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# WORK AND FAMILY

# STRESS

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FAMILY LIVING EDUCATION  
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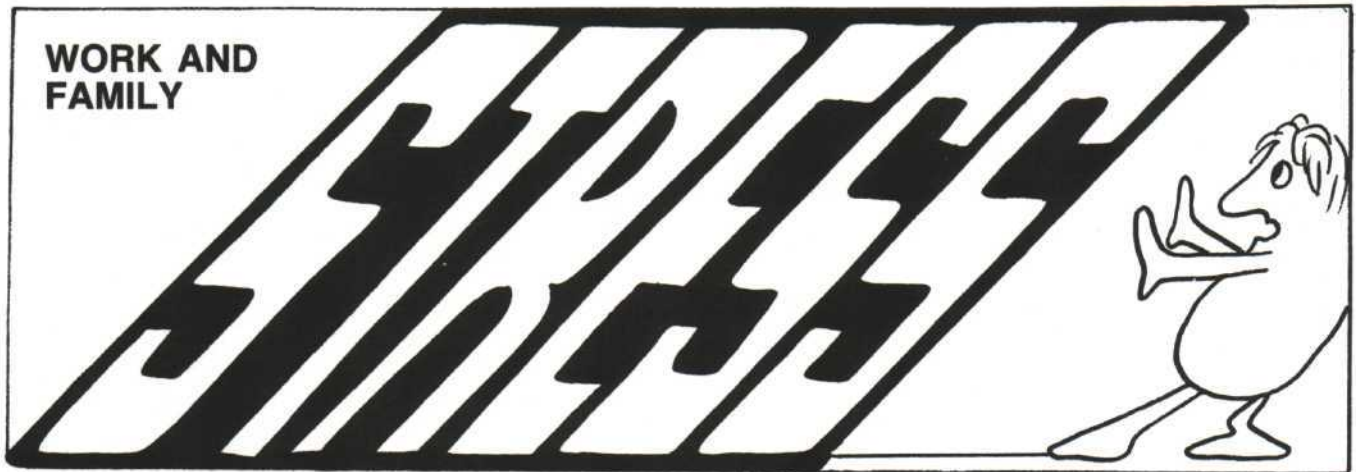


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## Introduction: Work and Family Stress

TODAY'S TREND toward greater family involvement in the work force by both men and women has been accompanied by a visible increase in individual and family stress. We see signs of it in the high divorce rates that continue to escalate, in those burned out on the job, in hostile and withdrawn children who are products of inadequate child care, and in poorly functioning individuals who have obviously pushed themselves beyond reasonable limits in an effort to respond to family and job demands.

The problems experienced on a job often resurface in family life. Similarly, the pressures of family life have negative impact on a person's work productivity and overall ability to be an effective employee.

The increasing numbers of two-paycheck marriages and single working parents appears to be here to stay. These lifestyles predominate in America. However, since most of today's adults did not grow up with both parents working or in single-parent households, the absence of early role models increases their uncertainty in later trying to blend together work and family responsibilities. Many feel pressured to be "terrific" parents, highly productive

employees, and responsive spouses—in other words, SUPER PEOPLE.

The purpose of this publication is to provide information about the nature of individual and family stress and ways in which it may be compounded when working outside the home demands considerable and constant changes within the family. Included is a consideration of certain personality traits and behaviors that may actually increase tension in the work and family settings.

Because it does little good to just talk about the impact of stress, suggestions are provided for working toward positive stress management.

It is hoped that the information will help families:

- learn more about the positive and negative effects of stress
- heighten understanding of the dynamic inter-relationship between families and work places
- increase personal awareness about the ways the two systems are often in conflict, generating stress in both settings
- set and implement personal, professional, and family goals in order to manage stress, thereby improving the quality of family life and labor-force productivity.

# The Nature Of Stress

## Defining Stress

Twenty years ago, the terms **stress** and **strain** were used most often by engineers and contractors. Technically, stress denotes the amount of force that can be applied to a structure before its **elasticity** is fully expanded. Strain is the amount of **distortion** the structure can withstand.

Today, the terms are popular in discussing **human structures** and behavior. How much stress and strain can human beings withstand before they cave in—physically, emotionally, or mentally?

Stress is now defined as the involuntary, non-specific production of excess energy in the body in order to meet the demands of daily living—events that we individually perceive as exciting, frightening, irritating or dangerous. In order to respond to these events—or **stressors**—our bodies undergo changes that prepare us for “fight,” “flight,” or simply quiet endurance.



## Physical Reactions To Stress

The complex body changes that occur in response to stress are stimulated by messages from the brain, nerves, and glandular systems. Any sort of demand on the mind or body first sets into action parts of the brain that regulate emotional control, biological functioning, and the autonomic system, causing a series of neurophysiological—or mind/body—reactions. It is important to see the connection between brain and body if we hope to manage our own behavior when we're under stress.

Next, the sympathetic nervous system gets into the act: blood moves quickly from hands and feet toward the head and trunk, and we feel such sensations as cold feet, chills, or clammy hands. Pupils

may dilate, the heart races, and the muscles in the neck, back, arms and legs tighten.

At the same time, the parasympathetic system stimulates hormones that help us cope with stress by temporarily increasing heart action. Blood pressure is elevated. We may perspire, feel nervous and shaky, and breathe more rapidly and deeply. Adrenalin (the fear hormone) and nonadrenalin (the anger hormone) pour through our bodies, causing a quick release of energy.

There is growing belief that the stress reaction, if experienced often enough and long enough, actually interferes with the body's immune system. If this is so, there is good reason to pay closer attention to the situations in which we commonly find ourselves under stress.

Avoiding stress would be both undesirable and impossible. Stress, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad. We need certain amounts in order to just get out of bed in the morning—to help us face unpleasant situations, or to deal with the excitement of a new and promising relationship. Every time we perceive any change in our environment—however small or important—a chemical and emotional reaction helps us assimilate that change. In effect, we are thrown slightly or greatly off balance, and the body involuntarily decreases that imbalance to set our world straight again.

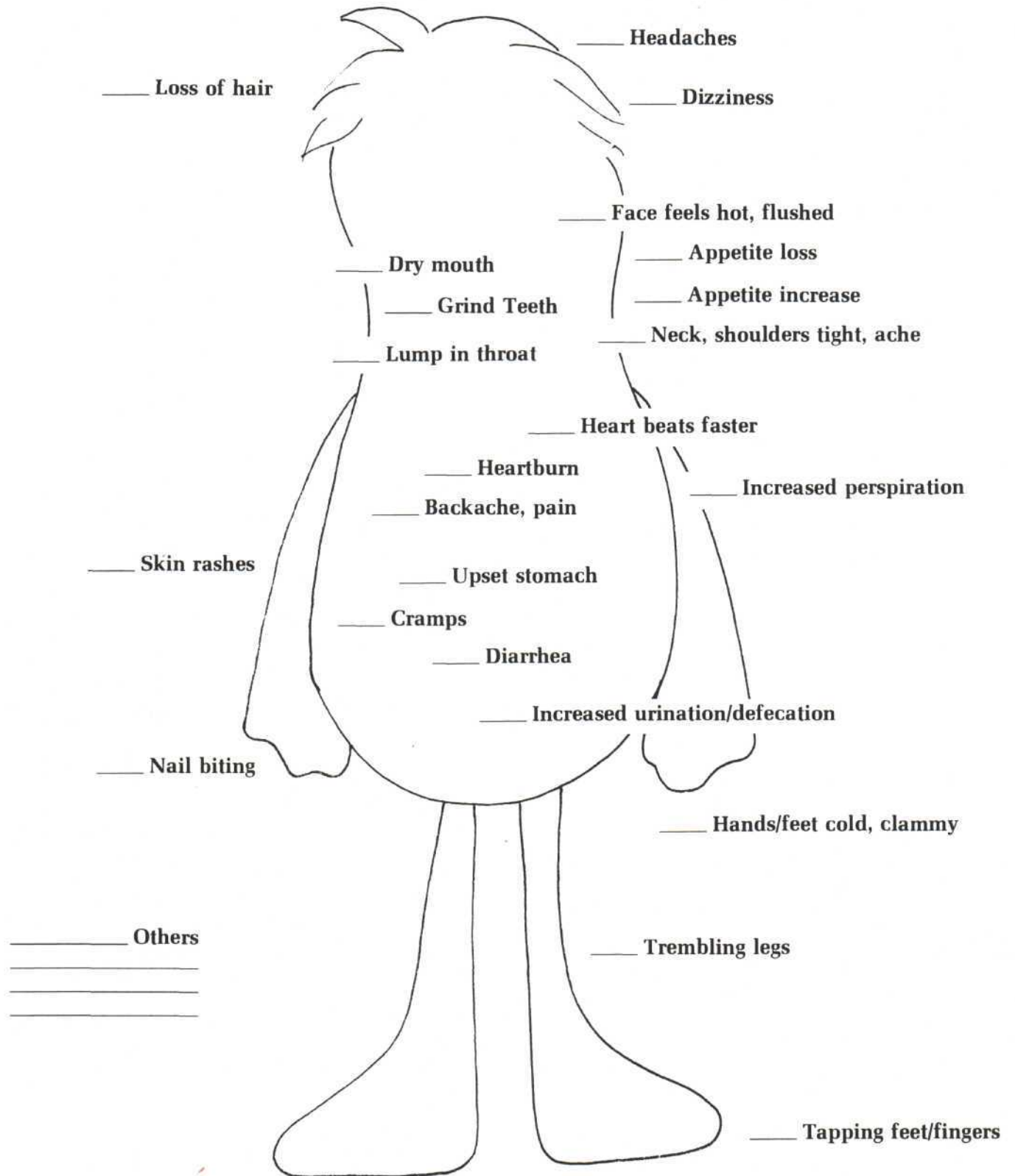
## Sources of Stress

The many sources of stress, or stressors, fit into four categories: fear, overload/underload, change, and ambiguity or uncertainty. Fear is the category which most allows us to **feel** physical reaction to stress. We have no doubt when we are frightened. Our heart pumps faster and pounds. There may be noticeable trembling, and breathing may become more labored.

