

# Easing Your Stress



**Information for Caregivers of Individuals  
with Developmental Disabilities**





There are four kinds of people in the world:  
Those who have been caregivers,  
those who currently are caregivers,  
those who will be caregivers,  
and those who will need caregivers.

- Rosalynn Carter



# INTRODUCTION

This booklet is written for you, the caregiver of a person with developmental disabilities. You also may be caring for an aging parent, or perhaps a spouse or significant other who is seriously ill.

As a caregiver, why is this booklet important for you? It is important because we know that while being a caregiver brings meaning and purpose into your life, it also brings stress. As a caregiver you experience the typical stress of everyday life; job responsibilities, money problems, and relationship issues but it doesn't stop there. Juggling doctors, therapists, teachers, employers, and bureaucracies are additional stressors and those can be downright overwhelming. Worrying about the future often adds another layer of stress.

Has anyone ever asked you, "How do you deal with all that stress"? Think about it. How are you managing your stress? It is an important question. There is a growing amount of evidence that shows, without a doubt, that stress takes its toll on one's emotional and physical health.

## In this booklet, you will learn

- how the mind-body connection affects your response to stress,
- how stress affects children,
- how other caregivers have learned to ease their stress,
- what resources are there for you, and
- how to identify approaches that will work for you to ease your stress.

## Caregiver stress is linked to

- reduced serotonin levels (the "feel good" brain chemical),
- raised "bad" cholesterol,
- increased muscle loss,
- increased memory loss and rigid thinking,
- increased anxiety and depression,
- increased insomnia,
- increased isolation, and
- diminished sexual desire.

Additional facts are related to the caregivers who experience chronic stress, or stress that occurs over time without relief. This long-term chronic stress is known to take ten years off one's life. Of the caregivers who experience chronic stress

- 88% have physical fatigue and emotional stress,
- 63% have poor eating habits and worse exercise habits,
- 46% have more caregiving responsibilities than they can handle, and
- 25% meet the diagnostic criteria for major depression.

This group is also twice as likely to say they are in fair or poor health compared to non-caregivers.

While these statistics may be alarming, the good news is that there are steps you can take to reduce the effects of stress. This booklet presents techniques you can easily learn that will feel comfortable to you. It has been shown that even the smallest changes can have dramatic, positive effects on your physical and emotional health.

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## THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION - WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

What does a mind-body connection really mean? It means the body and mind interact. What you do to one has an enormous impact on the other.

Let's look at two examples of the mind-body connection.

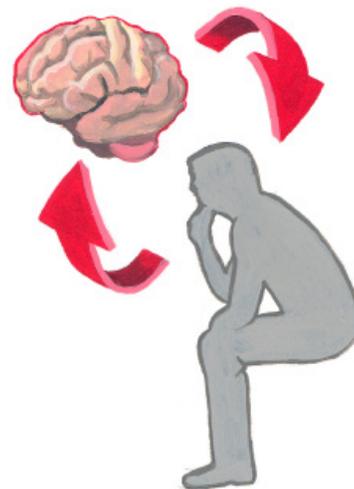
I was feeling worried about my child's upcoming surgery and all we need to do to be prepared (mind). Now I have a headache (body). What is the connection? Stress can cause muscle tension and this can build up in the neck and scalp.

My daughter is up every 3 hours - I haven't had a good night's sleep for two weeks. I am feeling angry and irritable! What is the connection? Little sleep reduces serotonin which is a calming hormone and increases cortisol which can increase stress, causing irritability.

Can you think of another example of the mind-body connection?

### Mind-Body Connection and Stress

What does the mind-body connection have to do with stress? What is stress? Stress occurs whenever your mind perceives a threat to you, your loved ones, or your future **and** you feel you have little control over it. When these two conditions are met, your body will have an automatic stress response, also called fight or flight.



You experience

- a faster heart rate,
- increased blood pressure,
- your brain releases extra stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline), and
- your muscles prepare for action.

This stress response is designed to help you to respond to perceived threats. It prepares your mind to be focused and your body to take quick action. Imagine a herd of zebras grazing on the savanna when a lion shows up for dinner. The zebras' stress response is turned on and they bolt. Once the danger is gone, the stress response is turned off and they go back to grazing.

