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Dealing with Farm Stress—Resources Inside!

As the serious financial and other stress continues in our agricultural community, we have compiled resources to deal with farm stress, market stress, youth stress, marriage stress, women's stress, men's stress, and grief. Our dairy team's farm stress resources can be found at: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/dairyteam/familyfarm-stress>

Below is a topic listing of the articles inside to help build knowledge, awareness and skills in coping with stress:

Market Reality, Stress and Grief

What Do We Do Now?

Primer on Farm Stress Resiliency

Dealing With Farm and Family Stress

Keys When Married to Farm Stress

G8 Marriage Communication 4U2

From One Dairy Girl to Another

Taking Care of YOU in Turbulent Times

Helping Farm Men Under Crisis

Adapting to New Realities

Farm Youth Stress and Challenges

What Do You Tell the Kids?

Good Grief...We Just Lost...

Dealing with Farm and Family Loss

Sincerely,
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Resource Packet authored / edited by: Larry Tranel

Attention: Please Read and Share enclosed information with Spouses, Friends, Neighbors and Clients who are experiencing Farm Stress or who work with those who are. Thanks.

Human Sciences Extension and Outreach:

In times of stress, whether financial or emotional, taking care of yourself, staying healthy and stretching resources are important skills. These resources and educational opportunities can help people cope. Human Sciences staff can reach out to families across the lifespan and strive to build a #STRONGIOWA one person at a time!

RESOURCES -- We are Here to Help!

Iowa Concern Hotline 800-447-1985 is available for:

Stress – available 24 hours/day and 7 days per week where trained staff take your calls via a toll-free hotline.

Crisis – Free and Confidential

Legal Education – Dial 711 or TTY/TTD;

Financial Concerns -- iowaconcern@iastate.edu

Email an Expert - Send your questions related to legal issues, finances, stress and crisis or disaster to our staff.

Live Chat - One-on-one, secure communication through typed text with a stress counselor.

Iowa Healthy Families Line - 1-800-369-2229
Toll-free telephone line for health information and referral for pregnancy, immunizations, and more

TEEN Line - 1-800-443-8336
Toll-free telephone line Iowa teenagers can call to discuss issues they are facing; available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week

Depression - symptoms, treatment, and support sponsored by the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Visit our [nutrition and wellness](#), [parenting](#), [stress](#) resources.

Visit us at: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/>

Find and contact our staff at:

[Human Sciences Extension and Outreach Staff Directory](#).

ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team
"Bringing Profits and Quality to Life"

Life is Difficult. It is in overcoming difficulty that often gives life it's meaning. (Scott Peck) **Life is a continual dying to oneself to become something more.** The caterpillar dies to itself to become a beautiful butterfly. Let's appreciate life, even amidst it's difficulty. And, let's extend ourselves to others to become more of both ourselves and them in the process. (Larry Tranel)

Market Reality, Stress and Grief

“Now What Do We Do?”

by Fred Hall, Dairy Specialist
ISU Extension and Outreach



Market Reality is an understanding of past market cycles, current market forces and future market opportunities based on a complex set of economic, political, cultural and other situations that affect farm incomes at any given point in time. **Market Stress** is an extended time where low product prices or high input costs cause negative margins and/or negative cash flow.

Market Grief is a reaction to the loss of something (profit or way of life) that is loved and cherished because finances or cash flow do not work out for extended periods of time. It may be an exasperation of a “Holy Cow” to a situation beyond control. Alternatives seem limited or are difficult to adjust to or realize in the new market norm.



At times, farmers get ravaged by the economy. Dairy prices plummet from time to time, which can last for years. Crop and other livestock prices often do not fare any better, minimizing alternatives. In 2014 for example, dairymen were getting over \$20 per hundredweight for their milk. In late 2018, that number sat below \$14 cwt. The 2018 average was the lowest average of that four year timeframe—a timeframe already previously stressful!

To put this in perspective, the 2018 break-even price for many Iowa milk producers was well over \$17.00 cwt. With the 2018 cow and heifer prices going below \$40 per cwt., selling heifers meant losing more than half the cost of growing them. In a depressed cow market, selling cows may mean forfeiting lots of the value of milk cows on the balance sheet. **So, how does one spell stress and grief?**

*Farm market stress and grief gave cause feelings of being overwhelmed, depressed, immobilized, lack of energy, loss of hope, etc. This can lead to exhibits of anxiety, anger and loss of good decision-making ability. **SEEK HELP! PLEASE!***

Dairy producers have heard time and again they need to use records to fine-tune their management to find every penny of margin. Getting back to the basics- knowing their cost of production; feeding and breeding efficiency; producing the most pounds of solids per hundredweight of milk; improve the milking system to increase labor efficiency; breeding superior females for needed herd replacements and breeding the lower quality females to beef bulls that generate added revenue. **Many have done all that and more and the numbers still may not work out.**

Dairying Might Get Even Tougher in Reality

as markets change. Exports might not clear additional milk and processing capacity sees constraints. Markets are not always humane--providing a price to balance supply and demand, even if low. Benefits of a free market do not come without cost. **A sad reality is the probability of an extended dairy recession even worse than the past few years.** Somebody or something needs to clear the market, meaning producers continue to leave.

Making the Tough Choices and Seeking Marketing Options

—while many producers do not use a risk management tool, they are available and can be useful. For example, the 2018 Farm Bill gives dairy producers new market protection options, which, in reality, may actually protect the over-supply of milk. It renames Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MMP-Dairy) to Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMC) and permits participation in both DMC and Livestock Gross Margin for Dairy (LGM) on the same production. DMC and the Dairy Revenue Protection program may also be used together. The DMC program is vastly improved from the old MPP and when combined with LGM coverage, should be considered by every dairyman, no matter how many cows they milk.

Every farm needs an operating plan, and as important, an exit strategy-setting a point where one is no-longer willing to accept equity loss and will exit the industry or reallocate resources to another enterprise. The easiest route, is to do nothing and hope things resolve themselves. Unfortunately, that hardly ever works. Remember, there is life after the cows leave the barn or even after people leave the farm. It is a tough reality, filled with stress and maybe even grief, but is often a necessary outcome in times of trouble.

