
Families Taking Charge: Dealing With the Stress

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Stress

All change produces stress, even “good” changes such as marriage or vacations. Sometimes it is hard to perceive the stress of “good” changes but easy to understand the stress caused by negative changes such as job loss. Common stressors in a transition are fear and uncertainty. For example, some of the fears a person may have about unemployment include fear of failure, the inability to manage debts, and the inability to learn new skills. The uncertainty of the job market may also be an issue.



The family’s background and the individual personalities of its members will determine how they see the situation. The individuals’ senses of competency, self-esteem, values, needs, and interest along with their health, past experience in handling stress, and financial and other resources will influence how the family views the situation. Some families will welcome the opportunity to make changes in their lives. Other families will be unable to act due to fear and uncertainty of the unknown. Their view of the situation may be keeping them from recognizing the resources available to them in the community and from relatives and friends.

Coping with Stress

People differ in the way they cope with stress. Coping influences how people adapt, and active coping strategies are related to less distress and fewer problems in the future. Avoidance coping strategies are associated with greater present and future distress (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996). Denial and avoidance strategies mean the problem is ignored and make it difficult for the person to move on. Active strategies are designed to assist the person in moving on. The five Rs below are examples of good active coping strategies

The Five Rs for Coping with Stress

Five strategies families can practice to remove the harmful effects of stress are: rethink, reduce, relax, release, and reorganize. Page two gives specific coping strategies arranged according to these stages. Families need to **rethink** those attitudes and emotions that bog them down and keep them from acting. They need to think about what is really important to them and then set goals that that will help them attain those things.



They need to **reduce** the amount of activity they do. They need to consider the amount of activity they can do without feeling overwhelmed or experiencing burnout. Families who manage stress successfully know their strengths and skills as well as their weaknesses. They don’t take on more than they can handle. Divide activities into what must be done, what would be nice to do if all the “must be done” items are finished, and those that you’ll do if there is any time left after the first two sets of activities are done. They need to **relax**. Meditation, deep breathing, and visualizing a quiet safe place are just a few techniques. They need to **release** the stress through physical activity. Families that have a variety of stress reducing techniques in their repertoire can apply them as the situation demands.

Families need to **reorganize** so that their lives reflect what is important to them. Families that have less stress have many interests and do not define their lives by just one aspect of it. They are active rather than passive and make things happen. They develop social networks of relatives and friends that can provide help and comfort during stressful periods (Blonna, 2004).

Additional Stress Reducing Strategies Organized by 5 Rs of Coping

Rethink

- ◆ Be positive; see every challenge as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- ◆ Use visualization to see your life as you want it to be.
- ◆ Use affirmations. Each day when you get up and before you go to bed, repeat the positive benefits of the changes you are making as if they have already happened.
- ◆ Accept the world as it is.
- ◆ Communicate your feelings honestly.
- ◆ Talk about your problems with your family, a close friend, a minister, or counselor.
- ◆ Journal or write letters to people (that you don't send) to work through your feelings of anger or frustration.
- ◆ Reach out for help.



Reduce

- ◆ Don't rush; allow extra time to get places.
- ◆ Take time to play.
- ◆ Take time for yourself each day.
- ◆ Simplify your life.
- ◆ Eat right.
- ◆ Take time to eat slowly.



Relax

- ◆ Take time to stop and admire nature.
- ◆ Meditate.
- ◆ Laugh!
- ◆ Find inexpensive ways to pamper yourself.

Release

- ◆ Exercise. Take the stairs. Park away from the entrance so you have to walk. Walk the dog.
- ◆ Stop worrying and act.

Reorganize

- ◆ Take things one step at a time. Don't try to resolve all problems at once.
- ◆ Know your high and low energy times and plan your work accordingly.
- ◆ Focus on one thing at a time.
- ◆ Learn to go with the flow; be flexible.
- ◆ Do your best and let go of the results.
- ◆ Make use of community resources.



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Adapted from:

Hayhoe, C. R. (2006). Helping Families in Transition Due to Unemployment. *Journal of Human Behavior in Social Environment*, 13(1), 63-73.

Sources:

Blonna, R. (2004). Copings with stress in a changing world (third edition). New York: McGraw Hill.

Holahan, C. J., Moos, R. H., & Schaefer, J. A. (1996). Coping, stress resistance, and growth: Conceptualizing adaptive functioning. In M. Zeidner & N. Endler (Eds.), *Handbook of coping: theory, research and application* (pp.24-43). New York: Wiley.