

DEAL WITH YOUR STRESS

Identify what is causing you stress.

Don't ignore or gloss over your problems. If something is bothering you, identify what it is. If you think it shouldn't be bothering you stop and ask yourself why it does. Taking the time to identify the serious stressors in your life will help you come up with a strategy for managing them.

Recognize what you can change.

If you can't change what's bothering you, change your response to the problem or learn to channel your frustration in another way. People find comfort in patterns, even if those patterns are stressful. Maybe it's time to change those patterns. If you can't change your stressors in life, maybe you can change the situation (different environment) or your response (humor) to lessen the most stressful situations.

Reduce the intensity of your reactions.

Should you be reacting so strongly to the situation? Sometimes, we need to put things in perspective. You may be overreacting and seeing the situation as more stressful than it is. Take a breath; walk out of the room; accept that no one's perfect, including your parents, coworkers, teachers, children, and yourself. Step back and ask yourself if what's bothering you deserves all your attention and energy.

Re-examine your attitudes and 'obligations'.

Are you putting yourself under too much stress? Are you trying to be all things to all people? Sometimes in trying too hard to do good for others, we aren't doing well for ourselves. Stop and examine your priorities in life -- and don't forget to name yourself as one of those priorities. You don't want to set the bar too low, but you don't want to set it so high that it's overwhelming.

Organize yourself.

Are you spreading yourself too thin? Overwork and fatigue are one of the most common causes of stress. Maybe you are taking on too much: learn to say no to things that will not affect your job, school or relationships. Spending time with family and friends is important, but sometimes you need down time and time to rest.

Develop emotional supports and use them.

Do you have someone you can talk to about your life? Having someone you can share both the good and bad with is important. If you have a large group of friends, lean on them in times of difficulty; you wouldn't turn them away if they needed you, would you? If you don't have a large network, start to build one. Join a group or organization where people will share your interests. Seek assistance from professionals (health care, counselors, religious advisors) who are experienced and comfortable in giving support.

Let it all out.

Laugh. Cry. Scream. Sometimes you need to let out your emotions and few tools are better than the ones God gave us. Saving these emotional outbursts for a private, comfortable setting is important; crying, screaming and laughing hysterically at work or school will more likely add to your stress. These mechanisms offer some of the most immediate means of stress relief -- they just shouldn't be your only way of dealing with stress.