



## ISMA-USA NEWSLETTER

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*ISMA-USA NEWSLETTER* is published twice a year. We invite all members of ISMA-USA and ISMA members from other countries to submit articles for publication in our newsletter. We will also accept articles with information of interest to ISMA from nonmembers. It is the newsletter's policy to include contributions with various points of views; however, these do not necessarily represent the views of ISMA or ISMA-USA Branch. Announcements of services or programs do not imply an endorsement. We reserve the right to edit any material that is received. Deadline for receiving copy for the Spring 2003 issue is March 15, 2002. Send to [Serena Wadhwa](#) or [Betty J. McGuigan](#) via e-mail attachment.

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## NEWS

### INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF STRESS MANAGEMENT'S FORMAT CHANGE

**John G. Carlson, Ph.D.**

Editor, International Journal of Stress Management

University of Hawaii

This seems like a good time for me to update everyone on the status of our publication, *THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF STRESS MANAGEMENT*, especially because big changes are in the seasonal winds and it is a nice time to hear good news and receive gifts.

The Journal, of course, is the official forum for branches world-wide of the International Stress Management Association and has served mainly to keep our membership and other interested readers apprised of empirical, theoretical, editorial, and other scientific aspects of the field of stress and coping. At this time we are in the process of what appears to be a major change in our format of presentation for the contents of the Journal. For the past 9 years, as you are probably aware, we have been able to send members 4 printed issues per year, and in this format the Journal has been able to progressively raise its standards owing to increasing numbers and quality of submissions. Now I am pleased to announce that we are considering a shift to a strictly electronic format beginning with Volume 10, 2003, in part because it has been recommended to us by the American Psychological Association, who would become our publisher under these terms. Assuming the success of this transition, there would otherwise be no immediate change in journal cost and its benefits you receive as part of your membership.

An electronic journal (by way of the Internet) has a number of distinct advantages for our membership and readers, among them easy and immediate access (without the delays due to paper publishing), instant international communications, and in our case--because of the proposed affiliation with the prestigious American Psychological Association--a still higher level of quality of submission and standards of publication. In short, this is an exciting and positive opportunity for the International Stress Management Association and all of its members.

I welcome your comments and questions on this process and what it might mean for your membership in ISMA-USA.

With aloha and best wishes of the season.

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## ISMA-USA'S NEW WEBSITE -- [WWW.ISMA-USA.ORG](http://WWW.ISMA-USA.ORG)

**Betty J. McGuigan, M. Ed.**

ISMA-USA Secretary-Treasurer

During this past summer ISMA's website moved to a new address and received a new facelift. Anne Hutchenson, web designer, created the new site and a new logo. She gave the site a more contemporary look and designed it for quick and easy movement around its various sections. *WWW.ISMA-USA* is better focused on the USA Branch's business while still giving ISMA worldwide information.

The installed Sitmeter services tells us where our visitors are geographically located, what referral service they used to reach the site and some of the pages they viewed. Our visitors are from every part of the world. Our site has been already been translated into French and Portuguese and possibly others that we are not aware of at this time. This should facilitate our message on stress management reaching more people more easily.

While our new site has a new address and look, it has kept much of the same favorite place people visit. Visitors most often go to our ISMA library to read articles and to check for book titles and useful links. Our Newsletter pages and information on our journal attracts visitors as well. Finally, when searchers are looking for individuals who are ISMA-USA members, search engines refer them to our on-line membership directory. Therefore, it is important to keep your e-mail address current in our directory.

We encourage members to write articles for our website's library and to inform us of recently published books on stress and stress management so that we can add them to the book list. We also encourage members who have websites to put a link on them to [www.isma-usa.org](http://www.isma-usa.org).

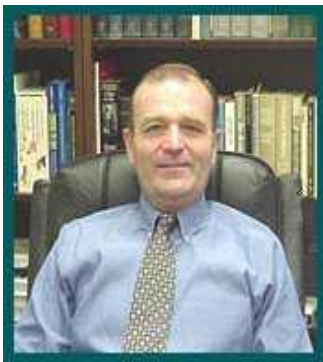
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## LETTERS

### LETTER from CHAIRMAN

**James Campbell (Jim) Quick,  
Ph.D.**



Professor of Organizational Behavior  
Center for Research on Organizational  
& Managerial Excellence (CROME)  
The University of Texas at Arlington

Dear ISMA-USA Members:

I have been recently asked with Cary Cooper at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) in the UK to revise our clinical monograph FAST FACTS: Stress and Strain by the Health Press and to consult on a federally funded stress and mood project in the US. These two experiences have reinforced for me the importance of anxiety and depression as the two primary presenting complaints for stress-related problems. While anxiety and depression may get people motivated to see a physician, psychologist, or other health care professional for help, there is a real need for more in-depth diagnosis to identify underlying causes, issues, and forces that are stressing a person out. Stress diagnosis is a complex process, but lets also not make it too complicated. We can also act without in-depth analysis.

My brother (Jonathan D. Quick, MD, MPH, a Program Director at the

World Health Organization in Geneva), and I had an opportunity this summer to work with his wife Tina (a nurse) in a stress workshop for the

Health and Safety Committee of an international organization. As we did that, I continued to be impressed with the power of the public health notions of prevention for stress management, with the three-level framework of primary, secondary, and tertiary skills which Jono and I worked out 25 years ago. As Dr. Lennart Levi, President of the International Stress Management Association, says: Prevention works!

However, there are times when we can make things too complicated with our fancy interventions and prevention techniques. Thus, Cary Cooper and I have crafted a set of four basic skills for preventive stress management which serve as a foundation for health enhancement. The four essential basic skills are diaphragmatic breathing, flexibility practices, humor skills, and positive respites. Because stress elicits a fight-or-flight response, we struggle and must counteract that struggle with generalized skills coupled with specific prevention practices aimed as channeling stress induced energy in positive ways.

**Diaphragmatic breathing** is practiced through slow, deep breathing from the abdomen. This is an especially useful skill to use in moments of anger or high emotion because a slow, deep out-breath serves also to lower the heart rate and respiration together. Slowing the breathing and lowering the heart rate work together to calm both the mind and the body. The caution: this is not a quick fix therapy but rather a life-long discipline that fundamentally enhances health and calms their reactions.

**Flexibility practices** are a generalized skill for dispelling stress and tension buildup in the large muscles of the body. Gently stretching the large muscle groups and lower back sequentially helps to dispel muscle tension build-up, which can be especially problematic for those who work at computer terminals and workstations for extended periods. Flexibility practices serve an important role in releasing the physical tension build-up inevitably resulting from stress.

**Humor skills** and mirthful laughter have been found to have generalized and positive effects on the physiology, relieving or reversing some of the bad effects of the stress response for patients. Humor and mirthful laughter increase natural killer cell activity and immunoglobulins, thus strengthening the neuroimmune system.

**Positive respites** provide opportunities for energy recovery, an essential ingredient in the stress recovery process. There are several ways that patients can seek positive respites, which are not intended to lead the patient into an avoidance of reality. Rather, positive respites are stress-reducing time outs, such as time spent with a loved one or in a quiet location that provides the patient with a sense of release and renewal.

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## **LETTER from EDITOR SERENA WADWHA**

Dear Members:

This year has been one of many changes for the newsletter. We have seen a new image emerge with the newsletter design. We added new columns and struggled with some of the old ones. We read as new members came into our organization and shared their achievements.

As the year comes to an end, I ponder over these changes and how these represent some changes that have occurred personally. As with the newsletter, there were moments of joy and pride, sadness and struggle. Letting go of the old for the purpose of growth and development is not always easy. Yet as I reflect on how these changes have moved me, I hope that you will take a moment to reflect on the changes that occurred within your year. I hope that you take a moment to contemplate on the changes you would like to see occur in the upcoming year. Change is never easy, but it is a constant and necessary process. It implies growth, and I

wish you all the best as all of us continue to change and grow in the New Year.

I wish you peace, safety, and happiness.