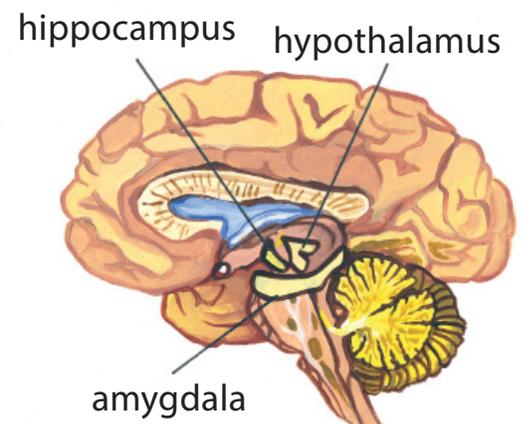
For today's caregivers, the stress response has become harmful to one's health for one simple reason - the stress response stays turned on. No one gets to go back to calmly grazing on the savanna. When the stress response is on, so is the flow of stress hormones and your muscles are always ready for action.

### **The Stress Response Story - It Starts in the Brain**

The stress response starts in the amygdala, a part of the brain. The amygdala has the job of deciding whether a situation is a threat. A mother-in-law's visit, for example, may be a threat for one person and not for another. If the situation is viewed as a "threat" the amygdala tells the hypothalamus to release extra stress hormones. When enough hormones are released a message goes back to the amygdala to stop. However, when stress is continuous (referred to as chronic), the mechanism to circle back to the amygdala wears out and the hypothalamus is not instructed to stop.

Long-term and excessive production of stress hormones is harmful rather than helpful. It can ultimately lead to damage of the endocrine system (which helps to regulate mood, growth and development, cell repair, metabolism, and sexual/reproductive processes). It also weakens the immune system (which helps the body fight infections). Chronic stress can also damage the hippocampus, a part of the brain that is crucial to short-term memory and the formation of new memories. Thus, chronic stress can affect both physical and mental functioning.

Chronic stress can result in insomnia, anxiety, high blood pressure, and an increased chance of, and slow recovery from, infections. Even more disturbing is that stress contributes to the development of major illnesses such as heart disease. Stress can cause serious damage to our health - the mind-body connection is very real indeed!



## STRESS AND CHILDREN

Everything you have learned about the mind-body connection and stress applies to children. Children have many stressors. Additionally, research tells us that children are also affected by their parents' stress. By learning how to ease your own stress, you will have a positive effect on those you care for.

Also, know that children are much less able to put their feelings into words. Stress can pile up and it shows up in different ways. Things to watch for are

- negative changes in behavior - acting moody, withdrawing, expressing worries, crying, fearful reactions, becoming angry, fighting, destroying property,
- changes in sleeping and eating patterns,
- feeling ill more often - headaches and stomach aches can be due to stress, and
- acting differently at home than in other environments.

As the parent, you can reduce your worry and related stress by networking with other parents. This way you stay in touch about your child or teen's well-being. Always seek professional help if you have any concerns about your child's health or behavior.

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You have learned about the effects of stress, how this is related to the body's stress response and stress hormones and how children are affected more than adults often recognize.

You are probably wondering what you can do to ease your stress. The good news is that there are many approaches that have been shown to be effective. With small changes in your lifestyle and little to no cost, you can improve the quality of your life and the life of those around you.

A message from caregivers who have come before you:

