



## **Managing Stressors During Our Most Challenging Times**

We all have stress in our lives. Stress comes in many forms, though how we handle ourselves as we weather the storm, has an impact not only on us but on everyone and everything around us. The stress of balancing our lives between work and family obligations is often overwhelming. Sometimes we want to have everything stop for a little bit so we can catch our breath. During these challenging times with our altered work realities, and uncertainty about our futures, stress is impacting us more than we ever imagined. Examining the difference between challenges that are occurring around us and the ones that are internal to us can then lead to a better understanding of how we can better manage stressors and maintain more emotional balance in our lives.

Why is managing stress that important? Both internal and external stressors can cause physical, mental, and behavioral problems. Some of the physical issues caused by stress are headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, gastrointestinal issues, high blood pressure, and difficulty breathing. The mental effects of stress can be crying, irritability, confusion, frustration, outbursts, forgetfulness, feeling guilty, depression and anxiety. And lastly, behavioral issues caused by stress are overeating, isolating from others, alcohol and drug abuse and overspending.

We all have external stressors. These are the challenges that we tackle routinely. External stressors can be employer expectations, childcare or eldercare issues, household duties, parenting responsibilities, financial issues and disturbing news events. Our daily stressors can become more acute in nature when we experience sudden or increased ongoing stress. Some examples of acute stress would be having a car breaking down, bad weather, health issues, a traumatic incident and the ongoing pandemic that has affected everyone across the globe in various ways.

Internal stressors are the stressors that we place upon ourselves. Internal stressors are caused by our expectations and pressures and sometimes our own beliefs that are not adaptive to our wellbeing. Such stressors can often lead to anxiety and depressed feelings and at times, go hand in hand with a negative attitude that can influence how well we care for ourselves and interact with others. An example of an internal stressor would be holding the notion that you “can’t” make mistakes as you try to balance your work, household responsibilities and the education of your children all at the same time. Another example of an internal stressor is spending a great deal of time in thought (sometimes consumed) about the negative aspects of a crisis or event vs. recognizing your own resilience over the past year. Remember to spend time thinking about the personal lessons and positive experiences that may have also come about from these external challenges.

Examining your overall approach to adversity and making adaptive adjustments to your internal assessments, expectations and underlying beliefs might be the single most important thing you can do to help you manage stress in your life. It’s about eliminating the overly negative thinking that causes you emotional disturbance. There is no doubt, we all need our time to grieve, to feel frustration, and even the most resilient among us can be irritable during stressful times. Though the task at hand is to think constructively about what we can make better, to think about what we can control and to accept uncertainty and imperfection when appropriate. This is not always easy especially during a time when public health, economic, and societal crisis overlap our existing stress. Though with each small accomplishment we become less immobilized and helpless and more resilient to the heightened levels of external stress that comes our way.

As for external stressors, there are many coping strategies that we can implement to mitigate the physical, mental and behavioral effects. However, the following practices can help us feel more in control and confident when faced with these challenges.

Sharpen your communication skills. When we listen and communicate well with others we can better understand them, and their expectations of us. In turn, we can clearly share our own expectations. Taking it upon ourselves to talk with your supervisor to better understand expectations, policies and goals in a changed work environment is one way to tackle work stress. It also helps to have meetings with family members to address concerns, share ideas, establish needed boundaries and find ways to help each other through difficult times.

Don’t forget to set aside specific time to care for you. In finding ways to take care of ourselves, there’s a better chance that you will feel that your time is more balanced and

you will feel more in control of yourself in times of adversity. We all have our unique ways (music, exercise, meditation, drawing etc.) of engaging in an activity that brings peace and calm and self-fulfillment to our soul. Moreover, don't forget to give yourself breaks and reward yourself for getting through a difficult task or a difficult day.

Life is surely a balancing act filled with hurdles and personal challenges, especially at this current time. Learning to adapt by being conscientious about changing your mental narrative when your mental well-being is at stake and regularly practicing healthy routines for stress management, contributes to work/life balance and ultimately personal growth. For additional information and individual assistance for managing stress contact **HelpPeople EAP at 315-470-7447**.



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