

Transform Catastrophic Thinking Into Purposeful Action During Times of Crisis

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Do you find yourself worrying about the health of your loved ones? Anxious about the loss of a family member's income? Wondering what your PCS will look like? Concerned about finding child care with school canceled?

With so much uncertainty and seemingly everything on the line because of the [coronavirus disease 2019](#) pandemic, it is not uncommon to have catastrophizing thoughts.

The [Army Resilience Directorate](#) offers the following information to help you turn catastrophic thinking into purposeful action.

What is catastrophic thinking?

Catastrophic thinking happens when thoughts lead to:

- Worst-case scenarios
- High levels of anxiety
- 'What-ifs' that may not be realistic

For example, you worry about the gym being closed and instead of finding another way to prepare for your physical fitness test, you come to the conclusion that you'll fail the test and your military career will suffer.

Why it's important to stop catastrophizing

You are less likely to find solutions when you're dwelling on the worst that can happen. That's because:

- Anxiety creates a strong fight-or-flight response. The release of the stress hormone cortisol may limit your ability to think critically and creatively.
- You waste critical energy by planning for a worst-case scenario that isn't likely to happen.
- You focus on areas that are out of your control.

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How can I stop catastrophizing?

Turn to strategies that help you think in a more productive way. Barbara Fredrickson's research-based [broaden and build theory](#) can help your mind and body shift from the fight-or-flight response to a problem-solving mode. The theory states that positive emotions help to calm us so we can think more clearly and creatively.

There are 3 steps to the theory:

Step 1:

Notice when catastrophic thoughts have hijacked your attention or are causing worry, stress or anxiety.

Step 2:

Recognize that you're not your best when under stress. Have a plan to shift to a more positive emotion. You might call a loved one, watch funny videos or practice deep breathing. Even telling yourself your thoughts are unrealistic can ease your stress and give you hope.

Step 3:

Address the problem once you're thinking clearly. Focus on the areas where you have control. You may surprise yourself with a novel, creative solution. Using positive emotions to accurately assess the facts and tap into your creativity can help you make good decisions and solve problems, now and in the future.

If you need immediate help or are experiencing a crisis, contact the [Military Crisis Line](#) at 800-273-8255 and Press 1.

Stay up to date on all the latest information on COVID-19. For updates for the military community regarding the virus that causes COVID-19, view the following sites:

- Visit [Coronavirus.gov](#), [CDC.gov](#), [USA.gov](#) and [Defense.gov](#).
- Follow Military OneSource's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) platforms.
- Continue to visit the [Coronavirus Information for Our Military Community](#) page for updates.
- Check [Move.mil](#) for PCS-related updates.