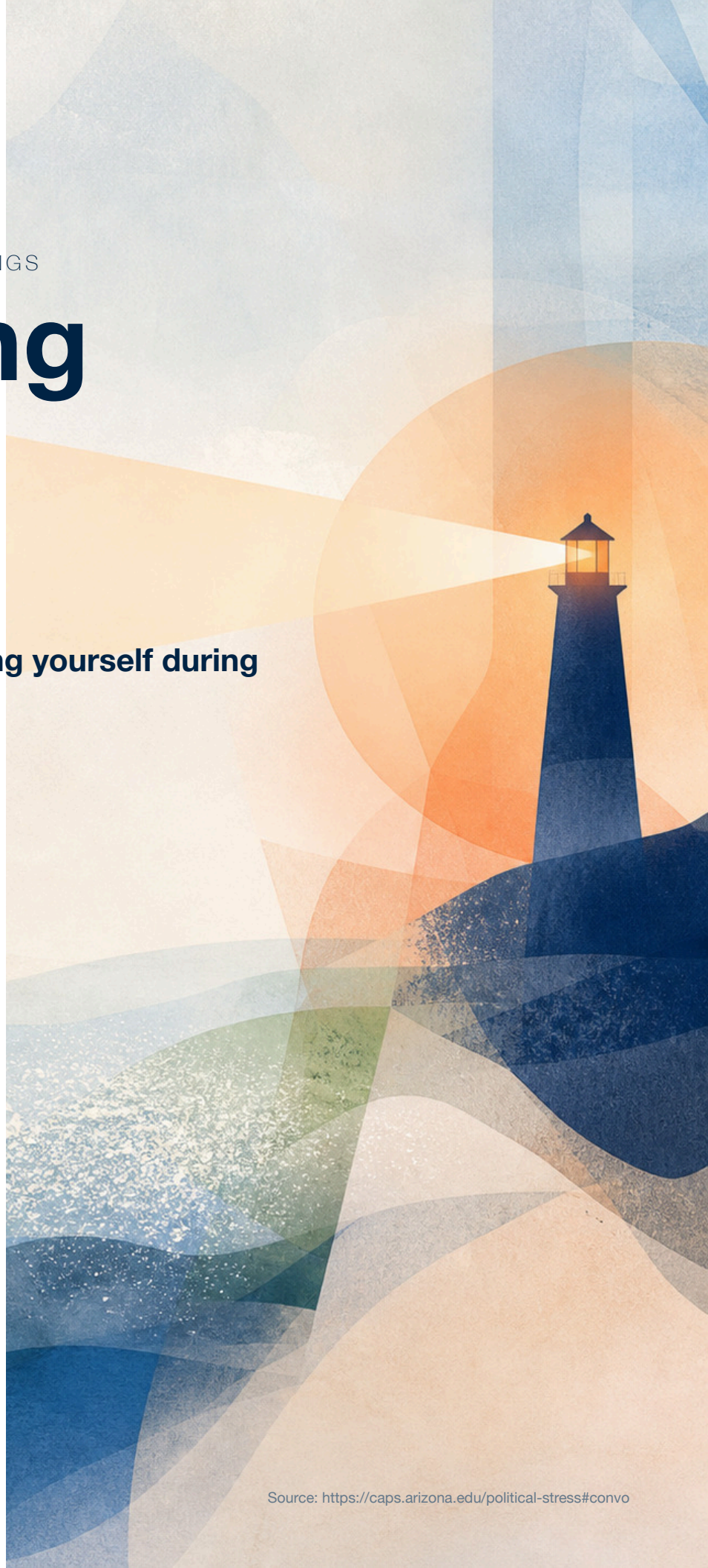


TOGETHER WE CAN DO HARD THINGS

Managing Political Distress

**Practical steps for supporting yourself during
times of political stress**



POLITICAL STRESS BASICS

Politics touches on personal issues that significantly impact our rights, safety, and future. Because these issues are so close to our core values and identity, political debates and decisions can feel threatening or cause conflict in our personal lives. It's natural to feel strong emotions like anger, fear, or frustration when we feel threatened in this way, especially when we have little control over the situation or are overwhelmed by a constant stream of news and information.

If you're experiencing political stress it can feel empowering to take action, no matter how small. Political stress can show up in various ways in our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and interactions with others. It doesn't have one single cause—people may experience political stress for many reasons, including conflict with others, uncertainty about the future including financial insecurity and divisive issues, discussions, or events.

Recognizing the signs and causes of political stress in yourself can help you understand your reactions, take steps to protect your well-being, and find healthy ways to cope and stay engaged at the level you desire without feeling overwhelmed.

Signs of Political Stress

- sadness, anxiety, anger, or hopelessness about politics
- trouble concentrating, overthinking, or feeling overwhelmed
- headaches, tension, and changes in sleep or appetite
- feeling isolated or disconnected
- irritability or conflict in political conversations
- frequently checking the news or social media

Causes of Political Stress

- divisive debates and personal conflicts
- uncertainty about leadership, policies, or the future
- laws or decisions that impact you directly
- constant exposure to conflict-focused political content
- feeling targeted or marginalized by political issues
- pressure to engage others or take a public stance

TIPS FOR COPING WITH POLITICAL STRESS

Although political stress can be overwhelming, finding balance and practicing self-care can help you stay grounded and connected to what matters.