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## **LETTERS to the EDITOR**

### **THE MISTAKEN NOTION OF GOOD STRESS: A RESPONSE TO ROBERT A. DATO**

**Bret L. Simmons, Ph.D.**

University of Alaska Fairbanks

**Debra L. Nelson, Ph.D.**

Oklahoma State University

We appreciated Dr. Dato's letter in the Spring 2002 ISMA-USA Newsletter entitled "The Mistaken Notion of Good Stress," for its attempt to clarify some of the confusion surrounding Dr. Hans Selye's notions of stress. Dr. Dato correctly reminds us that we should be very specific about our terms when discussing stress.

We must, however, respectfully disagree with Dr. Dato that it was a "great mistake" for Selye and others to suggest that eustress (good stress) was as legitimate a concept as distress (bad stress). We believe that there is solid conceptual and growing empirical support for eustress as the positive stress response that renders the view of stress as unadaptability overly simplistic.

Jonathon and Jim Quick offered the following definition: "Stress is the naturally occurring mind-body response to demanding and/or emergency situations, either of a chronic or episodic nature." The advantage of a definition like this is that it suggests a familiar stimulus-response framework. Leaving out the descriptive clauses, stress can be thought of as a process involving response to a situation. In its most basic terms, both the stimulus (i.e., stressor) and the response (i.e., the stress response) in the process we call stress are inherently neutral.

Despite the variety of approaches to conceptualizing stress, the literature is generally in agreement that certain stressors can elicit responses in individuals that, over time, can have adverse impacts on their health. The negative response to stressors is commonly termed distress, and it is distress that is commonly studied for its relationship to adverse health outcomes. Distress, as such, is negative and dysfunctional (i.e. bad stress).

Unfortunately, the positive response to stressors and the associated health benefits of these responses has received little attention in the literature. While some stress researchers acknowledge the importance of promoting the positive (i.e. eustress), they usually present a discussion of stress in which eustress, although conceptually distinct, is operationally merely the absence of distress. In a more complex model of stress, eustress would be operationalized as well as conceptualized as more than just the absence of distress. A more complex model suggests that the presence/absence of the positive as well as the presence/absence of the negative is necessary to fully appreciate the stress response.

Consider the metaphor of a bathtub to illustrate this point. As a minimum, we are concerned about two things when we settle in for a bath – the level of water in the tub and the temperature of water in the tub. Essentially two things determine the level of water in the bathtub – the flow of water into the bathtub and the flow of water out of the bathtub over time. Likewise, the simultaneous flow of both hot and cold water into the bathtub determine the temperature of the water in the tub. If we liken the study of stress to the study of water in the bathtub, our current approach is like studying a bathtub with a single water faucet – cold water, representing distress. We know a lot about the sources of cold water, and we can tell individuals how to either decrease the flow of cold water into or increase the flow of cold water out of their bathtub. We also know quite a bit about the physiological, behavioral, and psychological consequences of sitting in a tub of cold water for a prolonged period of time. Our knowledge of cold water (distress) is important, but does not

present a complete understanding of the water (stress) in the bathtub. A more complete model of stress would acknowledge that the bathtub does indeed have two faucets – hot and cold – and both are necessary to get the level and temperature of the water just right for a comfortable bath.

The study of eustress presents an enormous opportunity to contribute to our knowledge of stress. The challenge then becomes conceptualizing and operationalizing eustress in terms that distinguish it from distress, examining how eustress and distress are related, and exploring their differential contributions to the health of individuals, in particular, their health related to work. Rather than a “great mistake,” we view the study of eustress as “the great opportunity.”

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## **THE MISTAKEN NOTION OF GOOD STRESS REVISITED: A RESPONSE TO BRET SIMMONS AND DEBRA NELSON**

**Robert A. Dato, Ph.D., NCPsyA**

Dato Leadership Institute

One of the signs of a developing organization is collegial dialogue; therefore, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Simmons and Dr. Nelson for taking the time to respond to my article: “The Mistaken Notion of Good Stress.” As a scientist, I welcome enlightenment, whatever its source. I enjoy having my perceptions challenged by astute observers.

Simmons and Nelson believe that I said it was a “great mistake” for Selye and others to suggest that eustress (good stress) was as legitimate a concept as distress (bad stress). For the record, I made no such assertion. What I stated was that the mistaken notion of good stress was a great mistake because of the enormous confusion it has caused for thousands of professionals and millions of others. I firmly believe that the concepts of eustress or distress are equally inaccurate and irrelevant and should be discarded as useless. Furthermore, I suggested that it was unnecessary for Selye to coin a new term “stressor” when the more universal and accurate term “pressure” was satisfactory. I am against the use of these three concepts because they have produced more obfuscation than illumination. It is quite unfortunate that we have allowed the moralistic notions of “good” and “bad” to contaminate our scientific descriptions. It was Selye’s overzealous neologizing that started us down this path, but Selye was not God, and his concepts are not chiseled in stone. Let us perceive and think for ourselves, but with full appreciation of Selye’s significant contributions. Let us transform ourselves from devotees of Selye to devotees of science.

One of the statements made by the authors confuses me. On the one hand they continue to advocate the use of eustress and distress, which are polar opposites, while on the other hand state that stress is “inherently neutral.” Stress cannot be both polarized and neutral! I believe that pressure, adaptability, and stress (unadaptability) are inherently neutral. When a star explodes somewhere in the universe, it simply blows apart. It is not adaptable enough to maintain its integrity. Its degree of disintegration is its degree of stress. What happens, happens. It is neither good nor bad. Here is another example, one encountered in daily life. If we are out in a rainstorm, the rain = pressure, our umbrellas = adaptability, and our feelings = stress. From a strictly scientific viewpoint, it doesn’t matter how fast the rain is falling, what color our umbrellas are, or how positive or negative our feelings are. These specific elaborations neither alter the variables involved in stress, nor their relationships to one another. The concepts of eustress, distress, and stressor are mere elaborations and add nothing to our understanding of stress. In fact, these elaborations surreptitiously obscure the true meaning of the concept.

Simmons and Nelson assert that “the view of stress as unadaptability [is] overly simplistic.” We could easily say the same about Einstein’s famous formula  $E = mc^2$ . After all, isn’t sunlight “good” for us and nuclear radiation “bad” for us? My emphatic answer is: “That is not the issue!” To be sure, too much energy can harm humans, but that fact is irrelevant to our argument. There is no such thing as “good energy” or “bad energy.” Energy is energy! All energy is a combination of waves and particles. Energy is neither good nor

bad. The sun is neither good nor bad. Sunburn is neither good nor bad. Death is neither good nor bad. On the surface Einstein's equation appears to be "overly simplistic;" however, it was the end result of countless hours of theoretical work. Can we afford to dismiss his work or my own with only two words? I think not.

I developed The Law of Stress in 1978 after reading scores of books and journal articles related to stress and its management. I extracted dozens of definitions of stress. The Law of Stress, Stress = Pressure - Adaptability, embodies all of these views, without exception. Any dedicated scientist would have come to the same conclusion that I did. During the past 24 years, I have successfully applied The Law of Stress in both business and clinical settings. To a person, everyone who has used the law has found it enormously practical and helpful. While a few scientists have proclaimed that The Law of Stress is "overly simplistic," it has never been scientifically refuted. I doubt that it will be refuted, but I certainly remain open. I challenge other scientists to conduct a meta-analysis of the literature and come to a different conclusion than I have. All they have to do is begin with Galileo's work and review the stress literature to the present, then come to a single, sound conclusion.

I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my views. I stand by everything I said in the article "The Mistaken Notion of Good Stress." I want to thank Dr. Simmons and Dr. Nelson for sharing their views. They are obviously professionals who are sincerely concerned about understanding stress. I am more than willing to continue this important dialogue if they wish.

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## **FOCUS on STRESS MANAGEMENT**

### **THE CAUSES OF STRESS IN CHILDREN**

#### **Karen Sullivan**

Author of *Kids Under Pressure* (Piatkus Books)

In a previous newsletter [Vol 3, Issue 2, fall 2001] we looked at the growing problem of stress in children, and the multitude of symptoms that stress can produce. Parents and care givers are often bemused to learn that the children in their care are experiencing debilitating stress that could affect their growth, health, development and even their future. But it is often parents who unwittingly create the types of pressures that cause problems. Let's look at some of the main causes of stress in children.

