

Planning for a stressful event:

Steps to stay calm and prepared



Planning for a stressful event involves organising and preparing for a situation that may cause significant anxiety or pressure. Stressful events could include **work presentations**, **exams**, **medical procedures**, **moving**, or **social gatherings**. While stress is a natural response to challenges, preparing in advance can help reduce its intensity, build confidence, and improve outcomes.

Stress arises when we feel uncertain or unprepared. By breaking the event into **manageable steps** and equipping yourself with the **right tools**, you can approach it with a sense of control and resilience.

What are the symptoms of event-related stress?

Stress about an upcoming event can manifest physically, emotionally, and behaviourally.

Emotional Symptoms:

- Worry, fear or feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability or mood swings

Behavioural Symptoms:

- Tension headaches
- Muscle stiffness
- Rapid heartbeat
- Sweating
- Fatigue or difficulty sleeping

Physical Symptoms:

- Procrastination or avoidance of preparation
- Over-analysing or obsessing about the event
- Forgetfulness
- Poor decision-making

Stressful events can feel overwhelming, but with thoughtful preparation and support, you can face them with greater ease and confidence. Planning not only reduces stress but also increases the likelihood of a successful and positive outcome.

What can you do?

To help manage stress and feel prepared, follow these steps:

1. Break it down

Divide the event into smaller tasks or milestones. For example, if it's a presentation, focus on researching, creating slides, and practising.

2. Plan

Identify what you can prepare in advance, such as gathering materials, organising logistics, or practising scenarios.

3. Set realistic expectations

Recognise what is within your control and avoid perfectionism.

4. Create a timeline

Establish a schedule to avoid last-minute rushes, ensuring you have enough time for each task.

5. Practice stress-relief techniques

Use deep breathing, mindfulness, or visualisation exercises to manage pre-event anxiety.

6. Visualise success

Picture yourself confidently handling the event. Positive imagery can boost self-belief and reduce fear.

7. Prepare for contingencies

Consider potential challenges and plan solutions. For instance, bring backup materials or rehearse responses to difficult questions.

Fact:

Studies show that preparation and visualisation can reduce stress and improve performance by up to 20%, as they foster a sense of readiness and confidence.

What support is available?

If the event feels overwhelming, there are resources and strategies to help you prepare effectively:

1. Professional guidance

Seek advice from a mentor, coach, or therapist to manage stress and build confidence.

2. Workshops or training

Enrol in relevant courses to strengthen skills needed for the event, such as public speaking or time management.

3. Support network

Share your concerns with friends or family. Sometimes, talking it out can ease the burden and provide new perspectives.

4. Technology tools

Use apps or calendars to organise tasks, set reminders, and track progress.

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

Benjamin Franklin

Small rituals, such as writing a checklist or practising in front of a mirror, can significantly reduce pre-event anxiety and help you feel more in control.