Farmers need to be resourceful when considering how else resources can be used. Farm alternatives or off-farm jobs might not be a great choice, but a possibility needing consideration. Often, a conversation with someone who has gone through an “exit” can be helpful. Bringing others, i.e. Extension specialists, into the discussion might help to bring out ideas that otherwise might not be considered.

Hopefully, all the market reality, stress and grief can be worked through: making tough choices; reaching out to others, exploring options and giving life a new reality.

Hopefully, a new acceptance is attained that gives hope to meaningful life—a life maybe just different than before.



This article is co-authored by Larry Tranel, Psy.D.
ISU Extension Dairy Field Specialist in NE/SE Iowa

With market stress and grief, people often wonder—What can I do to get out of this mess or be able to save the lifestyle and assets? The important part is to recognize when to seek help and make informed decisions, not out of confusion and emotion, but objective reality, even when confusion and emotions are running high!

A **“PRIMER”** on Farm Stress Resiliency *by Larry Tranel, Psy. D., Dairy Sp.* **“Dealing with Farm and Family Stress”** *ISU Extension and Outreach*



Farming is dangerous and stressful, no doubt. Farmers have varying degrees of resiliency to deal with the physical and mental dangers of farming, leading to varying stress levels. The integrated blend of family, farming and nature can cause unique situations of stress in farm families.

Stress is normal and can be healthy as it might push us to do things that can promote growth in us. But, too much acute stress or piled up chronic stress can make it difficult to:

- Concentrate, remember and process information.
- Organize, calculate and make decisions
- Sleep, relax and breathe properly
- Communicate, share and bond as a family.



Stress can become a source of conflict but can also help families grow together as many farm families are strong **because** they had gone through a tough time together. Too much stress can lead to anxiety, doubt, depression and hopelessness. Overcoming stress overload by developing skills can help families have more resiliency to farm stress.

Chronic farm stress can weaken a person’s spirit, appetite, physical stamina, focus, relationships, decision-making ability and dampen happiness and satisfaction in time. Life skills can help deal with it.

Resiliency can be a learned, life skill. It is a person’s ability to deal with stress, using skills, to better cope and possibly even overcome the root causes or maybe just its effects. Since stress reduction techniques are a learned skill, the aim of this paper is to assist farmers and those working with them with a **“PRIMER”** acronym tool to better deal with farm stress. The tool is a six step process outlined below. The **“PRIMER”** Tool will then be detailed along with skills and goals that pertain to each step.



Perception – Our Thoughts under Stress
Reality – Our Environment in Stress
Identify – Our Emotions with Stress
Manage – Our Reaction to Stress
Extend – Our Communication of Stress
Resources – Our Support for Stress

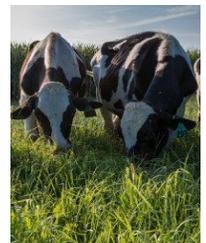
Perception is heavily related to the image or picture we have in our minds of whatever situation, coupled with any meaning or attitude attached to that image or picture. An occurrence might happen to two people and one might very positively perceive it and the other very negatively with a wide range of other “perceptions” in between.

A farm family’s perception can pertain to their internal environment, such as perceived interpersonal and familial strengths, as well as their external environment, including positive and negative experiences pertaining to the family’s ability to adapt. (Lavee et al., 1985).

Research suggests that families who **reinterpret** initial negative to more positive meanings of their overall crisis situations, are more likely to be in control of their stressors, to find possible solutions to crisis situations, and to adapt well eventually to the crisis (Xu, 2007). The problem is not that there are problems or stress, the problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having a problem is a problem.

Seeing stress as normal and a means of growth is a great tool. Accepting that life is difficult at times and that it is in the process of overcoming difficulty that gives life some of its meaning by helping us to grow is often an attitude that can assist more positive perception of stressful situations.

Reality is a sum of a person’s internal capacity and external environment to understand the situation surrounding stress or a crisis event. Some situations take families by surprise or are beyond their control. If life events come too soon, are delayed or fail to materialize, the health, happiness, and well-being may be affected (Schlossberg, et. al., 1996). Intensified emotionality and/or behavioral disorganization in families and their members are likely to occur as a result (Toberto, 1991). Another crucial variable in dealing with the unexpected is family development and environmental fit (Eccles et. al., 1993).



Ambiguous loss is often a reality and a most difficult stress to deal with as something is being lost, but not knowing what is happening; what might happen; or even what can be done to prevent the loss due to circumstances beyond control (Boss). So, the reality of farm and family stress can be normal living or it can cause many physical, mental, personal and family ailments. The goal is to understand the reality of the stress environment and seek remedy.

A Stressed Goal: The Most Important Thing, is to Keep the Most Important Thing, the Most Important Thing!!

Identify emotions of stress related circumstances.

Emotions are often so intertwined and often mangled that identifying the underlying causes or emotion is not easy. For instance, an exhibit of anger, a secondary emotion, often is expressed due to another emotion. Anxiety and depression often have a root cause. Once we realize our perception and the reality of the situation, we look inward to identify causes so as not to transfer negative emotions to or onto others.

When angry, it might be easiest to transfer the cause to the person closest to us, a spouse for instance, since they were part of the environment when the situation occurred, though they were not the source.

Thus, the identification of emotions and causes of stress is important so as not to wrongly blame or transfer negative emotions to someone who may just be an innocent bystander. Know that facts are much easier to untangle than emotions coming from a multitude of experiences.

The goal is positive emotions regarding stressful and other situations. Situations exhibit chemical reactions in our bodies that trigger our emotions. Our brains label the experience as good, bad, happy or sad, etc. It's a mind over matter deal as positive thoughts are a precursor to positive feelings or emotions. So, the skill to learn is how to identify emotions that have occurred while thinking positive thoughts. Thus, we are about as happy as we make up our minds to be. Choose happy and return there even when life gets us down, though granted, easier said than done.

