

Managing My Stress

OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify physical and emotional signs and symptoms of stress in oneself.
2. Assess personal stress management strategies.
3. Describe three new stress management strategies to try.

HANDOUTS:

1. *Sources of Stress*
2. *How Stress Affects Your ...*
3. *How Well Do I Manage Stress?*
4. *Take Home Message for This Session*

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Scrapbooking materials
- Flipchart and markers
- Pencils and pens

GETTING STARTED

Review the last session on active listening. Ask participants to talk about the results of using active listening in their conversations with other family members or their co-parent.

In an earlier session, you drew two pictures: one of yourself under stress and one of your child's co-parent under stress. Let's look at those drawings again. As you look at these pictures today, what do you see about how you experience stress?

- How do you feel stress in your body?
- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling?

Now look at your co-parent's drawing. Is there anything you would change on the drawing? How is your co-parent feeling stress in his or her body, thoughts, and feelings?

Today, we are going to talk about ways to soothe or calm yourself, and better manage your stress. We especially want you to learn some strategies that will help you to deal with your stress when in conflict with others.

When we are under stress, our emotional temperature can go very high (anger) and or very low (depressed). We tend to do and say things that we do not mean to do in order to relieve our stress. We also tend to justify our stress by saying we are experiencing "bad luck" or we are "having a bad day." We can help ourselves handle life's various demands by learning to identify stress and deal with it as soon as possible.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Sources of Stress

If stress is a significant problem for the group you are working with, you might consider adding this exercise before doing the other sessions in this module.

*Stress is not a bad thing. We all need a certain amount of stress to motivate us to take action. However, too much stress can cause problems. Let's review the handout titled **Sources of Stress**. Read each item and rate your level of stress for this item from one to five. "One" means that this is not stressful for you and "five" means it is extremely stressful. When finished add up your stress score. How did you do?*

Keep in mind that some stress comes from experiencing certain life events, like the death of a parent. We also know that new parents have more stress. Families where one member is in the military and on active duty have more stress. What problems or issues are you currently experiencing that cause stress?

It is important for you to understand what is causing stress for you—it is the first step for dealing with stress.

- What is your number one source of stress? (Have the parent circle it)
- What do you think is the number one source of stress for your partner or your child's co-parent? (Have the parent circle it)

It's important to know when you are under stress. Many people do not know they are stressed until they do something like lose their temper or overeat. Remember stress is not a bad thing.

ACTIVITY: **Signs of Stress**

Not only do you need to know what causes you stress, you need to be able to understand when you are under stress. This may sound silly to you but many people do not know they are stressed until they do something like lose their temper or overeat.

On the handout **How Stress Affects Your ...** check off the signs of stress that you frequently experience. In particular, check those that you did not include your drawing.

Look over your list.

- What items did you check?
- Did you discover some ways you experience stress that you didn't include in your drawing? What were they?
- How can understanding how you feel stress help you better cope with it?

Be sure to not ignore the physical warnings of stress. See a doctor if experiencing these symptoms.

ACTIVITY: **How Well Do I Manage Stress?**

Part I: My Stress Management Strengths

Prepare flip charts with the discussion questions and to write down responses of participants.

Once you know how you feel stress, it's important to have strategies for soothing or calming yourself down when you feel that you're under stress—or for preventing stress.

Discuss in pairs and write down your ideas:

- What things do you think you do well in helping yourself to manage the stress? Also, what have you tried that didn't work?

- What advice would you give to someone about how to do this?
- Who in your life helps you manage your stress? How do they help you?
- Why is it important to have others help you manage stress?

Once participants finish their discussions, have them share their answers and write down the strategies for managing stress they used.

Part II: Rating How Well I Manage Stress

For the next section, ahead of time prepare large posters or a sheet of paper rolled out across the wall horizontally. Write in large letters the four categories of strategies for managing stress (outlook or thoughts, self-care or health, lifestyle or actions, and relationship). Next to or underneath each heading, a picture can be drawn to match the topic. Then draw blocks with the specific numbered strategies—allowing room for the participants to put in their faces.

Draw three different faces: smiling, straight, and frowning near the rolled out sheet of paper on the wall ... and next to each face the words "I'm doing great," or "I'm doing okay, but not great," or "I have trouble doing this."

