



STRESS SOLUTIONS:

Tried and True Resiliency Strategies for Busy Lives

by Patricia Morgan, MA CCC

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FOREWARD

Patricia has brilliantly synthesized everything you need to know about stress and resilience but were afraid to ask! Her collection of heart-warming anecdotes, quotes and personal stories sprinkled with her trade-mark humour, provides the knowledge and reassurance that we're not alone when it comes to experiencing the ravages of stress and that we *can* do something about it. Without a doubt, I can attest that Patricia has demonstrated what it is to be resilient. After knowing Patricia for over 20 years, she walks her talk and practice what she preaches. She's resilience in action!

Not only does this e-book cleverly lead you through simply-stated, straight-ahead advice, it allows you to quantify your current situation through strategically chosen, easy to complete exercises. As a stress management professional, I found this read to be a great memory jogger and a must-have resource in our world where stress is reaching epidemic proportions. We need this e-book. Thank you for giving us hope Patricia!

Lana Bullough, Stress Management Speaker, Facilitator and Coach

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GETTING INTO IT, INTRODUCTION

“Whenever we feel stressed out, that’s a signal that our brain is pumping out stress hormones. If sustained over months and years, those hormones can ruin our health and make us a nervous wreck.”

Daniel Goleman.

Stress! Stress! Stressed out! When was the last time you felt stretched to the max mentally, emotionally and physically?

The last time for me was when my hubby, Les, went missing for over three hours. I last remembered him going out the door for a quick walk. When he didn’t return I told myself a stress-inducing story. “Oh my goodness! A car has hit him, or he has had a heart attack. He is in a ditch somewhere!” I could feel my heart beating faster and faster, my breath quickening, and my mind racing. “Be the hero of your marriage, Patricia. Take action!” I drove around the neighborhood looking for him. I was on the cusp of calling our city hospitals to see if he was admitted when he walked in the back door. I had forgotten he was at his monthly prostate cancer meeting. Whew! I took a big breath and had a laugh with him.

That day, my memory was not functioning well. I was in general distress, which easily leads to panic about other matters. I was dealing with office demands, return phone calls, a batch of burnt granola, a distraught daughter and the news that our neighbor friend had suffered a stroke and was in the hospital. The night before, an old friend called to say she needed a listening ear because the police had come to her door to inform her they had found her adult child dead. Everyday stress can pile on!

In 1936 an endocrinologist named Hans Selye used the term *stress*. He defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. Often that stress response is fueled by thoughts such as “My sweetie is lying, maybe dying, in a ditch somewhere!” Our ancestors saved their panic for stressful situations like fleeing lions who were chasing them back to their caves. Selye called too much stress, *distress*. He also coined healthy stress, *eustress*. The idea of *eustress* is that our bodies and our minds function best when we experience a certain amount of stretch and challenge. For example, regular and moderate exercise and mental challenge are resilience building.

Typically, I am perceived as managing stress well, even leading workshops on the topic; but obviously, the episode of imagining Les lying in a ditch tipped my stress bucket to *distress*. My thoughts put my body into *alarm mode*, which is also known as the *fight or flight response*. I was releasing stress hormones and could feel the blood in my legs surging, urging me to flee the house to find my imagined destitute man!

When we perceive harm or attack to ourselves or a loved one, whether real or imagined, we tend to have these innate, old reptilian brain responses. The hypothalamus stimulates our bodies to produce hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol, the fuel of the *fight or flight* response.

The adrenaline raises our blood pressure, increases our heart rate and fills us with extra energy. Cortisol releases glucose into our bloodstream to help us *fight or flee*. In the meantime, most of our other body functions, such as digestion, are suppressed. So much for that sandwich!

If we repeatedly activate the distress response, it takes a toll on our mental, emotional and physical well-being. Just think of headaches, irritability, confused thinking, defensiveness, rashes, exhaustion, restlessness, disturbed sleep, teeth grinding, stomach cramps and high blood pressure. There are over a hundred distress responses!

The good news is we have strategies to better train our minds to manage these emotions without triggering the distress response. This brings us to the relationship between being stress-hardy and resilient.

Resilience is the ability to effectively manage, adapt, and cope with changes and challenges. This ability builds stress-hardiness, sometimes called *stress-resilience*. We can either stay steady in the face of distressing situations or rebound. In the end, we don't want merely to have a sense of surviving but of flourishing in our own skins at home, work, and in the community.

Although the strategies offered here strengthen with practice, I want to warn you about assuming you can get them to work perfectly. We are *perfectly imperfect* humans. Please have compassion for yourself when learning and working with these ideas. I hope my story of frantically searching for Les helps you remember to *do your best and let go of the rest*. Plus, maybe you'll have a good laugh!

PART ONE

ASSESS YOUR STRESS

“There is nothing permanent except change.”

Heraclitus

1. Frantic, Frenzied or Simply Fried?

“Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of mental illness.”