#### **The happiness factor**

As probably the wealthiest and most financially secure generation across history, it follows that we should also be the happiest. The majority of us have money to buy far more than the basic necessities of life, and are the proud owners of what would once have been considered luxury possessions. But has this new wealth brought us happiness? The answer is a simple no.

According to a World Health Organization report, 'About 50% of the entire working population are unhappy in their jobs and as many as 90% may be spending much of their time and energy in work that brings them no closer to their goals in life. About 75% of those who consult psychiatrists are experiencing problems that can be traced to a lack of job satisfaction.'

What does this have to do with parenting? A great deal. Because we are, generally speaking, experiencing discontent and unhappiness, we are determined to ensure that our children have the best possible chance of happiness. This manifests itself in several ways. On a deep-seated and perhaps even unconscious level, parents have begun to believe that if children are given every opportunity to be the best, and to succeed, they will never experience dejection that could lead to later unhappiness. Children are encouraged to take part in

a wide range of activities, to succeed at school, to play instruments, to be model citizens, in order to give them every chance of a happy future. If they have a portfolio of talents and skills, they cannot fail to be happy. No one can doubt a parent's well-meaning intentions here, but the fact is that this creates a great deal of stress, largely because children are not physiologically and emotionally ready to deal with the demands they face.

### **Parental expectations**

Alongside the issue of happiness lies another feature of modern parenting: a passion for excellence. This is undeniably affected by our society, which focuses so heavily on being the best, coming first, and winning. The problem is that this is extended to children, who have little concept of balancing life's ups and downs. Childhood is a period of learning about the outside world, about experiencing defeat and coming to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses. The problem is that weaknesses are no longer acceptable. Given that there can only ever be one winner, there are an awful lot of children out there who will be experiencing massive disappointment, dejection, feelings of failure and inadequacy at a time when their self-esteem and personal identity are being established. Rather than creating super-children who will be able to handle anything that life throws at them, we are creating children who will have fundamental flaws in their emotional foundation. If they never succeed as children, they will never really have the confidence they need to try new things, to take risks, to believe in themselves, to make choices based on their own individual talents, skills and, yes, weaknesses.

While a certain amount of competition is essential in childhood, because, after all, we live in a competitive society, the amount of constant competition is undermining and exhausting. A child can no longer feel proud of a single achievement – in sports, perhaps. She's expected to be brilliant at everything, and if she can't do it naturally, she will be cajoled, encouraged, tutored, coached and pushed until she improves. Still, chances are she will never be the best, because there are always other children out there with a natural talent or affinity. What does that say to our children? What about the child who struggles with math, improves her marks with lots of hard work and still comes last in a class of 30? If the only measure of success is being first, being the best, then she has effectively failed. What should be celebrated here is her achievement, rather than her place in the class, but in most cases it is not. If something isn't excellent, it's worthless. If your son doesn't make the A-team at football, then he's no good, even if he beat 40 other boys to a B-team spot. It's a pressure that is too much for most children to bear, and only part of what the modern child faces today.

The problem is that this is encouraged by parents, often unwittingly. Too often parents focus on a 'failure' (a lack of excellence) as an indicator of long-term problems. If a child struggles academically, they are concerned that they are producing a potential misfit who will never get a job. They see other children succeeding in areas and, of course, there are some children who appear to succeed and excel at everything to which they turn their hand. These are the lucky ones from an external point of view, but these children will also face the inevitable problems that over-achievers all experience. They will undoubtedly fail at something across their lifetimes, and they may not be equipped to deal with it. They also face burn-out, either academically or otherwise, when they feel the need to pull back from the constant competition and stress that accompanies it.

The fact is that children are all individuals, and many develop at later stages. Childhood excellence is no guarantee of future success, and parents must learn to accept weaknesses in their children, while celebrating their talents and individuality.

This fixation on winning can lead parents to go to great lengths of give their children a competitive advantage, such as extra 'workbooks' at home, extra tuition, extra coaching, early reading programs, baby swimming classes, infant music lessons.

What all this does, however, is needlessly fill a child's hours with activities at which he may never really be any good, or for which he may never really have any interest or feel any passion. Over-scheduling is a serious problem in today's children, and this focus on being the best is one of the driving forces.

The main problem is, of course, that children are incredibly sensitive to parental approval, and will often pull out all the stops to ensure that they are performing according to expectation. The vast majority of our children are, then performing with a view to achieving recognition from their parents. Given that excellence in every aspect of life is now the norm, this puts an intolerable pressure on young children who follow the lead of their parents.

### **Living through our children**

If the majority of parents are dissatisfied with their lives, and their jobs, they need to acquire feelings of happiness, success and achievement elsewhere. All too often, this falls on the shoulders of young children, who become the focus of their parents' misspent dreams.

When adults first become parents, their identities are often shifted; they become a 'mummy' or a 'daddy', rather than a high-flying career woman, or a top lawyer. As part of that confusion of identities, parents often feel that their children's success – or lack of it – and achievement are reflections of their own status in society. Children become extensions of us. If we have an stumbling academician on our hands, we feel that we have failed. If we have a 'naughty' or 'disruptive' child, we are concerned that we will be considered inadequate parents. This type of neurosis is a common feature of most adults, largely because of the type of society in which we live. But it extends to and affects our children greatly. They are shepherded into believing that success and excellence are the hallmarks of a happy future, and not surprisingly, they experience enormous pressure en route.

### **Stressed parents**

Most adults admit to suffering from stress, and certainly parenting increases that burden. Modern parents are caught in a hugely difficult position. Children can be enormously demanding, particularly when they have a whirlwind of activities that require transportation, equipment, and payment. Furthermore, over-stressed children are much more likely to require emotional input that parents simply cannot dredge up and sustain, especially when they are feeling exhausted and undermined themselves. Most parents also feel great concern about their children's well-being, and every individual child requires different input and levels of understanding.

What are the implications of parental stress? Once again, there are many. First of all, stressed parents are much more likely to 'snap' and take out their problems on their children. Human resources are not endless, and if we are emotionally exhausted throughout the day, it's often difficult – if nigh impossible – to find the patience and even time required to parent the way we would all like to.

Feeling that we are inadequate parents in any way encourages us to 'make up for it' in other ways. One of these is through material goods. We can assuage guilt by giving our children the best things in life, whether we can afford it or not.

Whether it's clothes, computers, games consoles, CDs or new sports equipment, the increased materialism affects our children both now and in the future. First of all, they develop a need for and interest in material goods, which they will begin to associate with affection and love. This focus can become obsessive, and children will require more and more to satisfy them, and to reassure themselves that they are important and loved. Secondly, it creates an instant gratification scenario, wherein children demand and receive. They do not learn the art of patience, of financial management, of working hard for something (which imbues a sense of achievement), and of caring for things. If things are quickly and easily replaced, they lose interest, and are on to the next 'big' thing. It throws them in the big 'competition' ring with their friends, whereby they feel inadequate and upset when they do not have everything that their friends have.

This is a perfect example of consumerism run wild – children begin to associate well being with possessions, which is just the problem that plagues the majority of adults in today's society. Starting younger, however, what will be the long-term effects?

### **Busy parents**

Following on from the effects of stressed parents on children, there is undoubtedly an issue of time. Parents

who working incredibly hard have little time to spend with their children, and this in itself is stressful. Studies show that parents often have less than an hour a day to devote to their youngsters. Some try to compensate by showering their children with material goods or cramming activities into what was mistakenly viewed as 'quality time'. The result was an 'impoverished' upbringing that could be as damaging to pupils as the effects of poverty of the conventional kind.

Children require parents for more than material purposes, and without the regular, patient guidance of a loving parent, will often feel out of control and emotionally unstable. New experiences, concerns, fears and every other aspect of growing up can no longer be sorted out over the dinner table, on a family outing, or during a long bed-time chat. Children are not machines that can spill out the day's woes at the touch of a button. They often need to unwind, be encouraged and drawn out in order to express their emotions. If there is no time available, they will learn to shut it all away. Once again, my survey showed that 73 of 80 children felt it was easier to 'pretend that everything was all right' rather than sharing a problem.