You have listed some good strategies and why these strategies are important for us as couples. Now, let's think about ways to be even better at managing stress. We have listed strategies on these posters.

Because of the list we created together, you already have a good idea of areas where you are already strong. But it might be helpful to consider some other strategies that you don't use a lot right now and think about how to bring them into your lives.

We won't put you "on the spot" individually!

We'll see how we're doing as a group. You're going to go around the room and look at the posters that list these different areas of stress management. For each one you'll decide—if this is something you do a pretty good job with already—you'll draw a smiley face. If this is an area where you're doing "ok"—you'll draw a straight face. If this is something that is a real challenge for you—you'll draw a frowny face. Think about your response as we read through these. Let me know if you have any questions on any of these.

Read through with participants to orient them—either using PowerPoint slides or making posters. Pause to see if any strategy needs to be explained.

Outlook Skills

Changing your thinking and attitude about stressors...

1. I look at my stressors in a positive way.
2. I don't get hung up on things that I have no control over.
3. I use creativity, humor, and spiritual inspiration to improve my outlook.
4. I truly believe that I am capable of managing my stress and will ultimately be successful.

Self-Care Skills

Building up your body to withstand long-term pressure...

1. I pay attention to my stress signs.
2. I don't skip meals.
3. I keep sugar, fat, salt and caffeine to a minimum.
4. I eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains every day.
5. I drink six to eight glasses of water a day.
6. I limit or have eliminated the use of alcohol and tobacco products.
7. I have received (or would get) help for substance abuse issues.

8. I do 20 minutes of physical work or exercise three times a week.
9. I have 20 minutes a day of quiet time.

Lifestyle Management Skills

Managing your environment to promote stress management...

1. I have a relaxing place to go to.
2. I have control over what I'm involved in and can say "no." I have control of the way I spend time and energy. I say no to demands as appropriate.
3. I get rid of stressors that can be eliminated.
4. I set goals and move toward achieving them.
5. I schedule free time in my day for relaxing.
6. I notice stress and take action to manage it.

Working together with your spouse, partner, or other important person to manage stress...

1. We make each other aware if we notice stress signs in each other.
2. We talk together about how to manage stress.
3. We have a supportive relationship; we are "cheerleaders" for each other.
4. We talk in a supportive way with each other daily.
5. We have a satisfying sexual relationship.

Now, let's go around the room and put up our "faces."

To get the group started, the presenter draws her/his own faces...being sure to have some that are great, some that are poor, and some that are okay.

After participants have finished walking around the room and drawing their "faces"—discuss the group responses. The facilitator will be able to look at each one and tell where there is a group of smiley faces—a mix of faces—a group of frowning faces.

Discuss with the group:

- *Let's see where we're doing well ... (as a review of the first discussion)*
- *Let's see where we need to focus some attention...*

ACTIVITY: **Scrapbook Page**

Have participants prepare a scrapbook page that shows the participant's strengths for managing stress and how effectively managing stress is important for positive parenting.

HOMEWORK:

Also, have the participants take a minute to complete the **Take-Home Message** for their magnet. The action step should focus on using the new stress management strategies they learned.

CLOSING:

Today, we learned to recognize what causes stress in our lives, how we respond to stress, and how it affects our body, feelings, and actions.

Our home and work place can cause us stress or help us reduce our stress. We often expect people who are closest to us to "cut us some slack" or help us when we are under stress. Over the next week, pay attention to your stress, where it comes from and how you respond. Identify the different ways people in your life help you deal with stress or make it better. We'll begin our next session talking about what you learn.

Sources of Stress



On the next page is a list of some commonly experienced stressors in people's lives.

Score yourself on a ranking from 1-5: 1 is not stressful at all to 5 is extremely stressful.

You may not have experienced all of these stressors, and therefore can leave those that you have not experienced blank.

There are also blanks for you to fill in stressors that are not already on this list.

After you have completed this assessment, add up your points to determine your level of stress.

