

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Stress in the Workplace

In today's economic upheavals, downsizing, layoff, merger and bankruptcies have cost hundreds of thousands of workers their jobs. Millions more have been shifted to unfamiliar tasks within their companies and wonder how much longer they will be employed. Adding to the pressures that workers face are new bosses, computer surveillance of production, fewer health and retirement benefits, and the feeling they have to work longer and harder just to maintain their current economic status. Workers at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty, and are updating their resumes.

The loss of a job can be devastating, putting unemployed workers at risk for physical illness, marital strain, anxiety, depression and even suicide. Loss of a job affects every part of life, from what time you get up in the morning, to whom you see and what you can afford to do. Until the transition is made to a new position, stress is chronic.

A sense of powerlessness

A feeling of powerlessness is a universal cause of job stress. When you feel powerless, you're prey to depression's traveling companions, helplessness and hopelessness. You don't alter or avoid the situation because you feel nothing can be done.

Secretaries, waitresses, middle managers, police officers, editors and medical interns are among those with the most highly stressed occupations marked by the need to respond to others' demands and timetables, with little control over events. Common to this job situation are complaints of too much responsibility and too little authority, unfair labor practices and inadequate job descriptions. Employees can counteract these pressures through workers' unions or other organizations, grievance or personnel offices or, more commonly, by direct negotiations with their immediate supervisors.

Your job description

Every employee should have a specific, written job description. Simply negotiating one does more to dispel a sense of powerlessness than anything else we know. It is a contract that you help write. You can object to what and insist on what you do want. If there is a compromise, it's because you agreed to it. With a clear job description, your expectations are spelled out, as are your boss's.

A good job description is time limited. Set a specific date for a review and revision based on your mutual experience with this initial job description. If you and your boss can't agree on what your job description should be, look for another job, either within the same company or outside. Even in these tough economic times, it is important that your job be a source of satisfaction and respect.

When you're a square peg and your job is a round hole

Remember the old saying, "Find a job you love and you'll never work another day in your life." Most people spend about 25 percent of their adult lives working. If you enjoy what you do, you're lucky. But if you're the proverbial square peg and your job is a round hole, job stress hurts your productivity and takes a serious toll on your mind and body.

There are many reasons for staying in a job that doesn't fit you or that you don't particularly like. One reason can be the "golden handcuff" — having salary, pension, benefits and "perks" that keep one tied to a job regardless of stress consequences.

Many people are in jobs they don't like or aren't good at. The quick answer is to get a job they like or one that better matches their skills, abilities and interest — easier said than done. Some clients have no idea what kind of job they would like or what kind of job would be better. Worse, they don't have a clue on how to go about finding out this information.

Traumatic events on the job

Some jobs are inherently dangerous and others can suddenly become so. Criminal justice personnel, firefighters, ambulance

drivers, military personnel and disaster teams witness many terrible scenes and are exposed to personal danger routinely. They usually handle such incidents capably. But occasionally a particularly bad episode will stay with them, appearing in memory flashbacks and nightmares. Sleep disturbance, guilt, fearfulness and physical complaints may follow. Even ordinary jobs can become traumatic: a co-worker, boss or client physically threatens an employee; a bus crashes on a field trip; an employee is robbed or taken hostage; a shooting occurs. Such events can create post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and result in workers' compensation claims if left untreated by a trauma specialist.

Work setting

Sometimes your work setting creates physical stress because of noise, lack of privacy, poor lighting, poor ventilation, poor temperature control or inadequate sanitary facilities. Settings where there is organizational confusion or an overly authoritarian, laissez-faire or crisis-centered managerial style are all psychologically stressful.

Act through labor or employee organizations to alter stressful working conditions. If that doesn't work, try the courts, which have become increasingly receptive to complaints of stressful working conditions. Recent rulings created pressure for employers to provide working environments that are as stress free as possible.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is the federal agency charged with monitoring the work environment in the interest of work safety and health. If you think your work environment is dangerous to your health and safety from a physical standpoint, give them a call.

If nothing helps and the working environment remains stressful, exercise your avoidance options and get a new job. Job hunting can be stressful, particularly in times of high unemployment, but being ground down day after day by work is far worse.

~Adapted from *The Stress Solution* by Lyle H. Miller, PhD, and Alma Dell Smith, PhD.

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/workplace-stress.aspx>

Managing Your Stress in Tough Economic Times

Money is on the minds of most Americans. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association's 2010 Stress in America survey, over three-quarters of Americans (76 percent) cite money as a significant cause of stress. And while the economy appears to be becoming healthier, personal financial problems still worry many Americans.

But, like most of our everyday stress, this extra tension can be managed. There are healthy strategies available for managing stress during any difficult financial time for you and your family.

APA offers tips to help deal with your stress about money and the economy:

- **Pause but don't panic.** There are many negative stories in newspapers and on television about the state of the economy. Pay attention to what's happening around you, but refrain from getting caught up in doom-and-gloom hype, which can lead to high levels of anxiety and bad decision making. Avoid the tendency to overreact or to become passive. Remain calm and stay focused.
- **Identify your financial stressors and make a plan.** Take stock of your particular financial situation and what causes you stress. Write down specific ways you and your family can reduce expenses or manage your finances more efficiently. Then commit to a specific plan and review it regularly. Although this can be

anxiety-provoking in the short term, putting things down on paper and committing to a plan can reduce stress. If you are having trouble paying bills or staying on top of debt, reach out for help by calling your bank, utilities or credit card company.