This is an extremely dangerous scenario, and one of the most powerful sources of stress. Children need to learn to cope with conflicting emotions and problems by expressing them and then coming up with solutions. By burying them, they will ultimately begin to take a step back from reality, and 'pretend' everything is all right. It is a parent's job to provide help on the path through life, to provide guidance, love, understanding, nurturing, advice and be an unbiased listening ear. If our children never have time to express their concerns, either because they are being ferried from activity to activity with no time to stop and contemplate, or because they simply don't spend time with their parents, they will feel stressed by even the most basic aspects of growing up, such as peer pressure, identity, marks, performance and relationships.

What, too, are we teaching our children about relationships if we are unable to forge them at home? And children who are busy from morning to night simply don't have time to interact with family and peers, which is so essential for the renewal of spirit, the expression of problems and hopes, and the basis of relationships that will sustain them through periods where they simply cannot adapt alone. The bottom line is that too many children are alone. This is a product of an accelerated society where people are too busy to stop and simply be.

### **A modern lifestyle**

We've already looked at some of the reasons why children's lives tend to be over scheduled, but there are other factors that add to the pressure placed upon them. Some of these are societal, in particular, the breakdown of the family; others are caused by well-meaning authorities, such as educational institutions, who create situations where children are intensely pressured.

### **Education**

There are several elements here, and most of them exhibit the current trend for excellence. League tables between countries and schools put teachers and the education system under increasing pressure to perform. Not surprisingly, this pressure is passed down to the children themselves, who face a battery of exams and tests at increasingly younger ages.

This is a complex situation, driven partly by a parental and societal demand for success and achievement, and a genuine need to improve national standards for the benefit of every child. However, the means by which this task is being undertaken are open to criticism. No child should be pressured to perform for anyone other than himself. In other words, school standings in league tables, and working for parental approval, leave a child not only susceptible to failure, but likely to fail.

### **Starting school early**

The head start approach to learning has been widely encouraged, and while there is some evidence that capable children will benefit from early stimulation, this policy is not appropriate for a wide range of children with differing abilities. Shoving children into a system too young does much more than rob them of freedom; it also increases pressure to perform at an age when many children are simply unable to adapt.

### **Homework**

There is a plethora of studies into the need for, and the efficacy of homework, and most come to the same conclusions. Children who do only occasional homework appear to perform better than children whose time is regularly absorbed by an extension of class work. The main concern is not that homework is detrimental, but the fact that it adds to a child's stress load. Time that should be spent in free play is now being swallowed by activities that require concentration and application.

In the US, eight-year-olds regularly have at least an hour of homework daily, plus 20 to 30 minutes of mandatory reading. Apart from the time issue, homework also presents another opportunity to parents to control – and even criticize– their children's academic efforts. Parents often think that they are giving their children a tactical advantage by closely supervising their assignments, usually to ensure that their children get the best possible grades. Students today have lots of homework at earlier and earlier ages, even though many educational researchers say homework in primary, and even elementary school has almost no effect on student achievement. As assignments become more complex, parents find that a huge chunk of the 'quality time' they could be spending with their children is devoted to battling over homework.

### **Growing up too soon**

One of the side-effects of the modern get-it-now, faster-is-better society is the fact that children have been drawn in on the act. No longer content to wait until appropriate ages for activities, clothing, possessions and freedom, today's children expect to be and are treated as miniature adults, complete with miniaturized versions of everything adult. With this comes inevitable responsibility and a need for acquisition, both of which the majority of children are too young and immature to deal.

Children go to school earlier, and they learn to read earlier. Their weekend events are organized, with full 'adult' equipment and replica kit, and even international tours. They have CD players and all the latest top 10 hits; they wear mini-Calvin Klein; they have mobile telephones and their own computers. Advertising encourages them to look and be seductive and cool; young girls dress in the same style as their heroines, many of whom are scantily dressed and turning a buck by being sexy. The inevitable question that this scenario brings is 'What next?'

The pressure on children to become more grown up, more quickly, tends also to suit our modern style of parenting. If we treat our children as if they were older, dress them as if they were older, and push them on to achieve things at increasingly earlier ages, we can justifiably expect 'adult' behavior.

When children are exposed to an increasing number of experiences at an early age, they not only develop a tolerance, requiring greater stimulation and excitement to keep them satisfied, but they also become bored with routine, average activities. What fun can be had in the park with your parents, if you could be watching satellite TV in your room with your mates? How boring a trip to the seaside will seem after a 2-week holiday in the Antibes. Who wants to watch a 'U' rated film, when you've seen an 'R' or a '18' film with your friends?

Once children become accustomed to a steady diet of stimulation, it's very difficult to turn back the clock. This in itself is stressful; the need for constant stimulation indicates a need to keep adrenaline flowing – a problem faced by a huge number of adults, who cannot relax on a holiday, and seek out 'thrilling', 'risky' activities to satisfy a growing need for stimulation. Bigger, better, first and now are the keywords of our generation, and our kids are avidly taking part. Being part of this rat race has now been proven to be enormously detrimental to the emotional and physical health of our generation. What effect will it have on our children, if they've done it all by the time they are twelve?

More importantly, however, stress becomes a factor because of the emotional and physical demands that this type of lifestyle necessarily comprises. This type of lifestyle is literally an assault on young and impressionable bodies and minds. What's more, many children are being left to make the transition from child to adult on their own. So-called 'latch-key' kids are a modern-day phenomena, and many, many children are literally raising themselves, coming home to an empty house, forced to organize their own time structure, often make their own meals, and allowed to choose their own entertainment. Given the industry that has built up around consumption by children, and the amount of advertising directed at these age groups,

it's not surprising that children are confused by the conflicting messages to which they are subjected on a regular basis. If they watch TV, they'll see violence, sexuality, broken relationships, inappropriate mentors, and advertising that convinces them that they need a whole host of possessions in order to reach the status of 'cool', and to be happy.

Even children who are at home with parents during the day and after school have unhealthy pressures placed upon them by media, such as television. If most children in the US are spending an average of 38 hours a week exposed to media outside of school, by the time they reach the age of about 11, the average child will have witnessed more than 100,000 acts of violence on TV. Children may be exposed to as many as 5 violent acts per hour during prime time and an average of 26 violent acts per hour during Saturday morning children's programmes. And that's just violence. What about advertising, where even 12-year-old starlets have nothing between them and their Calvin Kleins?

The problem is that there are sequential steps in a child's development, and ignoring or disregarding these stages can have serious consequences. Children are confronted with choices and decisions that are often beyond their years; they find themselves in situations where they do not have the emotional or psychological tools to adapt; they are entrusted with obligations, possessions and responsibility that make them feel more independent and adult-like, but which are ultimately far too much to bear. Children need to be parented and allowed and encouraged to be children. It's not any parent's fault that this situation has arisen, but the fact is that parents have an obligation to take charge and become involved so that children can learn something along the fast lane to adulthood and avoid the stress that comes with it.

### **Leisure activities**

Tied into the concept of adultification is the issue of leisure activities. When children are constantly stimulated, they require constant stimulation. When their hours are filled by activities, they need a busy schedule to keep them occupied. When they do have a little time to spare, it tends to revolve around artificial stimulation: loud music, games consoles, computers and television.

There is nothing wrong with any of these activities – in moderation – but when they become the sole way that a child 'relaxes' and 'recharges', we have a problem on our hands. None of these activities will do anything to reduce stress in the short or long term. They also take the place of healthy activities, such as unsupervised play, exercise and quiet times to read, think or simply daydream. They also disrupt sleep, which adds to the stress load.

### **Broken Families**

Stress pioneer Dr. Robert Dato blames the rise in stress on the changing family unit. He says 'The main reason why stress is on the increase in children is the disintegration of the nuclear family. One-parent and blended families are on the increase. This is confusing and destabilizing to children. Yet children cannot attack the family directly because it is so valuable to them. So they turn their anger inward, which generates anxiety and depression. These, of course, are all forms of emotional stress.'

Broken families are not dysfunctional, but the family members involved often do not have the same network of close, loving care givers on which to rely. This is not just divorce or death at the root of this problem, but the fact that extended families are often hundreds of miles away. Children often grow up without regular contact with grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, all of whom can, at times, play an important role in development and, of course, stress relief. With parental expectations being so high, children often feel under confident about relating negative information to their parents. In their place, close family members can often be a godsend, allowing an outlet and advice without recrimination and with unconditional acceptance and love. Children today rarely have that advantage, and it simply means one less avenue down which they can turn.

