

## Psychological and Emotional Coping Skills

- Coping, *n.* the highest/covering course of a wall, often shaped to carry off water  
 Cope, *n.* ecclesiastical cape; shock of encounter in combat  
 Cope, *v.t. & i.* to dress or conceal with a cape; to contend, now, to strive or contend on equal terms or with a measure of success; to match oneself against

Develop coping skills adequate to protect you from being blown away by the hurricanes of life.

### Summary:

- Life is stress; stress **is** life.
- People respond to stress in different ways. Know yourself and your signs of over-stress.
- Learning and practicing healthy coping skills will help avoid/manage “stress emergencies”.

### I. What is stress? (Selye, *The Stress of Life*, 1950-56)

Selye, a medical specialist in endocrinology (hormones), noticed that all illnesses have similar basic symptoms: feeling and looking sick, aches, pains, digestive upset, and often fever or rash. Also, basic treatments are the same: rest, eat easily digestible foods, and protect against extremes of temperature or humidity. From these observations, Selye proposed that the body experiences a General Adaptation Syndrome (later named the **stress syndrome**) in response to any type of threat.

The syndrome has 3 stages:

- (1) the alarm reaction
- (2) the stage of resistance, and
- (3) the stage of exhaustion ultimately leading to death.

Human beings pass through the first 2 stages many times during life.

	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Mental</i>
<b>Stressors</b> “Stress is the wear and tear in the body caused by life at any one time.” (Selye)	<i>Environmental factors, e.g.:</i> cold (Raynaud’s), heat (MS), injury, disease, <i>crowding</i> (individual degree)	<i>Responses, e.g.:</i> fear, anger, grief, joy, excitement, <b>to loss, change</b> (“virtual reality”)
<b>Acute reaction</b> “fight, flight, or stand” reaction mediated by hormones, etc.	<i>Increased:</i> heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, sweating, pupil size, stomach acid, etc.	<i>Increased:</i> alertness, sensitivity to odors, hearing acuity
<b>Chronic reaction</b> mediated by neuro-immuno-endocrine interactions (neurotransmitters, hormones, immune system activity)	High blood pressure, arrhythmias, sleep disorder, chronic headache, backache, physical exhaustion <i>Increased risk:</i> infection and chronic illnesses (if predisposed) such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, heart attack, stroke,	Psychological exhaustion, lethargy, depression, anxiety

	arthritis, cancer	
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## NO STRESS MEANS WE'RE DEAD; TOO MUCH CAN KILL US

### II. What over-stresses me?

“No one can live without experiencing some degree of stress all the time. Crossing a busy intersection, exposure to a draft, or even sheer joy are enough to activate the body’s stress mechanism to some extent. Stress is not even necessarily bad for you; it is also the spice of life... But, of course, your system must be prepared to take it.” (Selye)

Root causes of mental stress are loss (Kuebler-Ross, Viorst) and change (Johnson), but the losses and changes that stress you may not stress someone else. Only you can determine when you are over-stressed (exceeding your “coping”).

“The same stress which makes one person sick can be an invigorating experience for another.” (Selye)

### III. How do I cope with excess stress?

Remember: **You and your stressors are unique, but you are NOT alone in your distress.**

To cope effectively with excess stress, Assess, Plan, Implement, Evaluate: “Take your pulse”, then take action. Different actions are needed for “emergencies”, “illness”, and “health maintenance”.

When over-stressed, remember:

**Perspective.** Relax. Humor.

#### (1) Emergency (physical crisis, emotional crisis, “9/11” event)

- Check physical/emotional vital signs - Airway, Breathing, Circulation (RN-PR).  
“The place to start, of course, is with your breathing. If you can manage to bring your attention to your breathing for even the briefest moment, it will set the stage for facing that moment and the next one mindfully.” (Kabat-Zinn)
- Escape immediate danger and pull yourself together (more breathing control, “mindfulness”; perspective).
- Enlist help to manage residual illness.
- After illness resolution, return to or start Health Maintenance program.

#### (2) Illness (rating scale of stressful life events: death, divorce, marriage, job loss, job change, relocation, birth of child, etc.)

- Recognize symptoms of emotional distress/depression: withdrawal, irritability/temper, lethargy/fatigue, avoidance of friends and previously pleasurable activities, over/under-eating, over/under-sleeping, hopelessness, avoiding responsibility/work, new or increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Employ healthy coping skills to regain perspective.

- Seek professional help if symptoms are present most of the day every day for 2 weeks or more or you have thoughts of suicide.

### (3) **Health Maintenance** -

#### **Physical + mental dimensions are inextricably intertwined** - neuro-endo-immunobiology

- Remember who/whose you are - heritage, experiences/successes (resume, portfolio, awards), skills/talents
- Maintain a healthy daily schedule of sleep/rest, work, exercise, leisure activity/socialization; have a good diet (brainwashing)
- Psychosomatics (Maltz, *Psychocybernetics*) show a good mental attitude - “smile”, “whistle”, “policeman’s clothes”
- Beware unhealthy coping mechanisms - over/under working, over/under activity, substance use/dependency (drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, food) - set limits, get help
- Develop a “bag of tricks” to maintain a positive attitude, sense of self-worth and perspective on life - quotations, stories, humor, uplifting reading
- Share - volunteerism/charity, spend time with (call, e-mail) supportive/positive people.
- “Inate vitality must find an outlet” (Selye) - write, paint, sing, dance, ski, garden, clean house, bike
- Good sleep hygiene - regular hours, avg. 8; dark, quiet, correct-temperature room; no caffeine or alcohol 4 hours before sleep; resolve mental concerns (breathing exercises, imagery, prepared for the next day)

#### **Avoid boredom** - update your “health maintenance” program

“A man can hurt himself by reacting to every proposition according to a set pattern.

