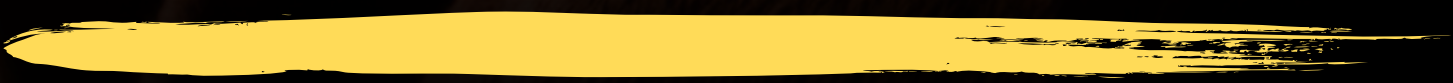


A close-up, low-angle shot of a person wearing a dark green hijab and glasses, looking down at a smartphone held in their hand. The background is a soft, out-of-focus view of a city street with buildings and trees. The lighting is warm and natural, suggesting daylight.

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Digital **Distress** Guide

Safeguarding your mental health in
a time of hyper-connectivity

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Mental health when engaging with **distressing** content



In the age of 24-hour news, we have access to live, uncensored images of conflict, poverty and disaster worldwide. Every time you go on your phone or log in to social media, you can be met with raw videos of people grieving and rubble and destruction where once stood someone's home. The reality of social media and our proximity to people's lives and stories means we can become so attached and, in turn, distressed by what we see. Navigating all of this across the world can have us glued to our screens, unable to disengage from the heartbreaking news we are reading. We want to stay engaged while also dealing with feelings of guilt for being able to step away so easily.

All this can lead to feelings of distress. You may find you are suddenly overwhelmed with any task ahead of you, you may feel the guilt of being able to step away from the news, social media and anything causing you distress, or you may feel grief for the first time about the loss of someone or something you've never met or seen.

These feelings can be overwhelming and seep into every moment, whether working, hanging out with friends, or doing mundane tasks and chores. Suddenly, everyday tasks may feel more challenging, and a looming question of 'what's the point of all of this?' can follow you as you live your day-to-day life.



If you notice negative feelings or behaviours such as staying glued to your phone, feeling too low to complete your daily tasks, or pulling away from your social circle, below are some steps to support you. But before that, we asked our team to reflect on global situations that greatly impacted them. They shared how they felt and what helped them overcome some of their distress.



Recently, everything has seemed mundane; all tasks, all meetings, like the joy has been sucked out. The guilt of wanting to experience joy is even harder to comprehend. The weather, of course, hasn't helped. I feel just like the weather is today: gloomy.

When I recognised how heavy my heart was feeling and how awful I felt about my privilege, I called my friend, who I hadn't spoken to in a while, because I knew she'd get it, and not surprisingly, she did. We talked at length whilst she did her ironing and discussed what kept us both consumed, heavy and distressed. We also spoke about other things, as you do. The call helped me. The following week was new, and I adopted some good habits to stay informed, helpful, engaged, and healthy.



"Every time I picked up my phone, I was met with heartbreaking images and videos of people losing their homes, families, and friends. I felt helpless seeing this unfold while in the comfort of my home. Focusing on work or everyday tasks was challenging, knowing many people suffered worldwide.

I think it really made me reflect on the blessings God has given me, but also be pleased with and accept everything God gives. I felt motivated to get involved. It also allowed me to reconnect with my community, knowing there was a shared grief we were collectively experiencing and a shared understanding and support system that now exists."





At first, I felt overwhelmed by the graphic content on social media; I constantly looked through posts to remind myself what was happening. I felt guilty about carrying on my daily routine; I would randomly feel emotional. But what helped me overcome this was reading the Qur'an and reflecting upon Allah's words, which brought me a lot of relief.

I use social media less, perhaps only a few days a week, to remain updated. I make dua constantly, knowing Allah is the only One who cares for all matters.



When consuming distressing content, I sometimes struggle with the thought that my mental health does not matter as what others are going through is far worse. However, listening to faith reminders allowed me to realise that my mental health is important for the wider society. If I take care of my mental health, that would mean I am in a healthy and strong position to help the people in my community.



To overcome my helplessness, I use situations to bring about change within myself and reflect on how I can make a positive difference in my community. This has led to me channelling these feelings of helplessness into action, and even though I know that I am still affected, I know I can be someone who can help instead of feeling helpless. I am helping by increasing my awareness of supporting initiatives that help those suffering. I am helping my community by attending community events and speaking to those around me so that we can help and act together instead of feeling helpless and alone.