***"Be positively selfish by doing things for yourself"***

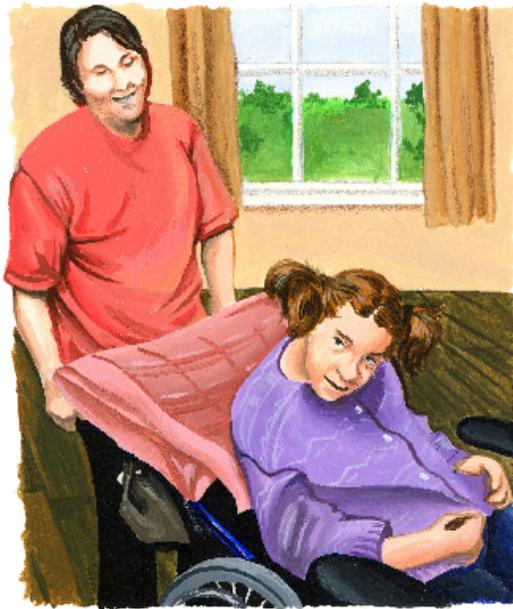
This may start by slowing down long enough to get in touch with who you are, what you enjoy, and what motivates you to start each day. Next you begin to nurture yourself by being and doing those things that reflect who YOU are - the things that make you - YOU. Those "things" you do for yourself may be small but can have a big impact on how you feel about life itself.

## LESSONS FROM CAREGIVERS

Those who have travelled further on this journey have much wisdom to offer.

In this section you will read about caregivers who have different stressors and use different approaches to ease their stress. The caregivers' approaches are evidence-based, which means that studies have shown they are effective. In each story the caregivers share their

- stressors,
- current approaches,
- new approaches, and
- supportive facts to consider.



Remember, stress occurs whenever your mind perceives a threat to you, your loved ones, or your future and you feel you have little control over it. Here are two extreme perspectives that result in different levels of stress:

- Your mind believes there is trouble lurking around every corner and there isn't much you can do about it. (The lions are everywhere and if they attack I am done for.)
- Your mind believes the world is generally safe and secure and if there were trouble you would be able to handle it. (The lions are busy feeding somewhere else and if they do show up I will have already gone.)

## Helen's Story

Hello, my name is Helen. My husband Jim and I have a son Allen who is 35 years old. Allen was born with Down syndrome and is doing pretty well. He lives in a group home nearby. I also care for my elderly mother whose health has worsened since my father's death last year.

Regarding how to ease stress, I remember the moment - over 30 years ago - when I said to myself, "Down syndrome is not going to go away. I have to learn ways to take care of myself and my family." I studied dance so I just continued dancing - in my living room - as a form of exercise. I didn't realize it at the time, but joining a parent support organization was the best decision I made for my family. Those personal connections still get us through tough times. They help us think through our challenges and to take action before things get worse.

My father's death has left me very worried about Allen's future without us. We have taken all the necessary legal actions, including making a will and a special needs trust, but the worry is still keeping me up at night.

I have recently learned about something called soft-belly breathing. You relax the belly; focus on your breath, count while breathing in and out. It is easy to do, it only takes a few minutes, and it helps to relax the worried mind.



### Facts to Consider

- Dance as a form of exercise reduces the effects of stress. When you exercise the body releases the hormone serotonin which creates a pleasant feeling. People who exercise frequently have fewer health issues when they encounter stress.
- Caregivers who feel they have social support report less stress than caregivers who feel they do not have social support.
- Soft-belly breathing and other simple breathing techniques shift the mind away from worrisome thoughts and bring the mind into the present moment. These techniques also produce a relaxation response which releases calming hormones.

## Bennett and Alicia's Story

Hello, our names are Bennett and Alicia. Our daughter Natalie has a developmental disability. We are often asked how we ease all the stress in our lives. One thing we both find important and greatly appreciate is our circle of social supports. Both of our families are supportive along with a few close friends.

We have come to realize we each cope differently. I play basketball and go into what Alicia calls my "cave" to play my guitar. Alicia finds talking with friends helpful; she just has a greater need to talk about things.

Natalie just turned 12 years old and she is beginning to go through lots of changes. I am stressed just thinking about what may be ahead for us. My health is showing it. I have high blood pressure, frequent colds and headaches.

I hadn't been to the doctor in several years. I went recently and she tested my stress hormone level and heart rate variability. She explained that I have adjusted to the stress in my life but that does not mean the effects of stress are not there.



My wife is connected with a parent-to-parent type of support group and I recently decided to attend. It has been helpful to hear how other families make adjustments and their plans for the future. Also, we arrange for respite care once a week so we can have a "date night". I am feeling more hopeful and less stressed.

