

Are There Any Reasons To Be STRESSED?!?

Demands and workplace pressures occur in all jobs. Larger workloads with decreasing resources, an increasing pace of work, and the push for improved, high quality products are all realities of employment for most individuals. When this experience is combined with additional factors such as extreme shortages in personal, high stakes accountability measures, diminishing decision-making power, and social changes that greatly impact the work process, school personnel find themselves under extremely stressful conditions. On top of this, school personnel must be well aware of the student population that they serve, being observant and attending to behavior that may be threatening. Long-term stress of this magnitude is physically and emotionally unhealthy for school personnel and debilitating to the education profession.

What is Stress?

Stress can be defined as a physical and/or mental state of strain and tension. Extended periods of stress can result in the body's inability to adapt physiologically to a relaxed condition or lead to clinical depression. Although long-term stress can have a negative impact on health and one's work, short-term stress can act as a motivator to improve task performance. Just the right amount of stress can inspire creative thinking, problem solving, or even improve relationships with others. Regulating long-term stress and understanding how to effectively manage stress are important life skills.

What are the Stressors in Schools?

Sources of stress in the school environment can range from social pressures from the community to dealing with students in the classroom who exhibit problem behaviors. Teachers may feel a sense of isolation because there is not enough time to interact and build connections with colleagues. They may have been placed in a teaching assignment outside of their field of expertise. Students have ever-constant needs, with some classes being filled with thirty or more learners. School administrators must carry out the requests of district central offices and other governing bodies to fulfill requirements, build a sense of cohesion for the staff, and often only relate to students if there are pending disciplinary problems. Many educators find themselves saying that these are not the reasons why they decided to work in the field, yet admit that this is where much of their time and energy is spent.

A "Short List" of Stressors for School Employees

- Lack of academic training and experience
- Teaching assignments that are outside of professional training
- No creative outlet for expression
- Lack of materials, resources, and equipment
- Extremely large class sizes
- Lack of leadership and support
- High incidents of student behavior problems
- Poor curriculum materials
- Excessive pressures from parents and community
- Negative school climate
- Lack of time to build collegial relationships and networks
- Lack of support from mentors
- Conflicting philosophies on school goals and mission
- No balance between school and personal life
- Feelings of self doubt and isolation
- Daily lesson preparedness and delivery
- Keeping abreast of new information in the field and technological developments
- Problems that students face in their homes

- Inability to effectively manage student behavior

Tips for Stress Management

Because the nature of stress is so extensive for school personnel, stress management needs to take place on a daily basis. The first step is recognizing a stressful situation and all of the elements that surround it. How do you feel? Listening to the body and mind is important to recognizing how one reacts physically and mentally to stress. If one finds oneself in a stressful state, reflect on the situation, thinking of what is stressful and why; rationalize remembering that tension can distort the picture or blow an issue out of portion; relax by breathing deeply and loosening muscles, and perhaps allowing thoughts to flow and closing the eyes; and refuel by physically and mentally disengaging oneself from the situation for a period of time if possible. A five-minute break in a quiet place can help alleviate a stressful moment. Learning the strategies of conflict management can also provide an effective means for handling tension and regaining a sense of control. Strategies of conflict management can also be considered stress relievers because they can ease tensions before circumstances escalate.

Other practical tips for stress management can be employed throughout the school day. Distributing the workload and delegating responsibility can help, particularly for those tasks that can be completed by students or parent volunteers. This is a great way to relieve the workload as well as build ties with students and parents. Put energy into projects that increase productivity through focusing on the conditions in schools that can be changed. To help with feeling isolated, try to use the time (however little there may be) to connect with colleagues to encourage one another, staying motivated through sharing ideas. Proper rest, diet, and exercise are also important to stress management. Leaving behind worries and concerns of the of the day, relaxing, and enjoying the time spent nurturing other interests can also be like a breath of fresh air!