



## Stress unavoidable dealing with life

June 28, 2010

*Evansville Courier and Press*

I recall a psychiatrist telling me several years ago that no one is 100% mentally healthy 100% of the time. Many people assume that stress comes in big packages, and if you have your act together then there should be no problems.

In reality, stress impacts all of us in which the causes are rooted by life situations that include finances, job, child rearing, interpersonal relationships, and a host of other issues all of us have to deal with in our hectic lives.

A survey of two-career couples revealed three major sources of stress: (1) too little time, (2) finances, and (3) child rearing. These situational pressures impact our attempts to maintain some balance of personal life with job demands - a task that seems to be never-ending. It's like fitting a size 12 foot into a size 10 shoe.

The demands of attending to daily life situations led to one author coining the term, "The Piñata Syndrome," referring to feeling beat up all the time by life's stresses.

In response to stress, we experience a variety of emotional reactions including irritation and agitation, sleep problems, moodiness and anxiety, fatigue with little energy, experiencing difficulty concentrating, defensiveness, and even some depression.

This does not even touch on the physical consequences that can be stress-related (e.g., hypertension, migraines, common cold, GI disturbances). As one mental health expert noted, "Stress is an equal

opportunity malady."

So, what can we do about it? Let's try to look at it this way, keeping in mind that there are no easy answers. Stressful situations will never go away, but how we deal with it can make a big difference.

Rule No. 1: Don't sweat the small stuff.

Rule No. 2: When managed well, it's all small stuff to a large extent, especially those situations in which we have some control.

Actually, life events don't create our stress; our way of thinking can be the culprit that causes the reaction. How we react to stressful situations can be the "straw that breaks the camel's back" or the key that gets us over the hump. I love the reference that says, "As we think, so we become."

One way of managing stressful situations is a concept called self-talk. This approach can be your best friend or your worst enemy. For example, if our use of self-talk has us believing that we must be unfailingly competent and perfect in everything we do, and/or results in us believing that our worth as a person depends upon how much we achieve and produce, then we surely will become our own worst enemy. Instead, (and this is the hard part) we need to take a hard look at how we think by accepting what many behaviorists have proven through research, which is "The way I think can affect the way I feel," and "If I don't like the way I feel, then I need to change the way I think."

As one person told me recently, "I have managed to talk myself into some deep stuff in my lifetime, but now I'm learning how to talk myself out of it

too."

Our personality style must be underscored by our survivor instinct. This means we may need to take on some changes in order to more effectively deal with stresses that will always confront us from time to time.

A survivor personality is part of what we need to develop or reinforce. One approach is to consider the following changes: (1) a willingness to look foolish, make mistakes, laugh at yourself; (2) open minded acceptance of criticism; and (3) an active imagination, daydreams, and conversations with yourself.

Finally, a sign in front of the Warrick County Education Center summed up the theme of this topic: "At times we live in chains and don't know we have the key."

We do have "the key" in the form of many strategies that can be put in place to help us more effectively deal with our day-to-day stresses. Self-talk can be a very powerful tool along with exercise; some good organizational management techniques; maintaining a good sleep routine; taking part in activities that are fun and energizing; and, always keeping in mind that for those stressful situations that we believe we don't have much control over, it may only be "small stuff."

---

This column was written by Ralph Nichols, Executive Director of Mulberry Center, Inc. Contact the organization at 812.436.4221 or [comments@southwestern.org](mailto:comments@southwestern.org).