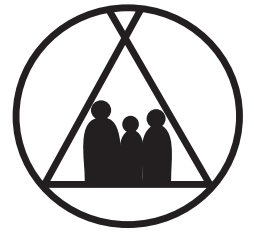




Principles of Child Rearing



Replacing Stress with Peace

Adapted from
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
(Alabama A & M and Auburn University)
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One of the worst effects of stress can be a feeling of helplessness that comes when we think there is nothing we can do.

In the book, *Alexander and The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander has a day when everything goes wrong. He gets gum in his hair, trips on a skateboard, gets scrunched in the car, is deserted by his friends, goes to the doctor, and falls in the mud. At home he is scolded by his mom, gets in trouble with his dad, has lima beans for dinner, gets soap in his eye, and is left alone by the cat.

Have you ever had a day when everything went wrong? Bad days make it hard to be patient and loving. A tired, frustrated, or angry person is not likely to be a good parent or caregiver.

This publication is intended to help you deal with stress so that you can be a more peaceful person and a more effective parent/caregiver. We suggest that you take the time to do the exercises throughout this publication. That way, you'll be making your personal plan to replace the stress in your life with peace.

What makes you feel stressed?

Every person has bad days. Sometimes a person has lots of bad days. Think of the things that make you feel stressed. List as many things as you can that cause you stress, especially those that bother you most. Make your list as complete as you can.

Stressors:

Maybe your list includes lack of money, whining or nagging children, or loneliness. Having a list of your worries may be useful as you try to deal with them.

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What does stress do to you?

When stress builds up, it can result in anger, headaches, discouragement, depression, stomachaches, feelings of helplessness, self-hate, and other “terrible, horrible, no good, very bad” feelings.

What are some of the reactions and feelings you have when you get too much stress? Please list them in the space below.

Stress Reactions:

One of the worst effects of stress can be a feeling of helplessness that comes when we think there is nothing we can do. When we feel helpless, we may stop trying to solve problems. Then the problems get worse. We feel worse. Then we get angry or discouraged. We do less. And things keep getting worse. That is a trap!



How can you deal with stress?

What can you do to deal with the stresses in your life? There are many things that can help. First, think about things you like to do. Do you like to sing? Do you like to be alone with nature? Do you like to talk to family members or friends? Do you like to play with your children? Do you like to exercise? List 20 things you like to do.

Things I like to do:

Next, ask yourself: “Do I take time in my life for the things I like?”

What can you do to make more time for the things you like?

Filling your life with things you like is a first step toward dealing with stress. There are other tools that can help also.

Suggestions for dealing with stress:

Read over the list below and mark the suggestions that will help you deal with your stress. You can use them to make a personal stress plan.

1. **Recognize the things that bother you.** Becoming aware of your stresses is a first step to dealing with them. It also is part of showing respect for your own feelings.
2. Recognize that you may not be able to fix everything at once, but there are things you can do that will help. Maybe they are little things but they make a difference.
3. **Throw away stresses that you can't change.** For instance, you may worry that a tornado is going to destroy you and your family. While it is possible that you could move, it may be more appropriate to throw away that worry. You may want to close your eyes and mentally tie the tornadoes in a knot and throw them in the trash or lock them in a closet. Decide which of your stresses you cannot change by thinking about them. Then don't think about them.
4. **Replace stressful thoughts with pleasant ones.** Think of it as emotional gardening. You pull the weeds out of your garden, and you cultivate the good plants. Acknowledge your hurt and/or injustice, but try not to dwell on it. Instead, think about someone you like and perhaps about some way you can help that person. A beautiful garden is very

satisfying. A garden of weeds can be very discouraging.

5. **Allow yourself to have time-off from stress.** Sometimes we feel so worn-out or frustrated that we want to cry or scream. That's a good time for a mental time-out. Find a place where you can be alone. Lie down, close your eyes, and imagine that you are lying in a beautiful, peaceful place. Imagine the sun on your face. Listen to the sounds of birds and waves. Feel the warmth. Breathe deeply and slowly. Enjoy relaxing for several minutes. Then imagine yourself walking, swimming, or anything you would enjoy doing on your mental break. When you are feeling better open your eyes. Think of some small thing you can do to make things run more smoothly.
6. **Use your sense of humor.** When you start to get frustrated or angry with your children, hold a training session. For example, I may feel like screaming at the children when they've left lights on throughout the house. Instead, call them together and tell them that a "crime" has been committed. Someone has sneaked into the house and turned on all our lights. I suspect it may be an elephant. Maybe we could all hunt through the house looking for the elephant and turn off lights. I am very careful to avoid sarcasm or hurt. I make my statements ridiculous so that everyone starts laughing, including me.