Manage through stress knowing all situations have some hope, alternatives or options. Identify what can be controlled and accept what is beyond control without blaming oneself. Understand that lack of clarity of future can induce stress as it brings worry, confusion, conflict and even shame (Boss). Assess stress symptoms--heart rate, shallow breathing, headaches, anxiety, outbursts, lack of focus and hope to name a few—to know stress levels.

When symptoms arise, use “**BEE SET**” —**B**reathe, **E**xercise, **E**at, **S**ublimate, **E**xpress and **T**alk to manage stress. When stressed, shallow breathing becomes norm. **Breathe** deep using stomach breathing, slow and draw out, to get more oxygen to the brain for better decision-making. **Exercise** to heart pumping levels to increase blood and oxygen flow to brain. **Eat** healthy to feel better. **Sublimate**, or trade pain, using visual thinking of happy times and places to relax mindset and change thoughts for a while. **Express** acceptance of the reality of the situation to help focus on a response or solution instead of the problem. **Talk** yourself through felt emotions with positive “I can do this” attitude, coupled with breathing, exercise, and sublimating activities. Use the “**BEE SET**” tool to take the **STING** out of stress. 😊 **The Best Place to “BEE” is Together, so “SET” your stress straight.** 😊



Extend oneself to others as social isolation and loneliness can further add to stress. Those in family environments are best helped by family members, but introverted males often do not extend their thoughts and feelings readily to allow for healthy family support. Guilt, shame and social stigma often inhibit extending to others for help, as well.

Feeling close to others increases oxytocin in the blood. Doing things for others increases happiness and reduces focus on self and personal problems—a sublimating tactic! Force oneself to find things to smile and laugh about—laughter being the best medicine is more than a metaphor!



Seek advice from others as many have experience with stress and difficulty as it is a common part of life, so realize one is not alone. Verbalizing or writing concerns often helps clarify thoughts and organize action plans. Lack of social support, on the other hand, can be a cause of future depression and loss of hope.

The goal is to become more intertwined in other's lives as stressed people are often better helped by family and friends who care than even by trained counselors. When extending to others, we often find new perspectives and mindsets, not to mention better feelings of the stressful situations at hand. Lastly, by extending oneself to others for help, consolation, or comradery, we often experience a basic human need of compassion that helps humans realize we are not alone in our issues of life.

Resources are important in life. Families that are able to make positive meaning of their stressors and use effective coping strategies as well as internal and external resources are more likely to adapt as well (Xu, 2007). This applies to individuals, too! Internal resources and coping strategies were shared in previous sections. External resource needs tend to focus on things that help develop skills in:

1) Interpersonal Communication—everyone has their own beliefs, feelings, needs and agenda to be shared. Knowing healthy/ideal versus unhealthy/common behaviors can separate success and failure in overcoming stress/conflict.

2) Family and Community Support—immediate and intergenerational families, and intertwined communities can be a source of both stress and strength—attend to self-help and other resources, and other people's needs as family and community support is a two way street.

3) Problem Solving Techniques—use processes to: define the problem/stress; consider pros and cons to alternatives; select a plan; take action steps; identify resources; and use group/family meetings. Be “proactive” in problem solving.

4) Goal Setting—Make them **SMART**—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-Based.

Keys When "Married" to Farm Stress

by Larry Tranel, Psy. D., Dairy Sp.

ISU Extension and Outreach



"G8 Marriage Communication 4U2"



Marriage + Farming = Good Luck which may over or underestimate the difficulty of raising a family on a farm but research shows couples are pretty satisfied with their choice to farm. Keeping marriages healthy is key because healthy kids come from healthy parents and healthy parents come from healthy marriages. There is compelling evidence that healthy marriages have beneficial social and economic impacts for both parents and children, including physical and physiological health (Ola & Mathur, 2016).

The aim of this publication is to share tidbits of advice on marriage communication, much of which was adapted from or taken from "The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Enrichment Network" (NERMEN) and the Healthy Relationships program. For more information: <https://www.fcs.uga.edu/nermen/>

Communication is much more than words as non-verbal communication is as important as verbal since 65%-85% of message is often non-verbal. When simply texting or emailing versus calling or meeting face to face, know the message can drastically change. Facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, touch, volume, posture, proximity of personal space can all impact how the message is received.

Communication is full of "Bids for Connection"—as kids and spouses constantly make bids to connect in relationships for affection, attention, and help. How a spouse or child responds often separates happy couples and families from unhappy ones. How you "turn" is an important fundamental to any type of relationship.

- Turning away**—ignoring the bid and continuing what he or she was doing....
- Turning against**—can't you see I'm busy...why do you want to waste your money....
- Turning toward**—well that sounds like fun...I'm happy you considered us...that is interesting but are you sure we can afford it? NERMEN

Make it a point, and practice, as repetition makes a habit, to turn towards family and friends to invite them to share more, with genuine interest. If not a good time, still turn toward them and share why. Use positive words and tone.

"What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility." Leo Tolstoy

Learning to deal with difficulty is how we grow as people!

In our bids for connection, we send messages. Below are **unhelpful messages** that many give:

- 1) Giving Advice—"what you need to do is...there's an easy fix for that...why not do it this way...."
- 2) Talking about YOUR feelings and experience rather than validate theirs—"I felt same way when..."
- 3) Making their pain seem unimportant—"You'll get over it...life will go on.... It's no big deal...."

Versus **Helpful Messages** to practice:

- 1) Acknowledge **their** THOUGHTS and FEELINGS—"It seems important to you that..."
- 2) Invite more discussion—"I want to understand more/why/how...what difference will it make"
- 3) Acknowledge that the pain or confusion is REAL—"You must feel awful" "Tough situation"

"Seek first to understand, then be understood"—Steven Covey

Healthy marriages tend to have arguments and at times, even conflict when challenging each other. Struggles can increase marital bonding as couples struggle to know each other better or experience a tragedy or turbulent time together. Conflict can also fester and divide.

