



Furthering Families

How can my family deal with stress?

Family stress is pressure or tension within your family that disrupts your normal, day-to-day life. Individual and family stresses are a normal and unavoidable part of everyday life, but change can make a family particularly vulnerable to distress as a result of having to constantly make adjustments. Stress comes in a variety of forms and means different things to different people. What is stressful for one person may seem like an invigorating challenge to the next. Family stress can build from a variety of everyday events or from a one-time crisis event. Keep the following in mind when your family is experiencing stress.

Everyday stress

Though exceptional events like the loss of a job or the death of a family member will cause a great deal of stress in your life, the demands of daily responsibilities and routine can build up over time to create a lot of stress in your life, too. When everyday stress seems like it may be getting to be too much for you, try to remember the following:

- Stress is hard to define, because it means different things to different people. Generally, though, too much stress causes a negative feeling.
- Stress can cause health problems like headaches, high blood pressure, not sleeping, and even depression.
- To reduce your everyday stress, try some of the following:
 - Remember that it takes time and personal commitment for things to change.
 - Determine the maximum amount of stress you can handle, and do not exceed it.
 - Learn to say “no” to activities that do not have to get done.
 - Do the best you can; no one is perfect.
 - Get one thing done each day. Make a “to-do” list of the things that you want to get done, and then, cross things off your list when they’re done so you can see that you are making progress.
 - Get moving! Try to fit in physical activity for 30 minutes at least 3 days per week.
 - Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals. Include at least five fruits and vegetables each day, and limit the amount of sugar and fat that you eat.
 - Limit caffeine, alcohol and tobacco use.
 - Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
 - Talk to a friend or family member when you are feeling stressed.
 - Laugh! Humor can help ease almost any situation.

- Make time for your hobbies or activities that you enjoy.
- Be flexible and know that sometimes things just will not go your way.
- Learn ways to change or limit stressful situations when possible.
- If your everyday stresses overwhelm you, visit your doctor or other health care professional.
- Structure your time by keeping busy with everyday activities. Try to live your life as normal as possible.
- Talk to close friends and family members. In addition to those who have been affected by the event, it is important to talk to others who may be able to offer you a new or different perspective.
- Avoid using drugs, alcohol, or nicotine.
- Write down your feelings.
- Take life one day at a time; you will get through this time.
- If your stress levels are worrying you or members of your family, visit your doctor or other health care professional in your area.

Crisis stress

It is those life events that take place less frequently that may cause us to feel out of control. Stress can occur from a positive major life event like marriage or a new job; or from a negative event like the loss of income or a family member's illness. Whether these major life events are good or bad stress, they will affect you and your family. In the beginning of a stress crisis, it seems like you may never get through it, but know that you will. Remember the following:

- You may have a number of different reactions to stress in a crisis:
 - You may feel tired, have trouble sleeping and eating, have headaches, or feel dizzy.
 - You may have trouble focusing on things or working through problems. Your memory may be affected; you may have trouble remembering familiar people and places.
 - You may experience feelings of guilt and helplessness and become overly sensitive. You may begin to doubt yourself and your choices, and you may become moody or angry.
- These feelings and reactions are normal.
- Within the first few days, strenuous exercise can be a healthy way to express your feelings.

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