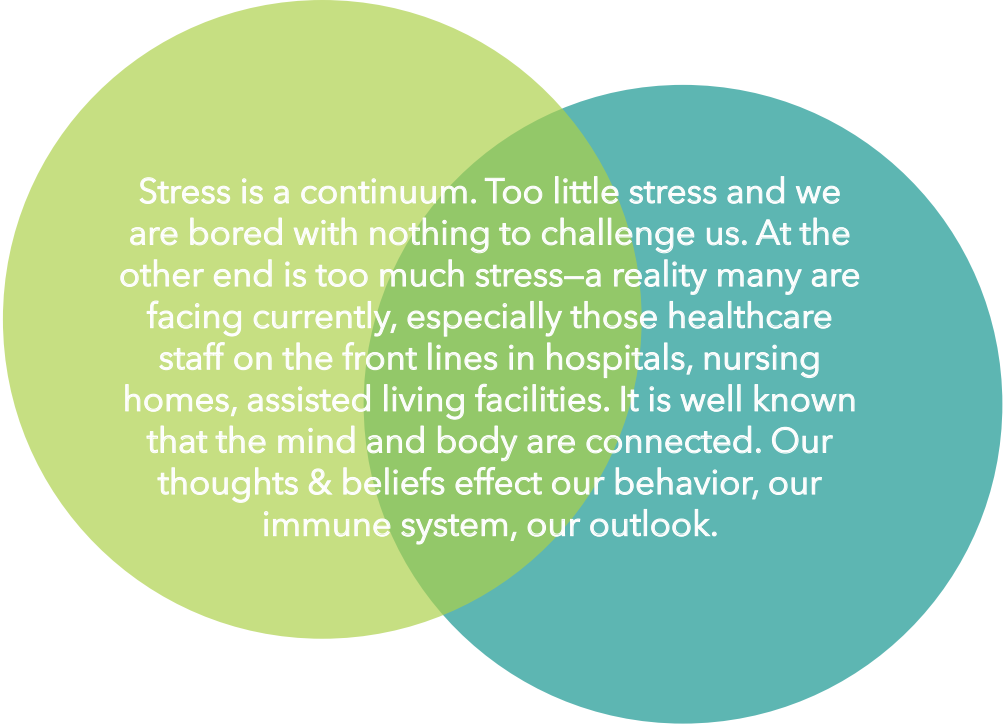


KATHY RUSHING

Marriage that Works

ABC'S OF MANAGING STRESS



Stress is a continuum. Too little stress and we are bored with nothing to challenge us. At the other end is too much stress—a reality many are facing currently, especially those healthcare staff on the front lines in hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities. It is well known that the mind and body are connected. Our thoughts & beliefs effect our behavior, our immune system, our outlook.

This checklist is focused on YOU. Remember the safety talk you get before every flight (when flying was a thing?!): should the need for oxygen occur, please secure your own mask first, then any small children traveling with you? Yea. You first need to make sure you are managing your own stress. Kids often take cues from us when we don't realize it. Even if you don't have children, your stress level can impact your relationships.

Many of these suggestions are things we already know, but the brain tends to forget when under stress. So, we (me included!) need reminders.

A UNIQUELY HUMAN CHOICE

Unlike animals, humans have a unique ability to **CHOOSE** a response. Sure, we sometimes blow it and “fly off the handle”, but realizing that we have a choice in our response is empowering. Reactions are usually not great, i.e., a reaction to a medication is **NOT** desirable. Reacting to a situation, without the facts, is also not desirable. Responding requires a bit of thought, a moment to breathe before we answer.

We are living in exceptional times, when much feels out of our control. But the one thing we **CAN** choose is our response.

LEARN YOUR ABC'S!

A—ACTION

Oftentimes when we are under stress, the tendency is to shut down, eat a whole bag of cookies, and watch Netflix endlessly. Not helpful! **ACTION** fuels energy. Even small actions can help us feel less overwhelmed.