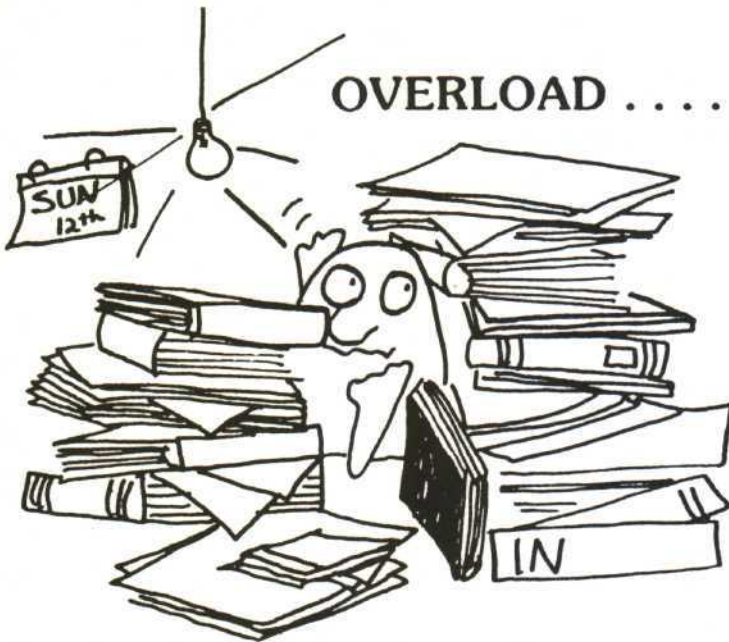
A “close call” in an automobile guarantees this kind of physical response. Another is a sudden scare while walking in a dark, isolated area. The mind signals danger, and the body responds intensely, putting us on the alert.

When experiencing other stressors, we may be less aware that stress is being generated. When we are **overloaded**, we may feel tense, worried, frustrated or angry. Often, however, we are more aware of the emotion than the actual physical change

# PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO STRESS



## OVERLOAD . . . .

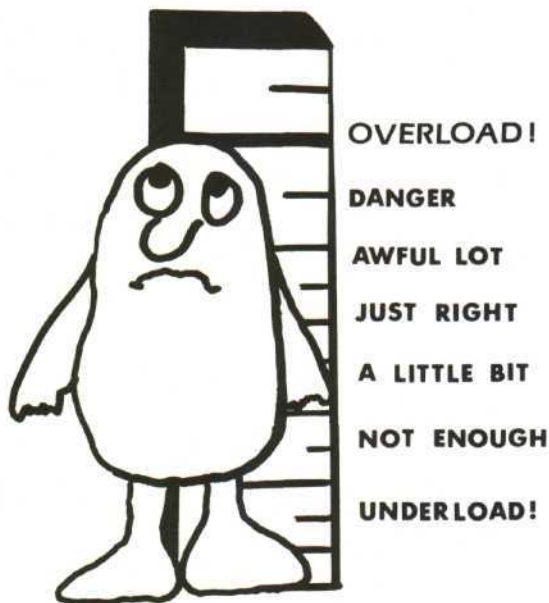


going on inside us—the response to the stressors. In this case we don't feel "up" to the task or tasks before us. The demands look overwhelming; and, consciously, we don't feel we have the personal resources—time, energy, patience, money, etc.—to deal with what is expected of us.

In contrast, but every bit as stressful, underload occurs whenever we are understimulated, i.e., do not experience enough demand in relation to resources we hold to meet demand. In short, not enough is happening in our lives and the stress generated as a result may propel us toward remedying that situation.

Even though change is always with us as a major category of stressors, change can be highly stressful, depending on how much adaptation is required:

- how pleasant or unpleasant we see the change to be
- the time it takes to occur, and
- how able we are to meet the challenge.



Also, because change is so much a part of our daily lives, we may be unaware of **cumulative demand** and may be rarely free from "being on alert." When this sort of demand becomes intensive and chronic, the production of high-level stress may also become chronic, though going unrecognized. High stress levels then become a way of life.

Uncertainty is the final category. Whenever we aren't sure of our direction, a possible outcome, or what is expected of us in a particular situation, we involuntarily put ourselves on alert.



## Behavioral Reactions to Stress

Though we are often unaware of stress, the tension resulting from the excess energy it produces will urge us to do something to cope with the event. It's believed that we learn our responses to stressors very early in life and that we respond to pressure in primarily one (or a combination) of the following ways:

1. We become aggressive, lashing out verbally or physically against perceived threats or threatening persons.
2. We withdraw, become immobilized and passive, and seek escape outlets in alcohol, daydreaming, drugs, sleep, or isolation.
3. We adapt to changing and uncomfortable situations when possible—or we change the way we feel about the situation. This requires assertive behavior and some sense of internal control—either over the event, or over our reaction to it.

Our primary tendency toward one of these outlets may be an outcome of having observed the important people in our lives when we were children. The way they coped with stress in their lives may have taught us lasting lessons in stress-coping. Our responses may also be partly the result, however, of inherent personality factors.

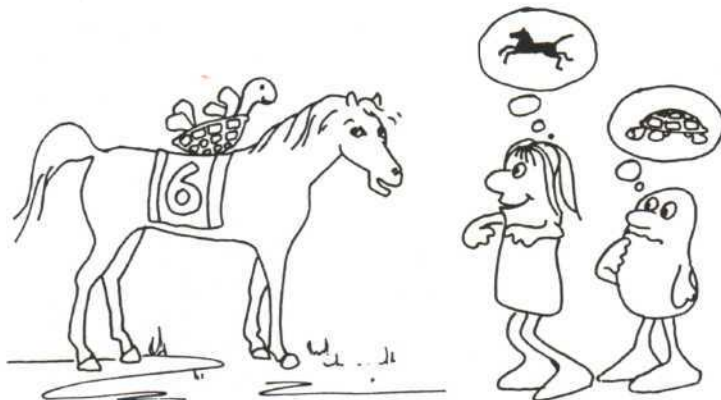
### Personality and Stress

Whether we inherit or acquire our personalities, they make a big difference in how we react to stressors. Some persons speed impatiently and aggres-



sively through life; they are inclined to talk fast, walk fast, and tend to be highly competitive. Labeled **Type A personalities**, they are almost predisposed to suffer more stress than their calmer **Type B** counterparts. It may also be true that they tend to induce stress in the more "laid back" Type B's as they urge them toward a life style that Type B's perceive as too hurried. On the other hand, Type B's, by their very nature, also induce stress in the more frantic A's. B's and A's differ significantly in their intensity, their preoccupation with time and schedules, and their need to exert control over others.

### Are you a "TURTLE" or a "RACE-HORSE"



Hans Selye (1978), who has been credited with heightening awareness about the potentially damaging effects of stress, notes that separating people into Type A or Type B may be a bit too drastic. He does, however, agree that personality differences do

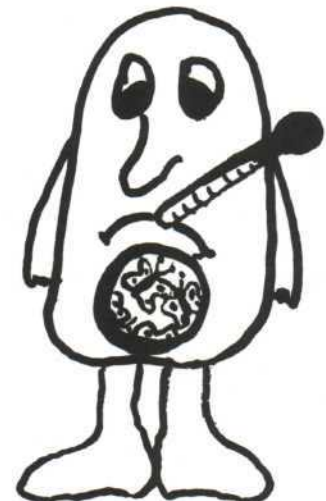
exist. Those who move at a naturally faster pace, he labels as "racehorses" and those who prefer a slower pace, "turtles." He insists that the important consideration is not the degree of difference, but the recognition of legitimate differences. We unduly pressure ourselves and others, he says, when we expect behavior that does not match personality.

### The Importance of Controlling Stress

The growing concern about stress appears wise, since we know that the consequences of unmanaged stress can be very serious. Inappropriate behavioral reactions involving aggression may have social consequences. We may harm ourselves emotionally or physically, destroy important relationships, or possibly suffer a stroke during an intense display of anger. Those who withdraw may suffer heavy personal losses, get involved in alcohol or drugs, overeat, suffer serious and prolonged depression, or try other equally debilitating escapes.

We should not minimize the physical dangers in poor stress management. We do not have infinite adaptability. Our bodies can only take so much insult before disease sets in. The bottom line is the documented fact that stress reduction takes the following down-hill course if not checked:

- Stage 1. **Alarm**—At first there is a generalized, overall reaction to stress. Muscles tense; the heart beats faster; lungs work harder to draw in oxygen.
- Stage 2. **Resistance/Restoration**—Particular organs are involved during high stress production—extremely elevated blood pressure; upset stomach or diarrhea, headaches. After any such "upset," restoration returns the body to near-normal functioning.
- Stage 3. Over time, the particular organ involved fails to restore pre-stress functioning. Disease may result such as chronic migraines, hypertension, cancer, colitis, or depression.





# Compounding Stress: Work and Family



## *Stress Is also a Family Affair*

We have been talking about events “out there” that cause actual physical and emotional changes in us **as individuals**. Stress management for the **entire family unit** is considerably more complex. Individual family members usually cannot discharge their tension independently; nor are they immune to the effects of stress in another member of the family. In other words, family stress is contagious.

Families have the responsibility of maintaining harmony among members and also to adapt the family unit to what is expected by society. Families, like individuals, differ a great deal in the numbers and kinds of stressors generated both inside and outside the family and in the resources they feel they have for dealing with stress.

Family resources are a collection of all the resources brought by each member—maturity, assertiveness, ability to function independently, and intelligence.

Family resources are enhanced when families have developed positive interaction patterns within the family—flexibility, organization, supportive behavior—and support outside as well—friendships and professional assistance if it is needed.

