



Resilience and Stress

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I received a significant publication today from a well-known institution of higher learning. This report, based on current parenting and stress research, defined stress as an inevitable, normal experience that is felt when an individual is unsure if she can meet the demands of her environment. The author explained the individual's response can be positive, tolerable or toxic. The document outlines strategies for coping with and managing stress and warns parental mental health concerns may arise out of stress. There is no sense in this article that there is a root cause for all stress...my thinking in the moment.

While there was recognition that a parent's response to stress can be varied, the real issue was invisible to the writers. With understanding of the principles I have become certain stress is not an inevitable, normal experience that we must learn to live with, cope with, or push through. Stress itself is simply not an agent.

Stress is a feeling that arises from my own state of mind. My state of mind is caused by my thinking and that shifts continuously. In a calm and secure state of mind there is no stress. On days when my stress level is high or problematic, I have simply taken a deep dive into an insecure state of mind. Most simply put, I have forgotten that I operate from the inside out. Stated another way, I have taken a low quality thought seriously, maybe even decided this idea was a permanent fact or the only way to see something. Bingo...a perfect storm of stress.

This is not frivolous stuff. For example, parents living in their own mental tornados can feel extreme stress, see no way out and innocently but viciously abuse children. We as professionals do have a choice in working with at risk parents. There is a decision to make. Will we simply administer consequences and instruct them in what to do next time? If so, then teach coping and stress management strategies and hope in the heat of the moment the lesson will stick. Or, do we choose the high road home? In this case we commit to seeing the health in every parent, and begin to share our understanding of the health inside of each and every human being. Do the individuals we work with—parents, clients, colleagues—understand they have a natural deep good feeling (called innate mental health) inside? Can we catch them in moments of peace and calm to prove to them they have the potential for learning to live in a secure and calm state of mind? Can we engage them in conversations about what doing life looks like from that stress free state of mind? Finally, can we trust that if we set this learning process in motion, each individual will begin to naturally, on his or her own, yearn for more of that good feeling and move toward personal mental well-being over time?

Today I sit quietly and recall the tiny infant in an orphanage halfway across the globe. Her mom had needed a shower; she put a pot on the stove, moved the kettle near the shower and put the baby in the way-too-hot water. She got the shower and lost her little girl. Was stress involved? Certainly. Did the mother's thinking play a major role? For sure. If only someone had been able to teach this young mother that she could notice her state of mind, understand her thinking was getting faulty and realize effortlessly she could simply step back and not take all thought so seriously. Two lives would have been very different today.

The question is, how long will it take before we understand the root causes of stress and build education, health and human services on that foundation? Maybe it is necessary to say managing and coping belong in the dark ages. We can live in the age of mental health education if we choose. Syd Banks lights our path beyond stress. "Let your negative thoughts go. They are nothing more than *passing thoughts*. You are then on your way to finding the *peace of mind* you seek, having healthier feelings for yourself and for others. This is simple logic." (*The Missing Link*, p. 108).

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