

EXTERNALISING AND DEALING WITH STRESS

People who feel resilient and confident that they can manage stress are much less likely to be overwhelmed by it—and more likely to have a healthy response—than people who think of stress as bad.

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Before continuing with this page, I urge you to read my paper: *Depression – Is It All Bad?*

As I have pointed out in other papers, stress is our number one health problem that has been unnecessarily exacerbated by the constant threat of COVID-19 and its mutants. Because we are not reminded on a daily basis about the effects stress is having on our global family, it does not diminish its negative impact it is having on our collective psyche. It is fair to say we don't hear about stress through the media because it's not newsworthy. Yet, the whole world knows that Queen Elizabeth II has been infected by one of the strains of COVID-19, and her son Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, has been diagnosed positive on two occasions. Nowhere have we heard of the stress that may be causing either one.

It all has to do with a number of individual parts in our brains that together form the *Limbic System*. Acting in concert the *Frontal Lobe*, *Cingulate Gyrus*, *Amygdala*, *Thalamus*, *Hypothalamus*, *Hippocampus*, and *Corpus Callosum*, examine all incoming data, and decide how we should react. If the information signals danger, the Limbic System will immediately cause the production of the hormone *adrenaline* that will in turn alert you to the options of flight or fight. It will be up to you to choose the most prudent option, to either turn and run, or alternatively to stand your ground and meet aggression with aggression. The adrenaline will also heighten your senses, your physical response, and your muscle strength.

There is a well-documented account of a woman in the United States rolling her car, as a result of which her young child was thrown out, with the vehicle coming to rest with her child trapped underneath. The mother, a person of medium stature, freed herself from the overturned vehicle and bodily lifted it off her child, such is the power of adrenaline.

Back to the brain. The bits that go to make the Limbic System also assist in deciphering right from wrong, and awakening in you the appropriate emotional reaction, which may include laughing in response to happy input, or to crying when sad news is received. It is for this reason that (most) people don't laugh and clap their hands when advised of the death of a family member, or recite profanities and break furniture when they learn they just won the lottery.

The involuntary reaction to any event is an outward display of how we are feeling inside, a response that is absent in sociopaths who feel no joy or remorse in anything they do, including killing another human being. As I am writing, Russia is invading Ukraine in what is an illegal military incursion against a sovereign nation, which I unreservedly condemn. Do you think Vladimir Putin cares how many people will die? Of course he doesn't. He suffers two neurological problems, a lethal combination of paranoia and sociopathy, resulting in a state of egomania^[1] whereby he considers his actions to be justified, which he performs without the burden of guilt.

^[1]Egomania is a psychiatric term used to describe excessive preoccupation with one's ego, identity, or self, and is possessed by delusions of personal greatness and grandeur, often accompanied by a perceived lack of appreciation by others. It is this lack of appreciation, which may take the form of opposition, that drives the person even further to prove they are right.

This indicates that things can go wrong in our brains and in our bodies, and certainly do, but when considering the complexity of our entire human form in which, on a minute to minute basis, there are literally thousands of such reactions occurring without our conscious knowledge, it is surprising to me that it doesn't happen more often.

So, how should we handle stress? Firstly, most of us create our own problems by internalising stress, by which I mean we draw it into our bodies where it joins other stresses and is deposited into the sub-conscious mind. Because we become victims of its subjectivity, internalised stress keeps regurgitating out from the sub-conscious mind, causing us further angst. This is like cancer that continues to grow in intensity, often with the same outcome.

So, how do I stop that from happening?

When you are confronted with a problem, imagine yourself holding up your hand to stop someone invading your personal space, because that is what the problem facing you will do. With the problem in plain view outside of your body, you can now start the process of assessment with the intention of objectively rationalising and disposing of the issue.

Step 1: Look closely at the problem and honestly appraise it.

You learn that your son John, who is in eighth grade, punched another kid, Freddy, striking him on his right shoulder, but with no apparent injury.

Step 2: Rationalise the problem and consider the possible outcome. For example, John could be expelled from school, or the other kid's parents could go to the police and start legal action.

Step 3: Accept that. Now is the time to begin mitigating these probable outcomes with positive and constructive action.

Step 4: You call Freddy's mother and tell her how sorry you are, and would like to make amends. You tell her Johnny also wants to apologise and would like to take Freddy to a movie and have a hamburger afterwards. Freddy's mom says she will discuss it with her husband, and will get back to you.

Step 5: Next morning Freddy's mom calls you, stating they are happy with the arrangement. You now call the school and talk to the Principal who accepts the compromise, but stresses that if such an incident should occur again, the school may not be so lenient.

Step 6: You sit Johnnie down and explain in detail what has transpired, being sure he understands the ramifications, both with the school, and possibly the Police.

Job done. Not only have you solved the problem with little stress to yourself, but in doing so you turned a negative into a positive with each mitigating step you took. The alternative would have been to internalise the problem and sit around letting it stew inside of you, waiting for the axe to fall.

And that, folks, is what the majority of the people in this world do, hence the sky-high level of internalised and unresolved stress that accompanies it. It is a truism that we each decide our own destiny, at least most of the time, therefore we are all capable of living happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives by taking affirmative action. It is usually not someone else's problem, so step up to the plate and take responsibility.

But, there's more. In this case, as is often the case with families, you will likely have saved John's dad, and John himself from suffering unnecessary stress, and perhaps even Freddy and his parents who could well have been burdening themselves with contemplating what action they should take.

I refuse to do stress. I deal with problems as I have outlined above, and I don't build bridges (read my paper of that title) before I get to the metaphorical river and determine if there really is a problem. Try it—there is enough real negativity going on in this world without imagining something that may never happen. You may think this approach is all too simple, but I'm sure you will be amazed at just how easy it is to live relatively stress-free.

May happy thoughts fill your life, remembering it is the only one you will ever likely have—so don't waste it feeling unnecessarily maudlin.
