

**Taking Care of Ourselves:**  
**Stress Reduction Workshop**

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**Introduction and Rationale**

- Providing care to young children is an intense and demanding job.
- Stress is natural and can be inevitable, but stress can take a toll on your health and effectiveness as a parent or provider.
- Stress doesn’t just effect you, it also impacts your relationships with children in your care and with coworkers.



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**Introduction and Rationale**

**Research shows that:**

- Caregivers who are stressed find it more difficult to offer praise, nurturance, and the structure that young children need.
- Caregivers who are stressed are more likely to use harsh discipline.
- Children whose caregivers are under high stress tend to have more challenging behavior
- Small changes can make BIG differences in stress



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Overview and Learning Objectives

- 1. **Define:** What is Stress?
- 2. **Identify:** Your Response to Stress:  
Feeding the Fire or Cooling it Down?
- 3. **Develop:** Next Steps
  - a. For me
  - b. For my program



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Let’s Talk About STRESS



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Definition of Stress

- Stress:
- Is a physical, mental or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension



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Common Symptoms of Stress

Cognitive:	Emotional:
Memory problems Inability to concentrate Continuous worry Racing thoughts	Feeling Down Feeling overwhelmed Irritability (short temper) Inability to relax
Physical:	Behavioral:
Excessive Perspiration Chest pains/ elevated heart Frequent colds/illness Nausea, dizziness or headaches	Increase /decrease appetite Nervous habits Difficulty/irregular sleeping Excessive use of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs



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Reflection Activity:

Knowing Your Sources and Signs of Stress



Think about the following questions:

- What are my sources of stress?
- How do I know when I am experiencing stress?
- What are my stress reactions?

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STRESS: Feeding the Fire or Cooling it Down?



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The Link Between Thoughts, Behavior, and Emotion

Your thoughts impact your behavior:

- Stress comes from our perception of the situation
- Technically, the actual situation is not stressful, our perceptions MAKE IT stressful
- Sometimes we are right, sometimes we are wrong!



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### Patterns of Thinking that FEED the Fire



- All-or-Nothing
- Filtering Out the Positive
- Overgeneralization
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Catastrophizing
- Emotional Reasoning
- “Should” Statements
- Personalization



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(Beck, 1995; Burns, 1989)

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### What Can You Control?





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### The Role of Control in Stress Reduction

Focus on what is in your control	Put aside what is out of your control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examples of areas in your control:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your ability to prioritize work &amp; personal obligations</li><li>• Your reactions to events and people</li><li>• Your thoughts</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examples of areas outside of your control:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How people respond to you</li><li>• Other people’s feelings</li></ul></li></ul>



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### The Role of Control in Stress Reduction

**Focus on**  
**what is in your control**

- Results:
  - Feeling empowered
  - Feeling relief

**Put aside**  
**what is out of your control**

- Results:
  - Feeling hopeless
  - Feeling anxious
  - Feeling STRESSED



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### Cooling My Fire

- Recognize that thoughts impact your behavior and emotions
- Focus on what is in your control versus out of your control
- Keep a list of activities to help you reduce stress

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### How do you COOL your fire?





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Strategies to Reduce Stress

- Coping Strategies
  - Ways to manage stressful situations
  - Deliberate and planned approach
  - Goal: reduce, tolerate, or minimize stress
  - Individualized



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Strategies to Reduce Stress

- Create a consistent routine
- Practice effective communication
- Establish “Me Time”
- Practice specific stress reduction techniques
- Express your feelings



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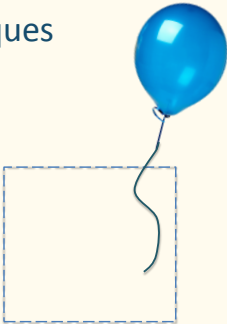
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Relaxation Techniques

Controlled, Deep Breathing

- Use a calming word
- Use “belly breaths”
- Imagine your other thoughts floating away in a balloon
- Try “square breathing”



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## Relaxation Techniques

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Useful for relaxing the muscles when they feel tight because of emotional stress
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation provides the most optimal relaxation
  - Chair Technique
  - Standing Technique
- Key: tensing a group of muscles, hold in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds, relax the muscles



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## Positive Self-Talk



I'm good enough...  
I'm smart enough...  
And doggone-it,  
people like me!