### Facts to Consider

- Women respond to stress differently than men. They have a greater need for a circle of support where the women take care of each other emotionally.
- Regular exercise helps you manage the effects of stress more successfully. When you exercise, the hormone serotonin is released, creating a pleasant feeling. People who exercise frequently have fewer health issues when they encounter stress.
- Playing and listening to pleasant music releases hormones that increase pleasant feelings. Slow music and classical music are particularly soothing.
- Healthy foods boost an immune system weakened by stress. Frequent colds and other infections are due to a weakened immune system.

## Susana's Story

My name is Susana. I am a young mother with one child, Javier, who is 8 years old. Javier's disability has been stressful for me, mostly due to his seizures and his difficulty in expressing himself. Javier is easily upset and he could have a seizure at any time, leaving me worried and anxious. Although Javier has progressed a lot, my extended family is often critical of my mothering skills. This is an added stressor!

Regarding how to ease stress, I began exercising twice a week when Javier started preschool. It was kind of hard at first, but it has been a lifesaver. I feel so much lighter when I leave the gym, like I can face the rest of the day.

Recently, I have been having headaches, feeling tired and irritable. I know it is related to stress. I want to learn how to relax more and enjoy my time with my son and family. While talking with another mother, I heard about a program called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a form of meditation.

They say it helps your mind stay in the present moment rather than the past (regret) or future (worry). I have found that to definitely be true!



### Facts to Consider

- Meditation helps ease stress. The focus on breathing and the quieting of the busy mind helps to release calming hormones.
- There are many different types of meditation. The common element they share is relaxation which decreases the production of stress hormones.
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction meditation was developed in the late 1970s. It has been widely adopted and well studied. For example, it has been shown to help people with insomnia get a good night's sleep.

## Richard's Story

I am Richard. I am 27 years old and a direct care worker with a large agency that provides services to adults with developmental disabilities. I have been in my position for two years. I provide support to individuals who are learning necessary skills to live on their own.

In terms of stress, I didn't know what it was until this past year or so. I am now feeling overwhelmed, tired and I guess somewhat depressed. Much of this is due to my job.

My job responsibilities keep changing. Also, too often I feel I don't have all the skills or management's support to really help people. I have become very negative, waiting for the next shoe to fall and wondering if this is the day I am going to resign.

Last week I spoke with a colleague, John, about my situation. He had already worked through some of the same issues. He suggested that I write out my concerns and frustrations and then make an action plan. He offered to support me along the way.

I realized that I help my clients with planning their futures, so why not plan my future? Talking and writing about my frustrations and concerns helped me stop thinking about them all the time. They also seemed less overwhelming on paper. I was able to focus and create a plan including shadowing a more experienced worker and discussing some things with my supervisor. I feel more in control now.

I know meeting up at the gym with John a couple times a week has also helped. I now have a more positive attitude.



### Facts to Consider

- Creating a plan of action helps regain a sense of control over one's life. This reduces stress.
- Positive thinking is the primary way to reduce stress.
- Sharing your frustrations with a colleague can give you new insights on how to handle your stress.

# THINGS TO DO TO EASE YOUR STRESS

You have learned about several approaches to ease your stress. The "ease your stress" approaches below provide more information and guidance. Remember, you know yourself better than anyone else. Choose the best approaches for you. Practice at least one of these daily.

## To Do On Your Own

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### Exercise

There are so many great forms of exercise. You may be wondering which is the best one. The answer is - the one you enjoy the most and that provides a little variety. Enjoyment ensures that you will keep at it and variety ensures you work different muscle groups. Setting up an exercise schedule is important - it is a way to let yourself and others know that this time is for you.

### Soft-belly Breathing

Soft-belly breathing and other simple breathing techniques shift the mind away from worrisome thoughts and bring the mind into the present moment. This is a form of relaxation for the mind and body.

Here are the steps to practice soft belly breathing. It takes 10 minutes.

