

Are you looking for concrete tools to cope with this incredibly difficult situation?

By Cait Kirby

 I have and use a coping kit. I use this kit when I'm feeling overwhelmed or when my chronic illness is causing pain and discomfort.

This kit is based in the senses and I have at least one item for each of my senses.

 Smell: I use an essential oil diffuser and diffuse cinnamon because it calms and relaxes me. (You might light a candle.)

 Taste: I sip on Tazo Zen green tea. It's slightly caffeinated but mostly just tastes calming and soothing to me. (You might chew gum or eat a Jolly Rancher.)

 Sight: I have the Catana Comics Love book full of cartoon images that are sweet and pleasing to look at. (You might look at vacation or wedding photos.)

 Sound: I have a playlist of uplifting and motivating music including songs from Disney films. I have a playlist of calming and relaxing music including instrumental songs from Harry Potter. (You might listen to your favorite Kelly Clarkson album.)

 Touch: I have a soft blanket that is fuzzy and warm. I have a weighted blanket that is heavy and comforting. (You might pet your dog or turn a rock over in your hand.)

I also have activities that help accomplish a few of my needs.

 Repetition and control: I use knitting or repetitive games like The Sims to feel like I am in control and accomplishing a task. The repetition helps soothe my desire for control. (You might do a puzzle.)

 Belonging and love: I reach out to friends and colleagues to chat and ask how they are doing. When they share their day with me, I know I am part of a community. I also volunteer with groups online to help those who may need a little extra support right now and in turn, they support me. (You might virtually babysit a friend's child.)

 Consistency and predictability: I use a task list and calendar to ensure I do the same things at the same time each day. I wake up at the same time, I play the same songs when I'm having intrusive thoughts, and I reward myself with the same fun activities, so my brain and body know what to expect and when to expect it. (You might use the Pomodoro technique or set frequent alarms to drink water.)

 Grounding and being present: I use grounding techniques to remind me where I am and that I am safe. I often use a 4-7-8 breathing technique to focus on my breathing. (You might count all the blue items in the room, or all the hats.)

 Grace and understanding: I show myself compassion by acknowledging what I have accomplished and also recognizing that I am more than just my accomplishments. (You might repeat affirmations.)

I don't use all the items or do all the activities at the same time and if one tool doesn't help me feel better, I try a new tool.