

HOW DO YOU HANDLE STRESS?

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Again it is that time of year when educators face the stressful start of a new school year. There never seems to be enough time to get everything done, our families complain that they never see us anymore while our inner voice tells us we need to work harder. As the first few days of school get underway, we breathe a sigh of relief that once again we have been able to begin a new school year, and we are still breathing. However, we may have set ourselves up for more stress throughout the year, because we have not learned to handle stress successfully.

Life is made up of stress and no one is ever free of its impact, but it is how we handle the stress that comes our way that will make or break us. Webster's Dictionary gives the following definition of stress: "mental or physical tension or strain, urgency, pressure, etc. causing this". Our stress comes to us in many packages, and sometimes it is very hard to see it, but the effects are still felt. We all need to handle stress, and if done properly it will improve our lives.

When stress occurs it is important that we recognize the symptoms and then deal with the cause of the stress. As you begin to understand more about how stress affects you as an individual, you will come up with your own ideas to help you ease the tensions, but here are a few suggestions you might try.

Know your limits. If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at the moment, do not fight the situation. Learn to accept what is - for now - until you can change it.

Share your stress. It helps to talk to someone about your concerns and worries. You can share your stress with a family member, friend, pastor, counselor or some other person whom you trust and feel comfortable with. This person will give you a different perspective of the problem.

Get physical. Doing physical activity releases pressure. Running, playing sports, working out in a gym, or working in your yard are all ways to help relieve stress, or you can simply walk for twenty to thirty minutes in a place that relaxes or calms you. You will find that after physical activity you will feel more relaxed, less uptight, and be able to look at the cause of your stress in a different light.

Be good to yourself. It is important to have a balanced life style. Get enough rest, eat properly, and exercise. The more rundown you are, the less likely you will be able to handle the stress that comes your way each day. Take time for yourself each day when you have no deadlines, and do something you enjoy doing. You can call it your special treat.

Make a daily list of tasks. To help keep yourself on track and take some of the stress out of your life, make a prioritized list of the tasks you need to accomplish for the day. As you finish a task check it off and at the end of the day you will be amazed with what you have accomplished.

Have a quiet spot. Create a spot where you can go when you feel stressed. A calendar picture of the ocean, mountains, a field of grain or a relaxing scene, that is kept on your desk provides a quiet spot when you have that stressed-out feeling. Listening to music can also create peace and tranquility.

Learn to relax. You cannot stay uptight all the time without having it affect you. You can find satisfaction in just being, without always striving for something. Find activities that give you pleasure and that are good for your mental and physical health. If you have trouble relaxing try some techniques that will help you in that area.

I would like to leave you with a few quotes I have picked up over the years. I like to keep these where I can look at them every now and again when I feel stress building up. I hope that you will find them useful as well. Remember, stress is constantly with us; it is the way in which we cope with stress that makes the difference.

"I'm an old man who has known a great many problems, most of which never happened." (Mark Twain)

"Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow. (Swedish Proverb)

"My tormentor is myself left over from yesterday". (Deepak Chopra)

"A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work". (Unknown)

"Conflict cannot survive, without your participation". (Unknown)

"Emotional maturity is accepting our feelings and then letting them go so that we can focus on the next moment with openness and receptivity". (Joan Lunden)

"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly". (Richard Bach)

"Give your worries to the Lord and He will take care of you". (Psalm 55:22, *Holy Bible, New International Version, International Bible Society, East Brunswick, New Jersey, 1984.*)