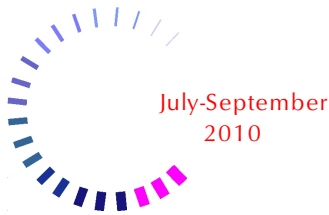


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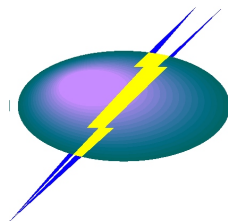
On Managing Stress

Jacob R. Sprouse, Jr.

Poor decision-making may be one of the most frequently noted “reasons” abuse happens or is perceived to have happen in foster family homes. And, in the day-to-day grind of coping with the myriad of demands, challenges and crises, stress is most often the fountain of poor decision-making.

Here is a brief, certainly not exhaustive, “laundry list” of suggestions on managing stress and improving your decision-making.

Decompress: Take, as in make, time to care for yourself. In highly stressful, loud or confusing moments, send everyone “to their corner.” Give the whole house a ten minute time out.

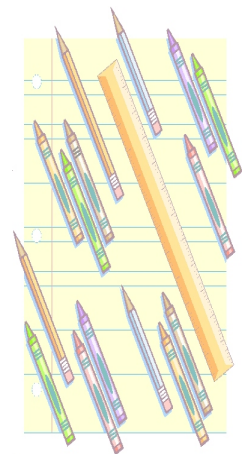


Everyone retreat to your room. Read, color, use your headphones - whatever, as long as everyone is quiet. Get a handle on your stress level - during this time out, take a shower, write a “if only” note to yourself, look through your high school yearbook (that’ll make you laugh). Point being: decompress before you explode.

Keep a Grip - Hold your reaction: It’s the old, but very “new,” count to ten, take deep breaths, smile, stand back and try to find a laugh — whatever the technique you use, you must **do nothing** for a short while; long enough for you not to do something foolish -

don’t explode, don’t lash out; be in control. Remember, unless someone is bleeding, something is burning or in serious jeopardy – it really isn’t “critical.”

Stick to your Routine: OK, so your day is already down the tubes and is nearly 9:30 AM . . . bodes well, you say? Try and “get back on track” with the family’s daily routine - even if it means skipping an item or two. Have lunch at your usual hour, same for dinner - even if you have to resort to take-out. If the family perceives the day is usual, you may discourage additional “contributions” to your already maxed stress level.



Communicate: You may find the rest of the family willing to help if they know you need them to. Another strategy: the family may be willing to “help” if by no other means than avoiding you and long as you have raised the “red flag.” Seriously, have a little flag stand on the kitchen counter - keep three little flags: red, yellow and green. Post the one that alerts the family to “where you are today.” Be honest, if you are stressed, then tell them so.

Work With Me On This: Maintaining “contact” is especially important for younger children. Even if their “help” would be more hindrance than help - put them on a parallel track. If you must perform some desk tasks then set them up with some “paperwork” - coloring book, stickers, whatever, the point being: work with me here and not against me.

Easy Does It: So, you are nearly out of rope and you want what? The teenagers to clean their room? Come on, pick and choose your battles and battle days. More than one general has had a “fireless dinner” - so feed the kids milk and cereal for dinner, leave the silly toys on the floor overnight, put Fluffy out and hit the bed. Do alert the troops that this is not the **new routine**, just emergency maneuvers.

Get Out of the House: The kids are driving you nuts? Well, misery loves company, so take them to the mall and let the community “share” in your bounty. Actually, there is safety in public places: if you feel highly stressed in your interactions with your children you will more likely react positively in a public place than you would behind closed doors. Plus, window shopping can be enjoyable. Let the little darlings begin their Christmas lists - so, it’s just July? Well, remember, it’s only 180 shopping days away!



Get Help: Actually call in assistance - baby sitter, mom, dad, neighbor, whomever. Put someone else “in charge” while you do what it is you need to get done. Alert the troops that there is a temporary “commander” and refer all requests for intervention.

Entertain Yourself, or Plan To: Do something silly - have lunch in the kid’s wading pool; have a slumber party, adults included, and all sleep in sleeping bags in the den - late watching TV and

squirming to avoid the pop corn husks. If you can’t actually “get away” then plan to. Pencil in a weekend away - plan it in detail. Today is better if some tomorrow, soon, you have “time away.”



No Guilt Policy: OK, so the best plans sometime fall short. If you allow the stresses to get the upper hand, say you are sorry and move on. Everyone, including your toddlers, understand the practicalities of being upset. Make sure those around you know that you are upset but that “they” did not do it. No guilt for them and none for yourself.

Laugh: Come on, it has to be very difficult **not** to find something humorous in nearly every little “crisis” - you just have to work at it; you every get so stressed that you, sitting at your desk, need to get something from the garage . . . you get up and go there, only, when you get there you forgot what it was you needed,



AND,

you have to haul your silly self all the way back to your desk and **actually sit down** in your desk chair before you can remember what it was you needed? Come on, now that’s funny. (If you do it twice in a row, write me . . I’m forming a special group.)