Don’t let defense mechanisms fall into a groove.” (Selye)

We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.  
Kettering

Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another. W Elliott

Look at a day when you are supremely satisfied at the end. It’s not a day when you lounge around doing nothing; it’s when you’ve had everything to do, and you’ve done it. M Thatcher

Smile at people. It takes 72 muscles to frown and only 14 to smile. Unknown

When you need to change something in your life, think about these questions:

What are the barriers to change?

What do I gain with change?

By what date do I want change to occur?

How can I facilitate change?

Maintaining proper perspective on emotions is a powerful key to health and strength. J Schindler

In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: It goes on. Robert Frost

## **Bibliography**

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### Death

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- 1981 Yeagley, Larry. *Grief Recovery*. 1055 Horton Rd, Muskegon, MI: Larry Yeagley, 1981.  
“During relaxation the body restores energy, maintains health and maintains youth.”

### Major Illness, Chronic Pain

- 1979 Cousins, Norman. *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*. New York: Bantam Books, 1979. Intro. by Rene Dubos. Self-healing through laughter.
- 1986 Siegel, Bernie. *Love, Medicine & Miracles. Lessons learned about self-healing from a surgeon's experience with exceptional patients*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.
- 1990 Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living. Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. Program of Stress Reduction Clinic at the Univ. of Mass. Medical Center*. New York: Delta, Dell Publishing div. of Bantam Doubleday, 1990.  
Physical/mental program targeted (and excellent for) managing chronic/cancer pain.

### General Loss

- 1986 Viorst, Judith. *Necessary Losses*. New York: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1986.  
Everything is a loss. Can be depressing. Read just the part that applies.

### “Life Success” Guides

- 1971 Charell, Ralph. *How to Make Things Go Your Way*. New York: Simon & Schuster

- Cornerstone Library, 1971. Personal "success" story "and you can too if you just try"
- 1976 Sharpe, Robert; Lewis, David. *The Success Factor*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1976.  
Very concrete program for behavioral/cognitive modification - goal-directed.
- 1982 Alves, Mario. *Dream a Little, Live a Lot*. New York: Vantage Press, 1982.  
p. 62 cognitive therapy "desire" vs. "fear" statements  
p. 93 Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs: from primitive, immature, universal and physical needs (physiological, safety, social-love, ego-self esteem, self-fulfillment) to civilized, mature, intellectual needs  
p. 101 stages of life (require written change of plan)  
p. 110 objectives: physical (health/fitness), career, family, friends/society, personal (education, travel, etc.), financial
- 1989 Coven, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Restoring the character ethic*. New York: Simon & Schuster Fireside Books, 1989.  
p. 46 "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." *Aristotle*  
p. 47 "... a habit [is] the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire;... internalized principles and patterns of behavior"  
1. Be Proactive (personal vision) 2. Begin with the End in Mind (personal leadership) 3. Put First Things First (personal management) 4. Think Win/Win (interpersonal leadership) 5. Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood (empathic communication) 6. Synergize (creative cooperation) 7. Sharpen the Saw (balanced self-renewal)
- 1997 Carlson, Richard. *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...and it's all small stuff*. New York: Hyperion, 1997. *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff Workbook*. 1998.  
Some Contents: 1. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff 2. Make Peace with Imperfection 6. Remind Yourself That When You Die, Your "In Basket" Won't Be Empty 9. Let Others Have the Glory 17. Surrender to the Fact That Life Isn't Fair 18. Allow Yourself to Be Bored 25. Smile at Strangers, Look into Their Eyes, and Say Hello 38. Tell Three People (Today) How Much You Love Them 49. Resist the Urge to Criticize 57. Become a Less Aggressive Driver 58. Relax 70. Remember That You Become What You Practice Most 80. Become an Early Riser 89. If Someone Throws You the Ball, You Don't Have to Catch It 94. Keep Asking Yourself, "What's Really Important?" 100. Live This Day As If It Were Your Last. It Might Be!

#### "Perspective" Books

- 1986 Fulghum, Robert. *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Uncommon thoughts on common things*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1986.  
p. 6 The Credo: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder (the seed in the Styrofoam cup). Goldfish and hamsters...and the seed in the cup all

die, and so do we. Remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - "look".

1991 Fulghum, Robert. *Uh-Oh. Some observations from both sides of the refrigerator door.* New York: Villard Books, 1991.

1993 Canfield, Jack; Hansen, Mark Victor. *Chicken Soup for the Soul. 100 stories to open the heart and rekindle the spirit.* Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1993. Sequels (3) + a plethora of books targeted to kids, teens, women, men, nurses, pet lovers, and a host of other audiences.

The 2- to 4-page stories are excerpted from other books or written by well-known and other authors.

p. 279 Chapter 7, Eclectic Wisdom: "This life is a test. It is only a test. Had it been an actual life you would have received further instructions on where to go and what to do!  
*Found on a bulletin board*"

#### "Business" Books

1995 Godin, Seth. *Wisdom, Inc. 26 business virtues that turn ordinary people into extraordinary leaders.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

Results of a survey sent to 23,000 and returned by 700 mid-level and top managers around the country. Discusses virtues in order of rank (top 10 = ethics, teamwork, honesty, curiosity, hard work, intelligence self-motivation, sense of humor, initiative, creativity)

1998 Johnson, Spencer. *Who Moved My Cheese?* New York: Simon & Schuster/ Simon & Schuster Audio Div., Sound Ideas, 1998.

Great analogy for psychological/emotional responses to and managing change in the workplace. Audio tapes are good if you have significant drive times.

#### "The" Job/Career Book

Bolles, Richard N. *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Berkeley, CA: Ten-Speed Press, 2002. Published first in 1970, rev. 1972, 1975 and annually.