Like individuals, family units occasionally (or frequently) feel overloaded—too much demand and not enough resources. These situations can develop when an individual’s behavior is disapproved of by other members, or when the family collectively experiences a stressful event, such as chronic disability or death, or a loss of income. This pile-up of stress within families can be connected to “significant” stressors or may come about as the result of seemingly insignificant, normal, developmental changes. For example, let’s look at the Kemp family:

Bill Kemp has been laid off for close to a year, and his unemployment benefits will run out soon. His wife Janet, who had not worked in the 19 years of their marriage, has been clerking at the local grocery store for the past six months. She was recently asked to consider a management training program. The couple has two children—Karen, 17, a senior in high school and working on a co-op program at a department store 1:00 to 5:00 every day; and David, 15, a sophomore heavily involved in athletics.

Janet, returning home at 6:20 p.m. and carrying two large bags of groceries, sees breakfast dishes still on the kitchen table. The left-over egg yolks have dried on the plates. Bill is watching the 6:00 news and drinking a beer. David asks, “What’s for dinner, Mom?” Karen is in her room, studying for a math test tomorrow.

### GROUP EXPERIENCE

We can see that each member of the Kemp family is experiencing individual tensions that, brought together into one arena, are potentially explosive and damaging to the family unit as a whole.

1. Divide into small groups of 3–5.
2. Identify and discuss:
  - What FEARS are possibly operating in this family?
  - What CHANGES have possibly prompted these fears?
  - What UNCERTAINTIES/AMBIGUITY might be operating?
  - Who might be suffering from OVERLOAD or UNDERLOAD?

### How Do Families Cope With Stress?

When families get to the “pile-up” stage, one or more members may become uncomfortable enough that adaptation is called for in order to restore balance, or “all-rightness.” Families may then have to take another look at their resources for dealing with the stressful situation. It won’t matter if resources really are adequate if the family doesn’t perceive that they exist.

When perceived resources fail to meet the situation, the success or failure of the family to cope,

that is, to put up with or adapt in their present situation, will depend on the following:

- Will the family have the organizational ability to develop new resources?
- Are they genuinely concerned about each other's welfare?
- Can they realistically assess where individual members differ in how they see the stressful event?
- Can they work together to intergrate those differences so that all members feel supported and listened to?
- Can they generate some different alternatives (resources) for dealing with the situation?
- Can they mobilize themselves as a unit to implement the best of those alternatives?
- Can they then cope with the new change?

### Some Families Cope Well; Others Fail. Why?

Some families seem to rally from a crisis without apparent damage. They even seem to gain strength from their ordeal. Others fold under from less pressure. What makes the difference?



As a total family problem, coping cannot succeed if key family figures are not involved. Those families who are fairly successful in reducing stress tend to compromise whenever possible in order to keep member morale up. When compromise isn't possible, families who maintain solidarity seem able to tolerate or accept a less-than-perfect situation. The importance of family unity allows them to do this.

Families who have chronic problems with compromise or other forms of adaptation are usually families that, in time, become increasingly dysfunctional. Their stress-coping mechanisms are so ineffective that they actually increase their stress levels. In effect, their style of coping becomes a stressor in

itself. When one family member continually fails to respond to what another considers to be important, resentment, dissatisfaction, and lessening in joint effort may occur.

Some family members, while not appearing stressed themselves, induce stress, increasing others' stress by their behavior. Families who work together to resolve a crisis successfully, on the other hand, are families who have added to their bank of resources. They are now richer in resources to use in meeting future challenges.

Homes are not always "havens" for restoring energy. Tremendous strains felt inside the family cannot be simply forgotten as members return to work. Interpersonal stress between family members and relatives, changes in the spousal or parent-child relationship, debt, illness, and additions or losses from the family all cause worries that travel with employees into the work setting.

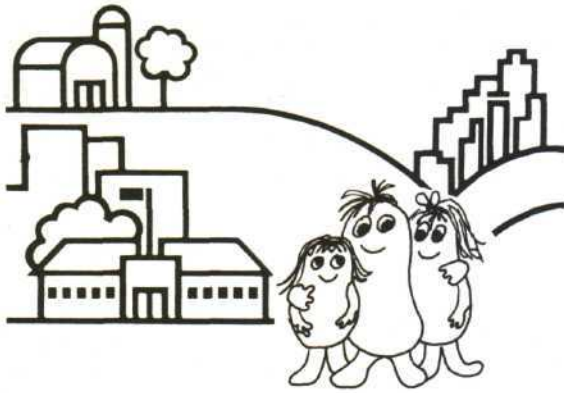
## Families and Work

Centuries ago, it was hard to tell where family and work were separate. Most families worked together, producing just about everything they needed to sustain themselves. The industrial revolution brought fairly significant changes. Men left the tight work/family sphere for the factory. As families became primarily consumers, men's major responsibility became that of bringing economic resources back into the family; women's primary roles became the management of those resources and the structuring of a family unit that would, in turn, provide and sustain satisfactory workers for the labor market.

As family dependence on the labor market and consumption needs continued to grow, men had to spend more time working just to sustain the family. The growth of credit—buy now and pay later—added to the burden of gathering enough resources, even if one **could** pay later!

At the same time, technology had introduced many household labor-saving devices, and these led to changes in the family. Higher standards in home management and child-care demanded as much time as ever, but these roles began to be seen as soft "push-button" operations, requiring few really "big" decisions. Housework was slowly devalued. Some assumptions were:

- It could be performed by just about anyone, even if it was preferred that the wife/mother do it.
- Children turned out well, thanks to child-care manuals.
- Shirts and linen were white, thanks to the latest technologically advanced soap powder or detergent.



Women began spending enormous amounts of time in volunteer work in an effort to utilize their energy in more esteemed areas. Meanwhile, compulsory education was turning out females trained in much the same way as males.

World War II was a major turning point in the growth of the two-paycheck family. Women were needed in factories, and the government set up day care centers to take care of children while mothers worked. Women became more highly valued for their contributions to the war effort.

After the war, day care centers were closed, and women were encouraged to return home. Many, however, decided they didn't want to. They liked their new independence, being with other adults during the day, and their added power in family decision-making. Many felt they had found more satisfying outlets for educational skills and training. They also liked the added income to spend on the abundance of attractive new products.

Many spouses felt differently, not about the money necessarily—but who was going to manage the “push-button” home? Who was going to take care of the children the way a mother would?

With inflationary recession, many families no longer had a choice, whether or not they valued one spouse being able to stay home. High divorce rates also produced a staggering number of single working parents with no choice about whether they would work.

Family members now invest the major portion of their time and energy outside the family. The nature of much outside work and the importance of relationships formed in the work setting are not easily set aside at home where family members spend time restoring their energy. The worker doesn't lock all the concerns at the work place, but often brings them home to give them further thought.

Family and job responsibilities take both energy and time—at least a minimum of both. This is perhaps the problem with overload. We feel guilty

when we can't handle roles or responsibilities as we grew up to believe they **should** be handled. The media reinforce our guilt. Children **can** grow up perfectly if family life is perfect. Homes can be beautifully furnished and cleaned easily and delicious meals served graciously; and marriage relationships **can** be lovely and long-lasting if we only work at them. At the same time, men and women are urged to competitively fulfill their own personal talents—be the best they can be: the best employee, the best spouse, the best parent, the best athlete, the best musician.

Our frantic pace to accomplish all of this—to be the best we **can** be—leaves us exhausted, anxious, and with poor self-esteem. We are in the midst of our chance to do it all, and we're messing it up.

Many persons in middle age continue to compare themselves against previous models of youth, perfection, and less-than realistic goals. They come up short and don't like themselves very well for failing. Others resent the sources of their varied commitments: “If the family hadn't taken up so much of my time, I would have made it; if the job hadn't drained me so much, our marriage wouldn't have caved in. These negative feelings are never kept isolated in either at work or at home; to some extent, they blend into the person's overall functioning in both areas.



### **Dragging Stress from One Life Arena to Another**

Psychologist Chaya Piotrkowski (1979) notes that family members often drag their successes and disappointments or stress with them from one setting to another. We know that stress can be positive and energizing. People who enjoy their jobs may continue to be charged up and enthusiastic outside of work bringing positive feelings home with them.



More often, however, there is negative carry-over, where stressful feelings at work are carried into the home. Members who drag problems home are often psychologically unavailable to other members. Positive family interaction is reduced, causing strain in the family. She notes that family members experiencing work overload and job role conflicts often need additional space to recuperate and manage their feelings. This can cause distance between family members and can, if job stress is severe and prolonged, become a way of life for a family. People who are forced to "moonlight" or work a great deal of overtime are primary candidates for stress due to overload.

Obviously, overload does not always originate in the workplace. It is also a frequent experience of women who work full time and continue to manage their homes and rear their children. Nicki Scott (1979), columnist for Gannett News Service, described a woman who complained that employment and family responsibilities were wearing her out and possibly destroying her relationship with her husband:

"My husband doesn't do all that much, once he comes home. By the time I've cooked dinner and given the kids the attention they need and cleaned up and gotten ready for the next day, all I want to do is fall into bed and go to sleep. After relaxing a while, reading the newspaper, playing a bit with the kids and watching TV, all he wants to do is play. Sometimes I just go through the motions because it's easier. But a lot of the time, lately, I've just said no to sex because I'm so tired I can't think of anything except sleep. Then he gets hurt because I've rejected him and doesn't seem to understand that it isn't him. It's me.



I think he compares me with the women in the office. He sees them being attractive and energetic and cheerful all day and assumes they're that way at home, too. Then he looks at me and wonders what's wrong. I'm energetic and cheerful in the office, too. That's my job. I'm sure those women go home and they're exhausted by the time they go to bed too. But he doesn't know that."

Another condition that Piotrkowski calls "energy deficit" can result from stress caused by boredom, monotony, and under-utilization of skills, i.e., underload. This happens when we don't perceive enough stimulation in our lives . . . or when a sharp drop in demand occurs, such as in the case of losing a job or retiring. The following is a typical example.

#### **Dorothy: Someone Who Was Sick of Nothing**

Though Dorothy enjoyed her job, after her third child, she and her husband agreed that "good mothers" don't work, especially with three children. She quit her teaching job and became a full-time homemaker and mother. Before a year had passed, her personality changed. Previously energetic and "up," she became listless and complained of dizziness and feelings that "nothing seems to matter."