Balance and self-care look different for everyone. Knowing your goals and what works for you is key. Taking breaks from the news, setting boundaries in conversations, and doing activities that bring joy can help you think clearly and stay calm.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MORE BALANCE WITH POLITICS



Choose How to Spend Your Energy

- identify what's most meaningful to you
- decide your level of engagement
- prioritize energizing activities or discussions
- focus on quality over quantity



Be Intentional with News and Media

- limit scrolling
- schedule times for media use
- curate feeds to positive or helpful content
- check the facts and verify the source
- avoid news before bed
- turn off notifications and skip comments when necessary



Focus on Constructive Conversations

- focus on facts, not just emotions
- listen actively and respectfully
- find shared values or concerns
- maintain a willingness to learn and understand
- respect each others limits and know when to stop

PRACTICE SELF CARE

Self-care is the ongoing care of yourself and your wellbeing. It's vital to our mental and emotional health in day-to-day life and supports us through challenging or overwhelming situations. Self-care helps us create the space we need to process our feelings, clear our minds, and recharge our energy.

Self-care looks different for everyone, so find what works for you.

Fun

Include things you do just for fun, like:

- video games
- audiobooks
- watching a movie
- singing in the car
- podcasts

Fun + Sustaining

Include items in your menu that help you in the long run and are also fun to do, like:

- having a meal with friends
- studying with a group
- going outside
- organizing your work space

Sustaining

Include items that help your life go more smoothly and help you in the long run, like:

- doing laundry
- setting boundaries
- screen time limits
- social media breaks
- using a planner
- going to office hours

Self-Care Goals

Give yourself a clear, concrete direction to go with your self-care. Consider what you want to accomplish and why and options for moving toward your goal. Here are some examples to get you started:

- do 1 of each category this week
- learn about what works for me
- tell one of my supporters about my self-care goals

Supportive People

Make a list of the supportive people in your life that you would like to include in your self-care activities or share your self-care goals with. These are also the people who you can reach out to when you need support.

How I'll Accomplish My Goals

There are many strategies for setting and sticking to our goals. Here are some to try:

- write it down
- tell a supporter
- schedule it
- use an app
- turn it into a game

EMPOWER YOURSELF

Feeling disempowered or lacking control is a common reason for experiencing political stress. Taking steps like finding your balance, setting boundaries, and practicing self-care can help you feel more empowered. Getting in touch with your values and what matters to you is another powerful way to regain a sense of control.

Remember, there's no requirement to engage in political discussions or take action; sometimes, stepping back to focus on your well-being is the best choice. If you do wish to be involved, concentrate on the issues and communities that matter most to you. Whether it's a broader cause or your close circle of friends or family, focusing on what you care about can help you feel more empowered and make a meaningful difference.



Focus on Your Strengths and Values

Knowing how to feel your best, build relationships, and handle challenges can help create a meaningful life no matter what's happening around you.



Be an Engaged Citizen

Choosing your own level of involvement in the communities and issues that matter to you can help you feel more connected and empowered.



Keep Learning

You can feel more empowered by continuing to learn and staying curious about the issues and discussions being addressed in politics.

HAVE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

We all have our own perspectives on political issues, often tied to deeply held beliefs and emotions that can make political discussions challenging or even divisive-especially with people who matter to us. Because of this, it's important to decide your own boundaries and comfort level for discussing politics, and to determine how much engagement feels helpful or healthy for you.

If a political issue is affecting your relationships, well-being, or shared goals, it might be time for a conversation. While talking about political issues can feel daunting, approaching the discussion calmly and focusing on common ground can make it more constructive and build connection, even with differing views.

Tips for Making a Difficult Conversation Constructive:

- Engage in political discussions when you feel mentally and emotionally prepared.
- Steer clear of "us vs. them" thinking.
- Stay open to understanding other perspectives, even if you disagree.
- Identify your triggers and have a plan to manage them.
- Take breaks if the conversation gets heated or unproductive.
- Monitor your feelings and stay grounded during the discussion.
- Practice self-care after the conversation.



Adapt As Needed

Treat your plan for coping with political stress like an experiment and leave yourself room to grow:

- choose something that appeals to you
- start with small manageable steps
- check in on how you're feeling
- adapt as needed

As isolating as political stress can feel, you don't need to go through it alone. Find where you feel comfortable, reach out to your supporters if you need help.

Does Political Stress Require Treatment?

Stress is a normal part of life, and political stress is no different. Whether you need extra help depends on how much it's affecting your daily life (how much "dis" stress it is causing) and how intense your feelings are.

Many people find that coping strategies like setting boundaries, taking care of themselves, and talking with supportive friends or family can help. However, if political stress is causing strong emotional reactions or making it hard to get through your day, we can help.



Lighthouse Counseling of Fredericksburg

To ask about services, contact us at
540-907-0121.