

12-Step Plan: What to do if your candidates lost (or won) on Election Day

1) Feel free to scream. Just don't do it in a public place. "If you are really, really upset and want to yell, go in the bathroom and close the door and yell," says psychotherapist Fran Sherman. (In your residence hall, you might try yelling into your pillow). "You have to get it out." This type of "verbal vomit" can be helpful, she says: "I equate it to when you are sick to your stomach and you let it out and you feel better." Not a screamer? Aerobic activity, which will release feel-good endorphins, is a good way to shed some angst, she says. Try going for a walk or run, do jumping jacks or push-ups.

2) Practice acceptance. Feel better after that therapeutic scream? Good. Now you can think more clearly and face the facts. "You don't have to like it to accept that it's the reality," says psychologist Vaile Wright, who is a member of the American Psychological Association's Stress in America team. "Say to yourself, 'I don't like this outcome, but this is the way it is and I'm going to move forward.' Fighting it is just going to prolong one's disappointment." If your candidate won this election, be aware that others may have a difficult time accepting the outcome. Be patient.

3) Take action. Decide what you can do to make a difference, says Wright. For instance, volunteer with a group that supports an election issue that was important to you. "Disappointment can motivate us to action – ideally in a positive way," she says. This can make people feel empowered, adds psychologist Mary Alvord. "You're not helpless, you're not a victim," she says. "Focus on what you can control. ...Take your passion and put it into some kind of action." Decide what you can control-you.

4) Create an exit plan. No — not to leave the country. Have a strategy that lets you gracefully exit any anxiety-provoking political conversation, politely change the topic or ably defuse tension. It may be saying something like, "We've got to take this one day at a time," agreeing to disagree on a subject or offering your own post-election stress-relieving tips, says psychologist Nancy Molitor. "The idea is to not escalate the conversation and to remain neutral," she says. (See whittier.edu/counseling for tips).

5) Heed your early-warning signs. "Pay attention to your body and your brain," says Molitor. "If you start to think, 'This person is an idiot' and 'I can't believe they are saying this,' recognize that it's only going to escalate." There are signs when we start to get worked up, such as a tight throat, a dry mouth, a tight back or a shrill voice, so "know your triggers," she advises. Pay attention to others cues as well.

6) Manage your exposure. "We all know who those problem people are in our lives, whether it's the guy in the cubicle next to us at work or the cousin on Facebook who keeps talking about a candidate," Molitor says. If certain in-person conversations, social media posts or TV outlets fuel aggravation or depression, then avoid those or limit exposure.

“If two people at work are spouting things, then avoid getting into a conversation with them,” she says. “Don’t engage.” It’s OK to walk away.

7) Think broadly. “Try to understand that people are not crazy just because they are supporting another side,” Molitor says. “It doesn’t make them a villain.” Practice kindness and empathy, says David Palmiter, a professor of psychology at Marywood University in Scranton, Pa. Sure, it can be challenging at times, but “it is possible to be empathetic with someone and disagree with their thoughts,” he says. “People who are therapists learn that quickly.”

8) Build a support system. It’s OK to vent — people want their feelings to be heard and acknowledged, says Palmiter. Just do it in a healthy, self-controlled way. “Talk to other people who you think are positive and support you,” advises psychologist Alvord.

9) Slow down and self-soothe. This is an ideal time to try meditation. “It’s not nearly as hard as people think,” says psychologist Elaine Ducharme. Too woo-woo for you? Then employ other relaxation methods such as listening to music, lying on a beach or even riding a motorcycle, if that’s what gives you some inner peace, she says. (Check out Calm app)

10) Be thankful. Think of what you are grateful for, even if it’s just small things, says psychotherapist Sherman. It can be “I’m grateful that it’s a sunny day” or “I’m grateful to have good friends,” she says. “When you feed your brain that positive information, you feel better.” Look for positivity in your day.

11) Get some perspective. “Turn on a comedy, watch a classic movie or turn off the TV and go for a walk,” suggests Molitor. “Be with your animals or kids or grandkids. Do something to get out of that silo.” Remember, “There are checks and balances in the system,” she says, so “try to keep the big picture. ... Life will go on. It may go on differently, but it will go on.”

