



# Suffering

At some point in everyone's life, stressful circumstances occur that can lead to "suffering." Suffering is when painful emotions get activated in response to a difficult circumstance. Sometimes that difficult circumstance can appear like a lightning strike... you don't see it coming at all. Other times, you are not at all surprised that the event is occurring.

Examples of stressful circumstances might include: a romantic break-up, an injury, a serious medical diagnosis/disorder, losing a job, an automobile accident, getting arrested, failing a course, economic hardship, a family member having difficulty, parents' divorce, a natural disaster, among others.

Some people seem to have more than their share of moments of suffering, while others seem to lead almost stress-free lives. It doesn't matter who has more or less suffering at a particular time. What does matter is how each person chooses to manage their suffering.

When we are going through emotionally painful experiences, we can be impacted physically, emotionally, and socially. Health can worsen, our immune system can weaken. Sleep may get disrupted. Appetite may change. We may pull away from friends and begin to isolate. Academic performance may decrease.

When stressful circumstances happen, we often want to spring into action and "fix" the problem, to stop the emotional pain. However, when problems cannot be quickly fixed, suffering can arise. In times like this, the only approach that works is to acknowledge the stressful event, reminding ourselves that suffering is a normal occurrence in life, and the best way that we can cope is to simply be kind to ourselves.

Repeating the following mantra can help remind you to accept that suffering has come into your life. It can help guide you to be kind to yourself and cope more effectively.

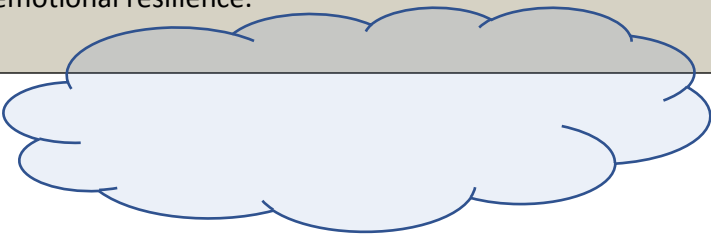
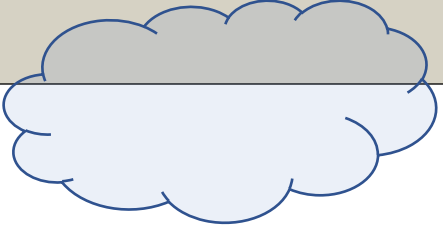
This is a moment of suffering.

Suffering is a part of life.

May I be kind to myself.



## WAYS TO BE KIND TO YOURSELF

1. Take good care of yourself physically. Eat healthy meals, drink water, get exercise, spend time in nature, and get plenty of sleep.
  2. Take good care of yourself emotionally. Allow yourself to cry. Write your thoughts in a journal. Seek support from your friends, R.A., Hall Director, and family members for emotional support. Set up an appointment with a counselor at Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS).
  3. Develop a daily and weekly schedule to help yourself stay on track. Keep yourself focused on each of your responsibilities (classes, job, studying, etc.) and do the best you can in each moment. Your life goes on, even while there is the presence of suffering.
  4. Meditate, and utilize the Suffering Chant to keep yourself aware and centered. If religion is helpful to you, seek spiritual support/guidance from a religious leader or congregation. If you find prayer to be helpful, then pray.
  5. Remind yourself that sometimes stressful events and moments of suffering have not only a beginning but also an end. Think of a summer thunderstorm that appears suddenly, makes all kinds of noise and commotion, but then goes away.
  6. Practice mindful attention by bringing your full focus to the present moment. When thoughts of the stressful event come into your head, simply notice them and then let them pass, like clouds in the summer sky. We cannot stop distressing thoughts... yet we can let them pass and choose to put our focus elsewhere.
  7. Let go of judging... yourself or anyone. Sometimes suffering comes to a person's life due to an unwise decision. Remember, we are all human and we all make mistakes. It doesn't matter how the suffering has come to you. What matters is that you are being kind to yourself as you cope with the suffering. Replace judgment with forgiveness... of yourself and/or others.
  8. Develop a "coping basket" filled with ways to help you be kind to yourself: soothing hand cream, a towel that can be heated, an eye mask that can be cooled, a puzzle/activity book.
  9. Listen to music to help you relax, to energize you, to help you sleep, to empower you. Choose mindfully the type of music you need at a particular moment.
  10. Remember that out of suffering, some blessings do result. As we move through suffering, we often develop more wisdom, more patience, greater acceptance, deeper empathy, and more emotional resilience.
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### Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)

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