



Seeking Center: How to Find Calm in the Midst of Chaos Handout

*"The green reed that bends in the wind is stronger than the mighty oak that breaks in a storm."
Confucius*

Is the stress in your life taking a toll on you? How can you manage your life challenges, so they don't take such a toll on your wellbeing? How can you become the reed that bends instead of breaks when life gets tough? Learn to recognize, understand and address your stress so that it limits the harm done. When you are able to cope well with a challenge, you can actually build your strength and grow as a person.

Understanding Stress

Stress can come in many individual forms. Three general qualities evident in many of the stressful experiences you face include:

Uncertainty-something is threatening you or a loved one's wellbeing or sense of security and you are unsure of the outcome or what the future may hold

Loss of Control-when something that matters to you is threatened and you have little to no control over that threat

Overwhelming pace or amount of demands-this quality refers to the number of demands placed on you and the rate at which you have to keep up with them

Noticing Stress

Your physical response to a threat- Hormones flood your body to prepare you to fight or flee. Your body:

- heats up
- heart rate increases
- breathing becomes shallow and rapid
- thoughts race
- stomach and muscles tense

Pay attention to this stress reaction. In the short term it helps you respond. If you are stressed for a long period of time it wears at your body.

Is your physical stress response wearing on your body? How do you notice it?



Reactions to Stress

How do you respond to Stress?

- **Increased intensity-** increased activity, agitated, irritable, angry, impatient, sleepless, loud, impulsive
- **Decreased response-** avoid, become withdrawn, stick your head in the sand, Space out, become quiet and depressed
- **Worry-** try to control or prepare for the future outcome by wasting time and energy worrying about what you have no control over
- **Avoidant behaviors-**over eating, sleeping, drinking or using substances, spending, smoking trying to get relief

Strategies to Cope with Stress

Recognize the Stress- Pay attention to yourself. Don't let stress reactions go unattended. Build up your reserves of coping by caring for yourself regularly. Speak up for yourself. Express your feelings. Exercise to relieve stress.

Uncertainty- Ground yourself in the facts. Learn more. Focus on what is happening in the present. Interrupt fearful thoughts of the unknown. Identify what you can do to deal with the issue now. Face your fears and they will subside. Learn to accept uncertainty. Remember how you have dealt with problems in the past. Focus on your strengths and supports.

Loss of Control- Identify what is in your control and do what you can. Clarify your responsibilities. Allow others to control their own life. Accept what you cannot change. Stop trying to be perfect. Accept and forgive mistakes made. Let go of control.

Increased Intensity- Slow down. Calm down. Engage in soothing activities. Meditate or listen to relaxation tapes. Notice your tone of voice. Quiet down and breathe.

Decreased Response- Get up and get moving. Face the facts. Problem solve and seek solutions. Reach out for help. Share your feelings don't bottle them up.

Worrying- Interrupt worrying. Change your focus of attention. Stay in the present.

Pace and Overwhelmed with Demands- Slow down. Consider if you are asking too much of yourself. Find ways to cut back. Ask for help. Make yourself a priority. Share your feelings and needs. Get organized. Set limits and learn to say no. Learn to accept you are doing your best. Unplug and make time to reflect in quiet. Develop daily rituals to relax and care for yourself. Exercise and engage the pleasure of all your senses. Get outside and enjoy nature. Connect with others.