

Kanawayimik's Counselling Corner

The Kanawayimik Communicator

Summer is now ending and the kids are back in school. This transition can be stressful for parents and families. Everyone talks about stress, but we are not always clear about what it is. This is because stress comes from both the good and the bad things that happen. Stress becomes a problem when we are not sure how to handle an event or a situation. Then worry sets in, and we feel "stressed." The American Psychological Association states "Stress can be a reaction to a short-lived situation, such as being stuck in traffic. Or it can last a long time if you're dealing with relationship problems, a spouse's death or other serious situations. Stress becomes dangerous when it interferes with your ability to live a normal life over an extended period. You may feel tired, unable to concentrate or irritable. Stress can also damage your physical health." This newsletter will talk about stress and how to handle it effectively.



Stress Management

Stress management starts with identifying what causes stress in your life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You may be aware that you are frequently worried (helpguide.org), but it is important to recognize how much time you spend worrying and what you are worrying about. There is a Buddhist saying that says "let go of things you can't control", this is a key idea to recognize. If there is nothing you can do to change the situation you are worrying about, stop worrying. You are wasting your energy on something you cannot change.

For some people they are their own worst enemy and it's procrastination that leads to stress. To identify your own sources of stress, look closely at your own perspective, habits, attitude, and excuses: Do you rationalize stress as temporary ("I just have a lot going on right now") even though you can't remember the last time you took a break? Do you define stress as regular part of your work or home life ("Things are always busy that's how its always been") or as a part of your personality ("I have a lot of energy, "I'm productive"). Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events? Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining stress, the constant stress you feel will remain outside your control (helpguide.org). The Mayo Clinic recommends you identify stress as an issue for yourself so you can understand it and learn ways to manage your stress in a healthy way. One of the mottos of our Counselling program is "Discuss, Understand, Resolve, and Heal", but before you discuss you must identify there is an issue to talk about.

How to Recognize the Symptoms of Stress

Stress becomes a problem when you feel overwhelmed by things that happen to you. You may feel “stressed out” when it seems there is too much going on at one time. The Mayo Clinic suggests, “know your triggers”. If this is difficult for you, some symptoms to look for are listed below. When you feel stressed, you usually have some physical symptoms. You may feel tired, get headaches, stomach upsets or backaches, clench your jaw or grind your teeth, develop skin rashes, have recurring colds or flu, have muscle spasms or nervous twitches, or have problems sleeping (WebMD; Medline Plus). Mental signs of stress include feeling constantly pressured, and always having to “be on the go”, having difficulty concentrating, being forgetful and having trouble making decisions. Remember not to justify these symptoms by saying or thinking “I’ve always been this way” and “I like to keep busy”. Emotional signs include feeling angry, frustrated, tense, anxious, or more aggressive than usual (Medline). If you notice “outbursts” of crying or any unwanted or unpleasant emotions this may indicate your stress level is too high and having a negative impact on your wellness.

A Cree Perspective on Stress

Kanawayimik’s Executive Director advises that the teachings for stress management, as all others, is to seek guidance and strength/courage to overcome any stressors in our lives when we smudge and pray to the Creator. Elders advise to seek support from our colleagues/families/friends by talking things over, expressing our feelings to another person that we trust. Elders say it helps to discuss with another person you trust.

The other way is to take prayer cloth and tobacco to different ceremonies and ask an Elder for prayers to help to understand what is causing the stress and how to overcome the stressors.



Cognitive symptoms of stress include:

- Constant worrying
- Racing thoughts
- Forgetfulness and disorganization
- Inability to focus
- Poor judgment
- Being pessimistic or seeing only the negative side

Physical symptoms of stress :

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation, and nausea
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Insomnia
- Frequent colds and infections
- Loss of sexual desire and/or ability
- Nervousness and shaking, ringing in the ear, cold or sweaty hands & feet
- Dry mouth and difficulty swallowing
- Clenched jaw and grinding teeth

Behavioral symptoms of stress :

- Changes in appetite – either not eating or eating too much
- Procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes
- Exhibiting more nervous behaviors, such as nail biting, fidgeting, and pacing

Emotional symptoms of stress :

- Becoming easily agitated, frustrated, & moody
- Feeling overwhelmed, like you are losing control or need to take control
- Having difficulty relaxing & quieting your mind
- Feeling bad about yourself (low self-esteem), lonely, worthless, and depressed
- Avoiding others

Children and the Stress of Parenting

Being a parent can be a joyful and rewarding experience, but there are times in everyone's life when the demands and hassles of daily living cause stress. The additional stress of caring for children can, at times, make parents feel angry, anxious, or just plain "stressed out." These tensions are a normal, inevitable part of family life, and parents need to learn ways to cope so that they don't feel overwhelmed by them (CMHA).

How Can You Cope?

Coping with the stress of parenting starts with understanding what makes you feel stressed and recognize that parenting is a difficult task. Once you learn to recognize the symptoms of too much stress, you can learn new ways of handling life's problems (CMHA). You may not always be able to tell what is causing your emotional tension, but if you notice, you are feeling more tension or stress than at regular times this is your brain giving you a message that you need to take some time to yourself. The Elders at KCFS say "children are gifts from the creator" so remember it is not your children's fault that you are feeling overwhelmed. They didn't ask to be born you were chose by the Creator to bring them into this world and it is your responsibility to take care of yourself so you can provide them with the necessary nurturing and love they need.

All people have reactions to life's events, which are based on our own personal histories. We must realize our feelings of stress come from inside ourselves and that we can learn to keep our stress reactions under control (CMHA). Remember one of your most important tools is to breathe. If you feel overwhelmed while your child is crying walk away from the situation and take deep breaths to calm yourself then return to your child.

A Stress Journal

A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. A journal is a great way to get your thoughts out of your mind so you are not carrying them around. Whenever you feel stressed, or any strong emotion, keep track of it in your journal. You can then look back at your journal to identify patterns and common themes. Make sure to include: What caused your stress (guess if you're unsure). What time of day you felt stressed (morning, afternoon, night?) How you felt, both physically and emotionally and how you reacted to the stress (helpguide.org).

Put time aside for yourself. Nurturing yourself is essential to well balanced health. Set aside relaxation time. Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. If you don't take time to look after yourself, you are no good to anyone else so, no excuses make time. Your health is important and you need a balance in your mind, body, emotions, and spirit. Remember you cannot give something to someone else that you don't already have yourself. Managing your stress levels is part of loving and respecting yourself.

Healthy ways to manage stress

Avoid unnecessary stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. However, in life there are stressors you can eliminate. Know your limits and stick to them. Taking on too much is not healthy and contributes to feeling overwhelmed (Helpguide.org).

Alter the situation

If you are in a stressful situation, try to change it. Learn what you can do so the problem doesn't happen again. This can involve changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life. Express your thoughts and feelings. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way (Helpguide.org).

Adapt to the stressor

You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Look at the big picture. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. If it won't matter in the future, focus your time and energy on something that is worth it (Helpguide.org).

Accept the things you can't change

You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession (Helpguide.org). Let go things you cannot control. Focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to situations. When facing challenges, look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.

Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come (Helpguide.org).

Adopt a healthy lifestyle

Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Eat a healthy diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and drink a minimum of 8 glasses of water throughout the day (Helpguide.org). If you are a bigger person, you should drink closer to 12 glasses of water. Reduce caffeine and sugar and ensure you get 8 hours of sleep (Helpguide.org). Adequate sleep fuels your brain and body. Lack of sleep can increase feelings of sadness and worry.

One of Kanawayimik's Elders George Benson often talks about finding strength in the serenity prayer, which states:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next. --Reinhold Niebuhr