



NAVIGATING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

Tips for Surviving and Thriving

Navigating the Legislative Session in Olympia is an incredibly demanding and fast-paced experience. The constant flow of information, high-stakes decision-making, and tight deadlines can feel overwhelming, particularly during short sessions where the pace is unrelenting. Longer sessions, while less hurried, bring their own challenges. The prolonged nature of the stress, combined with the uncertainty of outcomes and shifting priorities, can take a significant toll on your emotional and physical well-being.

If you're feeling stretched thin, know that you're not alone—and it's okay to acknowledge the difficulty of this work. To support you, the Washington State Psychological Association has compiled tips to help you stay balanced and resilient. These suggestions are not a substitute for professional help, so don't hesitate to seek support if needed. Taking care of yourself is essential for sustaining the critical work you do.

TIP #1: LEARN YOUR STRESS SIGNALS

Understanding how stress manifests in your body, mind, and behavior is key to managing it effectively. By identifying your personal stress signals, you can act before stress becomes overwhelming. Use the checklist below to pinpoint your specific stress responses, and feel free to add others as you notice them over time

EMOTIONAL STRESS SIGNALS

- Feeling fear or nervousness
- Feeling tense, on edge, or jumpy
- Excessive irritability or anger
- Feeling hopeless or overwhelmed
- Difficulty relaxing or controlling worry
- Feeling intense emotions for a long for a long time or difficulty feeling calm

COGNITIVE STRESS SIGNALS

- Trouble concentrating or staying focused
- Repetitive or unwanted thoughts
- Indecisiveness or second-guessing yourself
- Decreased confidence in your abilities
- Poor memory or forgetfulness

PHYSICAL STRESS SIGNALS

- Muscle tension or stiffness
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Rapid heartbeat or heart palpitations
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- Excessive fatigue or a general sense of being unwell

BEHAVIORAL STRESS SIGNALS

- Trouble sleeping or insomnia
- Changes in appetite (eating too much or too little)
- Increased use of substances like alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Avoiding people, places, or situations
- Difficulty maintaining healthy relationships

TIP #2: PLAN FOR THE STRESS OF THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Legislative Session is always going to bring some level of stress; it's part of the nature of the work after all. But instead of trying to eliminate it entirely, focus on preparing for it. Here are a few tips to set yourself up for success:

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Let your friends and family know what to expect during the session and how they can support you. If you share your home with others, see if they can take on some extra tasks or chores to lighten your load.

MINIMIZE STRESS TRIGGERS AT HOME

Simplify and organize your living space, especially your workspace, to create a calm environment. If possible, carve out a specific area for relaxing and unwinding—it doesn't have to be fancy, just a spot where you can recharge.

PLAN FUN AND NURTURING ACTIVITIES

Before the session begins, schedule solo or group activities that you'll look forward to during the session. These little moments of joy can make a big difference and "buffer" you against future stress.

BUILD A STRESS MANAGEMENT KIT

Pack a small kit with items that help you decompress throughout the day, whether it's a favorite snack, a soothing scent, or a quick mindfulness tool.

TIP #3: PRACTICE STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Stress management is not one-size-fits-all: What works for one person may not work for another. Below is a range of strategies and resources, categorized by the area of well-being, to help manage stress during demanding times like the Legislative Session. Sample these techniques to find what works best for you, and if you need additional support, don't hesitate to reach out to a mental health professional or access crisis resources.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Move Your Body

- Engage in physical activities like walking, stretching, or dancing to release tension and boost your mood.
 - Resource: [Mindful Stretching](#)

Address Nutrition

- Fuel your body with nutrient-dense meals and stay hydrated to maintain mental clarity and resilience.
 - Resource: [Healthy Eating Plate](#)

Create Micro Moments of Calm

- Take short breaks to breathe, stretch, or sip tea mindfully throughout the day to reset your focus and energy.

Practice Mindful Breathing

- Slow your breath or use techniques like box-breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts, and hold for 4 counts.
 - Resource: [3-Minute Breathing Space](#), Apps like [Mindfulness Coach](#)

Support Sleep

- If stress is disrupting your sleep, try guided exercises or apps specifically designed to improve sleep quality.
 - Apps: [CBT-i Coach](#), [Insomnia Coach](#)

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Name Your Feelings

- Identifying and labeling emotions can reduce their intensity. This practice helps you better understand and process your emotions.
 - Resource: [Emotion Wheel](#)

Surf Your Emotions

- Visualize emotions as waves that rise, peak, and subside naturally. Focus on physical sensations without reacting impulsively.
 - Resource: [Guided Emotional Surfing Meditations](#)

Examine Your Beliefs

- Challenge unhelpful thoughts using the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) framework. Reframe negative beliefs into balanced perspectives.
 - Resource: [Thought Record Worksheet](#)

Practice Self-Compassion

- Treat yourself with kindness and understanding, especially during difficult times.
 - Resource: [Self-Compassion.org](#)

Try Gratitude Journaling

- Write down three things you're thankful for each day to foster positivity and reduce stress.
 - Resource: Apps like [Gratitude](#) or [Reflectly](#)

Engage in Creative Outlets

- Relax and express yourself through activities like drawing, painting, music, or gardening.

Practice the Acceptance Framework from ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy teaches that while pain is a natural part of life, resisting or avoiding it often transforms it into suffering. Acceptance involves acknowledging and making space for uncomfortable emotions or situations, even if they are unpleasant, rather than fighting them. This approach allows you to free up mental energy to focus on what truly matters—your values and purposeful actions.
 - Resource: [ACT Guide to Acceptance](#)

SENSORY AND MENTAL GROUNDING

Engage in Sensory Soothing Techniques

- Use the “5-4-3-2-1” method to ground yourself: identify five things you see, four you touch, three you hear, two you smell, and one you taste.
- Incorporate comforting textures, soothing images, or calming sounds like ocean waves.
 - Resource: [Grounding Techniques Worksheet](#)

Learn Basic DBT Skills

- Develop strategies like distraction, self-soothing, or improving the moment to manage intense emotions without escalating the situation.
 - Resource: [DBT Self-Help](#) and [TIP Skills to Reduce Intense Emotions Quickly](#)

Use Mindfulness Tools

- Explore mindfulness apps or guided practices to enhance relaxation and present-moment awareness.
 - Resources: [Mindfulness Northwest](#), Apps like [Insight Timer](#) or [Mindfulness Coach](#)

Virtual Hope Box for Coping

- Use the [Virtual Hope Box](#) app for exercises and tools to improve coping, distraction, and relaxation.
 - [FREE Mental Health Apps](#)

SOCIAL AND ROUTINE BASED STRATEGIES

Stay Connected

- Reach out to friends or loved ones for emotional support and to maintain a sense of connection.

Build a Routine

- Incorporate regular stress-reducing activities like exercise, hobbies, and breaks into your daily schedule.

Seek Professional Support

- If stress becomes overwhelming, consider reaching out to a therapist or Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if applicable.
 - Resource: [Psychology Today's Therapist Finder](#)
 - Contact: WSPA's Director of Professional Affairs at dpa@wspapsych.org