Given that the family is the bedrock of humanity, a stable environment that allows growth, self-understanding, comfort and love, it's not surprising that today's children feel more unsettled and under pressure. If the very basis of their lives could conceivably change at any given moment, they'll never learn the trust that is necessary for self-acceptance, friendship, relationships and security – all of which are

necessary for maturing into a young man or woman who can react, interact and cope with the world around us.

### **Violence**

We've already looked at the idea that violence on television, and in other leisure pursuits, can increase the stress load. But what about the violence that many children from good families are now accustomed to seeing, hearing about and witnessing on a daily basis. Quite apart from the increasingly violent lyrics of music, nature of television programs and video/computer games, children live in a society where acts of violence are the norm. While not many of our children actually experience murders and shootings in their schools, which have become commonplace, they are, nonetheless, aware of them, which is likely not only to increase fear, but stress. If the once safe sanctuary of school hold the possibility of danger, feelings of fright and concern become more common in youngsters who have little idea of their own risks or potential dangers.

This type of violence can be one of the causes of post-traumatic stress disorder in children, but it can also add to the stress load of an ordinary child, living an ordinary life. What's more, children are now becoming victims of crime and violence on their own doorstep. Bullying is on the increase, as is suicide among children. Children are regularly robbed for mobile telephones and other expensive gear, and children are forced to live in a culture where death by guns is all too commonplace. Firearms killed 3,761 children and teens age 19 and under in 1998—that's 10 children every day. Of these, 2,184 were murdered, 1,241 committed suicide, and 262 were victims of accidental shootings.' More children and teens died from gunfire than from cancer, pneumonia, influenza, asthma, and HIV/AIDS combined in 1998.

Although the average child may not be in contact with such violence, they live in a society where it occurs, and this in itself is one of the stresses that has the potential to blight childhood.

### **Other factors**

Stress isn't necessarily a physical response to an emotional situation, or even an external pressure. In fact, anything that places a strain on the body could be considered 'stressful', and in the 21st century we are just beginning to realize the impact of some of these aspects of daily life. These comprise sleep (of which too many of our children get far too little), diet (consider the toxic quality of the majority of foods designed for children's consumption, and the fast-food culture), chemicals (such as passive smoking, paint fumes, contact with pesticides, chemicals found in cleaning and personal hygiene products, etc.), EM waves from computers and televisions, and lack of exercise, which causes health problems, fails to address rising levels of adrenaline, and leads to obesity, which places physical pressure on growing bodies.

Every aspect of your child's lifestyle has the ability to enhance or detract from his health; even the more insidious stressors, such as noise and passive smoke, take their toll and add to the possibility of overload. In the part three of this feature, we'll look at what children really need to cope with the stress of 21st century life, and the effects that it can have on their minds, bodies and even their future.

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## **AT-RISK TEACHERS: EMPOWERING EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

**Jennifer Krueger, M. A.**

Educational consultant and former teacher

Teaching has been listed among the most trying professions, including air traffic controller and surgeon (Hunter, 1977). While that comparison may be extreme, teachers are certainly entrusted with an enormous amount of responsibility for taking care of others. Too often, no one is taking care of them – not their training program, or their administration, or themselves. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (1998) projects that America will need to fill approximately 2 million teacher vacancies in the next 10 years. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) estimates that figure to be as high as 4.5 million vacancies. With the alarming rate of new teacher turnover, the expected exodus of baby boom retirees, and the continued growth

of school enrollment, teacher recruitment and retention are of critical concern (PDK Gallup Poll, 2001; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Teachers, on average, spend a minimum of five years training for the classroom. Two years after taking their first job, as many as 40% leave the profession (Heyns, 1988; Schlechty and Vance, 1981, 1983). Beginning teachers often experience a phenomenon similar to culture shock. Entering a new environment with meager survival skills, they become disoriented, disillusioned and insecure. The helplessness and corresponding stress that can follow has been termed “reality shock” (Gaede, 1978).

Reality shock, like burnout, can result from sustained disillusionment and exhaustion (Gold, 1993). Unlike burnout, reality shock is a stress response experienced only by beginners. Although the concept of teacher stress was introduced as early as the 1930’s (Hicks, 1931), most colleges of education still don’t prepare pre service (student) teachers to successfully cope with classroom stressors. As a result, schools are losing teachers faster than they can hire them. Although it is unlikely that most school administrations will make stress management a staff priority, colleges of education may be able to equip new teachers with the survival skills they need to avert reality shock.

Reality shock results from the collapse of “missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of classroom life” (Veenman, p.143). Student teachers often enter teacher-training programs with an agenda of single-handedly creating educational reform. Schools of education can foster this idealism by ignoring the most debilitating stressors teachers are likely to face (socioeconomic, cultural and political variables within the student/parent/faculty population). While it can’t be expected that pre service programs can prepare new teachers for every classroom variable, they certainly need to ready them with some of the coping skills necessary to survive the stressful nature of these unknowns.

Instead, teacher-training programs continue to focus on content and theory rather than include any personal (therapeutic) guidance. The only training generally offered in coping is “classroom management,” which focuses on the group rather than on the individual, and on the students rather than on the teacher. This glaring gap in instruction persists despite extensive literature on teacher stress. “Psychological support is the hidden dimension of teaching which has been the missing dimension in teacher preparation and professional development” (Gold and Roth, 1993, p.12).

Could the program support offered during pre service training intentionally obscure the stress of classroom teaching? Education programs may want to put the best face on the teaching experience. It is no secret, after all, that teaching is a stressful occupation. Colleges of education may try to soften the profession’s reputation in order to compete with other career training tracks that may bring higher salaries and more prestige (Schlechty and Vance, 1981, 1983). Because other career tracks could recruit prospective educators, training programs may be in no rush to address the less appealing aspects of becoming a classroom teacher. It stands to reason that if these issues are overlooked (purposefully or not), they won’t be incorporated into effective teacher preparation.

Unfortunately, it is not until novice teachers are well into their first year that they truly understand the complexity of their work and can begin to assess their preparedness for it. Judging by retention statistics, many new teachers feel that they are not at all prepared for the job. By the end of the first year, approximately 15% of new teachers will have left their positions and another 15% will leave the following year (Schlechty and Vance, 1983). For many novice educators, the rewards offered by teaching are just not worth the toll on their well-being.

New teachers have been trained to rely upon the system and that the system will support them. Their instructors encouraged them to seek the help and advice of mentor teachers, administrators and professors within the training program. But what happens that first year in the classroom when the level of support is drastically reduced, or worse yet, completely unavailable? While novices in other high-stress professions are likely to experience reality shock (physicians, surgeons, pilots, attorneys), they can expect some level of support from administrative staff or a professional mentor. Teaching is one of the few professions (like

nursing and social work) that thrusts novices into a high-pressure, high-responsibility environment with very little administrative or managerial support; teachers may be responsible for everything from cleaning their classroom to filling out reams of bureaucratic paperwork.

Pre service teachers are consistently sent a paradoxical message in the transition from college training program to first-year teacher. While in training, they are told that teaching professionals will be available to them and that they can and should rely upon their guidance. In their first year, new teachers generally receive the opposite message from both their peers and administrators: “We’re all busy and stressed out – you’ve got to make it on your own.” Further, they are frowned upon if they appear vulnerable, weak or in any way at a loss for control. On the other hand, they are rewarded if they stoically soldier through that first year carrying the weight of the responsibility alone. Unfortunately, the resulting stress can create burnout, and burnout often leads to leaving the profession.

While decidedly, both novices’ training programs and their places of work should be responsible for helping them best adapt to their new job, the more likely reality is that they will have to develop their own individual strategies for coping with workplace stressors. Most research on vocational stress places heavy responsibility for stress management training upon the organization, not the individual. Some authorities on stress assert that, without organizational intervention, stress management at the individual level is futile. Unfortunately, organizational intervention is rare, and so the individual must cope on their own with little or no training in self-management. The saying often goes that great teaching skills are something you are born with and cannot be taught – should that be said for great coping skills too?