Her husband urged her to get out of the house more often while he was home to care for the children. She joined a bridge club and women's golf league. She volunteered one afternoon a week as a cart lady at a hospital. As she became steadily depressed, her condition frightened her. Her doctor suggested tranquilizers. Her mother-in-law offered this advice: "Why, Dorothy, you have a good husband, a lovely home, and three nice children . . . and a chance to enjoy it all. Many women would like to be in your position!"

Dorothy wondered about her sanity.

It wasn't until she ran across a newspaper article, "Perhaps You Are Sick of Nothing" that her condition changed. Associated Press writer Jane White described the scores of people who grow ill because

of too little stimulation. While some of the resulting problems of underload are muscle-related—headache, low back pain, insomnia, fatigue—underload can also breed depression, anxiety, heart palpitations, and moments of panic.

“That describes me perfectly—that’s me!” thought Dorothy.

Many mistakenly look for distress only in those who seem overloaded, harassed, or overworked. Underemployment may also lead to psychological distress. Many are underemployed; i.e., their jobs do not require them to make full use of their skills or resources. Because of family commitments, lack of opportunity to be promoted, or inability to change jobs, these people can become very stressed on the job. Boredom, depression, or lack of self-esteem may result. These people begin to feel physically and mentally “beat”—and their feelings of depletion and “just being drained” often have the same effect on them as a person on overload. They cannot muster enough energy to handle their own lives.

Retirement can produce shock, depression, and a state of quiet panic in people who have relied too heavily on their jobs for satisfaction and have not developed other areas of their lives, such as leisure, or family involvement.

The average life-span of males following retirement is estimated at three years. Erik Erickson’s final stage in his description of the eight stages of man is that of “integrity versus despair.” Obviously, with the high death rate shortly after retirement, there may be a great deal of despair in those who leave the job market for their “golden” years only to find severe loneliness and the feeling that any ability to make a significant contribution is now past.

Unemployment may be the most stressful of all the work/family conditions. It combines all major sources of stress: change (it may be very abrupt); fear and uncertainty about what the future holds; overload (the huge task of looking for and finding work while still maintaining the family financially); and underload (too much time, not enough demand).

According to Dena Targ, Extension Human Development Specialist at Purdue University, “Unemployed workers usually lose self-esteem and feel guilty about the job loss—no matter how blameless they are. Other common reactions are depression, feelings of isolation from friends and former co-workers, and lack of hope. Spouse and child abuse may appear, or may intensify in certain families. Some unemployed people have negative reactions immediately, while others respond after they are not rehired or when benefits run out.

Family life is apt to be tense. The unemployed person may be depressed and immobilized or may have mood swings. Prospects for re-employment (or lack of them) and the family’s financial situation both have an effect on the family’s day-to-day routine.

“Families play a critical part in helping the unemployed member cope” says Targ. “Although the family may share some or all of the emotions of the unemployed person, family support is especially important at this time. There is no single or simple way a family can demonstrate its support. Each family has a unique financial situation and its own methods of coping with crisis.”

Support, though families want to provide it, may be short-lived in some cases: Bill, who had always readily helped his employed wife with the housework before he became unemployed, simply stopped helping with everything, including child care. “I’m not going to be turned into a stinking housewife just because she has a job and I don’t,” he said. Meanwhile, his wife who had vowed “they would get through it” is growing resentful: “. . . he tells me he’s not the maid, or that he still wears the pants in the family and I’d better remember it. I hate mornings, my job, coming home, this damned recession, housework, and men who clam up instead of talking . . . I hate being tired all the time and angry most of the time. And scared. I hate a job I used to love, and that’s sad. The job hasn’t changed either. I have.” (Scott, 1981).



## Careers, Jobs, Family Life: Role Changes and Stress

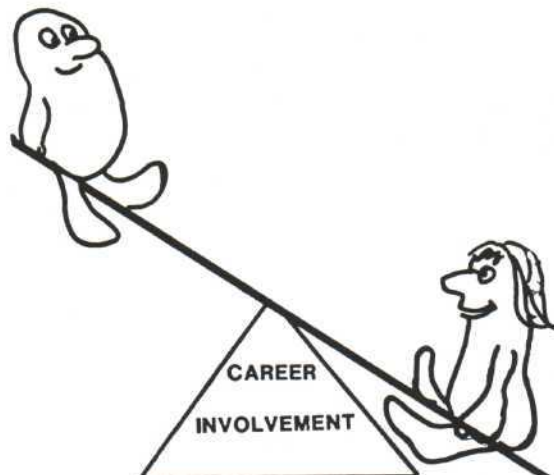
Families are always in transition as members move through their lifespans. The boundaries of the family change as new members are added or lost. Children are born and go off to school; members leave through divorce. Children marry and begin their own families.

As families change, responsibilities of the immediate family also change. Those who have two or more members employed are probably required to make more frequent changes in the responsibilities that each member assumes. The greater the demands of, or involvement in, working, the more radical the changes may have to be. Hall and Hall (1979) write:

"Generally speaking, the more a person invests in and identifies with his or her career role, the less time and energy there is to invest in the roles of parent, partner, or keeper of the house. There is no single role structure for two-career families. There are, however, general types, each representing various degrees of involvement in career versus home, and therefore different degrees and types of conflicts.

No relationship is static, not even the traditional marriage. People change, and it is more common than uncommon to find couples in transitions—moving to or within (a variety of) types. As more women enter, re-enter, and decide to stay in the work force, it becomes more likely that they will start to identify more strongly with their professional roles.

Typically, many couples move first from the traditional family structure to being accommodators. The wife is generally less career-involved than the husband, so his career comes first. If the wife's identification with her career continues, however, then the couple may move to being adversaries, or allies, or acrobats. Whatever the move, one of the major issues will be conflict—between their career roles or among multiple work and family roles (pp. 23–26)."



### Accommodators

Larry and Beth Cameron began a work/family arrangement as *accommodators* but moved to an *adversary* relationship, as they made shifts in their original arrangement. In the beginning, Beth wanted to be only minimally involved in the labor force, just enough to bring in a little "pin money" to supplement Larry's position as an assistant professor. They agreed they could get ahead faster financially if he could put a great deal of his time into his career—that a potential promotion would benefit them both.

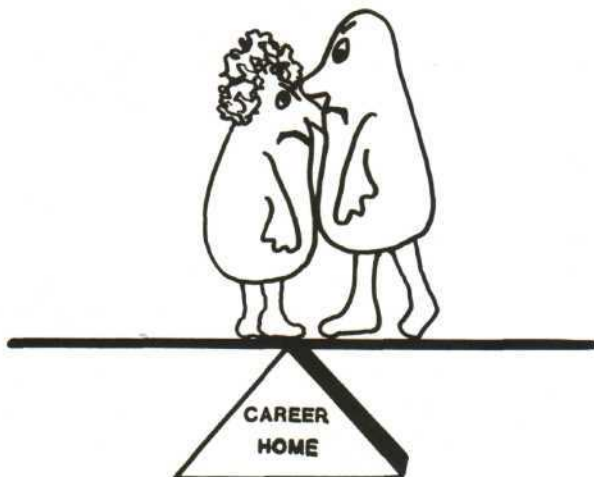
Beth, who had enjoyed assuming primary responsibility for home and children, took a job as a teacher's aide in a day care center. She became increasingly attached to her job and she suggested that it would be easy to finish her teaching degree (she had dropped out late in her junior year to help Larry finish), qualifying her for the head teaching position opening up the following year.

As Larry took over more child care while Beth attended classes, he complained that it was interfering with his ability to accomplish his own preparation adequately. Though he did not communicate his feelings to Beth, he felt betrayed by the "new arrangement." It was not what they had decided together would be best for them in the long run, and it would probably get worse when she went to work full-time. Beth, he thought, was being selfish.

In this case, the "giving-getting contract" they had agreed on earlier was no longer valid. All couples have such a contract, whether verbalized or not. In rare cases, some couples construct a written contract before marriage, outlining their expectations of one another. More often, couples never actually talk about their expectations; they talk **around** expecta-

tions and glide into an arrangement that **becomes** a "contract."

When the unwritten or written terms of a contract are violated, conflict may result, causing the couple to renegotiate their roles. When family members are adaptable, the strain may be reduced in time; when members cannot adapt easily, conflict may continue, and the family unit may become less functional. In any case, stress will escalate until family members adapt in some way to the changing expectations and responsibilities.



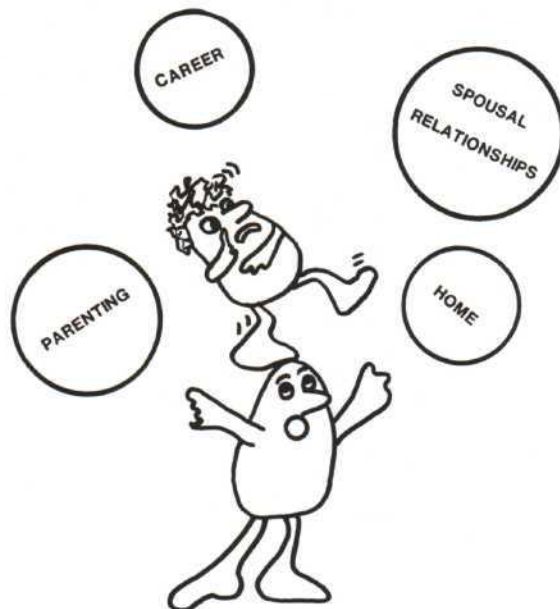
### Adversaries

According to the Halls (1979), the adversary relationship is the most highly stressful couple relationship. Adversaries continue to compete over work/family priorities. Though they continue to view family life as important, their identities are defined primarily by their jobs or careers. Neither one wants to assume primary responsibility for managing the home and children. They induce stress in one another by stubbornly refusing to resolve the problem or because they are truly not able to find an acceptable alternative.