Be "**conflict careful**" around kids as kids often **imagine** (think the worst); **magnify** (make bigger than it really is); and **internalize** (it's my fault) why mom and dad aren't getting along. As a result, kids might act out; turn inward; have trouble concentrating or interacting well with others; and/or have poor academic or other performance.

Love is more a choice, not just a feeling. So, **CHOOSE to LOVE, even when you don't FEEL like it.** Larry Tranel

Speak and Hear skills are BOTH important. Below are Speak Skills when sharing thoughts, feelings and concerns:

- Start with positive words/tone at ratio 5:1 or 20:1
- Carefully select words and tone and body language—Gentle and non-threatening
- Explain how you feel and think, using details—Use "I" statements and name specific behavior that concerns you or how it makes you feel—"I feel/think...when you...say or do..."
- Avoid the trigger words—**you** always and **you never**—turns conversation into fights
- Keep it brief, allowing your partner to paraphrase (repeat) or validate what was heard.

Marital and Family arguments sometimes go in circles with each spouse/member trying to prove they were right. Sometimes you are right, but that's not the point. If you can recognize part of the argument that you were wrong in, simply saying "I was wrong." can help. Resist following it with, "But..." Yea, *But...* I understand, *But...* OK, *But...* I did, *But...* *Source: Marriage Moments*

When listening to another, Practice **“HEAR” Skills** when someone shares thoughts, feelings or concerns

- **Honor the Other**—valuing and respecting with genuine interest (eye contact) for their thoughts and feelings, not focusing on your response
- **Accurate Empathy**—understanding and imagining how other is feeling and respecting feelings as real and valid
- **Allow Difference of Opinion**—even if don’t agree—listen without judgement or sharing how you feel, unless asked
- **Repeat to Confirm Understanding**, “I heard you say...I understood you feel...I think you wish....”

Increasing the Joy in Relationships

Show genuine interest/concern (eye contact, focus)

Be affectionate/empathetic (tender touch)

Be appreciative (attitude of gratitude)

Be accepting (yet disciplined)

Share Your Joy (overcoming sorrow)

(Adapted from NERMEN) **Jokey Around (respectfully)**

Not all conversations go well. Some conversations need a timeout and some need a chance just to do over. When conversation goes negative, below are some ideas when couples or family members just need to **Hit the Brakes and Repair some things that were done or said!**

1. **Common Ground**—“Let’s try to tackle this together” Accept Differences/Respect
2. **I need to calm down**—“Can I take that back?” or “Can we think for 5 minutes then talk?”
3. **Sorry**—“Let me try again...Forgive me....I didn’t think of it that way....”
4. **Get to Yes**—“I see what you mean....Can we compromise....Agree to Disagree...”
5. **Stop Action**—“Arguing is only making it worse...Can we write feelings in a letter?...Can we time out?”
6. **I appreciate**—“I see your point...we are both saying....I know this isn’t your fault...we both want what is best....”

In addition, at times conversations just need a longer, soothing break—20 minutes, positive thoughts, no blame, avoiding triggers that invoke negative language.

Bottom Line: Healthy Communication → Healthy Persons → Healthy Couple Functioning → Healthy Parenting = Healthy Child Wellbeing. Learn/Practice Communication!

But, not all marriages or other relationships make it or have the best interest of the relationship in mind. Before relationships get to “irretrievable damage”, spouses can be on the lookout for **“Signs of Relationship Troubles”** as highlighted by *John Gottman, Relationship Researcher*:

1. **Criticism**—self right, other wrong—“you always...you never...why can’t you ever...”
2. **Defensiveness**—“you’re the problem, ignoring other, yes-but..., not true, you’re the one...”
3. **Contempt**—name calling, rolling eyes, hostile humor, sarcasm, mockery—most poisonous!
4. **Stonewalling**—conveys disapproval, distances oneself, disconnection, silence, mumbling, removing oneself physically (85% of time it is the males who use this strategy)

These signs highlight a need for possible outside help, a facilitator, friend or counselor who might highlight these troubled habits for the good of the marriage.

In the End, Farm and Family Communication is Key!

Farm couples and members that can’t share thoughts, feelings, budge, give an inch, say they’re sorry, acknowledge wrongdoing—tend to drive a wedge—it only goes so far before it splits. In the larger farm family, think about these **Seven Biggest Disagreements in Farm Family Communication** and how they play out in your farm family.

- 1.* Decision-making--who makes them/who is included?
2. New ideas for change--is change threatening or better?
3. Money-spending policies--who decides who spends?
4. Time-off policies/vacations--where are your priorities?
5. Family and business goals—Loyalty to farm vs spouse?
6. Managing farm employees--which boss do I listen to?
7. Role of Spouse (s) -- what are the expectations?

*** Who makes the decisions is the ultimate!**

Adapted from Dr. Ron Hanson, Univ of Nebraska-Lincoln

In sum, the Top 10 skills to communicate to each other:

1. I love you—**appreciation** *Author Unknown*
2. I’m sorry let’s work it out—**forgiveness**
3. I hear you saying....—**listening**
4. You make sense to me because....—**validation**
5. I imagine you must feel....—expressing **empathy**
6. I would like this—what would you like? **desires**
7. Thank you for—**gratitude**
8. Would you please do this?—most are **not mind-readers**
9. I am feeling....—**responsibility to share** ideas/feelings
10. I forgive you....—**acceptance**, it goes both ways.

So, If married to farm stress, renew your vows and your commitment 4 Gr8 Marriage Communication 4 U 2 

Larry Tranel, Marriage Minister

Spouses and family members, even very loving ones, sometimes need a "Do Over." When you catch yourself (or you are caught) saying or doing something hurtful, be humble enough to ask for a Do Over. Apologize. Rephrase your statement in a more sensitive way, Make an amend. Sincerely say, “I Love You.” *Adapted from: Marriage Moments*

From One “Dairy Girl” to the Next...

by Jenn Bentley, Dairy Specialist

ISU Extension and Outreach



“Taking Care of YOU in Turbulent Times”



Dairy Farm Women have evolved in their farm roles, from traditional “bookkeeper” to now playing multiple roles both on and off the farm. Coupled with traditional roles that women tend to keep including household, children and community activities, it can enhance levels of stress as these roles become intertwined.

