

How to Positively Process Your Post-Election Feelings

As a nation, we're always passionate about our politics, but this election year, people seem more heated than usual. Maybe it's partly the pandemic that's keeping us cooped up, financially stressed, and worried about the future.

Part of the intensity of our feelings is also because elections are consequential. Candidates stand for a platform of plans, and many people feel strongly invested in these ideas and their outcomes.



Try not to frame the election in terms of **“winning” or “losing”** because when it comes down to it, **we are all on the same team**. We all want our country to succeed. It's important to remember that our political system has survived conflicts and strong feelings before and, as a nation, we always get beyond them over time. But it's up to each of us to be the change that we want to see and to work to defuse some of the conflict for the future.

For those who see the outcome they desire, there is celebration, joy, and satisfaction; for those who do not see their hopes come to fruition, the results can be painful, depressing, stressful, and worrisome. Whether you find yourself satisfied or unsatisfied with election results, we offer tips about how to process your feelings constructively.

If you are disappointed with election results...

- 1. Face your feelings.** Change, loss, and disappointment are a part of life. It is okay to feel sad or angry about the results. Sometimes you need to get through your bad feelings fully before you can get to acceptance. Just be sure your sadness or anger are not expressed in destructive or self-defeating ways.
- 2. Take a break.** Stay away from news or social media for a few days. The news comes at us 24/7 and it can be overwhelming, particularly when it is bringing us news we don't like. Plus, social media can be an arena of conflict. Why torment yourself? Take a break until things calm down a bit and until you feel more balanced.
- 3. Look for the positives.** The nature of political campaigns is to focus on what divides us, not what unites us. We're a melting pot, we won't always agree – things get messy. But people who think differently than you do are not bad or evil. Try to focus on areas of agreement and unity in the country rather than divisions.

4. **Take one day at a time.** It's easy to project ahead and to catastrophize, but we really don't know what the future will bring. And remember, you get another chance to change leaders every two to four years.
5. **Be kind to yourself.** Immerse yourself in activities that have helped you deal with stress in the past: Music or reading; taking a peaceful walk in nature, playing with your dog or cat, engaging in strenuous exercise, or spending time talking to people who make you feel good.
6. **Be kind to others.** Be respectful of family, friends, and work colleagues who think or voted differently. Prioritize relationships and focus on commonalities.
7. **Take positive actions.** You can't control national events; you can only control your reaction. One way to channel disappointment is to find hope in another direction. Volunteer with your political party of choice or at a local charity. If you feel that some issue that you support may not be reflected in the new political arena, get involved in organizations that reflect your views.
8. **Seek help if you need it.** If your depression or angry feelings persist for more than a few days or if your negative feelings are interfering with your normal life activities like eating, sleeping, and working, it may be time to seek help. Your EAP has telephonic counseling and coaching available 24/7/365 – give a call, that's a good place to start.

If you are satisfied with election results...

1. **Be gracious and empathize.** You got the result you hoped for but think back on how badly you felt when election results weren't the outcome you hoped for. Remind your disappointed friends, colleagues, or family members that you know what it feels like. Console them with the thought that we all get a chance to pick new leaders every 2 and 4 years.
2. **Be respectful and nonjudgmental.** Avoid telling people they are wrong or assuming you know their motives or feelings. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Keep respect in the forefront. Offer reassurance of continued positive regard.
3. **Don't hit people when they are down.** Don't gloat or rub salt in the wounds of those who are disappointed. Don't accuse or exploit weaknesses or sensitivities.
4. **Learn to listen better.** Don't assume you know what other people feel or mean – clarify using a feedback loop and rephrase what you hear. Avoid interrupting.
5. **Build bridges.** Cultivate acceptance. While differences can be a source of conflict, they can also be a source of our greatest strength. Your goal shouldn't be to win an argument but to build understanding, find alignment, and focus on mutual goals so that we can all go forward to a more positive future.