

Tips for Making it Through the Legislative Session

The Legislative Session in Olympia, whether in-person or virtual or some combination, is not for the faint of heart. The information flow in long sessions is said to feel like being hit by a “freight train” or with a “fire hose,” and short sessions are even faster paced. The stress load at times can be unmanageable. The Washington State Psychological Association put together the following tips for surviving the Legislative Session. These tips are informational only and not a substitute for professional help should it be needed. Please talk to your doctor, call the Crisis Line (1-866-427-4747), or visit the nearest emergency room if you are having thoughts of suicide or homicide.



Tip #1: Learn your stress signals

What does it look like when you are stressed? Discovering your stress signals can help you know when action is needed. Use this checklist to identify some of your specific stress signals. Add to the list as you notice additional signs of stress.

- Headaches
- Body tension
- Upset stomach or other digestive issues
- Change in sleep pattern
- Decreased focus/attention
- Frequent sighing
- Attempts at physical soothing (e.g., wringing hands, running finger through hair)
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Emotional outbursts
- Shallow breathing
- Other:



Tip #2: Plan for the stress of the Legislative Session

There is no way to completely reduce the stress of the Legislative Session, so prepare for it instead.

- Explain to your friends and family what to expect and what support you need. If you live with others, ask if they would be willing to take on some of your tasks or chores during the Session.
- Reduce stress triggers at home (e.g., declutter your workspace) and create a more relaxing, calm environment where you are able. It can be helpful to have a dedicated room or corner of a room for winding down.
- Prior to the beginning of Session, schedule solo and/or group activities to occur during Session that are fun and nurturing.
- Create a Stress Management Kit* to carry with you and to use throughout the day.



Tip #3: Practice stress management skills

Getting adequate sleep, eating well, and exercising are key to managing stress, and they also are difficult to maintain during the Legislative session. Avoid regularly doomscrolling and zoning out as these activities disconnect you but do not cue your brain and body to relax. Practice the following skills for in-the-moment stress reduction:

- Reduce environmental stimulation by closing doors, going into another room, or using noise-cancelling headphones.
- Use your breath to engage the nervous system. Slow your breath until it is steady. Then breathe in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 4. Do this for a few breaths and then return to a natural breathing rhythm. Next, inhale for a count of 4 and exhale for a count of 8. After a few breaths, return to natural breathing. Finally, inhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4, and hold for a count of 4. Repeat a few times and then resume natural breathing.
- Move your body. Going for a short walk, shaking your arms and legs, or doing a few stretches all count for movement. If possible, choose a movement that uses the entire body (e.g., jumping jacks, dancing).
- Watch a short, funny show or video.
- Utilize mindfulness apps and resources. For example, the free app Insight Timer** allows you to search for sessions by length of time. If you can only spare 5 minutes, you can find a recording that is 5 minutes or less. Explore other apps to find what works for you. (**WSPA does not have a financial or other relationship with Insight Timer.)
- Reach out for support. Call/text a friend to maintain connection.



When to reach out for professional help?

It can be challenging to know when help is needed. If you are feeling overwhelmed, your best efforts make little to no change, and this period lasts for at least 2 weeks, you may benefit from professional assistance. Talk to your doctor to make a plan and to get connected to resources. Visit the Washington State Psychological Association's [Find a Psychologist tool](#) for possible referrals.



*How to Create a Stress Management Kit:

Choose 1-3 items from each of the 5 senses. These items should be easy to carry with you so they are available at all times. Use 1 or more of the items at a time to reduce acute stress. Use this space to brainstorm ideas for your kit:

<p>Sight (Pictures, videos)</p>			
<p>Sound (Recordings, music)</p>			
<p>Taste (Tea, candy)</p>			
<p>Touch (Fidget item, cloth)</p>			
<p>Smell (Perfume sample, candle)</p>			