IDEAS:

- Move your body—go for a walk, practice yoga, follow an exercise class streaming on TV. Research shows the benefits of exercise in lowering bp, decreasing anxiety, & releasing endorphins (the feel good hormones). Fresh air & sunshine, when possible, is a bonus.
- What can you do to check in on neighbors who may be isolated? Turns out, doing something for someone gets us out of our own head, at least for a time. Pick up groceries, walk their dog, pick up mail (if not delivered to the house). People that were isolated BEFORE this pandemic will feel it even more profoundly.
- Write letters/cards to local nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Send to their main office for disinfection, then cards will be distributed.
- Do you know anyone on the front lines..doctors, nurses, caregivers, janitors (yes, they are often overlooked.) Make a pot of soup to drop off on their front porch, or purchase gift cards from businesses that may be open for take out.
- Gather unused soaps & shampoos (you know all those bottles you bring home from hotels?) and donate to a local homeless shelter.
- Do you sew? Some people are actually sewing masks for medical personnel. Brilliant!
- Donate to businesses/non-profits that continue to operate as essential businesses (soup kitchens, community cafes, homeless shelters, food banks...who else?)

B. BOUNDARIES

- **News:** With 24/7 news on, it's tempting to sit glued to the TV all day. While it's important to be informed, watching the news non-stop tends to add to a sense of anxiety and worry.
- Ask yourself, "Do I feel better or more hopeful after watching 3 hours of the news?" Paying attention to what DRAINS us, vs. what ENERGIZES us is important.
- Give yourself a reasonable time limit, and ask someone to hold you accountable.
- **People:** some people want to talk on & on about bad news. Sure, some of us are verbal processors, but again, it's OK to set boundaries. They don't have to know...it's Thursday and you need to wash your hair, so gotta run.
- Social media—much like the news, this can be another dark hole. Yes, it's important to keep up with people, but some people want to focus on all the bad news. You can hop off that crazy train, and unfollow or block people.

- Pick up the phone or FaceTime someone for REAL connection.
- **Home:** This is our sanctuary, but for many it has become grand central station, as kids are home from school, and you and/or your spouse or roommate are now working from home. It's important to create some boundaries around work time & space. Discuss schedules, chores, quiet times to help address expectations. This may be new to everyone, so be patient in this transition.
- Talk about gratitude—a gratitude journal (simple notebook or embellish to your heart's desire) that is pulled out every night at dinner, and everyone contributes something they are grateful for. It's hard to be grateful and grumble at the same time.

C. SELF-CARE:

If your well is empty, you are no good to anyone else.

- Create rhythms/routines. Routines have been disrupted, so it's important to find ways to ground your day. Create rhythms that give your day some structure and predictability, especially if you have kids. They may think it's fun to be out, but they are likely internalizing the stress of what's going on. They look to you, and will take your lead.
- Do you have a spiritual practice? Motivational books, religious texts, prayer, meditation all signal the brain with positive, hopeful focus.
- What's going into your mind? We tend to find what we're looking for (watching bad news for hours reinforces the belief that it's hopeless)
- Yoga is especially helpful for calming the mind
- Journal your thoughts, concerns, beliefs, and pay attention to what you're telling yourself. What is the worst that could happen? Can you process that? You're still alive? Ok, now you've imagined the worst, now what's the best that could happen? Which is more likely? What do you **CHOOSE** to focus on as a result of which is most likely? What is in your control, what is not?
- Reach out by phone, FaceTime. If you're feeling lonely, don't wait for someone else to call
- Sleep—rest is so important for our immune system
- Eat wholesome food. Allow yourself some treats, but focus on whole foods that nourish. There are a number of people offering free, online cooking classes to expand your skills, or cook with kids (or spouse!) The internet is a pretty amazing gift with streaming concerts, tutorials, even worship services.
- Above all, ask for help if you need it. Sometimes, we are too overwhelmed to even process options. So ask someone—a friend, minister, priest, rabbi, counselor. If you don't know any of those, email me at info@kathyrushing.com. I will help you get started.