If Beth cuts short her career path just to appease Larry, his tension due to her aspirations may decrease, but **her's** will increase. There will be a gap between the lifestyle she now desires and the one she is forced to accept out of guilt. She will feel trapped and helpless, and this will impair her ability to function well as a spouse and a parent.

If Beth becomes more involved in her job, there are a couple of ways that the couple could restructure their relationship. Both would require that Larry resolve his feelings about Beth's "selfishness" and his need to see the original relationship continued. If they move toward mutually supporting one another's commitment to family life and a

career, they may select one of the following structures:



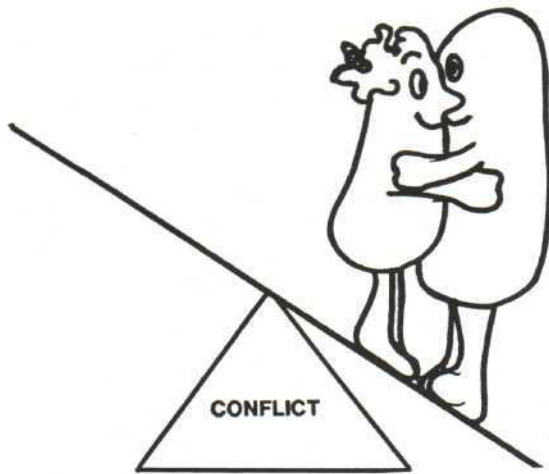
### Acrobats

According to the Halls, "... if both partners are highly involved in all of their roles, they can be thought of as rather **frantic acrobats**. Their identities are not defined primarily by a single role; rather they achieve fulfillment and satisfaction in all of them. These partners give equal weight to home and career roles.

Like adversaries, acrobats are apt to experience a lot of conflict over career demands and decisions, but the conflict is internal rather than adversarial. In other words, both partners are equally concerned with performing home and family duties themselves. They are not looking to their partners to take over. In a sense, they both want to have and eat their cake. Thus, acrobats must constantly juggle a profusion of demands they are unable to stop in mid-juggle and toss to their partner. They want to have a well-ordered home, provide real and emotional support for their spouse, pursue successful careers, be good parents, and still find time for the relationship. And they want to do it all themselves (p. 24)."

### OR:

As allies, "the two partners are both highly involved in either their career or their home roles, with little identity tied up in the other area. Their priorities are clearly defined. For allies who are high in home and family, being parents and partners is more important than career. Neither val-



## Allies

ues career above family, and both derive their primary identity and satisfaction from their family and their relationship. Again, the level of conflict is low. Not only are both partners willing to support the other at home, they also actively minimize the potentially stressful demands of their careers.

Likewise, allies who are highly involved in careers and far less involved with home and family also can minimize conflict by minimizing the importance of domestic roles. They are not overly concerned with maintaining a well-ordered home, preparing gourmet dinners, or entertaining frequently. Often, they choose not to have children. Their support structure may be “purchased”—in eating out,

hiring maids, and catering—or it simply may not exist. “If the house is a mess, so what? That’s not where I really live,” is their attitude.

The major source of stress for career-involved allies is lack of time to devote to their relationship. Minimizing home and family roles does not remove them from the reality of being husband and wife (p. 25).”

Many factors cause spouses to move in and out of the above structures: luck or lack of success in careers over time; the birth of a handicapped child; the necessity to care for an aging parent; the pile-up of family responsibilities that can “best be handled” by one spouse or another; or significant changes in the couple relationship itself.

Spouses who have been allies, for example, might move toward an adversary relationship if one becomes highly successful, and the achievement or income gap between them becomes significant. When the monetary and social recognition they receive is fairly equal, strain is absent. However, when self-esteem is reliant on equality of prestige, income, or power, the relationship may suffer considerably. The bottom line is that couples may not be aware of their true feelings about a work/family relationship until they experience changes in the relationship. It is change that forces them to take a realistic look at what their work and family values really are.

### INDIVIDUAL/GROUP ACTIVITY

Respond to the following questions:

1. What chance do you think Larry and Beth Cameron have for moving out of their adversary relationship? What individual and family considerations could limit their ability to make the change successfully?
2. Determine your own current work/family contract. Are, or were, you and your partner accommodators, adversaries, allies, or acrobats?
3. Provide two examples that support that conclusion:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. If your arrangement generates stress, how does it show up in the family?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Does it affect your work? Your partner’s work? If so, how?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Pitfalls in Reallocating Family Responsibility

Even when adaptable families can reallocate each member’s responsibilities in order to restructure their work/family situation, outcomes may be negative. The following “land mines” and “pitfalls” may loom ahead:

**Sometimes roles shifts are agreed on by all members intellectually but not psychologically.** They may have been “shamed” into agreeing—nagged mercilessly into making the change. Or, morally, they really do see that one member of the family may be overloaded and that responsibilities need to be reallocated.

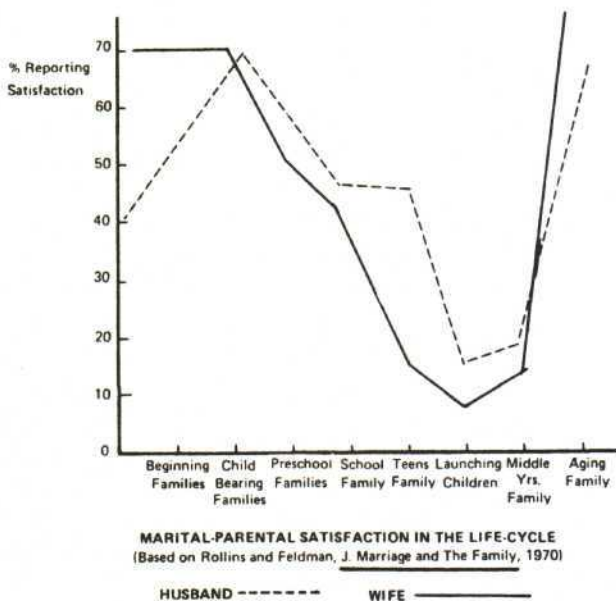
When it comes right down to matching their behavior with what has been agreed on, however, psychological distress may occur. Because power may shift along with shifts in responsibility, the self-esteem of a family member may suffer. For example, a child whose mother has just returned to the labor force may make extra demands on her just to “test out” whether or not (s)he is still valued by the mother. Spouses may also test one another in this way.





**Giving up a responsibility to another family member may also cause problems.** In one family where the husband had agreed to do most of the cooking, his wife complained regularly about the quality of his cooking, the mess he left in the kitchen, and his inability to get everything ready at once. Although he was trying to learn, he was irritated with her interference and told her angrily that, "if she wanted back her job as cook, she was welcome to it!" She unknowingly was refusing to give up **her turf**. As she gave up her role as chief cook, she also was giving up the reinforcement that she received and valued in that area. Subconsciously, she was not ready to do so, though she felt overloaded with family/job responsibilities.

**Roles may be thrown seriously out of balance.** For example, work roles and parenting roles can become dangerously more important than spousal roles, causing deterioration of the couple relationship. As seen in a study by Rollins and Feldman (1970), marital satisfaction seriously declines in those years when intensive energy is spent on childrearing and a job. (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. Marital-Parental Satisfaction**

Parents often feel guilty because jobs take so much time away from parenting. So, they may over-compensate. They worry that if they short-change their children in time spent with them, children may develop poorly. Many forget that the spousal relationship is also always in the process of developing and that positive rather than negative development of that relationship also requires a minimum of time and attention if it is to be maintained and strengthened over time.

As children are launched out of the home into college or jobs, spouses are often surprised and frightened by the state of their current relationship with one another. They have failed to notice how much they have grown apart in the years spent rearing their children and getting ahead in the work world. Often, they have little to say to one another if they aren't discussing their children. Too, they may have developed stronger and more interesting relationships at the work arena than they have had at home.

In reallocating much responsibility to children, there is the danger that children who readily accept the load given to them will expect greater freedom and privileges as a result. Stress inside the family will be generated when parents may not grant as much freedom as the children believe should be granted.

Allocating roles previously performed inside the family to extended family members (Grandmother, Aunt Betty) or paying a non-family member to perform them can also cause conflict or pressure. Not only does it give someone in the family another managing task, but the performance of the role may grate against the family's concept of how the role ought to be performed.

Sally, who had accepted a part-time job, was delighted that her mother-in-law so readily accepted coming into her home to care for the children. Her delight turned quickly to anger, however, as her mother-in-law continued to allow the children to watch large amounts of TV while she was away, despite her instruction that the children's viewing be limited to one approved program.

Members may become "stuck" in a newly negotiated role, even though they discover shortly afterwards that they are not as comfortable as they thought they might be. Also, because work responsibility constantly shifts, a family member who had agreed to take over a major portion of the load might become seriously overloaded and yet not wish to renege on family responsibility.

Though work and family overlap, portions of each area are fuzzy at best to the family members not involved in the others' work arenas. It is almost impossible to know sometimes what kinds of stressors other members are experiencing on the job unless communication patterns in the family and visits to one another's job place allow this understanding to take place.

Role changes should be periodically reassessed by all members of families who are involved as work/family participants.

Family members should be reinforced for carrying out family responsibilities, even if those responsibilities are considered part of their load. We are often rewarded at work for a job well done by good evaluations, raises, or a verbal thank-you. We remember to reinforce fellow workers when they make life easier for us, knowing that this kind of be-

havior on our part will encourage co-workers to continue to be supportive. On the other hand, we often take family life for granted, and pay attention only to what is not carried out well. We forget that human nature operates at home as well as at work and that positive reinforcement feels good there, too, and motivates us toward wanting to carry out our responsibilities.

Balancing work and family roles adequately often leaves individuals with little time to recharge themselves mentally or physically. When individuals allow themselves too little restoration, they may become noticeably less efficient in carrying out their responsibilities. The old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" might be extended to read, "It also makes him a very stressed individual." That goes for Jacqueline as well as for Jack.

