

# Managing Stress in the Family and in You

Now set your mind at ease. Stress is a natural part of life. You cannot eliminate it but you will need to manage it. Stress and the way we manage it affects not only the individual but also the family unit.

## What is it?

There are two different types of stress. One type of stress that tends to be unpleasant is called distress. Distress is tension filled and associated with affliction and suffering.

Another type of stress that tends to be enjoyable is called eustress (good stress). Eustress can motivate you to keep going. Too much eustress can become distress.

## Stress can be a good thing

A certain amount of stress is needed to keep us growing.

Contemporary research indicates that any stress is negative only if you view it as such. Any stress can be good because it creates opportunity for learning and positive change.

## Too much of a good thing

Too much stress has a negative impact on health, decision-making, and relationships.

## Sources of stress

We generate stress for ourselves. Some examples of the way we do this are:

- Focus on unrealistic expectations, or any expectations at all, about people and circumstances
- Overscheduling and hurry
- Negative interpersonal relationships
- Focus on problems versus strengths
- Resistance to change; and too much flexibility
- Poor boundaries
- High degree of guilt; Blaming
- Poor financial management

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Outside circumstances, beyond our control, may generate stress. Some examples of these circumstances are:

- The economy
- Local, national, or international crises
- Illness, death
- Developmental transitions (for kids, growing up; for adults, growing older)
- Any type of change (termination, relocation, business growth or decline, additions to the family, kids leaving home)

For more sources of stress see the Holmes-Rahe assessments at the conclusion of this document.

## **Stress and the family system**

When stress creates anxiety (strong negative emotions) in one member of the family, that anxiety can be channeled by other family members, travel through the entire family emotional system, and outside the immediate family to other connected emotional systems (i.e. school, work, extended family, etc). Some people are more stress tolerant than others depending on their personality, physical health, and interest in change. These may show less acute or chronic anxiety related to stress.

### **Symptoms of stress**

How does it look when someone is really stressed? In general, some symptoms of stress may be:

- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anger
- Aggression
- Sleep difficulties
- Sick more often

In children, some symptoms of stress may be:

- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Fearful
- Acting out
- Anger Aggressions
- Increasing difficulty getting along with others
- Problems sleeping
- Withdrawal

### **Secrets to managing stress . . .**

As you review the lists below, your stress level may go up. To avoid that, pick 2-3 items that you believe will make the most difference for you and your family. Focus on those.

As you progress with those 2-3, pick 2-3 more and work on those until you build a new way of being and doing. This takes time but will help you live a full life, without regret.

### **Secrets to managing stress . . . for the family**

As you apply these secrets, keep in mind that your children will be able to participate only as their developmental age will allow. Don't be afraid to stretch them just a little.

- Understand that . . .
  - Stress can be positive or negative.
  - A low level of stress is natural and normal. In fact, it promotes growth.
  - You control many of the circumstances that create undue stress for you and the family.
- Perspective and Priorities
  - Set realistic expectations for self, family members, and others.
  - Set priorities in light of values, mission, and goals clearly established by your family as a whole.

- Manage emotions
  - Be open and allow others to be open about feelings and emotions.
  - Be a calm, rational presence in your relationships.
  - Increase flexibility as needed and appropriate.
  - Take action to enjoy one another more in the family.
  - Laugh more.
- Work together
  - Be sensitive to individual family members and support them during times of stress.
  - Communicate, communicate, and communicate some more. Take time for more than maintenance communication and go deep to understand thoughts, feelings, and emotions.
  - Work together to solve problems. When appropriate, involve the children in helping.
  - Encourage one another to use compassionate, kind words in speaking to self (internal self-talk; internal conversations)
- Get outside support when needed (family coach, therapist, clergy, etc.)
- Respect Individuality
  - Allow children to behave according to their developmental age.
  - Avoid comparing to others.
  - Avoid pushing a child unnecessarily or beyond their ability.
  - Be in touch with the child's world to understand what may be generating stress.
  - Recognize and understand the child's unique response to stress. Help them understand it as well.
  - Respect the personality and individuality of others.
- Be grateful and hopeful
  - Be encouraging, acknowledging the character of individual family members.
  - Reduce excessive competition among children.
- Avoid punishing others emotionally
  - Avoid the use of "should" and "ought."
  - Extend grace for mistakes and make them learning experiences
- Maintain a healthy, well-paced lifestyle and family environment
  - Simplify schedules.
  - Maintain a sense of order, structure, and routine within the home.
  - Provide and enforce consistent boundaries and guidelines.
  - Teach your child (through word and example) to take care of themselves through proper nutrition, sleep, and exercise.
  - Guide the child to make good, healthy choices for dealing with stress.

### **Secrets to managing stress . . . for adults**

In addition to that above, older teens and adults can also employ these secrets to manage their stress.

- Perspective
  - Take responsibility for your stress. Don't play the victim and blame someone else.
  - Check your expectations of self. Be sure they are reasonable.

