

Lighten Up Your Heart - Let's Talk Stress! February Special Interest Study Topic



Little did we know that one of the last HCE Statewide Lessons developed by UW-Extension would be on Stress and Resilience! Then came the Pandemic and we've been stressing about the health of our family and community, the loss of jobs, and the need to keep our personal distance. Yes, we've all experienced old and new stresses in the past few months. But let's spend a moment talking about stress, what stress is and what stress isn't.

First of all, Not all stress is bad. In fact, stress can be a great **motivator**. For instance, stress can motivate us to move on, ask for help, or try something new. We can experience, **Positive stress** like a new job, birth of a child or grandchild, or enjoying a new way to exercise. These stressors trigger our brains and bodies to respond. Our brains might send us stress hormones that flood our body and prepare us for action. That's the feeling like there is a lump in your throat or a weight on your chest. What signs does your body give you to tell you there is stress in your life?

Another kind of stress is called **Tolerable stress**. These stressors tend to be more serious- loss of a job, divorce, financial difficulty- but with supportive relationships, it can be tolerated and overcome. Then there is **toxic stress** which, if left unaddressed can be detrimental to our health and wellbeing. In the presence of stress, resilience is our lifesaver.

Resilience in times of stress is much more than "*Bouncing Back*". Research by Dr. Felitti in studying Adverse Childhood Experiences acknowledges "...**One does not just 'get over' some things, not even fifty years later.**" Here is another perspective that comes out of the ACE research with Dr Felitti. We need to pay attention to the fact that experiences in childhood make a lifelong impact on people. Our ability to create safe and compassionate interactions will build trust within people. That trust is a starting point to a safe and healthy way of responding to challenges. If we give people the opportunity to talk about their history we begin to support

change and positive experiences. We can support people as they assess their strengths and identify areas of potential growth.

What are the Characteristics of Resilience People? They have....

- Healthy, supportive, caring relationships
- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Skills in communication and problem solving.
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Dr. Brene Brown says we are born “wired for connection” and claims that connection is a basic human need for survival. “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

What are some skills we can begin to teach ourselves and other to increase resilience?

Problems – We’ve Got Problems

The ability to solve problems increases resilience. When we feel empowered to tackle our problems, we feel more prepared to meet life’s challenges. Problem solving is not a skill that we are born with and many of us have not had the opportunity to learn a specific strategy to identify and solve problems. Use this activity by Greg Hicks in Happiness and Health to work through the process of finding hopeful options in a tough situation and see if you can come to a better solution.

(Finding Hopeful Options Activity)

Reacting in the same old way gets us the same old unsatisfactory, stressful and unhealthy results. By **Recasting** a tough situation we can find our feelings (sadness, fear, anger, joy), find meaning in those feelings and recognize opportunities we might not have seen before.

We can fret, worry, stop eating, overeat, and lose sleep over our problems. But that doesn’t get us to a better place and peace of mind. We can **Find Meaning** if we stop and think...

What are the causes of the problem? – What is out of my control, and what is in my control?

What can I do differently?

What do my feelings or instincts tell me?

What can I learn from this?

Hopefulness



“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.”

-Emily Dickinson