## *Group Role Play and Discussion*

### **1. Select four people in the larger group to play the following roles or break down into groups of four for small-group participation:**

#### **JANE—38, Married 18 Years to Dick:**

You are becoming a bit more assertive since you returned to work full time. You have a responsible position, enjoy your work, but are always tired since you have maintained your full-time job at home, too. You frequently feel guilty about not being able to do as much for your family but are beginning to fight back a bit because their demands are making you somewhat resentful. It is 6:30 a.m. You come down into the kitchen, fix coffee and breakfast, and then call the family. Call upstairs that breakfast is ready. After family members come down, continue to fix lunches, asking members what they would like for breakfast, what you can pack in their lunches, etc. Respond also to requests they are making.

#### **DICK—40, An Agency Manager, Married 18 Years to Jane:**

You are looked on by other family members as the major "breadwinner" and "head of the household." This is a position you intend to hang on to even though your wife has recently returned to work. You allowed her to work "only if it didn't interfere with the family and housework." Remind her of this. You look on your job as the most important and Jane's as supplementary or a "second job."

#### **JEFF—You Are the Son, Age 9.**

You try to minimize family conflict. You feel especially close to your mother. You come down to the kitchen when she calls you for breakfast. Enter slowly and complain that you have an awful

stomachache. Tell your mother you can't go to school and ask who's going to stay home with you. You prefer your mother to stay home. Keep up your whining while family members get caught up in problems of who's going to handle various situations that come up.

#### **SALLY—You Are the Daughter, Age 15.**

You are an advocate of women's new roles today, are outspoken about them, and have actually encouraged your mother to question her fairly traditional roles. Still—you don't fully understand what your mother is going through . . . you don't think to volunteer any help at home even though you are dismayed at your mother's domesticated, subservient behavior. You come down to breakfast when your mother calls, complaining that the outfit you wanted to wear today isn't ready and that you **never** seem to have clean socks in your drawer. Keep this up while pushing your mother to disagree with your father when he doesn't rally to help.

(Role play adapted from Borland, 1980)

### **2. Follow Role Play with Group Discussion:**

- A. What roles do each of these family members play?
- B. How did they come to have these particular roles?
- C. What responsibilities are attached to the roles?
- D. Who in the family **benefits** from a person carrying out that role?
- E. How are members **reinforced** for playing each role?
- F. What are the negative **and** positive aspects of the role structure in this particular family?

# KEEPING STRESS UNDER CONTROL

Too many people accept unduly high stress levels as a way of life. The damage resulting from stress and tension can be seen everywhere in ruined relationships, unhappy, frustrated family members, and jittery, unproductive employees.

Though we may not be able to fend off all the negative aspects of life, we can take an active rather than passive stance toward stress. That means knowing our limits before we've surpassed them and respecting others' limits, as well. It means building some preventive measures to keep stress under control. It means gaining real respect for the terrible and wonderful potential of stress and creatively turning it to our advantage whenever possible.

## *Recognizing When Stress is Out of Control*

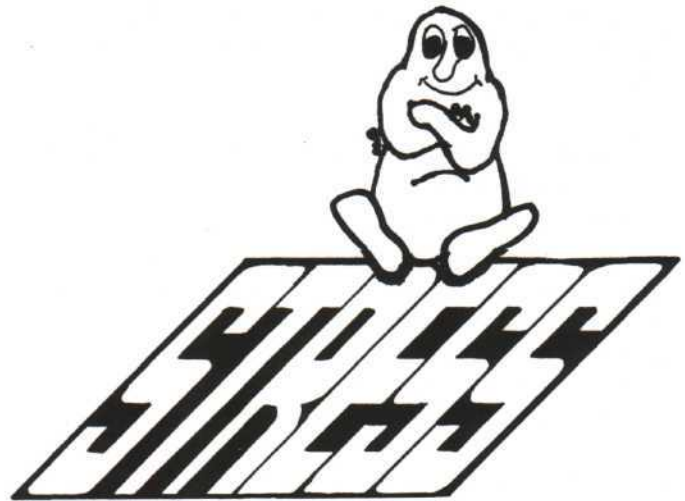
A number of stress tests can remind us of the kinds of events that add up to spell overload. Most tests, however, tend only to measure events, assigning more points to highly stressful events and fewer to those thought to be less significant. When we reach a certain total, we are supposed to be more vulnerable to emotional or physical illness. The problem is that each person **perceives** stressful events in his/her own individual ways, and some of us "cave in" more quickly than others.

Life event tests can be advantageous in helping us to anticipate overload and in preparing for coming stressful events. Perhaps a more realistic "watch-dogging" of stress levels, however, might be to stay alert for the behaviors outlined in the following "stress barometers" or indicators. Rather than tallying all the exciting or terrible events that have happened in the past 6–12 months, we should continuously be aware of our general health, our daily behavior, how well or how badly our relationships seem to be going with others, and any change in our tendency to be optimistic or pessimistic.

Early warning signs ought to get us moving to reduce or eliminate our sources of stress or to find temporary outlets to get rid of it.

### **HEALTH INDICATORS**

- Increased colds and flu
- Sudden loss or gain in weight
- Sleep disorders
- Bowel problems or frequent stomach upsets
- Flare-ups of physical problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure, colitis, headaches
- Constant fatigue



### **BEHAVIOR INDICATORS**

- Radical mood swings
- Flare-ups of anger, irritability
- Tendency to cry easily
- Increased chemical consumption—tobacco, alcohol, coffee, colas, drugs
- More risk-taking behaviors
- Continual complaining, sarcasm
- Forgetfulness, lack of concentration



### **RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS**

- Family tension, arguing
- Fewer friends
- Isolation from family members or co-workers
- More relationships on a down-swing
- Increased judgmental behavior
- Sense of being misunderstood, unappreciated

### **ATTITUDE INDICATORS**

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Inability to be enthusiastic
- Free-floating anger or anxiety
- Pessimism, cynicism, degrading of others

## Controlling Individual Stress: Quick Tips

### Every Day:

- Eat a hot meal
- Schedule some quiet time for yourself
- Drink less than 3 cups of caffeine-containing liquid
- List priorities to take care of and eliminate at least one
- Limit alcohol consumption

### Weekly:

- Get adequate sleep at least four nights.
- Exercise **vigorously** at least 2–3 times.
- Do something just for fun!
- Do something for someone else.

### Over a Lifetime:

- Eliminate smoking.
- Communicate anger and worry to someone who will **really** listen.
- Maintain eyesight, hearing, teeth.
- Keep in touch with a developed network of friends.
- Maintain adequate income to meet basic needs.
- Keep weight proportionate to height.
- Give and receive affection regularly.
- Attend religious or social activities.
- Organize time effectively.
- Maintain your sense of humor.

## Practicing Health Stress Management

### TIME MANAGEMENT

Though everyone has the same amount of time 24 hours per day—we spend it very differently. Many of us are much more conscious of time than others.



The way we organize time depends greatly on the values and the behaviors we learned about task completion as we were growing up. Some of us learned to be good procrastinators. According to Search (1981), "Fear and worry may be triggering your procrastination. How many times do you avoid doing something important because you fear you will make a mistake, get angry, feel guilty, hurt somebody, take on too much responsibility? Most of these fears are unwarranted. Most of us rely on one or more of the following escapes to help us procrastinate:

- Indulging ourselves, doing something we really enjoy—taking the day off to play golf, sleep, watch the "soaps"
- Socializing, visiting, telephoning, small talk
- Reading a backlog of non-worthwhile material
- Doing it all ourselves rather than delegating to others.
- Solving other people's problems
- Overdoing a good thing—being overly thorough: cleaning, organizing, making lists
- Running away—shopping, extending the lunch hour, hand-carrying messages
- Daydreaming—worrying about how you will get all your work done.

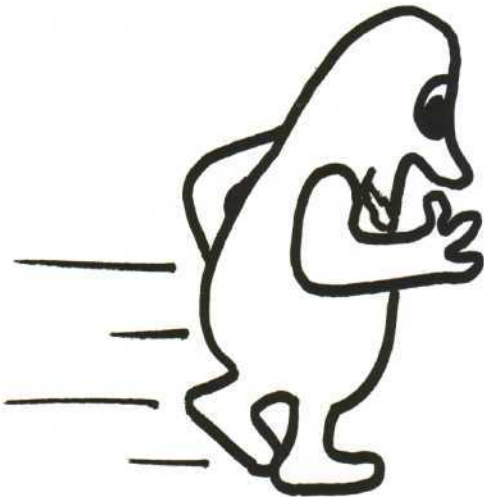
Search offers the following guidelines as strategies for conquering procrastination:

- Admit you are wasting time. Say it out loud: "I'm not making the best use of my time."
- Cut off escape routes.
- Set priorities and focus on one thing at a time.
- Set deadlines on priorities; use reminders to keep yourself going (calendar, egg timer, alarm clock).
- Set up a progress-monitoring system with a friend, spouse, co-worker, secretary, spouse.
- Check at reasonable intervals to ask, "How's it going?"
- Break up the big job into smaller tasks and get started.
- Block out a realistic amount of interruption and/or distraction-free time to do a good job.
- Don't duck the unpleasant.
- Procrastinate positively by sitting in a chair and doing absolutely nothing. Don't read, shuffle papers, knit, watch T.V.; just sit. Do this for 15 minutes and don't cheat. Getting started will be an appealing alternative.
- Break the procrastination habit. Develop the habit of 'DO IT NOW!'

Other time management tips include the following:

- Set priorities that are long-range and short-range.
- Make lists for the month, week, day.
- Divide your day and evening into two parts—half for you, half for others. Stick with it.

