

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

Guide to Dealing
With Stress as a Parent

By

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About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

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Guide to Dealing With Stress as a Parent

Everyone experiences stress. A little stress is considered a good thing. It keeps us alert, sharp and operating at peak performance. Too much stress can be debilitating. It can paralyze us and devastate our health. In a world that is filled with one crisis after another -some on a national scale such as a political scandal, and others on a smaller scale such as a child falling and scraping their elbow - we are continually placed in the path of stressful circumstances. It is easier to find solutions for the smaller events (a band-aid and a hug will suffice for a scraped elbow). But for other stressful events such as a job loss, financial difficulty, relationship problems or health concerns, the solutions are not so obvious. The reality is that many of the daily problems we face as parents don't have a quick, easy, satisfying solution and remain unresolved. As a result our lives come under the pressure of something called residual stress.

Residual stress is stress that remains as a result of unresolved problems. This stress may start to manifest itself in ways we don't often recognize. Dealing with the source of the stress is about problem solving. This booklet will take a look at some of those symptoms and suggest ways we can increase our awareness of stress issues. It will also address the decisions we can make and the actions we can do that will assist us in managing our stress levels.

Stress and anger are often considered two sides of the same coin. Although the focus in this booklet is on ways of managing stress, many of the suggestions are also effective in helping us control our anger.

As unique individuals our ability to cope with stress varies. As parents the way we handle stress will leave a lasting legacy to our children – a legacy of blessing or a burden of impairment.

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- Stress – warning signs
- Whose problem is it?
- Effective Problem solving skills
- Are you a work addict?
- Stress Busting Activities



STRESS – WARNING SIGNS.

Research has produced several warning signs of excessive stress. Individually they may not pose a problem, however three or more symptoms may indicate a mental health issue that has its origin in excessive stress levels. Thoughtfully consider if the following signs are present in your life.

- Persistent sadness
- Loss of interest
- Decreased energy
- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disturbances
- Feelings of hopelessness/guilt
- Thoughts of suicide
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Chronic aches
- Difficulty concentrating



WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?

In our walk through life we face many external influences. External influences come in many shapes and forms such as bribes, money, coercion, physical force, manipulation, coaching and consequences. Our challenge is to see that these are “just” influences – they do not control us. As much as others may seek to control us, the reality remains that the only person who can control you is you. Conversely, we must realize that we can attempt to influence others, but we cannot control their behaviors.

Focusing on our own behaviors and choosing those behaviors which are more effective will assist us in managing our stress levels. Effective behaviors are those that move us closer to what we want. Less effective behaviors do not move us in the direction of our goals or vision. Having a clear understanding that each of us is internally motivated and that external influences are just that – influences, is a significant first step in managing any stressful circumstance.

As parents we have a responsibility to ensure our children live and grow in an environment that is safe and nurturing. Part of that responsibility is to protect our children from those external influences that threaten their normal stress levels.

So the question arises: “Whose problem is it?”. Children must not be burdened with adult problems. We, as adults and parents, need the wisdom to deal with our own stress related issues and the discernment to recognize and refuse to deal with circumstances over which we have no influence.

Use the following questions to help you discern whether or not circumstances are within your influence, and if so what actions you might take.

- Whose responsibility is this?
- Can I have an impact?
- Can I influence someone who can make an impact?
- What steps can I take to solve the problem?



PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Much of what we face today as parents relates directly to problem solving. When problems get solved, stress levels remain low. When problems persist, stress levels rise. Equipping ourselves with a foundation of effective problem solving skills is an essential ingredient for good stress management.

Effective Problem Solving Skills

1. Communication skills
 - a. Communicate in behavioral language
 - b. Demonstrate empathy
 - c. Use effective interpersonal skills – active listening, paraphrasing, summarizing.
2. Conflict management skills
 - a. Learn a conflict model and use it
 - b. Understand the continuum of conflict
 - i. How it starts
 - ii. How it develops
 - iii. And what to do about it
3. Relationship building skills
 - a. Understand the conditions of a healthy relationship
 - b. Know and accept that it is important to build respectful relationships
4. Assessment skills
 - a. Know when to step back
 - b. Know when to just gather data

c. Know when to fight for what is right

Information about each of these problem-solving skills can be found in other *Step-By-Step To Effective Parenting* booklets.



ARE YOU A WORK ADDICT?

Why are you so busy? Do you really have too much work? Is work so important to you that you'll sacrifice just about anything in your life to get the job done? Even if it's at the expense of your health and family? Stress can be caused by many factors; however, the for many people it is their inability to organize themselves and their time. They also have difficulty saying 'no' or they may be a work addict.

