Caregiver resilience: Positive actions to avoid and bounce back from stress!

Are you feeling run down? Are you short-tempered with the children, with your co-workers, or with your own family? As rewarding as working with children can be, it can also be a demanding and stressful profession. Knowing when you are overwhelmed, exhausted, and need help and support is a first step towards dealing with and recovering from stress.

As a child care professional, your stress becomes a serious workplace issue when it makes it difficult for you to sensitively and safely care for and respond to children. Stressed and exhausted teachers may become short-tempered or may simply not engage with the children at all. Children need emotionally and physically healthy child care providers to set a positive tone in the classroom and to meet their developmental needs.

Know your stress and your stress response

What causes stress is different for each person. In child care or school-age settings, a late parent, a whining child, too much paperwork or your own lack of sleep might cause stress. Take a minute to think about what causes you stress. Writing down what causes you stress can be a good first step in bouncing back from stress.

How you deal with stress is very individual. You may tune out everyone around you, become anxious, write in a journal, overeat, ask for help, pray or use some other coping strategy. Responding to stress can be put into one of three general categories: avoiding the stress, problem solving, and getting emotional support.

Think about how you respond to stress:

Do you avoid the stress? You may avoid or not deal with the source of stress head-on. An example of trying to avoid stress is ignoring a co-worker rather than talking to her about a problem. Extreme stress at work might cause you to call in sick or use a vacation day to avoid work altogether. Although a break or pause is sometimes needed, total avoidance doesn't resolve the stressful situation. In fact, avoidance can make problems worse, leading to more stress.

Do you problem solve? You may try to solve a problem to reduce the stress. This is a positive step towards dealing with the stressful situation. An example of coping with stress by problem solving might be to plan a meeting with your director to strategize how to work with a family who is repeatedly late for pick-up, a cause of great stress for you. Problem-solving strategies not only fix problems and reduce stress, but can also help in preventing stress from happening.

Do you get emotional support? Stressful experiences can bring many emotions to the surface such as anger, sadness, frustration, anxiety, and more. Asking for help is a great way to get emotional support. For example, you may vent to a co-worker about a problem, seek the advice of a mentor, use positive self-talk, or try an outside source such as a yoga class to help handle the stress. Emotional support can help you manage and cope with the stress in a positive manner.

As you become more aware of what causes stress, you are better able to cope. This means you are building “resiliency” or the ability to bounce back when something difficult happens in your life. Everyone needs to be able to bounce back after a major stress, such as a loss of a job or death in the family. But you also need to be able to bounce back from everyday challenges and stress, such as dealing with challenging behaviors in your classroom. Taking one small step, such as going on a daily walk, can reduce stress and improve your well-being!
10 Positive actions to avoid and bounce back from stress!

You have the power to make deliberate choices about how you live and respond to stress. Not only can you find strategies to try, but you can also build better stress actions plans to incorporate. Look at the following lifestyle and work place practices that can help you begin to relieve and lower stress.

#1 Connect with others

Connecting with others can help reduce stress. For instance, when co-workers are compassionate, friendly, and supportive, there is a greater chance that you’ll like your job more, get more done, and have healthier relationships over all. These types of positive social connections at work have been shown to boost your health by lowering your heart rate and blood pressure and strengthening your immune system. Connecting with others in a meaningful way (both children and adults) can help you enjoy better health.

#2 Improve communication efforts

Often problems can happen when communication is poor or doesn’t happen at all. Poor communication is the perfect invitation to stress! Review the many ways you communicate in your job. Maybe you have weekly meetings with co-workers or use newsletters to communicate with parents. What type of communication works well for you? How can you improve your communication? And don’t forget that one of the best ways to communicate is to listen!

#3 Be sure there is good fit

When you want to go to work, enjoy what you do, and believe in the mission of your program, there is a feeling of “good fit.” A feeling of good fit allows you to handle stress and challenges. You know there will be support and that others believe in you. The opposite of good fit can occur when you don’t believe in the vision of the program or feel overwhelmed and unsupported in your job. This can lead to both stress and not liking your job. Finding good fit in your work life is important.

#4 Get organized

“I laid the parent permission forms right here on the table but they’re not there!” Sound familiar? Being prepared and organized will help you avoid those last minute energy draining and stressful moments. Are supplies available and organized? Does the room look overstuffed? Or does your room look inviting and well organized? Is there a filing system for paperwork? When you organize your work space (and yourself!), there is less chance for chaos and out-of-control feelings for both adults and children.

#5 Be mindful

Mindfulness practices have been around for thousands of years but recently are being used in educational settings as a way to reduce stress. Mindfulness means to quiet the mind, to be present in the moment with no distractions, and to have focused attention. Mindfulness may also help children and adults gain control of their behaviors and emotions. Mindfulness practices, such as focused breathing, yoga, and reflection can help you to recognize and possibly change challenging emotions.

#6 Use self-care

Self-care practices mean taking care of you. This includes knowing when and who to ask for help, stepping outside for a breath of fresh air, using positive self-talk (“I can do this!”), calling a friend, or making time for an enjoyable activity. Self-care practices help reduce your stress level and restore positive feelings.

#7 Avoid the meltdown

There is often no warning sign that a stressful event is coming—which can make managing stress a big challenge. Having an action plan for stressful times can help. Being able to bounce back from stress or become resilient means you need to have a plan for when stress happens. What would you include in your action plan to avoid stress?
# 8 Avoid the meltdown:
Be ready before stress happens

Although there is no specific way to be ready for stress before it happens, there are ways to be prepared. During stress-free times, do things that invite happiness, joy, and peace. Include experiences that bring laughter, curiosity, awe, and gratitude. Positive experiences help to renew your energy level and also help reconnect to happy times. It can also help to know you’ve made it through tough times. This gives courage and hope for handling future stress.

#9 Avoid the meltdown:
Plan strategies to act on

Although they are difficult to see during stress, when you’re in the eye of the storm, there are strategies to try to manage the stress or calm the storm. Think about the strategies that were mentioned, like stepping outside for a breath of fresh air or asking a co-worker for help. What will be your strategy? Think about it in advance. Having some “go to” strategies helps you to not have a quick reaction that could be negative, like yelling. These could be part of your action plan. It’s important to remember that it is OK to ask for help, particularly when the red-light of anger and frustration is flashing.

#10 Avoid the meltdown:
Use reflection practices after stress

Reflect on a stressful experience now that it is over and review (or reframe) the overall experience. Think about how you felt and how you reacted. What type of coping technique and skills did you use or not use? Looking back at the stressful event can help you know that you are OK and were able to recover.

Stress is bound to happen. Even the dream job can have workplace stress. There is no quick fix to dealing with stress, but there are many ways to deal with stress or even prevent stress from happening. Learning about stress and thinking about how to avoid and handle it helps you to become resilient or able to bounce back from stress.