

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

As a parent, I recognize that my response to stress is important because it's likely to be copied by my children. "Do as I say, not as I do" seldom (never?) works in parenting. So it's important for me to handle stress in a positive way. Reading through this article by Christian counselor—and mom—Megan Demianiuk reminded me of some important fundamentals to model for my kids. If you've ever struggled with stress or are looking for some ways to coach your kids through stress, read Megan's article.

—Nicole Balza

HOW CAN PARENTS AND KIDS MANAGE STRESS?

STRESS. It's a familiar word to each of us.

In today's fast-paced world of never-ending responsibilities, meetings, deadlines, practices, games, schoolwork, music lessons, household chores, meal planning, childcare, carpooling, relationship challenges, sickness, death, financial stress, and safety concerns, it's no surprise that 70 percent of parents report being under extreme stress (American Psychological Association). While some stress can be good and help motivate or stimulate us to take action, stress becomes a problem when there is too much, too often. Untreated, prolonged stress can lead to negative physical, mental, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual symptoms.



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE STRESSED?

Identifying your stress symptoms is the first step to doing something about it.

Common stress symptoms include

- headaches;
- fatigue or low energy;
- tight or sore muscles;
- chest or abdominal pain;
- insomnia;
- weight gain or loss;

- difficulty concentrating or problems remembering;
- racing thoughts or your mind going blank;
- digestive troubles;
- feeling nervous, tense, jittery, irritable, depressed, and/or sad;
- compulsive eating, smoking, or drinking; and
- anger with God.

Stress can come from various external sources—relationships, the workplace, major life events, and daily hassles. Yet the most common source of stress is internal. We create most of our own distress by our self-talk. What we say to ourselves in response to a situation determines our moods and feelings. It's how we interpret the situation (our thoughts) that makes us feel the way we do.

For example, when you have a long list of to-dos and you tell yourself, "I'm never going to get everything done; I just can't pull it together," you're more likely to feel frustrated and stressed. But if you say to yourself, "I have a lot to do, but I'll get it done eventually," you're more likely to feel a sense of calm and acceptance.

It's important to note that we can't totally eliminate stress, but we can learn to manage it and reduce the negative effects it has on us. Here are a few helpful techniques and tips.

HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

Visit forwardinchrist.net/parents to access years of perspectives from Christian parents on topics ranging from discipline to gender confusion to sibling rivalry. Just type a keyword or two into the search bar. In addition to articles, forwardinchrist.net/parents also provides videos and podcasts featuring interviews with Christian parents and Christian counselors.



TRUST GOD

Our sinful nature leads us to believe that we have sole control over our own problems, but we need to let go of control and put everything in God's hands. The Bible tells us not to worry but also reminds us that this life will not be easy.

- “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (James 1:2,3).
- “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34).
- “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Eat well. A nutritious diet can counteract the impact of stress by boosting the immune system and lowering blood pressure.
- Avoid excessive alcohol and caffeine. These release adrenaline and increase tension, irritability, and insomnia.
- Get enough sleep. The National Sleep Foundation states that most adults need 7 to 9 hours per night.
- Exercise. It increases chemicals (endorphins) that make you feel happy, increases oxygen circulation, can increase your self-confidence, and improves sleep.
- Limit social media consumption.



HAVE BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT

- Prioritize between essential and non-essential tasks.
 - Delegate.
- Allow extra time to complete each task.
- Overcome procrastination.
- Learn to say no.



IDENTIFY NEGATIVE THINKING AND SELF-TALK AND CHALLENGE IT

Remember that much of what we feel (stress) is caused by what we say to ourselves. Unfortunately, most self-talk is automatic, and we aren't even aware of it. Challenge your negative thinking by asking yourself:

- What's the likelihood of this happening?
- What evidence do I have for this?
- Could there be another explanation?
- What's the worst that could happen?



LET GO OF UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

With much of our stress, it's not the event itself that upsets us but how it compares with our expectations. When those expectations are unrealistic, we're almost certain to feel upset or stressed. Some of us assume that we should never make mistakes or never have a bad day. But in reality, we can't do it all, we can't please everyone, and we will make mistakes!

It's also easy to assume incorrectly that the people in our lives (our friends, spouses, or children) will always do what we want, never hurt our feelings, and always listen and behave the way we want them to behave. Yet we live in a sinful world, and those expectations are unrealistic, leading to disappointment and stress.



FOCUS ON RELAXATION AND DEEP BREATHING

Practice slowing down and taking long, deep breaths. This improves circulation and digestion, relaxes tight muscles, and releases neurochemicals, which elevate mood. Other techniques may include

- devotion and prayer,
- art therapy,
- hobbies,
- journaling,
- massage,
- music therapy, and
- spending time with family and friends.

The key is remembering that stress isn't just the demands placed on us but also our response to those demands. So take action and reduce stress by turning to God; following healthy eating, sleeping and exercise habits; having better time management; challenging negative self-talk; letting go of expectations; and practicing relaxation and deep breathing. Remember that we have a God who loves us and promises to take care of us. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).



Megan Demianiuk is a counselor with Christian Family Solutions.

LEARN MORE ► about stress or follow up with a professional Christian counselor at christianfamilysolutions.org.

Interested in more? Visit forwardinchrist.net/parents for more parenting resources, including articles, podcasts, and videos.