1. Put your feet on the floor and begin to relax.
2. Put your hands on your belly and allow your abdomen to relax.
3. Soften your focus or close your eyes.
4. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth.
5. Breathe deeply into your abdomen and feel it expand to the count of five.
6. Pause for a count of one.
7. Exhale slowly to a count of five, allowing your body to relax and release tension.
8. Repeat for five breaths or until you feel relaxed.
9. Congratulate yourself for taking action on your own behalf!



**Remember:**

***"Stress is***

***a reaction***

***to an event***

***rather than***

***the event***

***itself"***

## Humor

When was the last time you had a big laugh? Humor is good for you! Find ways to bring more humor into your life. Read and tell funny stories, watch a comedy, laugh with a friend. Also, being able to laugh together and at oneself helps us remember not to "sweat the small stuff", a great stress reducer.

## Meditation

Meditation is one of the best ways to ease one's stress. Even 10 minutes of meditation each morning can positively impact the rest of your day. Many communities are now offering classes on meditation - you may want to start with your library and/or community center to see what they provide. For meditation on the light side - there are suggested phone applications in the resource section that give you scheduled reminders to take some deep breaths.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is one of the most popular forms of meditation. In this form of meditation, one allows the mind to wander while focusing on the breath to produce a very relaxed and peaceful state of mind. This calmness stays with you and over time creates a more positive perspective toward life.

Studies have shown MBSR to

- decrease insomnia,
- decrease anxiety,
- reduce levels of chronic pain,
- reduce frequency of headaches, and
- reduce obesity.

In one study of parents of children with autism, the parents' stress levels decreased and their children had fewer emotional outbursts when parents practiced MBSR.

## Limit Worrisome Thoughts

Worrisome thoughts trigger the stress response. Whether you are worrying about the hungry lion possibly showing up or the hungry lion is heading towards you - your mind and body get prepared.

One approach to easing your stress is to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying. Try these steps and then create your own fun ways to stop your worrisome thoughts.

1. Observe your worry thoughts and notice those worries that are repetitive.
2. Give a title for each one of your repetitive worries and imagine each one has its own CD recording. For example, worries about your child's school placement for next year can be your "School Placement" recording.
3. When your "School Placement" recording begins to play - quickly decide whether there are concrete steps you should be taking.

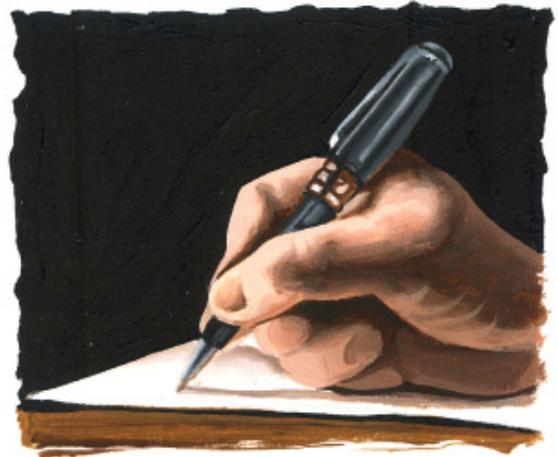
4. Next, actively choose whether you want to listen to this recording - again.
5. If you choose not to listen, pretend you are pressing the STOP button on your CD player.
6. If you choose to listen - notice how your body responds to the worrisome thoughts running through your mind.

## Positive Attitude

Having a positive attitude is connected with less stress and more happiness. Having a positive attitude does not mean you don't consider possible downsides to situations. Rather, positive attitude means seeing the good that comes out of difficulty, seeing oneself as an active participant in life rather than a victim of circumstance, taking a "can do" approach to new situations, and respecting and appreciating oneself and others. All the "ease your stress approaches" in this booklet can help you develop a positive attitude.

## Journaling

This effective way to ease your stress costs little, takes little time, and requires few supplies. You need a pad of paper, pen, and 20 minutes a few times a week. Find a quiet area in your home. Record the date on your writing tablet and make a few general notes about your day. Continue to write every thought and feeling that comes to you. Keep writing for 20 minutes. You will be amazed how writing down **all** your thoughts, non-stop, can lighten your mental load.