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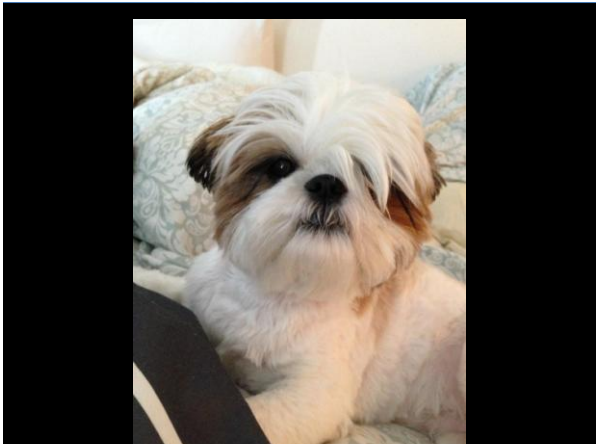
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Cooling the Fire of Others



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### Communication Techniques

**Active Listening**

- Builds relationships and sends a message of respect for the thoughts and experiences of others.
- Involves listening to the content of the conversation as well as feelings and non-verbal cues within the message
- Example:
  - Speaker: *I finally finished all of my paperwork.*
  - Listener: *Oh good, now you can help clean up.*
  - Active Listener: *You must feel relieved, that was a lot of work.*



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### Communication Techniques

**Effective Feedback**

- Is fact-based observation of what is going well
  - That was really effective, when you were speaking right at eye level with Jacey.*
- Describes changes in the future as “next steps” rather than criticism
  - Next time, you might try about using a softer voice.*
- Follow proposed changes with praise or encouragement
  - I really liked how you gave her a high five at the end.*



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### Writing and Reflecting

- Using a Stress Log**
  - Helps identify and understand your stress experiences
  - Builds awareness of how you react to stress
  - Reveals common themes or circumstances associated with your experience of and reaction to stress
  - Informs your next steps in learning how to manage stress based on your strengths and challenges



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### STAFF ACTIVITY

#### Keeping a Stress Log

There are a number of step for keeping and making use of a stress log

- **Record** your stressors within a time period and rate your stress response
- **Review** the types of stressors you experienced, your response, their frequency, and any common themes
- **Note Next Steps** including your strengths, challenges, and plans to improve how you will manage stress in next steps and your Individualized Action Plan



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### Create a Personal Action Plan

When [my stressor]  
and I begin to feel [sign of stress],  
I will [stress reducing technique].



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### Next Steps

1. What will you do to work on your own stress reduction?
2. What will you do to help staff reduce their stress?





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Resources and Evaluation

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation [www.ecmhc.org](http://www.ecmhc.org)

- Taking Care of Ourselves booklets
- A Dozen Posters to Manage Stress
- Guided Relaxation Exercises (English/Spanish)



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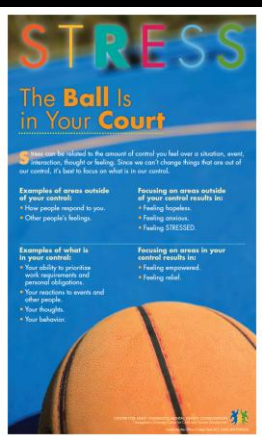
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STRESS

# Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts

Stress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful! Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all have, as well as ways you can challenge these thoughts.