### **Organizational Stress Management Training**

Many researchers have suggested that individualized stress management training is ineffectual because it does not, and cannot, change the source of the stressors: salary, work-overload, discipline, lack of recognition, etc. The only way these stressors will ever be reduced or eliminated, they argue, is if the organization takes some level of accountability; to start with, providing stress management training for their staff, and being proactive in minimizing environmental stressors. While this is highly desirable and certainly the best possible course toward reducing teacher stress, the same researchers who support it also reveal how difficult this reform will be and how slowly it is likely to occur. In the meantime, novice teachers must have some means of surviving their first years in the classroom.

Given that most new teachers are very young and professionally inexperienced, it’s fairly unrealistic to expect them to inherently possess enough emotional maturity to cope with school stressors. Typically, they are expected to mature on the job. As evidenced by the number of new teachers exiting the profession, this is a less than successful process. If novices do not already possess adequate coping skills, how many years are they willing to struggle before being offered organizational training? Research shows that many teachers with symptoms of burnout won’t even attend stress management training. Teachers should be exposed to coping skills early on in their training when they are energetic and open to guidance. While it is unlikely that intervention at the individual level will eliminate, or even reduce, the causes of teacher stress, it is the only option currently available to most teachers in coping with teacher stress. This does not mean districts and training programs should be absolved of the responsibility of providing stress management intervention.

Both individual and organizational involvements are required to reform the system. However, the idea that teachers should idly wait for organizational participation because any other approach is worthless signals the futility that brings about isolation, lowered self-esteem and feelings of learned helplessness (a pattern of helplessness that is reinforced over time). Teachers can hope, lobby and aim for organizational involvement, but in the meantime, they have individual resources to help them when feeling isolated and helpless.

While major reforms will be necessary to retain new teachers over the long term, it may be possible to increase retention in the short term if those first two years are not quite as shocking and discouraging. Since the first three years are considered the most difficult (and produce the most employee turnover), surviving them may provide a necessary window of time, allowing new teachers to transition to the “master” level. At this time in education, close to half of new teachers leave the profession before finding out if their jobs actually get any easier.

New teachers must have, at the very least, awareness of strategies they can practice at the individual level. Many individual intervention techniques (like meditation, exercise, adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, cognitive restructuring and time management) have been shown to decrease stress and increase the perception of control. A perceived lack of control (or learned helplessness) is, perhaps, the most corrosive influence on a new teacher's attitude. Therefore, a strengthened sense of control is more likely to support higher self-esteem and to produce a happier, calmer teacher – and a teacher that will remain dedicated to the profession. Early on in their training, new teachers should be aggressively encouraged to take charge of their own well-being and to make it a priority. They should be taught strategies for assuring that the pressures of the system don't override this all-important goal. If novices are not trained in self-management skills, they will continue to leave the profession at an alarming rate.

At the very least, pre service teachers need instruction in basic stress management strategies. Optimally, this training would be offered through several instructors and courses, but even a single course on personal coping strategies could be enough to offset school stressors. Basic coping instruction should include:

- Time Management: setting goals and priorities; learning to delegate; recognizing and overriding procrastination
- Health and Wellness: practicing good nutrition, exercise and sleep habits and reducing or eliminating unhealthy habits like smoking, drugs and alcohol
- Cognitive Restructuring: reducing negative thoughts and behaviors through cognitive re framing
- Social Networking: developing a support system; learning to debrief with trusted friends, family and colleagues; seeking opportunities for healthy social interaction and avoiding unhealthy social interaction
- Relaxation Methods: meditation, visualization, reflection and personal 'down-time'

Critics of "grassroots" stress management have been quick to point out that poor working conditions will never change if individuals are left responsible for managing job stress. However, for most teachers, the conditions promoting job stress continue without foreseeable resolution, and organizational efforts to assist teachers with coping strategies are infrequent at best. Some of the same authorities reporting that unrealistic expectations are a leading cause of teacher stress and burnout, go on to recommend idealistic stress management strategies (Needle et al., 1981; Maslach, 2001). They are idealistic because they simply are not likely to happen. Just as new teachers expect to be supported and encouraged during their schooling and first years in the classroom, advocates of group stress management expect the organization to support and encourage the staff with some version of stress management training. Unfortunately, this is often not the organization's priority. Therefore, all teachers, not just those that are new, must make stress management a personal priority.

Students suffering difficult life circumstances are frequently designated as "at-risk" and are provided every available support service. Why is not the same concern expressed for "at-risk" teachers? If helplessness is a precursor to reality shock and burnout, then we cannot advise that teachers wait, perhaps endlessly, to be rescued. Self-management may provide a life raft for beginners adrift in a sea of confusion and distress. While it is true that remaining afloat in the absence of help will be difficult, it is certainly better than the alternative.

In November of this year, the American Society of School Administrators hosted their annual conference. Other than management and administrative topics, conference sessions included the following workshops: "Self Nurture: Relax, Rejuvenate and Reclaim Your Health," "Yoga for Every Body," "Power, Balance, Reiki," and "Staying Positive in a Challenging Work Environment." Professional activity of this nature signals the beginnings of change in teacher education. If school administrators and/or colleges of education place coping skills at the top of their training agenda – there may be hope for all of those new teachers contemplating the rest of their careers. While it would be optimal for these two forces to join together in providing consistent, realistic stress management training for new teachers, history has proved it unlikely. Those fortunate pre service teachers who have been exposed to the more difficult aspects of teaching and

have been trained to cope on their own (rather than wait for rescue) may avert reality shock. Unfortunately those with limited self-management skills may already be heading for the door.

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

**Robert A. Dato, Ph.D., NCPsyA**

Dato Leadership Institute

Meditation has been studied scientifically for only the past half century, even though meditation has been practiced for thousands of years by many cultures. Research indicates that meditation decreases heart rate, blood pressure, anxiety, and depression—all key symptoms of stress. Meditation reduces the abuse of alcohol, cigarettes, and nonprescription drugs. Meditation increases relaxation, alertness, perceptual and creative ability, productivity, and performance in school and on the job. Meditation is successful in enhancing the effectiveness of coaching, counseling, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis when practiced in conjunction with these developmental activities. Given these results, it is not surprising that millions of people around the world practice meditation every day.

Meditation is easy to learn and practice. If you decide to devote a part of each day to meditation, it is recommended that you meditate early in the morning or late at night. Your meditation session should take about thirty minutes. If you decide to meditate indoors, go to an orderly and quiet room and close the door. Inform others that you will be meditating and request that you not be disturbed. Sit in a comfortable chair or on some cushions on the floor. If you decide to meditate outdoors, choose a safe and serene setting devoid of ambient activity. As you meditate, keep your body upright, relaxed, and still. Do not talk while you are meditating. If your body becomes uncomfortable, shift your position slightly. As soon as you begin, focus on the rate and depth of your breathing. During meditation, breathe slowly, deeply, and continuously. Establish an effortless breathing rhythm. Maintain this rhythm throughout your session. When your rhythm becomes slow and deep, shift your focus from breathing to perceiving. Perceive only. Do not think, move, or feel. As you meditate, the frequency of your brain waves will decrease as you enter a preconscious state. Conscious Beta waves (13-20 Hz) are transformed into preconscious Alpha waves (8-13 Hz).

Meditation permits you to explore your conscious, preconscious, and unconscious perceptions. Open Meditation permits you to explore your conscious and preconscious perceptions, whereas Closed Meditation permits you to explore your preconscious and your unconscious perceptions. It is suggested that you balance the practice of Open and Closed Meditation so that you are able to explore perceptions on all levels of awareness.

**Open Meditation.** Your eyes should remain open while engaged in Open Meditation. During Open Meditation, sequentially focus on the objects in your surroundings. Your conscious and your preconscious perceptions will integrate automatically. You will be creating new perceptions. Open Meditation is similar to the prolonged and intense state of concentration known as flow, and might be called disciplined daydreaming.

**Closed Meditation.** Your eyes should remain closed while engaged in Closed Meditation. During Closed Meditation, your unconscious perceptions will bubble up into your preconscious and will integrate automatically with the perceptions already there. As with Open Meditation, you will be creating new perceptions. Closed Meditation is equivalent to the hypnagogic states that you experience as you fall asleep at night or wake up in the morning.