Sources of Stress

Not Stressful At All

Moderately Stressful

Extremely Stressful

1 ☺

2

3 ☹

4

5 ☹

- Losing health benefits
- Divorce
- Relationship break-up
- Detention in jail
- Detention of family member or partner in jail
- No health insurance
- Death of a close family member
- Partner lost a job
- Finding transportation
- Change in living conditions
- Military deployment
- Changing personal habits
- Feeling unsafe in neighborhood due to crime
- Race-related stress
- Change in working hours
- Personal injury or illness
- Can't find a job
- Being fired from work
- Change in church activities
- Sick children
- Loss of a friend

- Caring for elderly parents
- Change in sleeping habits
- Change in eating habits
- Not having enough money to pay bills
- Change in health or behavior of family member
- Pregnancy
- Job changes
- Sexual difficulties
- Gaining a new family member
- Change in finances
- Death of a close friend
- Finding and paying for child care
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-
-
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Under 15 is lower stress; 15 to 30 is moderate stress; 30+ is higher stress

How Stress Affects Your ...

How Stress Affects Your ... Body

From the list below, check off any of the physical symptoms that you frequently have under stress that you didn't think to put in your drawing.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart races | <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased appetite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness | <input type="checkbox"/> Tapping fingers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cold hands, sweaty palms | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel like you're in a "fog" | <input type="checkbox"/> Cramps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Face feels hot, flushed | <input type="checkbox"/> Neck tightens up | <input type="checkbox"/> Backaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tightness of chest | <input type="checkbox"/> Legs get shaky | <input type="checkbox"/> Grind teeth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach | <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of appetite | <input type="checkbox"/> Fidgety |

How Stress Affects Your ... Emotions and Feelings

From the list below, check off any of the emotional symptoms that you frequently have under stress that you didn't think to put in your drawing.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easily angered | <input type="checkbox"/> Argumentative | <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crying | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling violent or ready to "rage" |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower sex drive | <input type="checkbox"/> Inflexible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cynical | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling exhausted | <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to sleep | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can't concentrate | <input type="checkbox"/> Aggression | |

How Stress Affects ... What You Do

From the list below, check off any of the behavioral symptoms that you frequently have under stress that you didn't think to put in your drawing.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under-eating | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased smoking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep to escape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over-eating | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug and alcohol use | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Withdraw from people | <input type="checkbox"/> Accident prone | |

How Well Do I Manage Stress?

Below are four groups of steps that people can take to manage their stress. Draw the face that best describes your progress next to each step.

 I'm doing great.

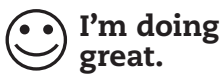
 I'm doing okay, but not great.

 I have trouble with this.

OUTLOOK SKILLS	How Well Am I Doing?
I look at my stressors in a positive way.	
I don't get hung up on things that I have no control over.	
I use creativity, humor, and spiritual inspiration to improve my outlook.	
I truly believe that I am capable of managing my stress and will ultimately be successful.	
SELF-CARE SKILLS	How Well Am I Doing?
I pay attention to my stress signs.	
I don't skip meals.	
I keep sugar, fat, salt and caffeine to a minimum.	
I eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains every day.	
I drink six to eight glasses of water a day.	
I limit or have eliminated the use of alcohol and nicotine products.	
I have received (or would get) help for substance abuse issues.	
I do 20 minutes of physical work or exercise three times a week.	
I have 20 minutes a day of quiet time.	

How Well Do I Manage Stress?

Below are four groups of steps that people can take to manage their stress. Draw the face that best describes your progress next to each step.



LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT	How Well Am I Doing?
I have created a space that invites me to relax.	
I have control over what I'm involved in and can say "no." I have control of the way I spend time and energy.	
I get rid of stressors that can be eliminated.	
I set goals and organize myself in a way to move toward achieving them.	
I schedule free time in my day for doing nothing.	
I practice some kind of stress management daily.	
RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES	How Well Am I Doing?
I make my partner (co-parent) aware if I notice stress signs in him or her.	
We talk together about how to manage stress.	
We have a supportive relationship; we are a "cheerleader" for each other.	
We talk in a supportive way with each other daily.	
We have a satisfying physical relationship.	

Take Home Message for This Session

Directions: Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**Managing my stress is
an important step toward
positive parenting.**

My Action Steps:

.....
.....

The Next Session:

.....
DATE
.....
TIME
.....
LOCATION

