

PROVIDERS

# Taking Care of Ourselves



CENTER FOR  
Early Childhood  
Mental Health  
Consultation

Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

# Activity 1



## Common Signs and Symptoms of Stress

### COGNITIVE

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Continuous worrying
- Racing thoughts

### EMOTIONAL

- Feeling down
- Feeling overwhelmed
- High level of irritability (short temper)
- Inability to relax

### PHYSICAL

- Excessive perspiration
- Chest pains/elevated heart rate
- Frequent colds or illness
- Nausea, dizziness or headaches

### BEHAVIORAL

- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Nervous habits (nail biting)
- Difficulty sleeping or irregular sleep patterns
- Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax

# Knowing Your Stressors and the Signs of Stress

When you are stressed, it is easy to react before even realizing you have reached a point of stress. In order for caregivers to successfully reduce their levels of stress and the impact it has on themselves and the children they care for, they must first recognize their stressors or "primary pressure points".

In the spaces provided, answer the following questions:

### What is stress?

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### What causes me stress?

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### How do I know when I've reached a point of stress?

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TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

# Activity 2

## Taking Care of Yourself

Sometimes you can make choices about how you spend your time that will actually prevent or reduce stress in your life. Here you will find suggestions for strategies that can help you avoid stress or cope with stress. If you take care of yourself, you will be in a better position to take care of others!



The quality of infant relationships is heavily dependent upon the caregiver's physical and mental well-being, and shapes the basis for all future relationships.

### Caring for Infants

- Communicate with other care providers to learn new ideas and strategies.
  - Exchanging ideas with others in your field can keep your work fresh and exciting. They may have implemented something you haven't tried before (like massaging babies' arms and legs after naptime).
  - You could have a monthly activity (like a book club or potluck dinner) where you and other care providers can come together to talk about things that have worked for you as well as challenges you've faced.

- Make sure to maintain your physical health by eating well and exercising. Caring for infants requires strength and endurance.

- **What are some exercises you can do to keep healthy?**

List them here:

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- Another part of maintaining physical health is eating well.

- **What do you usually eat for breakfast?** List some healthy options here:

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- **How about lunch options that you can make and bring to work?** List some ideas here:

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- **What can you eat for snacks that you can prepare and transport easily?** List some options here:

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TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

# Activity 2

## Taking Care of Yourself



Stress is a physical, mental or emotional response to events that cause bodily or mental tension.



- A healthy dinner can be one of the most challenging meals in a busy family. **What are some ideas that you can use to make sure your dinners are healthy?**

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- Infants take cues from those around them, so your mood is very important. If you are feeling stressed or upset, ask a colleague to cover you so you can take a short break (if possible) to take a mental break.
- To keep your stress level down, make sure to create time in your day to relax. This might be a bath when you get home from work, a walk to the store, or a nap.
- To minimize possible stress during feeding time, make sure you are familiar with each infant’s eating patterns and preferences. Communicate regularly with parents to make sure everyone is on the same page.
  - Communicate often with mothers who are breastfeeding so that you have comfortable ways for them to provide expressed milk for baby. Also, make sure breastfeeding mothers have a place to feed baby comfortably within the program. This can help to make feeding a more positive experience for everyone.
- Naptime can be a source of stress for you and the infants you care for. If an infant is having trouble falling asleep, here are a few suggestions you can try:
  - Walk around with baby, creating a slight rocking motion.
  - Introduce some quiet, soothing music or white noise.
  - Make sure there are no direct lights in baby’s eyes and that there are minimal distractions in the room (like conversations between adults, other children playing in the sleeping area.
  - Try feeding baby about a half hour before naptime. This can help baby feel tired.
  - If baby’s trouble continues, see if there is some discomfort like teething, asthma, allergies, or other health issues. Talking to parents can be helpful here.

## Caring for Toddlers

- Toddlers are very mobile! Keeping up with them requires that you maintain your physical health.
  - **Are there certain types of exercise you enjoy the most?** You’ll see the best results if you’re not dreading the activity. List exercise opportunities that you can fit in to your daily schedule:

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## TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

## Activity 2



Providing care to young children is an intense and demanding job. It can become increasingly difficult when combined with relationship, financial or other stressful concerns.

## Taking Care of Yourself

## CARING FOR TODDLERS CONTINUED

- Eating healthy meals will boost your energy. Try to get lots of protein (fish, chicken, beans and cheese) and good carbohydrates (multigrain bread, nuts) as well as fruits and vegetables.
- Snacking on healthy foods throughout the day will help you feel energized and ready to take care of your toddlers.
- Becoming familiarized with your toddlers' eating habits and preferences will minimize stress during meal times. Maintain communication with parents to learn about allergies, special preferences, etc.
- To help ensure an easy transition to naptime, develop a routine so that your toddlers know what to expect. If a toddler is having trouble settling down, here are some ideas to try:
  - Look for signs that child is not feeling well in general (i.e., a lingering ear infection, running a light fever, etc.)
  - Plan lunch or snack time to occur about a half hour before naptime. This can help toddlers feel ready to rest.
  - Make sure to minimize noise and distractions.
  - If toddler continues to resist, provide a quiet alternative (like a one on one book reading) and make sure to communicate this to parent.
- Try to surround yourself with others who understand what you do. Sharing your ideas with other care providers (and listening to theirs) can be rewarding.
  - You can have a caregiver supper club, where you and several other providers come together for a potluck once a month and share the joys and challenges of caring for young children.
- Relax as much as possible when you are not at work. Engaging in activities you love will help you feel ready to provide the best care for your toddlers.
- Try to maintain a balance between work and home life.
  - Talking about your day with your family can help them understand your work.
  - Dedicate time in your day to spending quality time with those you love. This may seem obvious, but it will keep you upbeat and ready for another workday.
- It's ok to feel overwhelmed. If you find yourself getting angry or upset, take some calming breaths. If this doesn't work, excuse yourself (if possible) to take a short break.

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

Activity 3

# Developing an Individualized Action Plan

Learning to manage stress in a healthy way may not come naturally. When starting any new behavior, it is important to develop a strategy for using it ahead of time in order to increase the chances of using the new behavior successfully. Make a plan for change. Think about one thing that causes you stress and one sign you know you are stressed. Then list a technique you will use for dealing with your stress in a healthy way.

## For Example:

When [**my stressor**] (*the baby cries for longer than 5 minutes*) and I begin to feel [**sign of stress**] (*my heart race*), I will [**technique to use**] (*breathe deeply to calm down*).

### My Individualized Action Plan

When [**my stressor**] \_\_\_\_\_ and I  
begin to feel [**sign of stress**] \_\_\_\_\_,  
I will [**technique to use**] \_\_\_\_\_.

When [**my stressor**] \_\_\_\_\_ and I  
begin to feel [**sign of stress**] \_\_\_\_\_,  
I will [**technique to use**] \_\_\_\_\_.

When [**my stressor**] \_\_\_\_\_ and I  
begin to feel [**sign of stress**] \_\_\_\_\_,  
I will [**technique to use**] \_\_\_\_\_.

When [**my stressor**] \_\_\_\_\_ and I  
begin to feel [**sign of stress**] \_\_\_\_\_,  
I will [**technique to use**] \_\_\_\_\_.