

Student Counselling Office (Zentrale Studienberatung)

First aid for crises

A crisis can have various causes – for example, not passing a third attempt at an exam, a death, the end of a relationship or a financial problem. If you are experiencing a crisis, you will probably experience a lot of emotional chaos and an unbelievable number of painful thoughts and feelings will come to the surface.

In such moments, you should put on the brakes and use the **S.T.O.P.** technique:

Slow your breathing.

Take a few deep breaths and pay close attention to your out breath. Count to three as you breathe in, and to five as you breathe out. This will help keep you from getting completely overwhelmed.

Take note.

Pay attention to what you are feeling in this moment. Become aware of what you're thinking, what you're feeling and what you're doing. Observe how your thoughts are swirling through your head and remember that you are more than your thoughts and feelings.

Open up.

Allow your feelings to be present and give them space with the help of your breath. Allow your thoughts too: go back a step in your thoughts and let your them flow freely, without getting into them too much or immediately dismissing them. Recognise that these thoughts are nothing more than thoughts and give them space, without being overtaken by them.

Pursue your values.

When you have taken the previous three steps, you are now in a mental state of mindfulness with respect to your own body. The next step consists of dealing with the crisis. Here, your actions should always be guided by your own values. Ask yourself, *'How do I want to conduct myself in this crisis? What do I want to stand for? How do I want to act, so that later I can look back and be proud of my reaction to this crisis?'*

Adapted from Russ Harris, www.thehappinesstrap.com

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We're here to answer all of your questions about your studies – by email, by phone or in person. You can find up-to-date contact information and office hours at bit.ly/HAW-ZSB.

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Things you should pay attention to:

- 1) Do you need help or would you benefit from support or advice? If yes, which friends, neighbours or relatives could you contact? What professional counselling offers could you take advantage of? (Where necessary, what emergency hotlines could you call?)
→ The Student Counselling Office services and emergency support services are listed here: <https://www.haw-hamburg.de/en/study/advising/psychological-support/>
- 2) Have you ever been in this kind of situation before? If this is the case, what did you do then that helped you over the long term? Is there something you learned from this which could be useful or helpful to you now?
- 3) Is there something you could do to improve the current situation in some way? Can you think of LITTLE things you could do right now that would help you move forward? What are the smallest, simplest and easiest steps you could take
 - a. in the next few minutes,
 - b. in the next few hours
 - c. and in the next few days?

Please note: The first step could be just to take a few minutes to breathe calmly. You could also get a pen and paper and write down a plan for what you would like to do in the time after that.

- 4) When there's nothing that could improve your current situation, are you prepared to accept this for the time being while you continue to focus on your breathing? Because you can't change anything about this situation, how could you use your time and energy in a useful way instead of trying to place blame, getting upset and getting stuck in the situation? And once again – pursue your values: How do you want to conduct yourself in this situation? Which very small steps would it be possible for you to take?
- 5) You can't influence the cards you are dealt in your life, but you can definitely decide how you want to play with them. For this reason, it's helpful to ask the following questions: 'Since I've been dealt this particular deck of cards, what's the best way for me to play with them? Which personal skills can I develop so that I can survive the game, even with this bad hand? What can I take from this experience for myself? What can I learn from it?'

Remember: Every painful experience is also a chance to further develop your mindfulness and problem-solving abilities.

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- 6) Don't be too hard on yourself! Ask yourself what you would tell a loved one who was going through exactly this situation and had exactly the same feelings as you. How would you act with this person? What could you say and do to help them? Then treat yourself in exactly this way.