The preconscious serves as the perfect staging area for the creation of new perceptions. Unlike the conscious mind, the preconscious mind is free of distractions, and unlike the unconscious mind, the preconscious mind is free from irrationality. The preconscious mind is both serene and rational. You will discover that the more you meditate, the more serene and rational you will become, for *meditation is the royal road to the*

*preconscious.*

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## THE LINK BETWEEN STRESS AND ILLNESS

**Loretta M. Siani, Ph.D.**

Accelerated Human Performance

“There is a clear link between stress and illness, a link so strong that it is possible to predict illness based on the amount of stress in people’s lives.” These are the words of O. Carl Simonton, M.D. author of *Getting Well Again* and founder of the world-famous Cancer Counseling and Research Center in Texas.

Stress is an everyday fact of life that we must all deal with. It comes in all shapes and sizes: problems at work, with finances or with relationships, deadlines, noise, traffic, bad weather, aging, child rearing, accidents, poor nutrition and poor sleep. Even our thoughts can cause us stress and make the human body more susceptible to illness. In spite of the fact that everyone experiences stressful situations, it isn’t the situations themselves that cause stress. It’s our way of reacting to the situations that makes a difference in our susceptibility to illness and our overall well-being. Here’s how it happens.

When real or imagined events occur that threaten our physical or psychological safety, an alarm is sent to the hypothalamus located in the mid brain. The hypothalamus has an important influence over many of the body’s functions including the uptake of sugar, regulation of appetite, temperature, sleep and sexual behavior. It is also in charge of the “fight or flight” response. When threats occur, the hypothalamus stimulates a number of bodily changes to occur in order to assist the body to “fight or flee.” These changes include increased heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension as well as increased blood flow to the large muscles of the arms and legs in order to help the body “fight or flee.” Additionally, signals stimulate digestion, tissue repair, and the protective effects of the inflammatory and cell mediated immune responses to be curtailed while the body is busy handling the threat.

One can only wonder what would happen to the body if it remained in the "flight or fight" response indefinitely or chronically. What would happen to the body’s ability to metabolize sugar? Would bodily tissues repair and would wounds heal? Would the appetite and body temperature be affected? Might there be problems with sexual dysfunction? What about the toll on the heart? Would it affect sleep patterns? What would happen to muscles that remain tense? And how would the body be affected if the inflammatory and cell mediated responses were chronically inhibited?

Fortunately, under normal circumstances, three minutes after a threatening situation is over and the real or imagined danger is removed the “fight or flight” response subsides and the body relaxes and returns to its normal status. During this time heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, muscle tension, digestion, metabolism and the immune system all return to normal.

The human nervous system is designed to handle threatening situations as long as the bodily changes created by them are released and the body is then allowed to rest and recover. Primitive man, facing lions, tigers and bears, was able to “fight or flee” and then rest and recover. But the modern world places different demands on the human body.

In the modern world instead of lions, tigers and bears, we face the frustration of traffic, the downsizing of our organization, a poor review at work, a nagging boss, a policeman giving us a speeding ticket, waiting in long lines at the bank and grocery store, family problems, marital arguments, financial difficulties, the uncertainty of world situations, etc. (Remember too, it isn’t what happens to us in life, it’s how we react to what happens that matters.) The pent up anger we hold inside ourselves toward any of these situations, or the

guilt and resentment we hold toward others and ourselves, all produce the same effects on the hypothalamus.

Social consequences in the face of modern day stressful situations make it seemingly impossible for us to choose to “fight or flee”. Nevertheless, all of the bodily changes created by the hypothalamus still occur. Instead of discharging this stress, however, we hold it inside where it’s effects become cumulative. The critical factor associated with stress is its chronic effect over time. When chronic stress goes unreleased, it suppresses the body’s immune system and ultimately manifests as illness.

Research shows that almost every system in the body can be affected by chronic stress. For some it manifests as suppression of the reproduction system. For others it manifests as heart disease, hypertension, depression, insomnia and anxiety. For others, chronic stress affecting the body’s uptake of sugar and produces the onset of adult diabetes. Suppression of tissue repair caused by stress leads to decalcification of the bones. Chronic stress creates muscle tension, fatigue, migraine headaches, diarrhea, constipation, arthritis, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, chronic pain and a whole host of immune system disorders. Dr. Simonton’s mind-body model demonstrates the clear link between psychological stress and the ultimate production of cancer cells in the body.

The good news is that there are a number of practices that can counteract the negative effects of stress on the body. Meditation, deep breathing, yoga, T’ai Chi and exercise are just a few that have healing affects. The key is that they produce what Dr. Herbert Benson, founder of the Harvard-affiliated Mind/Body Institute and author of *The Wellness Book*, identified as the “relaxation response.” The “relaxation response” gives the body the all-important period of rest it needs to recover. It produces a state of “alert mind, relaxed body” and returns the metabolism, heart rate, breathing, muscle tension, blood pressure, body temperature, and sleeping patterns to normal. The hypothalamus can then return to its job of mediating the immune system and warding off disease.

Dr. Simonton uses progressive relaxation exercises to produce the relaxation response. He combines this with positive visualizations of the future and positive visualizations of forgiveness. This allows his patients to release pent up emotions from the past, let go of anger, fear, guilt and resentment and replace them with acceptance, hope, love, joy and anticipation of a positive outcome. The release of the inner tension combined with positive visualizations unburdens the hypothalamus and restores the proper functioning of the body’s immune system.

So, is there a link between stress and illness? Clearly. So what do we do about it? Do we take medication? (That is certainly a question for our individual health professional to answer.) Do we treat the symptoms only? Or do we work at removing the cause of our stress? Knowing how important our reaction to what is happening to us in life is, perhaps we could learn to judge circumstances differently. Perhaps we could see our neighbors differently. Perhaps we could come to accept people and things as they are. Perhaps we could forgive our parents and let go of the past realizing that everything happens for a reason in life. Perhaps we could learn to compassionately confront our boss, our spouse, and our co-workers in a non-judgmental way? What if we stopped trying to control things that are outside of our control anyway? What if we decided to just be kind instead of being right? What if we experienced the inner peace that all of these practices bring? Would there still be a link between stress and illness? Of course. Would we be experiencing it? I don’t think so.

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## SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MANAGING STRESS

**Jennifer R. Bradley, Ph.D.**

Beaverton, Oregon

Did you ask someone for support today? Whom did you ask? What type of support did you request? Did you get what you needed? What impact did it have? Perhaps you got support that you did not want. How did you react? These are some of the questions that researchers have been asking about social support. In this article,

I will review some of what we know about social support and stress, together with some of the ways in which the research findings might apply to stress management. Researchers have been studying the relationship between social support and health for over thirty years. There is now a great deal of evidence to show that social support has a positive impact on health.

### **Social support has a direct effect on health.**

Although research shows that individuals with higher levels of social support are more healthy, we know less about the mechanisms involved[1]. Researchers have put forward two types of explanations that are relevant to stress management. The first model proposes that social support has a direct positive effect on health. One explanation for this is that since we are social beings, social support meets our needs for affiliation and thus directly benefits our health. Having our social needs met is important for well being, just as having adequate food and water is important for our well being. If we incorporate this direct effect model into the design of stress reduction efforts, a preventative approach is appropriate. Interventions that are effective in increasing social support should benefit health.

### **Social support has an indirect effect on health by reducing stress.**

The second explanation, or buffer model, is that social support benefits health indirectly through its effect on the source of the stress. For example, a few hours babysitting by a neighbor may enable a new parent to catch up on some sleep, and thus enable him or her to cope with the demands of a new infant. Discussing a problem with a friend may increase the number of options we consider, and thus enable us to solve the problem ourselves. In this buffer model, social support is beneficial only when an individual is under stress. If we are to apply this to stress management, social support interventions should be targeted to individuals under stress.

Although these two types of explanations have engaged researchers in many hours of debate, recent studies suggest that they are not mutually exclusive and that social support may influence health in different ways under different circumstances[2].

### **A dynamic model of social support.**

In more recent research, social support is considered as an interpersonal exchange[3]. Social support is not something we receive passively. Rather than asking whether social support is important in managing stress, we need to ask what type of support, for which person, and in what type of context. The lesson from this research is that stress management practitioners should keep this complexity in mind when thinking about ways in which social support could be used effectively to reduce stress.