## Resources on Health and Well-Being

Just knowing what is "out there" can open up possibilities in ways you would not imagine. Become curious about what people are doing to improve their health and well-being. While at the grocery store, the library or any place you regularly visit, look at the bulletin board with a fresh set of eyes. Spend a little time reviewing the resources in this booklet. Choose a few, visit their websites or call to find out what may be helpful.

## Express Gratitude

There is a budding area of research on the importance of expressing gratitude. Studies have shown that writing down four things you are grateful for every night helps create a positive outlook on life. Writing them down is more effective than saying them quietly to yourself, so just keep a pad of paper and pen on your bed stand. Doing this with your children would be twice as beneficial!

## Spending Time Outdoors

It is hard to understand exactly why spending time outdoors is so relaxing, renewing actually, but it just is. Either alone or with your friends and family, figure out ways to spend more time in nature. Rivers, parks, forests, beaches, bird watching, hiking, fishing, nature trails, canoeing, boating, collecting shells - pick an activity and just go do it!

## Things To Do With Others

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### Social Life

Take a hard look at your social life. Has it shrunk to the size of a shriveled-up pea? Whether you need to find new friends or reconnect with old friends, it is important to do so. Write down the names of everyone you consider a friend, and pick one you would like to spend more time with. Contact that person. If there is no one on the list you want to spend time with, know that there are people who would like to meet you. Find a way to meet them - your health depends on it.



### Support Group

Attending a support group, even a couple of times, can be life-changing. Support groups provide companionship, empathy, caring, ongoing support, vital information and advocacy assistance. The resource section of this booklet includes organizations that provide peer support groups.

### Self-Expression

There are many ways to creatively express yourself. Singing, writing simple poetry, dancing, flower arranging, cooking, decorating, sewing, woodworking, and arts and crafts are some examples. Think about what you enjoy doing and just do it! There are many class offerings that are inexpensive, or you could trade talent lessons with someone who wants to learn what you already know.

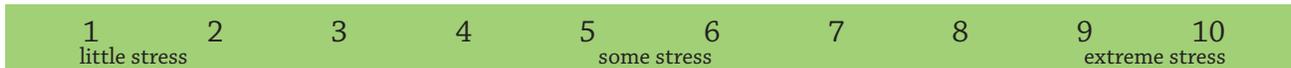
# CAREGIVER WORKSHEET

## DISCOVER YOUR OWN UNIQUE APPROACHES TO EASE YOUR STRESS

Before completing your Caregiver Worksheet, observe what causes your stress, what happens to your body and mind when you experience stress, and ways you ease your stress. You may want to write your observations and insights in a journal.



1. My current level of stress is:



2. Using the 1 - 10 scale above, rate the degree to which each of the following is a stressor in your life.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My son or daughter's future         | <input type="checkbox"/> Our health insurance coverage                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My child's behavior                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Our health care costs                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My child's health                   | <input type="checkbox"/> My ability to manage all my responsibilities      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My child's education                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability of a loved one to manage responsibilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My/Our future                       | <input type="checkbox"/> My parents  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My/Our financial future             | <input type="checkbox"/> My in-laws  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My health                           | <input type="checkbox"/> My spouse or ex-spouse                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My employment stability             | <input type="checkbox"/> My other children/step-children                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment stability of a loved one | <input type="checkbox"/> Other   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My employment - work dynamics       |  |

3. When I am stressed I tend to \_\_\_\_\_. List all the different ways you respond to stress. For example, overeat, raise my voice, drink more alcohol than I would like, etc.

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4. I regularly use the following approaches to ease my stress.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being artful (drawing, painting, playing music, theatre group, etc.)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressing a positive attitude                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing techniques  | <input type="checkbox"/> Saying nice things to and about myself         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spending time with friends and or family       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercising (lifting weights, biking, walking, aerobics, swimming, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Connecting with other caregivers               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Giving myself special treats as a form of self-appreciation             | <input type="checkbox"/> Spending time alone doing a favorite something |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bringing humor into my day  | <input type="checkbox"/> Spending time outdoors                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limiting my "worry" thoughts  | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing in a journal                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meditating  | <input type="checkbox"/> Practicing Yoga                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoying music  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing sports  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                   |

5. For the stressors that you rated 5 or above, what new approaches would you consider using to ease your stress?

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6. I am going to begin using the new approaches on this date, \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.