- **Recognize how you deal with stress related to money.** In tough economic times some people are more likely to relieve stress by turning to unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking, gambling or emotional eating. The strain can also lead to more conflict and arguments between partners. Be alert to these behaviors — if they are causing you trouble, consider seeking help from a psychologist or community mental health clinic before the problem gets worse.
- **Turn these challenging times into opportunities for real growth and change.** Times like this, while difficult, can offer opportunities to take stock of your current situation and make needed changes. Think of ways that these economic challenges can motivate you to find healthier ways to deal with stress. Try taking a walk — it's an inexpensive way to get good exercise. Having dinner at home with your family may not only save you money, but help bring you closer together. Consider learning a new skill. Take a course through your employer or look into low-cost resources in your community that can lead to a better job. The key is to use this time to think outside the box and try new ways of managing your life.
- **Ask for professional support.** Credit counseling services and financial planners are available to help you take control over your money situation. If you continue to be overwhelmed by the stress, you may want to talk with a psychologist who can help you address the emotions behind your financial worries, manage stress, and change unhealthy behaviors.

More information about the [APA Stress in America Survey](#) is available.

This tip sheet was made possible with help from APA member Nancy Molitor, PhD.

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<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/economic-stress.aspx>

Identifying Signs of Stress in Your Children and Teens

Young people, like adults, experience stress. It can come from a variety of sources including doing well in school, making and sustaining friendships, or managing perceived expectations from their parents, teachers or coaches. Some stress can be positive in that it provides the energy to tackle a big test, presentation or sports event. Too much stress, however, can create unnecessary hardship and challenge. Adults can sometimes be unaware when their children or teens are experiencing overwhelming feelings of stress. Tuning into emotional or behavioral cues is important in identifying potential problems and working with your young person to provide guidance and support to successfully work through difficult times. Here are some tips from the American Psychological Association on ways to recognize possible signs of stress:

Watch for negative changes in behavior

Youth of all ages, but especially younger children, may find it difficult to recognize and verbalize when they are experiencing stress. For children, stress can manifest itself through changes in behavior. Common changes can include acting irritable or moody, withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure, routinely expressing worries, complaining more than usual about school, crying, displaying surprising fearful reactions, clinging to a parent or teacher, sleeping too much or too little, or eating too much or too little. With teens, while spending more time with and confiding in peers is a normal part of growing up, significantly avoiding parents, abandoning long-time friendships for a new set of peers or expressing excessive hostility toward family members, may indicate that the teen is experiencing significant stress. While negative behavior is not always linked to excessive stress, negative changes in behavior are almost always a clear indication that something is wrong. Adults will want to pay attention to these behaviors and determine an appropriate response or intervention.

Understand that “feeling sick” may be caused by stress

Stress can also appear in physical symptoms such as stomach aches and headaches. If a child makes excessive trips to the school nurse or complains of frequent stomachaches or headaches (when they have been given a clean bill of health by their physician), or if these complaints increase in certain situations (e.g., before a big test) that child may be experiencing significant stress.

Be aware of how your child or teen interacts with others

Sometimes a child or teen may seem like his or her usual self at home but be acting out in unusual ways in other settings. It is important for parents to network with one another so that they can come to know how child or teen is doing in the world around them. In addition to communicating with other parents, being in contact with teachers, school administrators and leaders of extracurricular activities can help parents tap into their child or teen's thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and be aware of any sources of concern.

Listen and translate

Because children are often not familiar with the word stress and its meaning, they may express feelings of distress through other words such as “worried,” “confused,” “annoyed” and “angry.” Children and teens may also express feelings of stress by saying negative things about themselves, others, or the world around them (e.g. “No one likes me,” “I’m stupid,” “Nothing is fun.”). It is important for parents to listen for these words and statements and try to figure out why your child or teen is saying them and whether they seem to indicate a source or sources of stress.

Seek support

Parents, children and teens do not need to tackle overwhelming stress on their own. If a parent is concerned that his or her child or teen is experiencing significant symptoms of stress on a regular basis, including, but not limited to those described above, it can be helpful to work with a licensed mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Psychologists have special training to help people identify problems and develop effective strategies to resolve overwhelming feelings of stress.

Special thanks to psychologists Mary Alvord, PhD, and David J. Palmiter, Jr., PhD, ABPP, for their assistance and expertise.

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-children.aspx>

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful.

How to Stop Disrespecting Your Children

<http://kindredmedia.org/2016/04/how-to-stop-disrespecting-your-children/#comment-287037>

Meditation Plus Running as a Treatment for Depression

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/meditation-plus-running-as-a-treatment-for-depression/?r=0>

For information or links to health tips, visit:

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Parents, The Anti-Drug Website:

www.theantidrug.com/advice/

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous:	780-424-5900
	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Al-Anon/Alateen:	780-433-1818
Support Network / Referral Line:	211
Distress Line:	780-482-4357
Cocaine Anonymous:	780-425-2715

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:

<http://4woman.gov>

Active Living Website:

<http://www.centre4activeliving.ca>