### **The fit between social support and support needs.**

Different types of support that have been studied include emotional support, informational support, and tangible support[4]. Lending money would be an example of tangible support, giving someone contact information would be an example of informational support, while listening to someone express his or her feelings would be an example of emotional support. Of course, these types of support can overlap. Giving someone information or practical help may not only reduce stress by helping them to solve the problem, but also convey to the individual that he or she is cared about and thus provide emotional support. The same "supportive act" may mean different things to different people. We may also have different preferences in how we want to people to respond when we are feeling stressed. What kind of responses do you find most supportive when you come home if you've had a stressful day at work? How do these compare to the preferences of your friends or of other members of your household? You may want someone to sit and listen while you unload your day. Your partner may want some time alone to read the newspaper. If you both arrive home stressed on the same day this may require some negotiation!

It is important for the stress management practitioner to ask whether the type of support offered fits with the need of the individual at a particular point in time. If you lose your job, your most pressing concern may be how to pay bills and buy food for the family this month. A short-term loan may be the most helpful immediate support in this situation. On the other hand, if you have some savings, and you are feeling angry about being laid off, the most appropriate support may be to have an opportunity to talk about what it means to you to lose your job. In other situations, the best type of support may be giving information about

resources that may help in the search for a new job. This extent to which the support available fits with the need of the individual is sometimes referred to as the "matching hypothesis" [5].

Although this may seem like common sense, it is not always easy to determine what the individual's need is. Support needs are likely to vary over time and between individuals. For example, if a company designs a formal system to support employees who care for dependents, they may provide a range of services such as child care, elder care, and care for family members with disabilities. If such programs are to be effective it is important that they are kept under review. Ongoing dialogue between employees and employers will be necessary to ensure that the services provided meet the needs of service users.

### **The context for social support.**

In addition to analyzing needs for support, stress management practitioners should take account of contextual factors if they wish to design and implement effective ways of using social support to reduce stress. In today's work environment it is not always easy to create and maintain a supportive work team. Job insecurity, frequent restructuring, and work overload are just a few of the challenges that may have a negative impact on social support in the workplace. Although most of the research focuses on whether higher social support reduces stress, there is also some evidence that a stressful work environment can lead to lower social support[6]. If increasing social support is to be an effective way of reducing stress, it is important to pay attention to how structural or other changes might disrupt social networks and social support.

As organizations become more diverse, an understanding of how culture interacts with social support and stress is increasingly significant. This is an issue that has received relatively little attention from researchers. In the workplace, it is also crucial to pay attention to the culture of the organization or workgroup. Research with teachers has shown that support may be requested and given in indirect ways as a means of allowing individuals to save face and to maintain collegial relationships [7]. In some organizations, direct requests for help may not be an effective way of getting help and may contribute to increased stress if needs remain unmet.

This brief review of some of the lessons from research on social support reminds us that social support is not a "magic pill" that we can use to cure all the ills of stress. There is no doubt, however, that social support does have an important impact on our well being. In times of crisis, we may be more aware of our support needs and less likely to take social support for granted. Perhaps we should pay more attention and take more time to build and strengthen our social networks outside of such crises. As the following quote from a manager reminds us, social support is a reciprocal process. The benefits of creating and maintaining a workplace and a community where individuals are valued and supported are likely to go far beyond immediate improvements to individual health.

"My team ... are fantastic and are supportive of me. I like to think I am equally supportive of them. When they have problems I encourage them to discuss [the problems]...I think because they see the commitment I give to them - it is returned to me in 'buckets'. I consider myself honored to work with them and they know I appreciate them."

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## SPOTLIGHT on ISMA-USA MEMBERS

In this section, we want to focus on YOU, our members. We will introduce and welcome new members to our association, and we will report and congratulate members on their achievements and involvements. Please help us to connect with each other and to be informed about the great things you are doing by sending information to the editors either about yourself or another member.

### NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to these new members who joined ISMA-USA in the last few months:

**Ruth Caggins, Ph.D.**, is an Associate Professor of Nursing at Prairie View A& M University where she teaches both theory and clinical practices in mental health. She lives in Houston, Texas.

**Robin Dinerman, M. A., M. S.**, is a hatha yoga instructor and an EEO counselor for the Employment Assistance Program. She resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

**Jeffree S. Gars, D.C.**, is a chiropractor and founder and president of an onsite occupational healthcare company, HEALS-ON-WHEELS. He lives in Roswell, Georgia.

**Pamela A. Johnson** works at NCCI, INC., and is very active in community volunteer work. She lives in Tamarac, Florida.

**Charles F. Law, Ph.D.**, is a psychologist at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

**Joseph C. Obi, M.D.**, does neurolinguistic programming and is chief consultant and CEO for Genetree, LTD. He lives in Gateshead, England.

**Bret L. Simmons, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor of Business Administration at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. He is especially interested in eustress.

**Kathleen Somers** does group and individual training in relaxation and stress management. She is especially interested in biofeedback. She lives in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

**John Michael Tracy, Ph.D.**, manages the outpatient neuromuscular rehabilitation program and provides clinical speech pathology services at Salem Hospital in Salem, Oregon.

**Lynda Wells, M. BA.**, is the co-founder and Director of The Way To Wellness, Inc. Her company offers tools for stress control and management. She lives in New York City.

### MEMBERS' MILESTONES

Congratulations and best wishes:

**Lisa R. Underdown** is now in private practice in Green Hills, Tennessee, as well as continuing to work out of Madison Church of Christ Counseling Center. She works with comorbid Axis I and Axis II disorders. She is planning on starting a support group for people with eating disorders.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CONFERENCE

#### WORK, STRESS, AND HEALTH: NEW CHALLENGES IN A CHANGING WORKPLACE

The Fifth Interdisciplinary Conference on Occupational Stress & Health

CONVENED BY: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, CANADA

March 20-22, 2003

Sheraton Hotel, Toronto, Canada

Direct all conference-related questions to:

Wesley Baker

Conference Coordinator

American Psychological Association

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750 First Street, NE

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Phone: 202-336-6124

FAX: 202-336-6117

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## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

#### Book Reviewer

Review books for the ISMA-USA NEWSLETTER

Anyone interested and able to help with this important task should contact Editor [Serena Wadhwa](#) for more details.

#### ISMA-USA Web site Librarian

This person would serve as a contact person for submissions to our on-line library, be a resource person to answer inquiries from visitor to our web site and search for new book titles to add to the existing list.

For further details contact [Betty J. McGuigan](#), web site editor.

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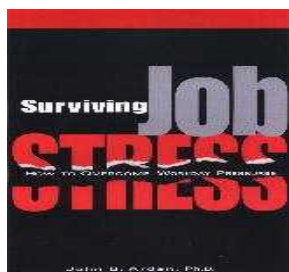
### RESEARCH & WRITING PARTNER

Wanted: Former academic psychologist seeks a research and writing partner to complete a project on defining stressors in higher education, as analyzed by gender, age, and college major. Person who would like to partner in this project would have a background in developmental psychology, small sample statistics, and stress management.

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## NEW PUBLICATION



### SURVIVING JOB STRESS

by  
John B. Arden

Surviving Job Stress offers specific



Each chapter of *Surviving Job Stress* includes anecdotes to illustrate the different ways people respond to stressful workplace situations, and also contains important information on:

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solutions for dealing with difficult co-workers or supervisors and for balancing the stress of supervision. It helps readers answer crucial questions, like: "Should I take time off?" or "Is it time to move on?" A valuable resource for anyone experiencing some form of job-related pressure, *Surviving Job Stress* helps readers improve their quality of life, their self-esteem, and their productivity in the workplace.

About the Author --

John B. Arden, Ph.D. (Sebastopol, CA), is the Director of Training for Psychology and Social Work for the Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers in Northern California. In this capacity, he oversees 20 different training programs in many medical centers throughout the area. He is also the Director of Training at Kaiser Permanente in Vallejo, where he served for several years as the chief psychologist and currently leads the job stress program. He has taught in colleges, professional schools, and universities, and is the author of several other books in the field of psychology.

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