**All-or-Nothing Thinking:** You see things in black-and-white categories. If your actions aren't perfect, then they are seen as a failure.  
**Challenge:** Instead of thinking in an "either/or" way, try to think in shades of gray. Evaluate the situation on a scale of 0-10. Think again about partial success and reevaluate, on a scale of 0-10.

**Filtering Out the Positives:** You focus on one thing that went wrong and filter out the positive events that occurred.  
**Challenge:** Try to be as kind to yourself as you would be with a friend. Review the day's events, and focus on all of the positive things that went right. For every negative thing you think of, try to also focus on one positive thing.

**Overgeneralizations:** You see a single negative situation as never-ending and a "forever" pattern.  
**Challenge:** Remind yourself that a single negative event (or even multiple events) doesn't mean it will truly last forever. Think of a specific time when a single negative event did not have a long lasting outcome.

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CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON CHILDREN  
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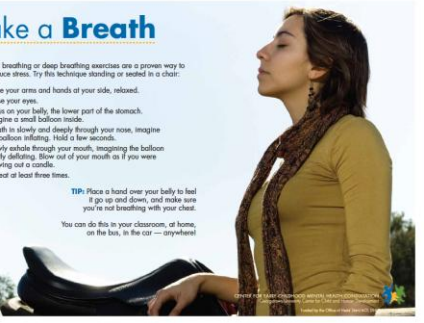
# Take a Breath

**B**elly breathing or deep breathing exercises are a proven way to reduce stress. Try this technique standing or seated in a chair.

1. Place your arms and hands at your side, relaxed.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Focus on your belly, the lower part of the stomach. Imagine a small balloon inside.
4. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, imagine the balloon inflating. Hold a few seconds.
5. Slowly exhale through your mouth, imagining the balloon gently deflating. Blow out of your mouth as if you were blowing out a candle.
6. Repeat at least three times.

**TIP:** Place a hand over your belly to feel it go up and down, and make sure you're not breathing with your chest.

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car — anywhere!



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STRESS

# From Head to Toe

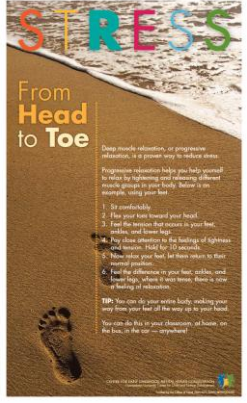
Deep muscle relaxation, or progressive relaxation, is a proven way to reduce stress. Progressive relaxation helps you fully respond to stress by tightening and relaxing different muscle groups in your body. Below is an example of one part of the exercise.

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Use your hands to warm your feet.
3. Feel the tension that occurs in your feet, ankles, and lower legs.
4. Pay close attention to the feelings of tightness and discomfort. Hold for 20 seconds.
5. Now relax your feet, let them return to their normal position.
6. Feel the difference in your feet: notice and describe how it now feels. Does it show a sense of feeling at relaxation.

**TIP:** You can do your entire body, working your way from your feet all the way up to your head.

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car — anywhere!

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## A Strategy a Day Will Keep the Doctor Away!

Here are some daily strategies to reduce stress. You will be surprised by how effective even the smallest change can be!

**Create a Consistent Routine**

- Daily exercise: Any physical activity that you find enjoyable.
- Add soothing music to your daily commute.

**Establish "Me Time"**

- Create time to maintain hobbies.
- Have a spa night at home.
- Reward yourself for a job well done.

**Practice Effective Communication**

- State feelings in a clear way: For example, "I feel angry when you yell at me."
- Offer factual descriptions of what upsets you, rather than labels or judgments.

**Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques**

- Learn relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation.
- Introduce positive statements into your day and in reaction to negative or unhelpful thoughts. For example: "I always try my best." Or, instead of, "I need to be perfect, or I fail," say, "I did a great job learning this new curriculum."

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PRINCIPLES

Taking Care of Ourselves

READERS

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## National Center on Health Contact Information

Toll-Free: 888-227-5125

Email: [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org)

Website: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center>

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