12) Model good behavior. This is a great opportunity to show children —and each other— how to deal with disappointment (or victory). “We can teach kids to be a gracious loser,” says Alvord. Likewise, being a gracious winner is important. “Whether or not you are in a leadership position, have co-workers or fellow students, we all set examples for each other with positive ways to cope,” she says. And there is a payoff for all that discipline: “Typically, we feel good when we help others, and we definitely feel a sense of accomplishment when we exhibit self-control,” Alvord says. Here’s an added bonus: By doing those things, we strengthen our own resilience, she said.

[Laura Petrecca](#), USA TODAY 7:22 a.m. EST November 9, 2016

Remember on-campus resources are available:

Counseling Center (next to Campus Safety); 562.907.4239; whittier.edu/counseling

Open Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; closed daily from Noon – 1:00 p.m.

Professional counseling staff is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For after hour advice, call the After-Hour RN Telephone Advice Line at 562.464.4548 (NOT for life-threatening emergencies). For emergencies, call Campus Safety at 562.907.4211 and ask to be connected to an on-call therapist or call 911.

Self-Care In the Midst of Grief

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of the election results can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time:

- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as grief, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. Anything creative can work, as long as it is an adaptive outlet for your feelings.
- **Look after your physical health.** The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you need to feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Don't isolate.** During this time, although you may feel as if you want to be alone, try to temper your periods of being alone with being amongst people. If being in a group or crowd is too overwhelming, reach out to a single friend.
- **Avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope.** Although the grief you feel may be overwhelming at times, this is the time to express it. Medicating this mood with substances is a temporary fix that keeps you from fully processing the pain. Using substances during this time is an added risk as people who are under the influence remain in grief, often lashing out at others, causing relational problems.

There are many resources available to help you:

- **Walk-in or call the Counseling Center (562.907.4239) to meet with a counselor**
- **Consider on-line resources that are available 24/7, such as <http://griefnet.org>;
<http://rollingout.com/2016/11/09/manage-post-election-day-2016-stress>;
<http://ct.counseling.org/2016/10/vote-anxiety-managing-2016-election-stress>;
<http://grief.com>**

Following the election results, you may have found yourself experiencing a variety of feelings. Sometimes referred to as the “Stages of Grief,” these feelings often occur in a pattern or series for most people; however, grief can be a very individual experience. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Consider these stages:

1. **Shock & Denial** – You will probably react to learning of the results with numbed disbelief. You may deny that it really happened at some level, in order to avoid the pain. Shock provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once. This may last for weeks. Shock is often greater when the results of the election did not pan out the way you hoped it would.
2. **Anger** – Frustration gives way to anger, and you may lash out and lay unwarranted blame for the results of the election. If you have a faith belief, you may seek answers from your Higher Power to help explain how this could happen. This is a time for the release of bottled up emotion. You may rail against fate and question why it panned out this way.
3. **Bargaining** – During this stage, you may attempt to regain control. While trying to move toward the reality of this election, you may think of ways to try to “undo” it. Bargaining often sounds like a private conversation between you and the universe or a Higher Power (e.g. “Would you change the results of the election if I promise to be a better person?”)
4. **“Depression,” Sadness, Loneliness** – Just when your friends may think you should be getting on with your life and come to terms with the outcome of the election, a long period of sad reflection may hit you. This is a normal stage of grief, so do not be “talked out of it” by well-meaning outsiders. Encouragement from others is not helpful to you during this stage of grieving. Healthy coping mechanisms are vital at this time, so keep talking about your feelings. Avoid escapes like drugs and alcohol. Seek counseling if no one around you is willing to listen to your sadness.
5. **Acceptance & Hope** – During the last stage of grief, you learn to accept and deal with the reality of your situation. Acceptance does not necessarily mean instant happiness. Even in acceptance, there may be times when you will return to earlier stages, feeling sad as you have memories, or feeling angry at the results. This is all a part of the normal grieving process. You will find joy again and you will be able to move on.