



STRESS Management

PREPARATION

ALABAMA COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION SYSTEM

Help children cope with emergencies

The way children cope with disasters or emergencies often is directly tied to the way their parents cope. Children can detect adults' fears and sadness. Adults can make disasters less traumatic for children by taking steps to manage their own feelings and coping. Parents and guardians almost always are the best source of support for children in disasters.

Here are 15 tips to help reduce stress in your life:

Plan and organizing. Using time wisely to think and plan is time well spent. In fact, if you fail to take time for planning, you are, in effect, planning to fail. Organize in a way that makes sense to you. If you need color and pictures, use a lot on your calendar or planning book. Some people need to have papers filed away; others get their creative energy from their piles. So forget the "should" and organize your way.

Set goals. Goals provide direction to your life and determine how you spend your time. When asked the secret to amassing such a fortune, one of the famous and wealthy Hunt brothers from Texas replied, "First you've got to decide what you want." Set goals that are specific, measurable, realistic, and achievable. Your optimum goals are those that cause you to "stretch" but not "break" as you strive for achievement.

Prioritize. Use the 80-20 rule originated by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto that states, "80 percent of the reward comes from 20 percent of the effort." The trick to prioritizing is to isolate and to identify that valuable 20 percent. Once identified, prioritize your time to work on those items with the greatest reward. Prioritize by color, number, or letter—whichever method makes the most sense to you. Flagging items with a deadline is another idea to help you stick to your priorities.

Use a to-do list. Some people thrive daily by using a to-do list created the day before or the first thing in the morning. Such people may combine a to-do list with a calendar or schedule, or use a "running" list that is continuously updated. The key is to use the method that works best for you. Don't be afraid to try a new system. You just might find one that works even better than your present one!

Be flexible. Allow time for interruptions and distractions. Plan for 50 percent or less of your time to allow flexibility to handle interruptions or unplanned emergencies. Schedule routine tasks when you expect to be interrupted. Save or make larger blocks of time for your priorities. To get back on track fast when interrupted, ask Lakein's crucial question, "What is the most important thing I can be doing with my time right now?"

Pick your best time. Are you a morning person, a night owl, or a late afternoon whiz? Knowing your best production time will help you to use that time of day to tackle your priorities.

Do the right thing right. Doing the right thing is effectiveness; doing things right is efficiency. Focus first

on effectiveness, then concentrate on efficiency.

Eliminate the urgent. Urgent tasks have short-term consequences, while important tasks are those with long-term, goal-related implications. Work toward reducing the urgent things you must do so you'll have time for important tasks. Flagging or highlighting items on your to-do list or attaching a deadline to each item may help keep important items from becoming emergencies.

Practice the art of intelligent neglect. Eliminate trivial tasks or those tasks that do not have long-term consequences from your life. Can you delegate or eliminate any task on your to-do list? Work on those tasks that you alone can do.

Don't be a perfectionist. In the Malaysian culture, only the gods are considered capable of producing anything perfect. Whenever something is made, a flaw is left on purpose so the gods will not be offended. Yes, some things need to be closer to perfect than others; but perfectionism or paying unnecessary attention to detail can be a form of procrastination.

Don't procrastinate. One technique to try is the "Swiss cheese" method described by Alan Lakein. When you are avoiding something, break it into smaller tasks and do just one of the smaller tasks or set a timer and work on the big task for just 15 minutes. By doing a little at a time,

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Proper preparation will ease the stress that a threatening storm will inevitably bring.