7. **Be sure to keep yourself strong.** Are you eating well? Do you regularly get some exercise or relaxation? Make time in your schedule to keep yourself physically fit. For childcare, you might take turns with a friend or family member. Today you watch her children for an hour or two while she takes a break. Tomorrow she watches yours while you take a break.
8. **Draw strength from friends and family members.** You have family and friends who help you make decisions, feel loved, and feel hopeful. Get together with them. Ask them if they will listen to you. Talk to them. Tell them how you feel. You may have some friends or family members who make you angrier or sadder. It might be good not to talk to them when you feel stressed. Anger makes stress worse.
9. **Focus on things you love to do.** Go back to the list you made and pick out some of the things you love to do most. Make time for them. Set aside money to do them. Ask people to help you do them.
10. **Anticipate problems and solve them.** Deal with them. For example, it may bother you that your toddler loves to play with the stereo. Put the stereo up out of reach. Put interesting and safe toys where the children can play with them. Baby-proof your home. Make a special play area for your children. Prevent the troubles that drive you crazy by planning ahead.

11. **When you are feeling tired and discouraged and don't want to do anything, look for a little job.** Maybe you could wipe off the cabinets. Maybe you could take out the trash. Look for a little job to get started. Once you finish the little job, give yourself credit for it. Don't beat yourself up with a long list of all the things you still need to do. Once you get started with a little job, you may feel like tackling bigger jobs.
12. **Deal with rejection.** One powerful stress for most people is the feeling that no one cares. Maybe when you talk to your mother she only preaches to you. Maybe your husband or wife doesn't understand you or show respect for your feelings. Some researchers now tell us that the healthiest people are not necessarily those who had a perfect childhood but those who have made peace with it. Maybe Mom was not nice and maybe Dad deserted the family. Try not to stay angry and upset with the past. Try to accept what has happened, and try to live in the present and imagine a better future. Try to accept what your parents/caregivers have done, can do, and build good relationships.
13. **Get outside yourself.** Sometimes we worry so much about our problems that we can't see anything else. It may help to take some food to the neighbor or to volunteer some time to a community group.

You don't need a lot of extra demands. But taking a little time to help others can bring peace and satisfaction.

- 14. **Be creative.** Organize to solve problems. Look for good solutions. For example, if your children are always hungry by dinnertime, maybe you could provide them with a healthy afternoon treat or you could eat dinner earlier.
- 15. **Get help if you need it.** If you begin to feel overwhelmed, especially if you feel suicidal, get help! Go to a person you trust. They can be a family member, friend, elder, doctor, minister, or the mental health clinic. Everyone gets discouraged from time to time. But if those feelings become severe, get help.
- 16. **Be patient.** Some problems solve themselves with time. Eventually children outgrow diapers. They get past teething. "The rain stops and the sun comes out." Work on the things you can change. Be patient with things that take time.

- 17. **Be a friend to yourself.** Don't expect yourself to be perfect. Stop doing things that tear you down. Notice the good things you do, and dwell on those things. Don't try to force yourself to be perfect or always kind. Treat your feelings with respect. Other people may sound bigger and stronger and more sure of themselves. But your feelings are important. Listen to them. Instead of dwelling on a mistake, learn what you can from it, and then let the mistake go. Examine your expectations. Make sure they are reasonable.
- 18. **Take control of your life.** Helplessness is a terrible feeling. While you may not be able to change everything, notice the things you can change.
- 19. **Discover meaning in your life.** Some people find meaning through learning, some through service, and some through spirituality. Enjoy the contribution you make. See the purpose behind people doing good deeds.

- 20. **Don't compare yourself to others.** Your sister may be a wonderful cook. Your neighbor may be incredibly organized. But don't compare yourself to them. No one has every talent. Discover your talents. Enjoy them. Use them to help others.

- 21. **Can you think of other ways you can deal with stress?**

If so, list them here:

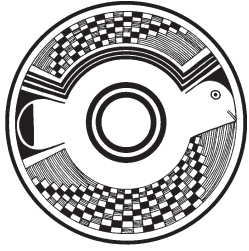
For more information, contact your county office of the NDSU Extension Service.

Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.



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Make a stress plan

As you read over this list of ideas, have you marked those that seem most helpful to you? Then you are ready to pick one of your stresses and come up with a plan for dealing with it. Don't plan how to deal with all your stresses. Just start with one. The stress that I am going to start with is:

■ **Stressor** _____

What I plan to do to prevent or deal with that stress? (Pick something from the list or use your own ideas.)

Do I need to involve others in helping with my plan? How will I involve them?

What is my goal? How do I hope to change things?

After you have tried out your plan, see how well it works.

Praise your success. Plan how to be successful in dealing with other stresses.

As you make room in your life for things you love and replace stressful feelings with feelings of peace and calmness, you will find your personal and family life more satisfying.

You are likely to find that you are more successful in your work, more effective with your children, and more at peace with yourself.