

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2024-2025 News & Notes



April 2025 News and Notes Counteracting “Headline Stress Disorder” By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

Counteracting "Headline Stress Disorder"

More and more, we hear of the negative effects of world and national news on our emotional health. An article by the American Psychological Association attributes this to “the steady drumbeat of headlines and related social media commentary [that] has been without pause: an ongoing pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, election controversy, mass shootings, and the list extends onward.” 1

In tracing the onset of “headline stress,” some mental health experts have cited news coverage of the contentious 2016 election as a starting point, others the COVID pandemic. Whenever it began, many psychologists recognize that this is an increasingly prevalent problem today.

“I think that what we don't realize enough is that our daily informational diet is just as important for our mental health as our nutritional diet is for our physical health,” believes Gurmeet Kanwal, M.B., B.S., clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine. “For some people, current events can trigger traumatic reactions from past events in their lives, even if they are not similar situations.” 2

Researchers of this phenomenon have found that study participants report such mental health problems as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2024-2025 News & Notes



learned helplessness. Most affected, according to one study, are those accessing news through social media websites rather than more traditional sources, such as newspapers and television. The reason for this, posits Matthew Price, PhD, of the University of Vermont in Burlington, “might be embedded in the way [such sites] use news to reel in and retain their users. They’re designed to be limitless scrolling.” 3

An article published by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) further explains, “Constant news updates, possible changes to laws and programs that affect you and your family, and worry about the future [can also] bring feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration, helplessness, and fatigue.”

For this reason, the authors offer a number of suggestions for those experiencing difficult emotions to counteract these feelings:

“Prioritize your physical health.” This includes healthy eating, exercise, and adequate sleep.

“Set limits on how much time you spend with news and social media.” This might be setting screen time limits and scheduling non-tech activities. Other options include establishing certain times in the day when you access news sources and social media, perhaps setting a timer to keep sessions to a limited duration, and/or establishing a “tech-free zone,” especially at mealtimes.

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2024-2025 News & Notes



“Connect with other people.” “Social support is also a key aspect of protecting your mental health and well-being, so make sure to stay connected with close friends and family, and ask for support when you need it.” Similarly important is joining with others in your community to share common interests and activities.

“Put your emotions into action.” In addition to NAMI, several articles on media overload advocate the power of taking action on your beliefs. Whether participating in a letter-writing campaign, contacting your representatives, demonstrating, or joining an advocacy group, taking action will counteract the feelings of helplessness that can overwhelm us.

“Find opportunities to feel hope and joy.” NAMI suggests, “Keep doing the things you like to do. Search for hopeful news stories. Find reasons to laugh. Take comfort in the fact that many, many people in this world are standing up to make things better.” 4

1 <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/11/strain-media-overload>

2 <https://weillcornell.org/news/how-to-cope-with-stress-from-news-and-current-events>

3 Op.cit. www.apa.org

4 <https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/article/486-i-m-stressed-about-current-events-how-can-i-practice-self-care-during-uncertain-times>

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2024-2025 News & Notes