- Manage emotions
  - o Talk about worries and concerns with someone you trust (friend, family, coach, therapist, clergy).
  - o Try to walk away with at least one action step to address them.
  - o Avoid taking on the problems and concerns of others.
  - o Spend time with people who are positive and energize you.
  - o Be kind, compassionate, and gracious as you speak to yourself.
  - o Avoid self-medicating.
  - o Live the serenity prayer

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change  
 Courage to change the things I can and the  
 Wisdom to know the difference.*

- Respect Individuality
  - o Be your unique self and let others be themselves. Avoid trying to be or keep up with someone else.
- Pace
  - o Simplify your schedule.
  - o Pace yourself. Take time-outs as needed.
- Priority Management
  - o Set priorities in light of values, mission, and goals clearly established by you.
  - o Share task responsibilities with others. Delegate. Yes, even within the family.
  - o Practice the “Do it Now” principle. Avoid procrastination.
- Self-awareness
  - o Be aware of how you respond to stress. How do you respond mentally, emotionally, socially, physically, spiritually?
  - o Stay aware and clear about what you are feeling. Talk about it to someone you trust.
- Maintain a healthy, well-paced lifestyle and family environment
  - o Take care of yourself through proper nutrition, sleep, and exercise.
  - o Plan your leisure time and do it.
  - o Take mini-vacations through meditation and relaxation.
- Play to your strengths and interests
  - o Spend as much time as possible in tasks that are enjoyable and rewarding.
- Celebrate and serve
  - o Plan and do something nice for yourself each day.
  - o Plan and do something nice for another person each day. It gets the focus off your issues and helps someone else.
- Get outside support when needed (friends, family, life-coach, therapist, clergy, etc.)

## Wrapping Up

Here's a reminder to not allow the secrets to managing stress increase your stress level. Instead, work on these things.

- Increase your awareness and understanding of stress and its effects.
- Pick 2-3 action items on which to focus.
- Put some routines into place to help manage stressors and stress.
- Work together with the family and/or support team as appropriate to achieve progress on your goals.
- Get help from a coach, therapist, or counselor to create a life experience where stress is productive for you and your family.

For additional help visit:

- [discoveryourtruecourse.com/resources/](http://discoveryourtruecourse.com/resources/)
- [withoutregretbook.com](http://withoutregretbook.com)
- [discoveryourtruecourse.com/personal-development/personal-coaching-mentoring/](http://discoveryourtruecourse.com/personal-development/personal-coaching-mentoring/)

## For Adults

To measure the impact of your stress according to the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, check the items you have experienced in the last year and total the number of “Life Change Units” that apply to the events checked. The final score will give a rough estimate of how stress affects health.

✓	Life event	Life change units
	Death of a spouse	100
	Divorce	73
	Marital separation	65
	Imprisonment	63
	Death of a close family member	63
	Personal injury or illness	53
	Marriage	50
	Dismissal from work	47
	Marital reconciliation	45
	Retirement	45
	Change in health of family member	44
	Pregnancy	40
	Sexual difficulties	39
	Gain a new family member	39
	Business readjustment	39
	Change in financial state	38
	Death of a close friend	37
	Change to different line of work	36
	Change in frequency of arguments	35
	Major mortgage	32
	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
	Change in responsibilities at work	29
	Child leaving home	29
	Trouble with in-laws	29
	Outstanding personal achievement	28

✓	Life event	Life change units
	Spouse starts or stops work	26
	Beginning or end school	26
	Change in living conditions	25
	Revision of personal habits	24
	Trouble with boss	23
	Change in working hours or conditions	20
	Change in residence	20
	Change in schools	20
	Change in recreation	19
	Change in church activities	19
	Change in social activities	18
	Minor mortgage or loan	17
	Change in sleeping habits	16
	Change in number of family reunions	15
	Change in eating habits	15
	Vacation	13
	Christmas	12
	Minor violation of law	11

**Score of 300+:** At risk of illness.

**Score of 150-299:** Risk of illness is moderate (reduced by 30% from the above risk).

**Score <150:** Only have a slight risk of illness.

## Non-Adult

✓	Life Event	Life Change Units
	Death of parent	100
	Unplanned pregnancy/abortion	100
	Getting married	95
	Divorce of parents	90
	Acquiring a visible deformity	80
	Fathering a child	70
	Jail sentence of parent for over one	70
	Marital separation of parents	69
	Death of a brother or sister	68
	Change in acceptance by peers	67
	Unplanned pregnancy of sister	64
	Discovery of being an adopted child	63
	Marriage of parent to stepparent	63
	Death of a close friend	63
	Having a visible congenital deformity	62
	Serious illness requiring hospitalization	58
	Failure of a grade in school	56
	Not making an extracurricular activity	55
	Hospitalization of a parent	55
	Jail sentence of parent for over 30	53
	Breaking up with boyfriend or girlfriend	53
	Beginning to date	51
	Suspension from school	50
	Becoming involved with drugs or	50
	Birth of a brother or sister	50

✓	Life Event	Life Change Units
	Increase in arguments between	47
	Loss of job by parent	46
	Outstanding personal achievement	46
	Change in parent's financial status	45
	Accepted at college of choice	43
	Being a senior in high school	42
	Hospitalization of a sibling	41
	Increased absence of parent from	38
	Brother or sister leaving home	37
	Addition of third adult to family	34
	Becoming a full-fledged member of a	31
	Decrease in arguments between	27
	Decrease in arguments with parents	26
	Mother or father beginning work	26

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**Score of 150-299:** Risk of illness is moderate. (reduced by 30% from the above risk)

**Score <150:** Slight risk of illness.