

## MANAGING EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

*You have much more control over your emotional state than you probably realize. What and how you think can determine what and how you feel. What and how you feel color what and how you think. Getting control of your thoughts changes the way you feel and getting control of your feelings alters the way you think. The techniques described here help you manage this complex equation.*



*You can use some of these techniques by yourself but you may need help with others. Since many techniques involve relaxation, they tend to lower your metabolic rate and general level of physiological arousal. They may interact with any prescription medications you are taking for a seizure, cardiovascular, diabetic, or endocrine disorder. Be sure to check with your physician before using them.*

### **Emotional Release**

You don't want to get rid of emotions, you just want to manage and get them under control. A three-step method of emotional release has helped many of our clients. The first step is to identify exactly what it is you're feeling and label it. As we said before, emotions often defy description, but try. Building a better emotional vocabulary makes it easier. Write down as many adjectives as you can for anger, anxiety, and depression. Use a thesaurus, get words from friends, family, and co workers. Sort your words in order of intensity. Learn to examine your emotional state and attach a label that describes it with some degree of accuracy.

Next, experiment with thoughts that increase the intensity of the emotion you're feeling. Then try thoughts that will reduce that intensity. Rate the intensity level of your emotions on a scale from 1 (the lowest level of intensity) to 10 (the highest level of intensity). Learn to raise and lower your level with your thoughts.

Learning to release emotions is the third step. This can happen in a number of ways, such as acting them out, talking them out, or thinking them out. Shouting, crying, or being fearful takes the edge off your feelings, allowing you to think more clearly. You can talk about how you feel with a friend, family member, or counselor. Sometimes, images and thoughts can release you from emotions.

We have a friend who cries in her hot bath when she's feeling sad. It's a good way to release your depressive symptoms. Some people act out their frustrations and anger by shouting into the wind or beating a pillow. Some clients express their fear and anxiety with pat phrases like "Oh, my God." or "Oh, oh." In releasing your emotions through talking to other people, be sure you don't act out the emotion toward them. Try to stay calm and talk to them rationally about how you feel. A word of caution, we are not advocating expressing feelings irresponsibly just to get them off your chest nor are we suggesting you wallow in your feelings indefinitely. The intensification and expression of feelings is one aspect of learning to manage strong emotions and getting them under control.

If you learn how to intensify emotions, you can also learn how to decrease or to transcend them. When you do, you will feel more in control and can choose the emotional option that fits the specific time and place.

Here are a few rules to remember about releasing feelings:

- Mean what you say, say what you mean, but don't be mean when you say it.
- Don't break things that don't belong to you.
- Don't hit other people.
- Don't hurt yourself (physically or with drugs, food, etc.).
- Use a little judgment when in public.

## **Self-monitoring**

Relate your thoughts to your emotions by keeping track of what you're thinking about when you feel them. Try to make connections between your thoughts and your emotional symptoms. Sort out your irrational thoughts and counter them with rational ones. Irrational thoughts can lead to irrational behavior.

## **Taking Quiet Time for Yourself**

Set aside quiet time for yourself every day. Do it regularly, don't wait until you're anxious, angry, or depressed. It doesn't have to be a lot of time. Even twenty to thirty minutes is enough time. Pick a place where you can be by yourself and undisturbed.

One of our clients chose his lunch hour as his quiet time and spent it in his car in the company parking lot.

## **Deep Breathing**

There are few self-regulatory exercises as calming as deep breathing. Deep breathing improves the efficiency of your cardiovascular system in delivering oxygen to your body including your brain.

Try the "one, two, three" deep breathing exercise we teach our clients: In a seated position, place your elbows on your knees, lean forward, and place your chin in your hands. Now, breathing through your nose, take three deep breaths and hold each one for a slow count of three. Lean back and continue to breath slowly and deeply through your nose as you let yourself calm down and relax.

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**

It's impossible to be relaxed and emotionally tense at the same time. They are mutually exclusive. PMR is a powerful technique not only for releasing muscle tension and becoming aware of your body, but also for releasing emotional tension. It involves tensing and relaxing muscles in a progressive series and takes about twenty minutes to complete. It is often taught as an introduction to biofeedback and self-hypnosis autogenic imagery.

## **Visual Imagery**

As you relax using PMR, conjure up images of emotional release. Try different images until you find one that appeals to you. Often feelings cannot be put into words. Instead they come out through our imaginations. We fantasize scenes that never happen, perhaps what we wish we could have said to the boss or what we should have done to forestall some tragedy. Sometimes the visual image is the memory of a real event that keeps recurring as a "flashback".

You can change your images to either increase or decrease the intensity of your feelings. You can use visual imagery when you are ready to let go of your anger, anxiety, or depression. One client, tired of being angry at her landlord, imagined putting her anger in a black balloon and letting it float away. It got smaller and smaller as it soared into the sky.

## **PROFESSIONAL HELP AND ASSISTANCE**

### **Behavioral Medicine**

A specialist in behavioral medicine is generally a psychologist or physician trained in the diagnosis and behavioral treatment of stress-related emotional and physical symptoms and complaints. Many hospitals and medical centers have departments of behavioral medicine or can refer you to a practitioner in your neighborhood.

### **Psychotherapy**

If these techniques don't work, your anxiety, anger, and depression may be rooted in deep-seated psychological problems and you may need psychotherapy. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers are professional psychotherapists. They may come from different schools of thought ranging from doctrinaire Freudian psychoanalysis to cognitive behavioral therapy. Whatever the approach, it has to feel right to you and you have to trust your therapist. If the approach doesn't make sense, or you don't feel comfortable with the therapist, try another one. You can get referrals from your, physician, state professional organizations, mental health centers, or try the Yellow Pages.