This often results in symptoms of anxiety, worry, and stress—trying to balance farm, family, and non-farm activities. Yet, families choose this lifestyle to raise their families on the farm, being their own boss and knowing the values that can be instilled in raising children there.

As a dairy girl myself, a wife and mom, still engaged in our 4th generation farm and the dairy community, having seen stress play out, I think the DAIRYGIRL acronym can be a summary of positive ways we can take care of ourselves during stress or turbulent times.

Remember DAIRY GIRL:

DEEP Breathe

ACTIVE Goals and Exercise

IMPLEMENT change

REMEMBER your TEAM

WHY? What’s your WHY?

GRATITUDE

INCREASE Happiness

RESTORE-mind, body, soul

LEARN everyday

My role in Extension has typically focused on dairy production management. The **Dairy Girl** concept will focus on “YOU” management as it’s hard to take care of cows or loved ones if you haven’t first taken care of **YOU!**

Deep Breath – Start your day with a deep breath to inhale the future and exhale the past. Take 10 minutes and plan out your day from daily farm chores to household grocery list or meal plan. Understand that it may not always go as planned (cow calves, tractor breakdown, child is sick), and use deep breathing techniques to reduce stress until a new plan can be made.

Be Active – Keep your SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely) goals in front of you and be proactive in achieving and sharing them as a farm family. Know Procrastination Increases Stress! Exercise Reduces Stress! Stay active!

Implement Change – Try spelling Challenge without Change. If you’re going to rise to the challenge, you must be prepared to change. Instead of “I can’t change milk prices” or “I can’t work with him/her”, create re-frames for your thoughts to “I can change how I....” then follow through implementing.

Remember – Who’s on your team? Surround yourself with positive people, those that talk more about constructive thoughts and ideas and less about other people. Remember, you become like the five people you spend the most time with. So, who do you want to become? Remember to bond with them.

WHY? – Take a step back and practice self-awareness. Visualize what’s important and why. But, if a crisis occurs, don’t get stuck in the **WHY?!!!**

Gratitude – There is so much beauty around us and often we forget to look up. Create a gratitude journal and write down 3 things you’re grateful for each night. They can be simple things; family meal, funny joke, someone’s laugh, and you’ll quickly realize those simple things add up to the greatest moments in life.

Increase Happiness – When everything else is out of your control, you can be in the driver’s seat of happiness. They say laughter is the best medicine! And it’s contagious, if you’re happy, it often spreads to your spouse and children.

Restore – You can’t pour from an empty cup. Making health a priority is important for your mind, body, and soul. This includes exercise, sleep, hydration, and fueling your body with nutritious foods. Some find running, reading, gardening, or faith and community service additional ways to fill their cup back up. It’s important to know what works for you, take time to do what makes your soul happy. ☺ And smile, it relaxes and restores peace of mind. ☺

Learn – Learn from people who inspire you, spend time with them and ask for their help. And, Learn to help others—It tends to make us feel most human. As you actively share your goals with family members, learn about their goals.

The secret to living well and longer is: eat half, walk double, laugh triple and love without measure. – Tibetan Proverb

Mental health matters! You are worth more than the sum of all your problems. Don’t be afraid to use mental health resources, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

Helping Farm Men Under Crisis!

Mostly Adapted from Randy Weigel, Univ. of Wyoming Extension

by Larry Tranel, Psy. D., Dairy Sp.

ISU Extension and Outreach



Traditional Male Farm Identity or beliefs how men should behave have roots at many levels of society and at many levels in the minds of men. This identity encourages men to be independent, strong, self-reliant, competitive, achievement oriented, powerful, adventurous, and emotionally restrained (Harris, 1995). This leads to four traditional attitudes about masculinity:

- men should not be **feminine** (“no sissy stuff”),
- men should strive to be respected for **successful achievement** (“the big wheel”),
- men should **never show weakness** (“the sturdy oak”), and
- men should seek **adventure and risk** (“give ‘em hell”) (Brannon, 306).

This traditional view of being male causes many men to hesitate to seek help...some men are taught that masculine power, dominance, competition, and control are essential to proving one’s masculinity; that vulnerabilities, feelings, and emotions in men are signs of femininity and are to be avoided; that masculine control of self, others, and environment are essential for men to feel safe, secure, and comfortable; and that men seeking help and support from others is a sign of weakness, vulnerability, and potential incompetence. (Robertson, Fitzgerald, 1992).

Perception of Self and Others causes men to not seek help as concerns about their personal or financial reputation; lack of knowing what help is available; not having a mindset of seeking help; lack of time, money or insurance to seek help; feeling need to be self-reliant; fear of being perceived as lazy or mentally unstable, or simply too much pride or distrust of those in helping professions.

Bottom Line = Need to Change the Mindset!

Mindset strategies below can help men emotionally survive a crisis and may offer support and encouragement:

Embrace the crisis. Why? Because you will learn how strong you are and how strong you can be. Let the crisis teach you about yourself. Realize you will never be the same person after the crisis. But, if you so choose, you will be stronger.

Refuse to be a victim or Play the blame game. An unforgiving spirit takes a lot of energy. You may be a victim of circumstance but don’t blame others or yourself for what happened or dig yourself into a rut. You may not be able to control the crisis, but you can control your attitude toward it. Remember, your life has a purpose because you are alive and much more. Forgive those who wrong you and focus on love.

Accept your emotions. Laying in bed at night, the chest pounding and mind racing, thoughts of anger, failure, guilt, shame, and even death may surface. Do not deny these thoughts but accept as part of the learning experience. They are normal; they are who you are. Living with your emotions is painful, but it builds your resolution to persevere.