10 Tips for Handling Distressing Content



1. Taking a break from the screen but not from education

Our phones keep us connected to global events, but the barrage of distressing content can strain our mental health. It's hard to disconnect, knowing those in crisis can't, but taking a screen break is often vital for our well-being. You don't have to cut off completely; you can use this time for reflection. This pause helps protect against compassion fatigue and rejuvenates your perspective. Meanwhile, use the break to educate yourself further about your cause, understand others' struggles, and brainstorm ways to help.



2. Begin a conversation offline

While disengaging with content online, you can utilise some of your time by educating those around you. With global events, mainstream media often only showcase one side of the conflict. Speak to those in your social circle about the cause you care about.

There is strength in numbers, and having a support circle that cares about the cause can help when you feel low. You can reflect with one another but also provide compassion and support.



3. Focus on **your** response

Seeing disturbing content about conflicts, followed by influencers promoting products or friends sharing everyday posts, can stir feelings of anger or betrayal.

It's vital to realise you can't control others' actions or know their intentions. Releasing this anger helps prevent burnout. Channel your frustration into positive actions, like creating educational posts or getting involved with local charities.

Focus on understanding and managing your emotions, finding healthy ways to cope.



Reflect on yourself and focus on your own emotions. This will allow you to understand your feelings and find healthy ways to deal with them.



4. Try striking a **balance**

Social media isn't the only place to engage or take action. Seek alternative, safe methods to contribute and stay involved. Join community groups aligned with your cause to avoid feeling isolated. Balancing your involvement adds variety, allows you to step away from screens, use your skills positively, and support both your local community and your cause.



5. **Connect** spiritually

In times of distress and hopelessness, speaking to Allah is always recommended. Whether through prostration or simply pouring out your heart, it can clear your mind and bring solace. Prayer and Duaa are powerful tools for both personal reflection and interceding for others. Embrace the power of Duaa, holding it close to your heart.

Often, the most sincere conversations with Allah occur when you most need to connect and share the weight in your heart. While we can't always help physically, our prayers can transcend distances and impact the farthest corners of the world.

6. Be mindful and **regulate** screen time

Regular exposure to distressing content can impact your sleep and mental health. It's important to consume such content at a manageable pace and take time to process what you've seen. Social media often mixes intense videos with lighter content, like garden renovations, making it hard to digest it all. Take your time to understand and be mindful of what you watch, ensuring you're taking care of your mental well-being.



7. **Seek** support

If you need a safe place to discuss your emotional well-being, asking for help is okay. Tap into resources online and helplines. MYH is open daily from 4 pm - 10 pm, where you can find a listening, non-judgmental ear.

0808 808 2008
help@myh.org.uk



8. Understand your **limits**

Don't compare your efforts to what you see on social media or among friends. We all have different limits for engagement and mental health, and you might be dealing with personal challenges too. Reflect on your feelings and capacity. Overdoing it can delay healing and exhaust you physically and emotionally, potentially causing more problems.

Everyone copes with grief and stress uniquely, so focus on maintaining your health to offer the best support.

9. Utilise your **strengths**

Feeling unhelpful or guilty, especially when overwhelmed by work and online content, isn't beneficial.

Remember, there are numerous ways to contribute. Recognize your limits and play to your strengths. Whether it's uniting friends, drafting messages, or using creative skills, use what you're good at. Your unique contributions, no matter how small, are vital to the causes you care about and the change you want to see in the world.



10. Use the **tools** you have access to

You can support causes from afar, even if you're grieving for those you've never met. Here are some ways to make an impact from any location:

Join a protest

Participate in safe, peaceful, and organized protests in your local area. Follow the day's guidelines to effectively make your voice heard.

Write to your MP

If a cause close to your heart isn't represented in government, write to your Member of Parliament. Share your thoughts and suggest actions they could take.

Use your money

Donate to verified charities backing your cause. You can also contribute by boycotting certain brands, purchasing ethically, supporting local businesses, and giving back in other ways.

Regarding the impact of distressing content on mental health, think about how it has affected you and the strategies you've used to cope. What helped you overcome these challenges?



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