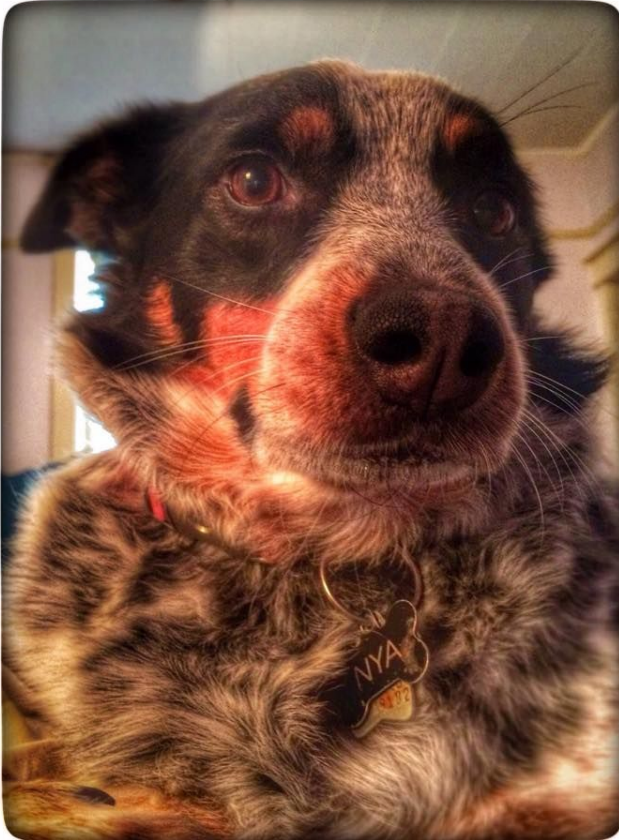


Election Night Survival Kit

From Margaret Howard, MFA, LCSW, Trauma Therapist

Why We Need A Plan

Election night 2016 is probably going to be tense. Unless it's an obvious landslide from the start, the day could be a prolonged stressor. Actually this election is *already* highly triggering and we *already* need this kit.



The National Sexual Assault Helpline reported a 30+ percent increase in calls from survivors the weekend the assault tapes were released. So, even if we're trying not to pay close attention, it's in the background and hard to avoid. Plus, things we try to ignore have a way of surfacing suddenly, and that can be overwhelming, so it's better to acknowledge and prepare.

In you don't mind, I'd like to share an example from my own experience of how a triggering event can happen unexpectedly, and how it might express physically (as well as emotionally): I watched the first presidential debate, alone. I thought I was "handling it," but afterwards, within half an hour, I had a big somatic response – fever, chills, shaking, deep tiredness. I'm really used to paying attention to what's happening in my somatic and emotional self, but still it snuck up on me and was not fun. After I worked through it and started settling it occurred to me: I need to plan for election night. Some kind of a survival

kit. Talking with people, it became clear that it would help others, too. **Here's the thing: When we're triggered or distressed, access to "executive function," that part of the brain that analyzes and makes decisions, goes offline.** The protective systems of the autonomic nervous system reroute resources to survival: fight, flight, or collapse. That's why it's hard to figure out what to do when we're under assault, or triggered from a past event. **So let's have this stress reduction plan ready long in advance.** The goal is to stay grounded, stay within our windows of tolerance, and avoid states that could have long-term consequences or make us sick or miserable. I really hope this helps you. We are in all in this together, and together we will prevail.

National Sexual Assault Hotline (survivor support): 800-656-4673

Custom Kit: If you'd like a custom kit, contact me, Margaret@theWildTherapist.com

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The run-up: Choose a place or container in which to gather your resources, including this Kit.

Election Night and the Next Day

Where You'll Be:

Not everyone can chose, of course. But if you can, do. And if you can't, spend some time visualizing the place and how you'll be able to take care of yourself in it, within the parameters you've got.

Where You'll Be Election Night: _____

Where You'll Be The Next Day: _____

Back-up plan: _____

Who you'll be with:

Plan who you'll be with. Yourself? Your pet? Family? Friends? Like-minded strangers in a public space? If you are going to be alone, list three supportive figures, even if they're no longer living or are from a fiction, history, mythology, TV, or a movie, and have an image of them nearby.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Connecting for support across distance:

If you're going to be at work, can you email, text, connect on social media, or make a phone call? And if you're going to be alone, are there people you can text or otherwise connect with across distance? Also, as above, it may help to have a photo of your pet, loved one(s), and/or iconic figure that is soothing or strengthening to you with you to look at from time to time, even if it has to be on bathroom breaks. List them here, then gather them together in your kit:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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What you'll be doing:

What do you want to be actually be doing on election day, night, and the next day?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Intentional self-care :

Make a list of several things you enjoy doing, and that are nurturing for you:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

Healing Sleep:

Develop a 3-step ritual for bedtime:

1. Half an hour before bed:

2. Fifteen minutes before bed:

3. When you get in bed:

Now Gather Your Self-Care Items

Create your physical Kit. It will be a comfort, now and on election night. Put cozy socks, essential oils, games, stones, a favorite book, sage, photos of loved ones, maybe some tea and chocolate, this paper, and any other object or resource you'd like to have near you **in a box or another special place**, all together. You'll be glad you did.

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Examples of Intentional Self-Care

Only do what you know is good for you, and nothing you're allergic to or that could be triggering or unsafe in any way. Consult your healthcare professional. Trust yourself.

- Ground
- Stand, sit or lay on the actual earth
- Voo (make a long "voo" sound)
- Be with like-minded people
- Long exhales
- Butterfly hugging yourself (bilateral stimulation)
- Sit with your feelings and the sensations in your body, notice them and how they change
- If you feel agitated MOVE!
- Avoid other triggering activities, like people who give you the creeps or disturbing movies
- Epsom salts foot soak
- Soothing natural scents
- Listen to music
- Sing
- Dance
- Yoga (trauma-sensitive)
- Coloring, painting, drawing
- Making or building
- Hike
- Take a walk
- Swim
- Bath or shower
- Play an instrument
- Cuddle a pet
- Facetime or Skype with a loved one
- Comedy
- Soothing ritual
- Camp fire
- Engage in your spiritual practice (plan it now)
- Be with like-minded loved ones
- Massage or other body work
- Energy work such as Qi Gong or Tai Chi
- See your therapist! Make an appointment now

Keep in Mind

- You are not alone, millions are also stressed and triggered by this
- You don't have to pretend to yourself that you feel fantastic
- It's ok if you do feel fantastic, though!
- Just because other people don't *look* stressed that doesn't mean they're not!
- You can meet your feelings and the sensations in your body with compassionate non-judgment
- You can say nice things to yourself!
- You can call the **National Sexual Assault Hotline (survivor support): 800-656-4673**. They welcome calls from *all* survivors of *all kinds* of sexual assault, including stalking, grabbing, and threats.
- You can call the **National Suicide Lifeline: 800-273-8255**.

**All Good Wishes to You,
Be Kind to Yourself. Be Kind to Others. Be Mindful of the Moment. Ground.**

Visit <http://www.theWildTherapist.com/ElectionNight> to download more copies of the Kit.

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