Connect with other men. This is not easy for our gender because, in general, men are not great communicators. But simple gestures from other men, such as phone calls and texts, can be very comforting. Silence, on the other hand, is invariably seen as judgment or lack of concern. Reaching out to others keeps you connected to the world.

Stay away from negative people. Nothing brings you crashing down faster than negative thoughts. Research on stress and crisis, as well as health issues, shows that people with positive attitudes handle and recover from crisis better than those with negative attitudes. Keep your sense of humor. It is often said that 'laughers survive and survivors laugh.'

Decide when to worry. If one worries about their crisis in the evening, one might toss fitfully all night with negative thoughts consuming them. Limit worry to two hours every morning when one has more energy and a better attitude-- then try (not always successfully) not to worry the rest of day.

Don't shut out your family. When facing crisis, men often become quiet and withdrawn. This causes anxiety in other family members, which then causes more withdrawing. Let the people in your family know how you're feeling, your worries, your fears, and if you really are okay.

Take care of yourself. There is a wealth of research on the value of good health in handling stress and crisis. It gives you energy, protection, a positive attitude, and a sense of control. Practice added safety. Eat well, exercise, get enough sleep, and rely on your faith to pull you through. Research has shown prayer to be a positive tool in healing and life quality.

Believe in tomorrow. There may be a reason this crisis is happening to you, and your job is to find out why. Keep telling yourself, I will survive, I will get through this. The future is promising in many ways: believe you will be there to see it.

Though farm crisis, family crisis, and personal crisis are all different, the human response is similar. 'Anyone can give up, but only the strong will continue to battle.' Men can use male identity value of “Take the Bull by the Horns” using Mindset strategies, and deal with crisis or stress in competitive ways.

“Farmers are Resourceful, Be Resourceful 4 Yourself 2”

Men in rural areas tend to be more introverted, thus taking more of an inward approach during stressful times. Encouraging and helping connections while respecting the needed time to privately process stress is important.

Farm Youth Stress & Challenges

by Larry Tranel, Psy. D., Dairy Sp.
ISU Extension and Outreach



“What Do You Tell the Kids?”

Farm Youth have varying degrees of “mastery” to deal with the opportunities and stressors of life. Learning opportunities abound on the farm, but growing up on a farm can also bring challenges—this fact sheet’s focus.

Challenges are normal and can be healthy as they can push youth to do things that promote healthy growth. It is in the process of dealing with and overcoming challenges that can help provide deeper meaning in life and can help youth develop a life skill of “Mastery” along the way.

Mastery is the ability to both conceptualize and actualize solving a problem, create a project, communicate an idea, achieve a life skill, or using a skill to deal with or better manage a situation or opportunity. The aim here is to better develop Mastery over life’s more “down” times.

When Youth are Down with a:

Dent, Doubt, Damage, Demand, Denial, Departure, Disappointment, Discouragement, Delay, Debt, Danger, Deficit, Difficulty, Dispute, Disturbance, Division, Defeat, Depression, Destruction, Disaster, Disability, Disease, Divorce, or even Death....

What Do You Tell the Kids?

The Power of Positive Reality is a mindset to help youth use the Power of Positive Focus that hopefully leads to the Power of Positive Definition of who they are that then leads to the Power of Positive Reality in their lives. Relating the Power of Positive Reality to Farm Child Psychology is depicted in the table below. The goal of Reality is to foster youth to positive Actions, Behaviors, Habits, Performance, Decisions and thus Positive Reality on the right. But, in order to get youth there, we need to step back and help youth create or envision positive Thoughts, Images, Ideas, Perceptions, Mission to help youth create a positive FOCUS—a mindset to overcome negative stimuli.



Positive Thoughts are a precursor to positive **Feelings** and thus, positive **Actions**. A common parenting skill is to threaten youth to quit this action, behavior or habit or to perform a certain way or make this decision, maybe even harping on this daily to get this end-result or action. As children grow, they tend to acquire many deep-rooted pictures or images, ideas, perceptions from parents and peers, teachers and television, siblings and society that may or may not be healthy.

Trying to sway youth towards a healthy **action** that conflicts with their **perception** or **mind picture** of what is the norm may mean a parent needs to go back and adjust the camera or brain lens to help youth understand why their **image** might need to be changed first for healthier **decision-making**. But, the reality of getting from picture to good decision has another step. Attached to the thoughts, pictures and perceptions are often feelings, attitudes,

values and principles that often need changing to get at the desired action, behavior or habit. Bottom line is that positive thoughts or images are precursors to positive feelings or attitudes which are precursors to positive actions, habits or behaviors—Thus, the power of positive reality in youth development takes a multi-step approach.

Well-Adjusted Youth tend to come from well-adjusted parents. Modeling healthy behavior is key. Witnessing unhealthy conflict due to farm or family can be harmful, a source of unhealthy pictures or perceptions that may get rooted in a child’s mind forever. Farm and family stress may cause youth to be anxious, scared or sleepless and may respond by acting out or turning inward, and having trouble interacting, concentrating and performing in school or elsewhere (NERMEN). All families have some conflict and challenges or they are not normal. 😊

It is more important to deal with a youth’s thoughts more than feelings (Rosemond) as often parents give overt attention to a child’s feelings at the expense of well-adjusted thought processes to help them better deal with their feelings. **It is more important to empathize with youth than to sympathize** with them. The former tends to help with understanding their situation. The latter tends to help them feel sorry for themselves. But, in times of great grief, sympathy may be the needed form of compassion.

Acknowledge Thoughts...I understand...you’re thinking...
Empathize with Feelings...I sense...you must feel...

Farm Youth Psychology 101:

The **POWER** of **POSITIVE REALITY**

Thoughts → Feelings → Actions

Images → Attitudes → Behaviors

Ideas → Values → Habits

Perceptions → Principles → Performance

Mission → Identity → Decisions

FOCUS → DEFINITION → REALITY

Communicating with Youth under Stress is not an easy task! Its success is a product of good relations. Success of relations is a product of good communication! Thus, it's a "Catch 22" situation needing a "TALK" plan!

