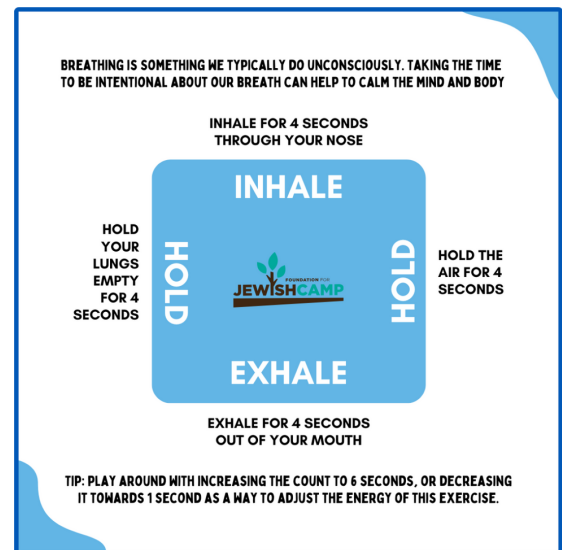
Acknowledging and Validating Feelings



While it may be tempting to ignore whatever reaction you are having to news, political discussions and election results, you should stay in tune with your own mental health, self-monitor it, and plan whatever self-care practice you feel will offer the best coping strategy for you at the moment. Even if you don't "feel" anything, you can still be affected. Many people experience physical or emotional symptoms right away; others may need some time before they experience symptoms.

Breathing

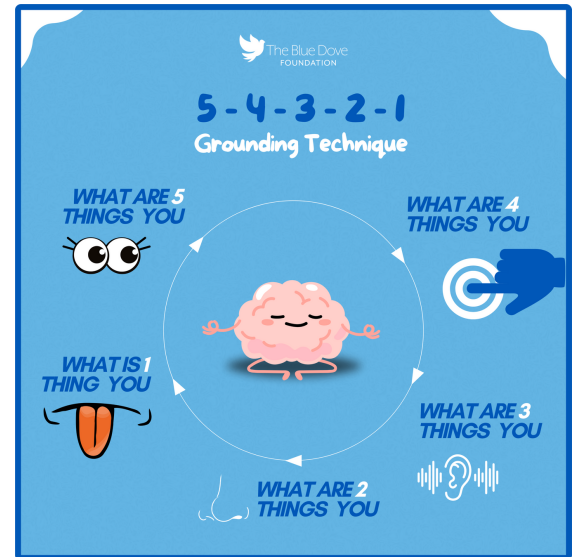
Being aware of and changing our breathing is the primary strategy we have to control anxiety and other emotional responses to stress. When we are anxious, the body's natural stress response is to breathe shallowly and take in less oxygen. By breathing more slowly and deeply, we can reverse this process and calm our agitation. Check out [this resource](#) adapted from the Foundation for Jewish Camp.



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Grounding

Certain strategies can help contain our emotional reactions, stop unproductive cycles of thinking, and bring us into the present moment, where we have more control over our mind and body, and where we feel safer. Examples include utilizing our five senses, e.g., comforting touch or smell, or identifying unhelpful and untrue patterns of thinking. [Read more about grounding tools and techniques.](#)



Meditating

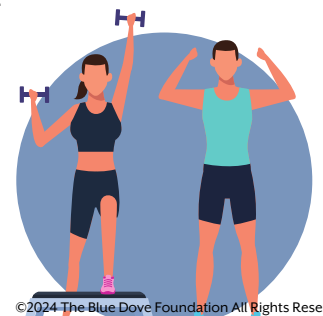


Studies find meditation can help manage the symptoms of different conditions, including anxiety. You can engage in meditation in many ways that allow you to connect your mind and body in order to help create a sense of calmness. [Read about different types of meditation to find one that might interest you.](#) As with anything, the more you practice meditation, the more value you will see.

Moving Your Body



[Moving your body](#) can support your mental health as much as it supports your physical health, helping to alleviate stress, process your emotions, and ground you in your body. Movement can mean a wide range of activities, from simply walking for a few minutes each day to more strenuous exercises. Think about small ways you can incorporate movement into your daily life; even small things make a big difference.



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Connection and Community

Think about one or two people you can reach out to in your circle when you're feeling stress and anxiety during this election season. Identifying an ["emotions chavruta"](#) (Hebrew for partner) with whom you can share what's going through your mind allows you to be raised up by those who care about you. Reach out to friends and family to "check in" and see how they are doing.

How to check in:



1

Find a partner with whom you are willing to be vulnerable.

2

Both of you write down and share three worries on your mind.

- Consider using this structure: "I feel _____ about _____ because _____."
- This format helps people assess and meditate on each worry, considering the core feelings and beliefs behind it.



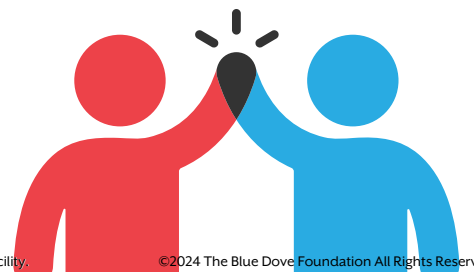
3

Allow your partner to listen, ask questions and share insight. Allow yourself to accept strength and new ways of looking at the situation.

4

When your partner speaks, listen intently, validate their emotional experience, and offer support.

[Essential Partners](#) has materials to help schools and communities facilitate challenging conversations and generate opportunities for understanding and support.



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Generating Hope

“Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope.”
- Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, pg. 166

Every election can feel momentous, but extended uncertainty can provoke anxiety — extreme anxiety for some. At a moment of national transition, we invite you to consider what your hope is for the future of the country. What role can you play in making this happen?

With hope in the forefront of our minds, we can identify opportunities to work toward actualizing positive change in our community. Volunteer for a campaign, help someone get to the polls on election day, or listen to someone else's point of view without judgment. These actions not only can help us work toward our hope; they can help us manage our election anxiety.

While intense polarization may currently dominate our political discourse, there is an alternative. All of these suggestions are as much about self-care as they are about generating understanding, leaning into love for ourselves and those around us, strengthening community and

