

Barbara A. Hancock, M.A., LMFT
3815 W. Olive Ave. Suite #102
Burbank, CA. 91505
(818) 556-5223 bahancock@roadrunner.com

MANAGING FAMILY STRESS

“Families characteristically lack time perspective when they are having problems. They tend generally to magnify the present moment, overwhelmed and immobilized by their immediate feelings; or they become fixed on a moment in the future that they dread or long for. They lose the awareness that life means continual motion from the past into the future with a continual transformation of familial relationships” (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999, 4).

As families transition from one stage to another, family relationships shift and require members to adjust to changes in the dynamics within the family. Families have to balance individuality with togetherness in an ever-evolving emotional process. (Kerr & Bowen, 1988)

I. Stages of the Family Life Cycle:

1. Leaving home: single young adults
2. The joining of families through marriage
3. Families with young children
4. Families with adolescents
5. Launching children and moving on
6. Families in later life

II. Healthy Family Styles:

1. Maintain meaningful rituals and traditions
2. Negotiate rules, roles and rituals
3. Have clear boundaries
4. Communication is welcomed and open
5. Differences of opinion are allowed
6. Expression of feelings are allowed
7. Learn how to manage crises
8. Maintain an open “family system” by allowing others “in”

III. Identifying the sources/situations producing stress in your life.

Vertical stressors v horizontal stressors: Troubled home life, jobs/2-career families, economy/financial problems, scheduling, and family crises.

IV. What actually causes stress?

A. Perceptions, interpretations, and reactions to the situations that occur in our lives: Stress-inducing thoughts, beliefs, attitudes on a continuum from hopeless to challenging. How does the family, over time, view and re-define the stressor? What meaning does it have for the family? How does the family view their ability to cope?

1.) Procrastination towards changing what needs to be changed (avoidance) vs. Action (taking responsibility for the role you play in maintaining it).

B.) Family Resources: Psychological, social, interpersonal, and economic characteristics of individual family members that are present in relationships with each other and with the community.

1.) Resources present

2.) Resources cultivated in response to old/new stressors

a.) Health of the marital dyad, support from extended family, friends, pastor, counselors, financial

V. Symptoms of Stress: Physical, Emotional, and Behavioral:

A. Stress in adults: Acute stress: recurring headaches, indigestion, fatigue, and insomnia are vivid warning signs. Chronic stress: long ignored symptoms can lead to Physical/mental health problems.

Physical problems: grinding teeth, tremors, confusion, forgetfulness, over-eating, alcohol abuse, prescription medication abuse, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and other illnesses.

Mental Health problems: feelings of hopelessness, constant anxiety, depression, and in severe cases serious mental aberrations such as paranoia and delusions.

B. Stress in Children: Acting out, stomach aches, headaches, not wanting to go to school, skipping school, grades dropping, aches and pains, obsessive behavior, flu-like symptoms, chronic worrying, listlessness or hyperactivity, drugs/alcohol

VI. Stress Management Tips:

“What you think about you create”: the effect of catastrophic thinking, globalizing, black and white thinking, numbing on the nervous system.

1. Replacing negative thinking with positive self talk

2. H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)

3. Breathing
4. Exercise
5. Make time when you have no time: if you learned you had an illness, you would find time to treat it. You have to think of managing stress in this way
6. Don't react, respond: "when in doubt, think it out!"- Give it 24 hours.
7. Make a gratitude list
8. Prayer: develop a conscious relationship with a power greater than yourself or, God, as you understand God.
9. Say "no"- know your limitations ("When I say no I feel guilty")
10. Be willing to seek the help of counselors and therapists if you need it.
11. Utilize resources of friends and neighbors
12. Don't judge your insides by someone else's outsides.
13. Acknowledge the areas where you have no control and "let go."
14. Determine what you have control over and take a small step to do something about what you *can* change.

Other Tips:

1. Eat healthy
2. Listen to your favorite music
3. Exercise, participate in sports or other fun activity
4. Keep a stress journal
5. Laugh as often as you can
6. Plan your time
7. Prioritize
8. Talk to a friend, don't hold it in
9. Get a massage
10. Read a book/watch T.V
11. Do a craft
12. Take a warm bath
13. Take a nap
14. Get a good night's sleep
15. Keep a journal
17. Read a daily affirmation

VII. Helping Kids Reduce Stress: "What you live with, you learn. What you learn, you practice. What you practice, you become. What you become has consequences." The biggest source of stress for your kids is your level of stress.

1. Eat healthy- don't skip meals
2. Be consistent with rules and boundary setting.

3. Get regular exercise- play with your kids.
4. Listen without judging or criticizing.
5. Don't expect perfection: Nobody's perfect/everybody makes mistakes.
6. Physical contact: hugs
7. Stress reducing exercises (above)
8. Stop and smell the roses.

VIII. Ways families can connect to reduce stress in the family:

1. Meals together
2. Family fun nights
3. "Jammie" Day
4. No "screens" days (T.V., Facebook, email, computers, smart phones)
5. Game night
6. Jigsaw puzzles
7. Family household activities: gardening, garage sale, family projects
8. Adopt a family philanthropy
9. Scrapbooking
10. Go for a family walk, hike, out-door activities.

References

Kerr, M., Bowen, M. 1988. *Family Evaluation*. Norton.

McGoldrick, M., Carter, B. (Eds.). 1999. *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*. Allyn & Bacon.

Resources

Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers – Robert Sapolsky (2004)

The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Handbook (6th Edition) – Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, Mathew McKay and Patrick Fanning (2008)

Mind Over Mood: Changing the Way You Feel by Changing the Way You Think – Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky (1995)

<http://www.stressmanagementtips.com/school.htm>

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm

<http://stress.about.com/od/stressmanagementtools/a/parentcare.htm>