Talk Meaning—help youth see and appreciate the "meaning" of small, good things in their lives, starting early on. They find greater happiness and satisfaction, even amidst difficulty, and help understand the bigger "meaning" of other things.

Talk Definition—help youth "define" who they are in their strengths and abilities, not just athletic or musical talents, for example. Call attention to their goodness, kindness and sensitivity and "encourage each other (them) daily while it is still today" (Hebrews 3:13) with positives points mentioned much more than negative ones.

Talk Positive Reality—help youth "realize" that if they want to feel good about themselves they need to "think" good about themselves. Do they see themselves as weak and down in a hole or strong, sitting on top of the world? Both **Humility** and **Confidence** need to be learned in their internal reality. Focus on the positive and learn from the rest as youth are as happy as they decide to be.

Talk Relative—help youth relativize, not magnetize problems. Often farm youth don't have all the things others do. Talking the previous topics of meaning, definition and reality, can help youth realize how blessed they may be without things or in comparison with other youth around the world.

Talk Respect—help youth develop humility and thus develop a sense of respect for others and the world around them. Understanding that respect for parents, teachers, coaches and other role models, barring and wrongdoing, creates a value of humility within oneself towards others. Humility is often a more important interpersonal value than pride, for communication skills later in life.

Talk Joy—help youth experience joy in relationships by:

- Being **genuinely** interested/concerned using eye contact and focus, which means not letting cell phones get in the way!
- Being appreciative with an attitude of gratitude.
- Being accepting, yet disciplined in righteousness.
- Being joyful, looking at blessings even in sorrow and joking around as appropriate.
- Being affectionate and empathetic which means using a tender touch. (adapted from NERMEN)

Talk Their Level—Adults can be intimidating to youth often simply because height is associated with power. Sitting or kneeling to get closer to their level can often improve communication response with a simple gesture for more level "eye to eye" contact.

Talk in Their Time—Youth often are not as talkative when their minds are occupied elsewhere. Meal times, car ride time, family game time and/or lying in bed/prayer time are often more responsive times when youth "might" talk. ☺

Talk Their Talk—Use words and examples they can relate to and create "word pictures" connected to their interests to give better meaning. Youth tend not to be proactive in talking so, like boating, if just left to natural currents, busyness and competing interests will drift people away. It takes time and energy to keep youth on course with purpose.



Talk Their Walk—youth are growing up in an environment today much different than parents. Farm and family stress might pale compared to bullying and social challenges brought on by technology and social media, which have made it ever so difficult to walk a mile in their shoes. When their "walk" is less than good, youth need support, security and safety measure, knowing they are not alone and that family is their safe haven where boundaries and the "**fundamentals**" of life are found. Youth need safety and boundaries, but help them see the **fun** or meaning in the **mental challenge** of "thinking" through life.

So, What Do You Tell the Kids? Farm youth, when times are tough, can often rise to the occasion, and even help deal with the fire or problem, if supported with clear and caring communication. Protecting loved ones from bad news is not always best, as often, kids may be aware of something, feeling emotional charges. Mistrust can develop if not being told the truth. If age appropriate, give youth the opportunity to appreciate the real concerns of the family—it can teach youth to deal with difficulty—and can help build resiliency in your children.

Bring youth along in the discussions rather than just announce the bottom line plan. Let them know they are loved and did not cause this as they often blame themselves. Listen to them without criticizing their worries. Check their level of understanding and know a one minute chat, a gentle hug or a reassuring word may be the best way to communicate with youth under stress.

When Youth Turn to You, do you? a) **Turn away**—ignoring bid for connection and continuing what you were doing...
b) **Turn against**—can't you see I'm busy...why do you want to waste your money....where'd you get that crazy idea...
c) **Turn toward**—well that sounds like fun...I'm happy you shared with me...that is interesting....but... (adapted from NERMEN)

Good Grief—We Just Lost....!!

“Dealing with Farm and Family Loss”



by Larry Tranel, Psy. D., Dairy Sp.
ISU Extension and Outreach



Farm Families have unique risks and experiences in the farming way of life. Farm families often choose the lifestyle due to the pleasures of being their own boss and raising their family on a farm. But, farming is a high risk occupation both in physical safety and financial security. The natural environment with weather, market forces and hard work can end in either profit or loss. Loss is a reality to farming in the event a cow dies, a crop is flooded or the cash flow and finances even causes one to lose the farm.

Grief is experienced as normal and can even be healthy as one reacts to the loss of something that is loved and cherished. Dealing with grief is a learned skill to help one understand grief, not to overcome it, but process through it to hopefully return to normal functioning over time.

Loss is a life event where someone or something that is loved suddenly or slowly ceases to be a part of our lives. Dealing with an acute loss (barn fire, death in family) or a chronic loss (loss of profits over time), or an ambiguous loss (not sure of the what, how and whys of a loss) all need the process of grief to deal with the loss. Even though loss is typically bad, the “grief process” can be good in helping one deal with the loss and return to meaningful life.

Deacon Larry's “Good Grief” recipe:

