

How to Be Calm

I've often been described as a "calm" person. I'm not sure if they really mean "boring," but I'm happy to be calm most of the time.

When others are stressing out, I can help calm them down.

When things aren't going well, I calmly take appropriate action instead of falling apart.

When things are falling apart, I can hold to the center. I can feel into the difficulty, and find the peace, the unshakable connection to everything around me.

I'm not saying that to brag, but in hopes that it will move others to try it as well.

If you'd like to be calm, to stress out less ... I offer you this guide.

A Calm Motto

I recently offered this motto to my 18-year-old daughter, when she was stressing out about a situation she was facing:

"No big deal."

I told her, "Just remember NBD. No Big Deal."

Remind yourself of this motto whenever things are going wrong, or someone is frustrating you, or you aren't getting what you want. No big deal.

Of course, there are some things that are a big deal:

- Life & death or emergency situations
- When a loved one really needs your help

I'm sure there are other situations that are a big deal, but most of the time, it's not as big a deal as we imagine. We add stress unnecessarily to the situation.

You have a million things to do and not enough time to do it all? Not a big deal: pick the things you *can* do, and get to work. That's all you can do anyway, so it's not worth adding some stress to the already difficult situation.

Have a huge task to do that is going to be very difficult? No big deal. Just take the first step. Just get moving. You'll deal with the difficulty.

Plans fall apart? No big deal. Figure out a new alternative.

Someone unhappy with you? No big deal. See their pain, give them some compassion, take the appropriate action to help fix things or go on about your business if it can't be fixed.

There's another way to look at it, of course: everything is a big deal. What we do matters. And in this way, instead of just letting ourselves be distracted or taking things for granted, we can give the act in front of us our full attention and love.

That doesn't mean we need to get upset or stressed out about our situation though: while the act in front of us is a big deal, the situation is not a big deal. Life goes on. And it is delightfully beautiful.

Calm Practices

When things are falling apart, when things don't go your way, in addition to reminding yourself that things are No Big Deal ... there are some practices you might try out:

1. **Get in touch with the difficulty.** We usually want to get away from the difficulty, to have the stress and pain end, to find peace. This usually results in greater difficulty and unhappiness with the situation. Instead, we can get in touch with the feeling of stress, with the pain or fear or anger or irritation that we're feeling. That means dropping into the physical feeling in your body, which is nothing to panic about. It's just a feeling in the present moment, and you can stay with it, with courage. This is a transformative practice, and I highly recommend you practice it as often as you can during the day.
2. **Get bigger than yourself.** When we're stressed or frustrated, it's because we're trapped in our own small, self-centered point of view. We want what we want, and we are unhappy when we don't get it. If we can get beyond this limited viewpoint, all of a sudden we have some spaciousness. Things don't seem so closed in and dire. We can see the bigger picture, see things from other people's viewpoints, see that there is more than just what we're seeing and what we want. This bigger view is usually pretty calming. When you're getting bothered, try stepping outside yourself and seeing things from the point of view of others, or a bird's-eye view.
3. **Connect with the peace at the center.** After doing the above two practices, there's a deeper one: find the place inside yourself that is completely at peace. It's the center of the storm, where nothing is going crazy, where it feels like there's an eternal truth — that you are deeply connected to everything else. This can take awhile to find, so practice. Once you find this unshakable connection, it doesn't matter what's happening around you — it's there.

You can practice all of these, one after the other, or just pick one and practice it every day for a week or two. You'll find calm. It will be exquisite.