Make your first session a trial interview. Find out something about the therapist's approach, orientation, training, background, and experience with problems like yours. Ask questions about them as people.

### **Counseling**

In addition to therapists, professionals such as ministers, priests, and rabbis offer counseling. Counseling is generally much more short-term than psychotherapy and is limited to specific problems and issues. Counselors are more likely to offer advice and assistance in direct problem solving.



# WHAT YOU CAN'T, OR SHOULDN'T, DO IN YOUR WILL

Wills are wonderful, simple, inexpensive ways to address many people's estate planning needs, but they can't do it all. Here are some things you *shouldn't* expect to accomplish in your will.

## Leave Certain Kinds of Property

You can't use your will to leave:

- Property you hold in joint tenancy with someone else (or in "tenancy by the entirety" or "community property with right of survivorship" with your spouse). At your death, your share will automatically belong to the surviving co-owner. A will provision leaving your share would have no effect unless all co-owners died simultaneously.
- Property you've transferred to a living trust.
- Proceeds of a life insurance policy for which you've named a beneficiary.
- Money in a pension plan, individual retirement account (IRA), 401(k) plan, or other retirement plan for which you've named a beneficiary on forms provided by the account administrator.
- Stocks or bonds held in beneficiary (transfer-on-death or TOD) form. If you want to change the beneficiary, contact the brokerage company.
- Money in a payable-on-death bank account. If you want to name a different beneficiary, just fill out a simple form at the bank.



## Leave Funeral Instructions

Wills are typically not read -- or even found -- until days or weeks after a death. That's too late to be of help to the people who must make immediate decisions about the disposition of a body and funeral or memorial services. Instead, make a separate document spelling out your wishes and tell your executor where to find it when the time comes.

## Reduce Estate Taxes

If you expect your estate to owe federal estate taxes, you may want to take steps now to reduce the tax liability. A will won't help you avoid taxes. Many kinds of trusts can reduce or postpone the tax bill.

## Avoid Probate

Property left through a will usually must spend several months or a year tied up in probate court before it can be distributed to the people who inherit it.

## Put Certain Conditions on Gifts

There are also a few legal limitations on what you can do in a will. For example, you cannot leave a gift that is contingent on the marriage, divorce, or change of religion of a recipient. You can, however, try to influence lesser matters. For example, you could leave money "to Jeremy, if and when he goes to college." Making such conditional gifts, however, usually opens a can of worms -- who will enforce the will's conditions, and for how long?

## Leave Money for an Illegal Purpose

This one doesn't come up often, but you can't earmark money for something illegal, such as encouraging minors to smoke.

## Arrange to Care for a Beneficiary With Special Needs

If you want to provide long-term care for someone, a will isn't the place. Far better to set up a trust that's tailored to the beneficiary's needs. A special needs trust can provide extra income for a loved one with disabilities, without jeopardizing government benefits.

## Leave Money to Pets

Pets can't own property, so don't try to leave property directly to your pets in your will. Instead, leave your pet to someone who has agreed to provide a good home -- and leave that person some money to help out with pet-related expenses. Some states allow you to set up trusts for animals, but that's probably not necessary if you have confidence in the person you've named to care for your pets after your death.

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# MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY A PART OF YOUR FAMILY'S ROUTINE

## Make Physical Activity a Part of Your Family's Routine

### Set Goals

Have your family establish goals that everyone can achieve together. In the first few weeks, you may not achieve every goal, but if you stick with it, physical activity will become a part of your family's routine.

Set effective goals that are specific, achievable and forgiving. Rather than saying you will exercise more, set a goal like walking for 30 minutes a day, three times a week.

Issue a family challenge to see who can be the first to achieve a Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) by committing to physical activity five days a week, for six weeks.

*Tip: Effective goals are specific, achievable and forgiving. "Exercise more" is a great idea, but "take a 30 minute walk" is more specific and easier to achieve.*



### Schedule Your Activity

The best way to begin increasing your family's physical activity is to schedule time for it. Start by identifying at least three 30-minute time slots this week for activities like taking a walk, playing sports or doing active chores. Choose times of the day or week when everyone is most likely to stick to the schedule.

### Add it Up

Post progress for everyone and the family on the refrigerator or in another location where the whole family can see it. Don't forget to celebrate your achievements; every little bit counts.

### Be Flexible

If a conflict comes up during physical activity time, reschedule instead of canceling. Find a new time for the activity to replace what you missed.

### Share it

To keep the momentum going, share your new ideas, activities and tools with friends, neighbors and relatives. Invite them to join in and get moving too!

### Ideas to Get Started

There are countless ways to enjoy physical activity together as a family.

### Suggestions

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Limit TV time and keep the TV out of your child's bedroom.
- Walk around the block after a meal.
- Make a new house rule: No sitting during television commercials.
- Play tag, swim, toss a ball, jump rope, hula-hoop, dance to music or even play a dancing video game. It doesn't have to be sports—just get your family moving!
- Walk the dog, go for a jog, go on a bike ride, take the stairs or head to the park and let kids run around for a while.
- Celebrate special occasions—like birthdays or anniversaries—with something active, such as a hike, a volleyball or soccer game or playing Frisbee at the park.
- Get the whole family involved in household chores like cleaning, vacuuming, and yard work.
- Walk instead of drive whenever you can. If you have to drive, find a spot at the far end of the parking lot and walk to where you're going.
- Park farther away and count with your children the number of steps from the car to your destination. Write it down and see if you can park even farther away on your next stop.
- Train as a family for a charity walk or run.
- Spend time together with a family park day, swim day, or bike day.
- Issue a family challenge to see who can be the first to achieve a "Presidential Active Lifestyle Award" by committing to physical activity five days a week for six weeks.

source: <http://www.letsmove.gov/>



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