Grief is unique—everyone needs their own recipe

Grief takes time—let it work in due time

Grief has loss—keep the memories alive

Grief can cause anger—be aware in response

Grief is messy—let the mind and body cry

Grief is “extreme” stress—practice safety

Grief tastes bitter—recall the happy times

Grief can be lonely—others feel helpless

Grief stops one's world—the world moves on

Grief needs empathy—but accept the sympathy

Grief needs comfort—make healthy choices

Grief needs exercise—“move” your spirit into it

Grief needs hope—tend to feelings of despair

Grief needs a smile, at least once in a while! 😊

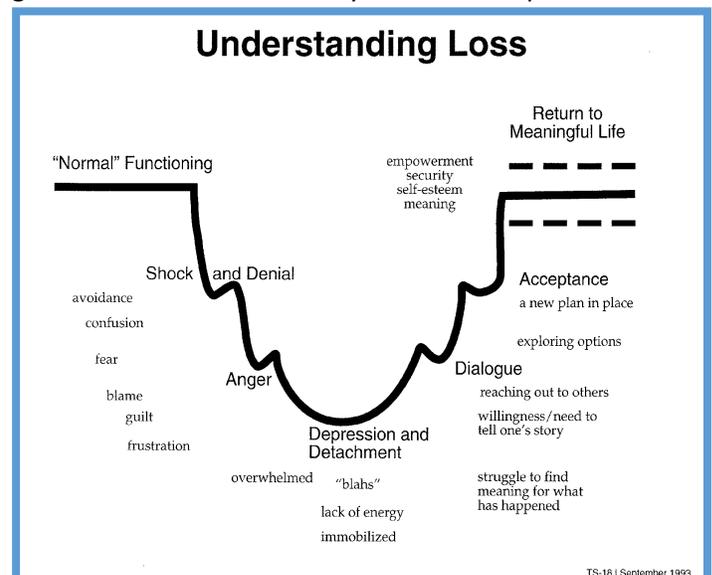
Let “Good Grief” Build Stamina to Survive

What We Didn't Think Possible—for “Good Grief's” Sake!

Deacon Larry Tranel, Bereavement Minister

Isolation of many rural farm families is not a friend to the “Good Grief” process as extended family and community support is often the best medicine. Research shows people are often best helped by a friend or family member, even moreso than a trained counselor—though they may be very important in the process, too. Many sharp, entangled emotions go through the grieving person. When it is the loss of a dairy herd or farm, knowing this tradition is coming to an end, can cause farmers to feel shame and failure. An accident or loss of assets can cause farmers to feel guilt. Males are engrained to protect and provide for their families and feel at fault even though external market forces, which farmers have no control over, are making it difficult for many others to survive in the same farm climate. Know one is not alone!

Below is a graph of the grief process found very beneficial. The upper left begins with normal functioning before a stress event, loss or grief began. The magnitude and abruptness of the loss determines the amount of shock, denial, anger and anxiety that may occur and the associated feelings of avoidance, confusion, fear, blame, guilt and frustration that may surface in response.



At the bottom, even with “Good Grief”, feelings of being overwhelmed, depressed, immobilized with lack of energy, is an area of biggest concern as loss of hope may cause unhealthy decisions. **Hopefully**, through the struggle and reaching out in dialogue to others, exploring options and life without, **a new acceptance can be attained**, with a return to a meaningful life—life just different than before.

With grief, people often wonder--are YOU over it YET? With “Good Grief”, the goal is NOT to get over it, but to savor the memories of what was lost, and process through grief to return to a meaningful life in one's own time.

ISU Extension and Outreach PUBLICATIONS

available at: <https://store.extension.iastate.edu>

Changing Farm Financial Conditions
Encouraging a Friend to Seek Professional Help
How to Help “When You Don’t Know What to Say”

All About Stress—Taking Charge Series

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/5165>

All About Stress

Managing Stress in Young Families

Managing Stress in Midlife Families

Managing Stress in Later Life Families

Helping Children Manage Stress

Using What You Have to Get What You Want

Farm Stress Resource Links for more information:

IA “Stress on the Farm—Strategies that Help”

https://www.extension.iastate.edu/dairyteam/files/page/files/handout_t-stress-on-the-farm-strategies-that-help.pdf

MN <https://extension.umn.edu/mental-health-and-well-being/stress-and-change#managing-stress-554310>

MI https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing_farm_stress/

Mental Health--Impact for Farm Families Collection

(from National Ag Safety Database)

<http://nasdonline.org/browse/424/mental-health-and-substance-abuse.html>

A sampling of publications available:

[AGRICULTURAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ARE IMPROVING, BUT NOT FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURIES AND FATALITIES](#)

[DEPRESSION: COMMON FOR FARM PEOPLE](#)

[TIPS ON RECOGNIZING AND DEALING WITH DEPRESSION](#)

[BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF FARM PEOPLE DIFFER FROM THE GENERAL POPULATION](#)

[ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: COMMON, BUT MANAGEABLE FOR FARMERS](#)

[HANDLING RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS ENHANCES THE WELL-BEING OF FARM PEOPLE](#)

[FARMERS' COMMON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES OFTEN ARE OCCUPATION-RELATED](#)

[Suicide: Permanent End to a Temporary Problem](#)

*The **problem in life** is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting life without problems, thinking that having a problem is a problem. That, my friends, so often becomes the problem. Know, that overcoming problems transforms and builds us into becoming more than before. Thus, problems often ignite wholeness in us, which is why **having a problem isn't always a problem.** -- Larry Tranel*

4-State Dairy Farm Stress Webinar Series

1. [Recognizing and Managing Stress in Dairy Farmers Farm Stress & Decision-Making During Challenging Times](#) (webinar handout: John Shutske-WI)
[Your Work as an Ag Professional: Helping Tame Farm Stress](#) (webinar handout: John Shutske-WI)
2. [Managing Stress, Anger, Anxiety, and Depression on Dairy Farms](#) (webinar handout: John Shutske)
[How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset-Michigan State University Extension](#) (webinar handout)
3. [Dairy Outlook](#) (webinar July, 2018 as outlooks change)
4. [Know your Cost of Production](#)
5. [Making Production Decisions During Challenging Times](#)

Webinars are also available on ISU Extension Dairy Team website or at: <http://fourstatedairy.org/webinars.html>

*“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, **all of which have the potential to turn a life around.**” -- Leo Buscaglia*

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Note: Fact Sheet references available upon request.

Remember: “The Best Place to Be is Together”

Note about the Author/Editor: Dr. Larry Tranel is a Pastoral Psychologist and an Extension Dairy Specialist and who has spent 30 plus years working in agriculture with farm families. Larry is also an ordained minister specializing in rural, marriage, family and youth ministry. Dr. Tranel would like to thank the many farm families he has been privileged to assist over the years that inspire his work.