The following short quiz begins to identify the work addict. Simply answer "yes" or "no" to each question.

1. Do you work more than 50 hours a week?
2. Do you dream about work?
3. Do you wake up in the middle of the night 'stressed' over work?
4. Do you feel that in order to succeed you must work late or at home - most of the time?
5. Are you a stranger in your own home?
6. Do you constantly miss family and social events because you're always working?
7. Do you schedule and undertake more than you can get done in a 40-hour work week?
8. Do you get bored when you're not working?
9. Is missing family and social events because of work unavoidable?
10. When on holiday do you constantly check your phone messages and email?

The greater the number of yes answers, the closer you are to fitting the profile of a work addict. If you've answered yes to more than half of the questions, it's time to take make more effective choices before you lose your health, family and everything you hold near and dear to your heart.



STRESS BUSTING ACTIVITIES¹

Stress and its flip side, anger, impede our ability to be happy, to build relationships and to create successful families. This double sided coin also reduces our social skills, making it difficult to process information and make effective decisions.

What works to read you stress? The following techniques are ways to work with the uncomfortable emotions associated with stress. They are not listed in any particular order. Individuals have a tendency to select a favorite one or two and use them more extensively.

Deep Breathing

When you are stressed, you might contract your body and hold your breath to try to squish the feelings in order to keep from feeling bad. Pulling your body in tight and stopping your breath keeps you from getting good oxygen to deal with whatever upsets you.

Whenever you are stressed or angry, use your breath to make yourself strong and powerful! Your breath is your best friend! It will always be with you when you want to calm yourself down. Make your breath go down deep into your body as far as you can. Deep breathing which goes down past the rib cage into the belly helps you feel relaxed as it bring good, life-affirming oxygen into your body. Breathing helps calm the fight, flight or freeze reaction that you can go into when stressed. Deep breathing helps bring you back where you can think more clearly and reason!

¹ Adapted from Howard Cutler and Richard Davidson, *The Art of Happiness*

Imagery

Your powerful imagination can make pictures in your mind to release unhappy experiences and bad feelings. Your subconscious mind does not know the difference between reality and fantasy.

Sometimes you can trick it by using your imagination to make pictures in your mind to change what you are feeling. You can use symbols and rituals to release your anger, fear, sadness and other uncomfortable feelings.

Make up a story of somewhere safe where you want to send a bad feeling—to the moon, to the center of the earth or the North Pole. See the feelings coming out of you and rushing off to that safe place. You can picture cooling water being poured on your stress to put it out or someone loving coming to comfort you when you are sad. Use your imagination!

Positive Thinking

The research on brain function shows that certain areas of the left side of the brain activate and light up when you engage in positive thinking. The brain chemicals, which create a sense of well being, are turned on when you keep your mind in a positive mind set. There are many books written on happiness to show you how to get the most out of your life. Get in the habit of becoming aware when you are thinking negative thoughts and learn ways to shift those thoughts.

Positive Self Talk

Talking to yourself to calm down when you are upset is a form of Cognitive Behavioral Psychology. Self Talk statements give you a new way of looking at things. You can learn to be your own cheerleader and coach when you tell yourself positive words about what you want. See yourself becoming how you want to be. "Chill out" words will help talk yourself down when you are upset. Remind

yourself to breathe and keep your cool. Talk to yourself to become strong and resilient.

Talk Your Feelings Out

Two heads can be better than one when figuring tricky things out. Talking about your feelings with a safe person can help you get a new perspective. A safe person is someone who can listen to you, take your feelings seriously and will keep your private information confidential. They can help you problem solve and figure out what to do with your problem. If talking to your friends or parents doesn't help solve your problems, then you may need to consult with someone who is trained in counseling to help you work things out.

Write about Your Feelings

Writing about what happened that upset you and your feelings about it helps you get them out of your head. The research shows that writing about their feelings and their problems helps people feel better. Writing about the day's events and the things that upset you is called journaling. Consider getting a special book, a personal diary, or open a confidential file on your computer, so that you can privately write about the things that make you feel uncomfortable or upset.



FINAL STEP

It's a Tough World out There!

Today's life is so stressful. Gather all the tools you can to help you deal with the daily grind that faces you. Learn all these approaches and use them daily as you go through life. As parents you have the added responsibility of family. The joy, peace and blessings of a family make this journey an exciting one. The knowledge and practice of stress busting is a skill that all family members can learn and practice.

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aid – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family

36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child
39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child
 - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE