



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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For Immediate Release

Recognize How Stress Affects Behavior and Relationships

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How people respond to stress can affect their behavior. Stress also can affect their relationships.

Everyday activities and demands can trigger automatic stress responses. These responses are meant to help an individual respond quickly to a perceived threat. When the threat is resolved, the body resumes normal functioning.

If a threat is not resolved quickly, these physical and emotional responses can take a toll on the body. The stressors create physiological responses influencing a person's capacity to process emotions and behaviors. There may be times when it is impossible to see perspectives other than your own. In times of stress, your relationships may suffer.

Sometimes how we respond can harm us or could hurt others close to us. We need to recognize the signs that we are under stress and how it makes us feel. It will be different for everyone. Examples of warning signs include irritability, headaches or muscle tension. Some people may eat more than they usually do, cry easily or feel resentful. The earlier we identify our warning signs the better.

If you or someone around you notices a change in your behavior, it is a good time to examine what is going on in your life. Try to determine what is causing the stress and whether you have control over the source. If you have control, you have the ability to make a change or a plan to deal with the stress.

People get frustrated when they don't have control over the source of their stress. We can only make changes in ourselves. We cannot change other people. Part of managing stress is accepting what we cannot change. This is important to remember in our relationships.

People cope with stress in healthy and unhealthy ways. Healthy ways have a positive effect on the body, such as going for a walk, sitting quietly and breathing deeply, using humor or writing concerns in a journal. This could be a time to talk to your partner or friend about what you are feeling. Letting them know what is going on will help you and will help them understand why you have been acting as you have.

Unhealthy coping strategies have a negative effect in addition to the stress. Some examples of unhealthy ways to cope are yelling, smoking, abusing alcohol and drugs, and avoiding being with others.

I suggest following basic steps to reduce stress: recognize the warning signs early, identify sources of stress and identify changes you can make. If you are struggling with the steps, reach out to your partner or a friend or a professional to get some help.

ISU Extension and Outreach has a series of publications on managing stress, available for free download from the Extension Store (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>): Taking Charge: All about Stress, PM1660A; Taking Charge: Managing Stress in Young Families, PM 1660B; Taking Charge: Common Stresses for Parents of Teens, PM 1660C; Taking Charge: Managing Stress in Midlife Families, PM1660D; Taking Charge: Managing Stress in Later Life Families, PM 1660E; Taking Charge: Helping Children Manage Stress, PM 1660F; Taking Charge: Using What You Have to Get What You Want, PM 1660H; and Taking Charge: Coping with Unemployment, PM 1660I.

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