- Delegate, whenever possible, both at home and at work. Be specific about what you want done.
- Never handle a piece of paper twice.
- Do not allow others to usurp your time.
- Allow reasonable time frames for accomplishing the task and then meet the deadline without procrastinating.
- Dovetail tasks whenever possible.
- Use available resources to alleviate the press of time and responsibilities (e.g., Purchase good cleaning tools for home and yard maintenance).
- Set reasonable levels for quality. Sometimes we feel our family lives should always look like the ideal T.V. family, that our homes and meals we serve should be “HOUSE AND GARDEN” quality. When we are unrealistic about what budgets and time allotments can stand, we put enormous pressure on ourselves.
- Build in time for unexpected events and time for yourself. One woman presenting a time management seminar suggested that participants should program their time so that they could take advantage of even small amounts of free time. She noted that she used red lights for getting through a magazine each week. That might be time management that has become *too* compulsive.
- Refrain from always taking work home at night and on weekends. Recognize when you are compulsive about the job or family life and when one is interfering with effective behavior in the other.
- Write everything important on a calendar and look at the calendar each morning to remind yourself of obligations.
- Take occasional breaks while working. You will improve your output and your outlook.



## Nutrition, Exercise, and Weight Control

### EAT RIGHT; EAT SMART

Because we are *organic* beings, the fuels we provide for our bodies are extremely important; yet, many of us disregard nutritional requirements daily: we are too busy to take time, so we grab just anything to satisfy the stomach's cue that the body needs refueling. We gulp meals down, stress our bodies by going too long without a meal, or skip an important meal such as breakfast altogether. At other times, when we are not hurried, but still highly stressed, we use food as a sedative: a whole package of cookies just makes us *feel* good. Several cups of hot coffee with them makes us feel even better—at least for a while until our blood sugar levels react negatively, causing added stress.

We get caught in a vicious cycle, and because eating habits are very behavioral, they are difficult to change. However, conscious attention to *what* we put into our mouths, when we do so, and under what circumstances is an important aspect of stress management. Meals should be periods of restoration for minds and bodies. People who skip breakfast and work through their lunch breaks day after day are working unwisely—against themselves.



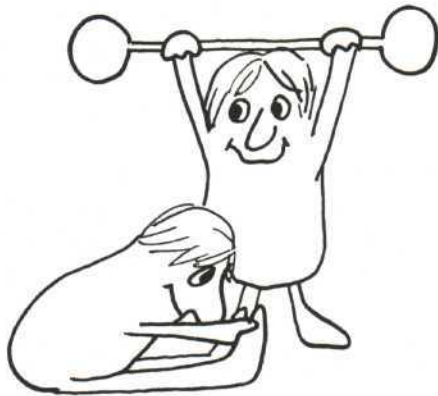
Weight control is significantly related to heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and other evidences of body stress and strain. Because of improper nutrition particularly when we use food as a reward or a pacifier, most Americans are too heavy.

Weight charts are readily available, and most of us are acquainted with weight levels appropriate to our height. We also know that it is not necessary—or healthy—to get heavier as we get older, that calories must be cut as lifestyles become more sedentary. For example, the proper weight for a male approximately 5 feet 9 inches between 22 and 35 years of age is about 154 pounds. To maintain that weight, he must consume no more than 2,800 calories. Past 35, he must drop his caloric intake to 2,600. After 55 he must again reduce that level to 2,400.

Similarly, a female who is 5 feet 4 inches and between 22 and 35 should weigh approximately 128 pounds. To maintain her weight, she should not consume more than 2,000 calories, dropping her consumption to 1,850 calories after 35 and to 1,700 after the age of 55. Of course, lifestyle activity and genetic makeup both play a part in caloric weight control.

### EXERCISING CAN DISCHARGE TENSION

A great deal of anxiety and stress can be discharged through physical exercise—jogging, aerobic dance, racquetball, team sports, or simply brisk walking. Regular exercise is good health insurance, and, unless there is a physical problem, we can benefit greatly by exercising to the point of exertion at least 2 or 3 times a week.



Some people enjoy doubling the benefit by getting together with friends or other family members during this time; others prefer to exercise alone, enjoying the quiet and the time to just get away by themselves. Hearty physical exercise can be especially beneficial to those whose job situations require extensive mental activity. Exercise builds up our capacity to withstand intense stress when it does occur.

Younger people should develop exercise outlets that can be continued as they get older. Exercise, however, is a vital ingredient in the health of all age groups. Those who are older and “out of shape” should make the supreme effort to get back into shape. A physical check-up followed by a sensible and regular exercise program could be a life saver!

### GETTING ENOUGH REST

Notice that this section is entitled, “Getting Enough Rest” rather than “Getting Enough Sleep.” There is little agreement about how much sleep we need.

Individuals should gauge their sleep and rest needs against their own feelings of well-being. As long as we are *resting*, a sleepless night now and then is nothing to worry about. Many people who

believe they did not sleep at all on a particular night actually drift in and out of sleep.

Occasionally after retiring, we may be unable to fall asleep because we are too charged up emotionally. This may happen after an evening meeting or activity where the conversation was provocative or simply stimulating. It happens also when we are charged up physically—when we have gone beyond reasonable limits in our coffee, cola, or tea consumption or have eaten a large meal just before retiring. Sometimes sleeplessness will occur the night before a particularly stressful situation where we “worry through” the next day’s event again and again until we finally exhaust ourselves. In such cases, we could profit by using some of the relaxation or rehearsal exercises suggested in this publication.

Other sleepless nights occur when we are regularly under a great deal of stress. We may get to sleep but wake up early in the morning and have trouble getting back to sleep. Some people will wake up regularly at a certain time each morning, for example, 3:34 a.m., tossing and turning their way until the “proper” time for arising arrives. Rather than fighting it, it might be more profitable to just get up, make ourselves some warm milk (it really works! Milk contains chemicals that naturally stimulate our sleep centers) and involve ourselves in some activity such as *light* reading until we feel sleepy.

Interrupted sleep does not mean that the sleep we do get is not necessarily quality sleep. We have to dispel the myth that only 8 hours of non-interrupted sleep each night is an adequate amount.

Sleeping pills and other sleeping aides should be avoided, as should alcohol and tranquilizers. They may provide us with sleep, but it is restless sleep, and the drugs may interfere with “dream sleep” (REM), causing daytime anxiety. Sleeping aides or chemicals, if used frequently or for sustained periods, increase stress levels.

Again, the key in managing stress levels is getting to know ourselves well:

- What is your preferred cycle for sleep, and during which hours do you sleep best? You may not need 8 hours or you may need 10. You may benefit by daytime naps or taking them may keep you awake at night
- Do you have a regular time for retiring and arising? If not a regular pattern may help.
- Have you developed a ritual for retiring—winding the clock, taking a bath, putting out the cat? It is documented that rituals trigger responses in us for what should come next—in this case, sleep

- Make sure the sleep environment is comfortable—that your mattress doesn't fight your body, that the room is adequately ventilated and not too warm or too cold. Use your immediate sleep environment—your bed—only for sleeping, rather than as a mini-living environment in which to eat, read, watch T.V., clip toenails, and write notes. Is it someplace you retire to in the daytime when you are angry, upset, or worried? If so, you may come to associate these feelings or activities with the bed itself.
- Mentally and physically slow your pace a good hour before bedtime. If you have had a particularly stimulating meeting or session with family members, allow yourself time to unwind even if it is time to retire. You probably won't sleep, anyway.
- Finally, try this exercise upon retiring. Lie on your right side and inhale and exhale deeply and slowly 8 times. Move to your left side and do the same thing 16 times. Then, lie on your back and inhale, and exhale 32 times, deeply and slowly. Ideally, you won't be able to complete the exercise consciously!

### The Relaxation Response

What does the word meditation mean to you? Does it conjure up silent monks moving noiselessly around in monasteries—or a bearded East Indian guru sitting cross-legged at the top of an obscure mountain?

Many of us are reluctant to try actively to relax our mind and bodies because we feel it would be impossible or silly. It just isn't "our style." The alternative may be constant tension in the absence of any other way to discharge daily tension.

We can learn to relax. At first, we may be self-conscious or pay more attention to the process than necessary. If we continue to practice relaxation, however, the physical and mental benefits will be rewarding.

Relaxation exercises are *least* beneficial up to two hours after eating a heavy meal. The best times are perhaps in the morning before breakfast and in the afternoon between lunch and dinner. Since the idea is not to fall asleep but to relax, do not lie down. Instead, sit comfortably in a chair, loosen any tight clothing, place feet on the floor and hands loosely in your lap. Take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes, whatever feels comfortable. Though there are a number of techniques, the following are easy to do almost anywhere, anytime:

### RELAXING MIND AND BODY

1. Close your eyes.
2. Pay attention to your breathing. Allow it time to become regular and natural. Each time you exhale, allow some tension to float away from your body.
3. Choose a word that is pleasing to you or neutral—"daisy," "one," etc. Concentrate easily on this one word as you breathe in and out. If your mind strays, bring it back to the word; do not be alarmed if your mind does stray.
4. Deepen your relaxation by counting backwards slowly from 10 to 1. Each time, allow yourself to feel heavier and heavier. Or, picture yourself in an elevator at the top of a tall building. Push the elevator button in your mind and watch yourself descend slowly . . . slowly to the bottom, feeling calmer and more relaxed as you pass each floor.
5. Come back slowly by counting from 1 to 5, gradually becoming more alert. At the count of 5, open your eyes and get up slowly.

### IMAGERY, FANTASY, AND REHEARSAL

Do you feel guilty when you catch yourself day-dreaming? If not excessive, "side trips" can be beneficial in restoring us or in helping us imagine ourselves working successfully through a potentially stressful experience. All we need to do is use our imaginations and take ourselves into a very specific situation. Imagine where it is, who is there if you want someone there. Picture yourself relaxing on the beach, in a mountain meadow—whatever makes you feel *good*. Use all of your senses in the fantasy—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

Imagine yourself in an activity you enjoy, if you wish. Spend about 10 or 15 minutes and then slowly return.

Rehearsal is beneficial for imagining yourself through a potentially threatening situation. See yourself there. Imagine what it will look like, and what will be demanded of you. See yourself responding well to the demands and moving success-



fully through the experience. Feel how good it feels to have accomplished the task. Again, spend 10 to 15 minutes, and then return slowly. (Source: H. Benson. *Relaxation Response*; and J. Goth-Owens. *Stress Connection*)

### DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

This exercise will allow you to understand tension and relaxation. The goal is to first tense each muscle group and then relax it, moving from feet to head.

