

# Reduce the Impact of Stress on Your Relationship

## Objective

To reduce the impact of stress on your relationship and to increase intimacy and communication.

## You Should Know

Stress is a leading cause of interpersonal tension and dysfunction in relationships. When you experience acute or chronic stress, it can extend into your relationship, impacting intimacy and eroding communication. You might lose patience with your partner much quicker, withdraw your communication or affection, or start an argument to blow off steam.

Stress makes it more difficult to effectively communicate and resolve conflict in relationships. Couples are also more likely to view their relationship negatively when they are experiencing prolonged stress. Chronic stress also affects self-esteem and self-worth, further increasing strain on relationships.

## What to Do

Effectively managing stress begins with identifying the sources of stress, assessing your ability to control or change the situation, and staying connected to your partner. Make two copies of this worksheet, one for you and one for your partner. After you complete the worksheet, plan time to share your answers with your partner.

First, identify sources of stress. Rate the following statements using a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 = does not apply, to 10 = this is a significant form of stress in my life.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I worry about money all the time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parenting is a major source of stress for me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't get along with my in-laws.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My partner and I rarely communicate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arguing is a frequent source of stress for us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel sexually frustrated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My job is extremely stressful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am dealing with a serious and/or ongoing health challenge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I recently lost my job or I am having a difficult time finding a job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ We experienced a death in our family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Addiction is an ongoing issue within our family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Our schedules are overwhelming and we spend little time together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What are the top three sources of stress in your relationship?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Are there additional issues contributing to these problems?

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There are 2 basic ways to cope with stress:

**1. Eliminate or manage the stressor.** Some stressors represent things you can control (e.g., working too many hours). In some cases, it is possible to make choices that actually eliminate the stressor (e.g., find a new job or decrease your hours).

**2. Change your reaction to stress.** When a stressor cannot be eliminated, it is important to address how you react or cope. Coping strategies can assist you in responding to stress in healthier ways.

Choose one stressor that you can eliminate or manage.

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What can you do to control or change the stressful situation?

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Next, choose one stressor with which you can change your response or reaction.

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If there are stressors that are difficult or impossible to change, what can you do to cope?

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Finally, it is important to stay connected to your partner as you manage stress to reduce the negative impact on your relationship. Here are some ways to stay connected to your partner (as well as reduce stress!):

- **Daily touch** – Spend at least 30 seconds twice/day being physically affectionate with your partner.
- **Demonstrate genuine interest** – Be curious and initiate unique, thought-provoking, open-ended conversations.
- **Express gratitude** – Let your partner know how you appreciate them.
- **Share memories** – Each day recount a funny story, a touching moment, or look at old photos.
- **Create shared moments** – Schedule a date night, vacation or new adventure, or take a class together.
- **Listen** – Ask more questions or simply reflect back what you hear.
- **Laugh together** – Humor can reduce tension and lighten the mood.
- **Express loving-kindness** – Couples in successful relationships treat each other with love and kindness, expressed through loving words and kind actions.
- **Turn off electronics** – Take a break from your devices when you are together.

Can you think of another way stay connected to your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

Commit to practicing at least one act from the above list every day. Use the following chart to record the activity you engage in with your partner. Record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences when connecting with your partner. Finally, describe how your partner reacted.

Date	Activity	Your Thoughts, Feelings, Experience	How Did Your Partner React?

**Reflections on This Exercise**

After completing this exercise, was your relationship less affected by stress? Explain.

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Did you notice an increase in intimacy and effective communication with your partner?

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What else can you do to stay connected as a couple as you cope with stress?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5= moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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