7. The resources that are available for me are (friends, family, agencies, etc.)

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These resources will provide (support, information, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

8. I will know I am being successful when

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# RESOURCES

## STATE OF FLORIDA

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### ***\*The Arc of Florida***

<http://www.arcflorida.org>

The Arc of Florida promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.

2898 Mahan Drive Suite 1  
Tallahassee, Florida 32308  
850-921-0460 or 1-800-226-1155

### ***\*Family Network on Disabilities (FND)***

<http://www.fndfl.org/>

A Florida network of individuals of all ages who may be at-risk, have disabilities, or have special needs and their families, professionals, and concerned citizens. The mission of FND is to ensure, through collaboration, that individuals have full access to family-driven support, education, information, resources, and advocacy.

2196 Main St Suite K  
Dunedin, FL 34698  
800-825-5736

### ***\*Parent to Parent of Miami, Inc.***

<http://www.ptopmiami.org>

Parent to Parent of Miami provides information, educational training and support to individuals with a disability and their family members. Their staff are specially trained parents, families and professionals who have a family member with a disability. Services are provided in English, Spanish and Creole.

7990 SW 117th Ave, Suite 200  
Miami FL 33183  
305-271-9797 or 800-527-9552  
Serving: Miami, Dade and Monroe Counties

### ***\*Central Florida Parent Center***

<http://www.centralfloridaparentcenter.org>

This organization provides information, training and support to individuals with disabilities and their families.

1021 Delaware Avenue  
Palm Harbor FL 34683  
727-789-2400 or 888-61AWARE  
Serving: 30 counties in central and northeast Florida

### ***\*Family Café***

<http://www.familycafe.net>

The Family Café provides individuals with disabilities and their families with an opportunity for collaboration, advocacy, friendship and empowerment by serving as a facilitator of communication, a space for dialogue and a source of information. Family Café sponsors a large information and skill-building conference each year in Orlando, Florida. Scholarships are available to help cover travel and lodging costs.

519 North Gadsden Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301  
850-224-4670 or 888-309-CAFE

### ***Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)***

<http://www.apdcares.org>

This is the state program that assists people who have developmental disabilities and their families. It also provides assistance to identify the needs of people with developmental disabilities and funding to purchase supports and services.

4030 Esplanade Way, Suite 380  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0950  
866-273-2273

**\*Family Care Council Florida (FCCF)**

<http://www.fccflorida.org>

The mission of the Family Care Council Florida is to advocate for, educate, and empower individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. The FCCF partners with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to bring quality services with dignity and choice. There is a Family Care Council for each APD district in Florida.

800-470-8101

**\*Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)**

<http://www.florida-card.org>

CARD provides support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism and related disabilities. Their website provides a wealth of information about autism and the resources available to support families.

**Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources (FDLRS)**

<http://www.fdlrs.org>

FDLRS provides diagnostic services, workshops, technology and other services to students in special education and their families. FDLRS services are part of every school district in Florida. 850-245-0475

\*These organizations provide peer support.

## NATIONAL

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**Caregiver Action Network**

<http://www.caregiveraction.org>

The Caregiver Action Network (CAN) is the nation's leading family caregiver organization working to improve the quality of life for the more than 65 million Americans who care for loved ones with chronic conditions, disabilities, disease, or old age. CAN is a non-profit organization providing education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers free of charge.

**Centers for Disease Control**

Families with Special Needs: Caregiving Tips

<http://www.cdc.gov/family/specialneeds/>

This site provides general care giving tips and links to information on specific health topics to help you, the caregiver, and those you care for stay safe and healthy.

## COPING STRATEGY SPECIFIC

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**Mind-Body Practices**

<http://www.nccam.nih.gov/health/mindbody>

Additional information about mind-body practices including massage therapy, meditation, relaxation techniques, spinal manipulation, and yoga.

**Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>

The Center for Mindfulness is at the University of Massachusetts, Department of Medicine. This website provides information about the MBSR meditation practice.

**The Center for Mind-Body Medicine**

<http://www.cmbm.org/resources/self-care>

This website includes instructions on how to do soft-belly breathing.

## CHILDREN AND STRESS

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### *Stress Free Kids*

[http:// www.stressfreekids.com](http://www.stressfreekids.com)

This website provides specific strategies to assist children with their stress. There are CDs and DVDs available and a section for parents of children with special needs.

### *Stress: Taking Charge*

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/PM1660F.pdf>

This is an informative pamphlet on stress management in children.

Source: Iowa State University

### *Conscious Discipline (English and Spanish materials)*

<http://www.consciousdiscipline.com>

Conscious Discipline is a comprehensive discipline program developed for parents and teachers. It is designed to provide parents with the conscious awareness and skills needed to create safe, connected, problem-solving homes.

## BOOKS

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### **Books - Adults**

Epstein, R. (2001). *The Big Book of Stress Relief Games*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

This book offers quick games, exercises and activities designed to reduce stress in many situations: in meetings, in front of the computer, or when dealing with difficult people. The former *Psychology Today* editor-in-chief Dr. Robert Epstein describes fifty 1-3 minute games that make stress reduction effortless and effective.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness (rev.ed.)*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group.

This book is an excellent beginner's guide to meditation and serves as an introduction to the mind-body connection. It provides a practical,



step-by-step meditation guide based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's program called mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). The author also explains, what stress is and why we need it, how to handle potentially stressful situations, and how to use mindfulness meditation to help you: relieve physical and emotional pain, reduce anxiety and panic, and improve your health and your relationships.

Kumar, S. (2005). *Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publishing, Inc.

This book helps the reader find a comforting and mindful path through grief and loss. The author discusses how grief and loss can result in positive changes where the individual finds greater meaning, purpose and joy in their life. He describes the tools on how to create this change.

Orloff, J. (2004). *Positive Energy: 10 Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress, and Fear into Vibrancy, Strength, and Love*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

This book introduces you to a new field of energy psychiatry which blends the practice of mainstream medicine with our new understanding of subtle energies which affect

our health and behavior. Dr. Orloff uses this science to prescribe ten ways to boost energy, improve relationships and deal with people and situations that drain our energy. She delivers her message with warmth, humor and compassion.

### Books - Children

Huebner, D. (2006). *What To Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety*. Washington, DC.: Magination Press.

This book guides children and parents through the cognitive-behavioral techniques most often used in the treatment of anxiety. The concepts and strategies are easy to understand and there are clear how-to steps that make the book interactive and motivating to read.

Lite, L. (2008). *Bubble Riding*. Marieta, GA: Stress Free Kids.

This book is designed to help children increase creativity while lowering their stress and anxiety. Children learn fun visualization techniques as they imagine filling and relaxing their bodies with the colors of the rainbow. A sea child and turtle take children on a bubble ride into the world of relaxation. This and other similar books, CDs, and DVDs are available in English and Spanish from <http://www.stressfreekids.com>

Williams, M. (1996). *Cool Cats, Calm Kids: Relaxation and Stress Management for Young People*. Atascadero, CA.: Impact Publishers.

This light-hearted book shows young children how to relax and reduce their stress using examples from the world of cats. The adult "purr-spective" at the end gives guidance to parents on how to help their children feel better about themselves.

## PHONE APPLICATIONS

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Consumer health smartphone applications (apps) are another resource for you. There are thousands of smartphone apps and many of them are free, or cost \$1 to \$10 to download. Some examples of health-related smartphone apps include:

- Body mass index
- Count calories
- Healthy recipes
- Inspirational quotes
- Meditation tools
- Sleep tools
- Track blood pressure
- Track calories burned during walk or run
- Track daily nutrition
- Track walking or running progress
- Soothing music and instruments to play
- Workout videos

The easiest way to find apps is to check your device manufacturer's online apps store and with your wireless carrier. In addition to the download price, there may be additional fees if you get text or e-mail messages. Some apps may also come with other equipment or software.

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