Begin with your toes, curling them as tightly as you can for 5 seconds and then relaxing. Feel the relaxation of the tension and then move up, tensing and relaxing ankles, thighs, hips, and buttocks, and stomach muscles.

Next, arch your back away from your chair for 5 seconds and then relax, feeling the tension draining as you do so. Extend your hands in front of you, clenching your fists and then releasing them. Relax forearms by pushing hard against an invisible wall. Bend elbows and tense your biceps. Relax and allow tension to flow out of your arms. Feel how heavy they are. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears, hold them, then relax.

Concentrate now on your facial muscles, drawing back the corners of your mouth and then relaxing the lips, cheeks, and jaw. Squeeze your eyes shut tightly for 5 seconds and then relax completely the nose and eye region. Finally, wrinkle your forehead, trying to touch your eyebrows to your hairline. Now relax.

### Family Stress Levels

Just as individual tension can rise to dangerous proportions if not controlled, pressure in families



can also get out of hand. We know that stress levels may be out of control when:

- There is increased arguing among family members
- Members are spending more time away from the family
- There is increased conflict with relatives
- Managing the children seems overwhelming
- Tasks or chores are consistently not taken care of
- One or more members is exhibiting emotional problems
- One or more members are dependent on alcohol or drugs
- Alliances have developed between certain members, excluding others
- Spousal or child abuse occurs
- Family isolates itself against neighbors, community
- Regressive behavior occurs and persists in children, such as bedwetting in a child who had not been doing so or thumb-sucking in a child who had formerly abandoned this behavior

#### Controlling or Compounding Family Stress

When there is conflict in *OUR* family, we:

- Support one another.
- Get uptight and yell.
- Fall apart.
- Stop talking and withdraw.
- Consider everyone's viewpoint.
- Look for a scapegoat to pin it on.
- Take sides.
- Look consciously at every alternative, whether it seems reasonable at first or not.
- Leave the decision-making to one person.
- Ignore it until it changes or goes away.
- Seek outside counseling.
- Hold grudges.
- Increase our use of chemical substances.
- Become aggressive or violent.
- Use guilt, fear, or threat tactics to control one another.
- Cover it up.
- Talk about it.
- Moralize, rationalize, intellectualize.
- Become sarcastic with one another.
- Formulate a plan and act on it.



# I WANT TO MAKE A CHANGE

## *Developing a Plan to Deal with a Stressor*

While I may not be able to change everything about my world that frustrates me, I can attack at least one problem at a time and work toward a positive change. Something in my life that continues to bother me and make me unhappy, almost daily, is:

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I am tense or unhappy about this situation because:

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The change I would like to see is:

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The obstacles that always seem to get in my way are:

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I can decrease these obstacles by:

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**I will**, take the following positive steps to see this change come about.

1. 

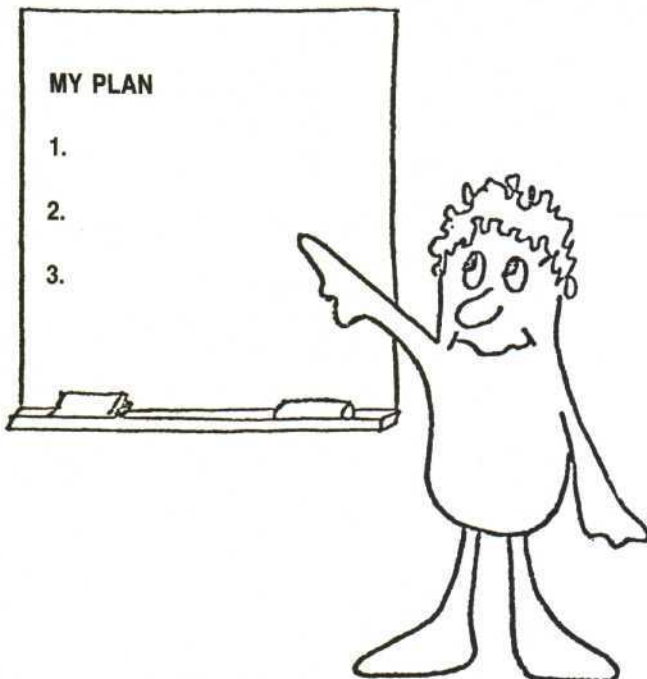
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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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## *Individual & Family Support in the Community and at Work*

Attitudes of family members affect employment structures. Examples are: general dissatisfaction with working conditions, low morale, greater valuing of leisure time, changing family obligations, increased concern for the work/family interface, preference for alternative lifestyles and desire for more interesting work.

Employers are concerned with declining productivity and have grown increasingly aware that conditions and experiences off the job influence employee performance. These concerns have led to expanded employee benefits and scheduling innovations. Workplace innovations in many areas of the country now include:

**Flex-Time**—Where it has been adopted, flex-time has had the most positive impact on employee morale of any benefit offered. Flex-time, or flexible working hours, allows employees to begin work and complete an eight-hour or standard shift with some deviation from the 9–5 routine.

While using flex time depends on its feasibility for a given type of work, many employees will make use of such an option when it is offered. For example, some employees could begin work at any time between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m. and finish between 3:45 and 5:45 p.m.

It has proven to be an attractive “plus” for recruiting new employees, especially those with families. Flex-time has reduced absenteeism and tardiness, as it allows flexibility in family or personal activities. Viewed hesitantly by management at first, under good management it has been successful and effective in meeting the ever-changing needs of employees.

**Employee Physical Fitness Programs**—Certain companies are putting their concern for health and fitness of employees into action by offering a broad range of physical fitness activities. Employees and their families may use a company gym, exercise and weight rooms, swimming pools, bowling alleys, gymnastic buildings, and softball fields.

Some programs recognize individual accomplishments. Participants are encouraged to adopt a “lifestyle attitude” that may involve aerobic exercise, diet, and other good health practices.

**On-Site Day Care Centers**—On-site child care potentially strengthens family ties by breaking the pattern of isolation of employed parents from their children. Children and parents are in close proximity and spend time together commuting to and from work. It has been documented that on-site child

care reduces absenteeism, turnover, tardiness (due to shortened commuting time), and training costs. Usually infant care is included, and, in some cases, after-school day care may be available. Employees usually pay for the service which has proven to be a good public relations tool in the recruiting and holding of employees. On-site care also removes the single major block for most women seeking employment—reliable child care. Often, the peace of mind resulting for employees is demonstrated in their work output, relationships with co-workers, and in interaction with their children.

**Job Sharing**—In job-sharing, two people jointly fulfill the responsibilities for one full-time position or job title. Job-sharing teams organize their schedules according to the needs of the unit. Some teams split the day into morning and afternoon assignments; some job sharers work two and one-half days each week; others arrange schedules as needed.

Job sharing is more successful when communication between team members is used so that transitions between shifts are smooth. Advantages for employees are availability of less-than-full-time employment and flexible schedules. Advantages for the employer include higher productivity and less absenteeism.

Many employers are reluctant to get into job-sharing if it means paying full employee benefits to both workers. When this point can be negotiated, or when workers have coverage in such areas as health insurance through their spouses, for example, employers are much more open to job-sharing as a personal benefit (Waters and Nickols, 1981).

In addition to these arrangements, there are a variety of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's). Counseling staffs are available to aid employees in



money management, relationships with other family members or work colleagues, or alcohol or substance abuse.

More employers recognize the importance of family life, as fewer are demanding that employees move in order to be promoted. Husband-wife teams in the same work place are increasingly viewed favorably rather than negatively. Both employer and worker are coming to realize that stressed families yield stressed employees.

Communities are also getting into the act of reducing family strain when both parents work or single parents are employed. "Latch-key" programs—after school care for children 5 to 12—are an example, and fees are adjusted to family income. Cooperative nurseries are becoming more flexible in allowing working parents to participate. Many school systems are serving hot breakfasts as well as hot lunches. The YMCA and YWCA and other agencies offer a variety of family support programs. Often, assistance is available for women who wish to re-enter the job market after long periods of absence.

Increased levels of education, an aging population, emergence of the women's movement, and more working women are factors contributing to employment innovations. Recent legislation influencing the status of employees includes the Equal Pay Act of 1953, Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973, and Public Law 95-555 (1978) to ban discrimination based on pregnancy.

## Summary

Reading about stress management or participating in a program can *not* change people's lives or help them get rid of stress entirely. There are, however, some basic principles underlying what is known about job-related and family stress and how to manage it more effectively. The interactive and often competing nature of work/family relationships have a pervasive effect on both systems. Conflicts affect worker productivity, organizational efficiency, and normal routines of marriage and family relationships.

Certainly the number of issues related to work/family stress exceed those considered in this publication. However, the key approach for each of us is to look objectively at the sources of stress as well as the physical and behavioral reactions to it. But, if we only look at our reactions—headaches, stomachaches or those times when we "blow our cool"—and do not act on what is causing us to be ill or psychologically upset, we do nothing about effectively managing our stress.

Participation in both family life and the work force will continue to be a dominant lifestyle for many. Stress will be an integral part of that lifestyle but it does not have to be debilitating. Our real work in life, perhaps, is to know ourselves as well as possible so that we can work positively at the job of improving the quality of our own lives and that of others.

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- New Relations: A Film About Fathers and Sons*. 34 minutes, color. Fanlight Productions, 47 Halifax St., Jamaica Plain, Mass. 02130
- Managing Stress*. 35 minutes, color. McGraw-Hill CRM films, 110 15th Street, DelMar, CA 92014
- Taking It In Stride: Positive Approaches to Stress Management*. Spectrum Films, 2785 Roosevelt St., Carlsbad, CA 92009

### FILMSTRIPS

- Managing Stress, Anxiety and Frustration*. 4 slide-tapes: What is Stress, Stress and the Body, Relaxation Techniques, Life Management Skills. Human Relations Media, 175 Tomkins Ave., Pleasantville, NY 10570
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