Richard Carlson

Maybe you have a critical manager, a gridlocked drive to work, a hormonally charged teen, or unresolved traumatic issues. Whatever it is that is going on for you, can build. Once we reach a critical mass of stress, we are at risk for poor health, damaged relationships, and perhaps depression or burn-out.

Plus, add inevitable change! Some changes, like the seasons, come and go. They exist in our life rhythm. Others are forced upon us or are freely chosen. We know this, right? But here is what may not be so clear. Change, no matter its pleasing anticipation, pace or demand, requires us to adjust. Adjustment takes extra focus and time. As we feel that extra demand, more of our brain power and body capacity are challenged. We burn more energy!

A newborn baby is born. Yea! Sweet, cuddly and messy at one end. Sleepless nights begin, more money needed, and, heaven forbid the darling has colic! I bet you get the picture, of this long-awaited change!

One more point before you assess your stress. Be careful about comparing your degree of stress and your ability to manage it with someone else's. OK? Individual differences in adapting to change are due to genetics, attitude, awareness, support, self-care, habitual self-talk, and stress management skills. Lifestyle choices also have a significant influence on managing distress.

This assessment invites you to review the changes in your life in the last year. Please

decide how stressful each event was *for you*. Notice your body reaction. Pay particular attention to your heart, gut, and your tear glands. The body doesn't lie. Trust what it tells you about the degree of stress caused by each change.

For example, when my dad died, it was stressful on my mother. But she was in many ways prepared for his passing. She grieved and eventually established a comfortable pace as a single woman. My son was in his late twenties when he lost his dear Chandra to breast cancer. His experience was very different and in many ways more complicated and stressful than my mother's loss. You know your experience better than anyone else. So, you decide on a scale of one to one hundred how much a stressful change was to you!

Exercise:

- 1) Check the events that have occurred in your life in the **last year**.

- 2) Give each checked event a **rating** of between **0 and 100**. **0** indicates that an event had **no effect** on your physical, mental or emotional well being. A rating of **100** indicates that it caused **major** trauma requiring significant life adjustment.

- 3) **Total** your ratings.
 1. Death of a child ____
 2. Death of a spouse ____
 3. Divorce ____
 4. Partner separation ____
 5. Imprisonment ____
 6. Death of close family ____
 7. Personal injury or illness ____
 8. Engaged or newly married ____
 9. Partner reconciliation ____
 10. Personal health challenges ____
 11. Retirement ____
 12. Health change of family member ____
 13. Pregnancy ____
 14. Sexual difficulties ____
 15. Addition of a new family member ____
 16. Change in financial state ____

17. Death of close friend ____
18. Spousal arguments ____
19. Change of job ____
20. Fired from work ____
21. Conflict with boss ____
22. Conflict with co-workers ____
23. Job expectations too high ____
24. Work overload ____
25. Too much job responsibility ____
26. Change in work responsibilities ____
27. Boring/meaningless work ____
28. Too little job control ____
29. Change in work hours/conditions ____
30. Partner begins or stops work ____
31. Major mortgage ____
32. Foreclosure of mortgage/loan ____
33. Care needs of older generation ____
34. Son/daughter leave/come home ____
35. Trouble with in-laws ____
36. Outstanding personal achievement ____
37. Begin or end of school ____
38. Death of family pet ____
39. Change in residence ____
40. Change in schools ____
41. Change in recreation ____
42. Change in social activities ____
43. Minor mortgage or loan ____
44. Change in sleep habits ____
45. Change in eating habits ____
46. Living with challenging teen (s) ____
47. Living with person with high needs ____
48. Holiday celebrations ____
49. OTHER: _____

TOTAL SCORE: _____

Frantic? Around or less than 150 points

Frenzied? Between 151 to 300 points

Fried? 301 or more points

Note: This self-assessment was inspired by and adapted from the "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe which was first published in the "Journal of Psychosomatic Research", Copyright 1967, vol.II p. 214. Pergamon Press Ltd.

How to Use Your Stress Rating

Again, only you can decide how your score from the above scale can support you. I usually provide this scale to my Pressure Proofing workshop participants. Typically a small percentage of people report a number less than 150 points. The majority report between 151 and 300 points. Then there are the rare individuals who, sometimes with tears, share a score as high as 700 points! I have been told, "Patricia, thank you, I thought I was going crazy. This makes so much sense. Now I see all the challenges and changes I have faced."

It was in 2011 that I called my year, *horribilis*. Queen Elizabeth coined this word in her Christmas message the year Prince Charles' and Prince Andrew's marriages ended. Here are her majesty's words: "1992 is not a year I shall look back on with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an annus horribilis."

For me, 2011 consisted of the death of my sweet Mom and two weeks later my darling hubby, Les was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Our son separated from the mother of his children. After a broken toe, I ended up with blood clots in my leg and lungs. In between daily, then weekly and monthly injections and other health issues, I struggled to maintain my position as president of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers, Calgary chapter. I also struggled to maintain the same level of support care for our daughter and grandchildren who live with disabilities. Self-care took on a deeper meaning!

I hope that reading this eBook is part of your self-care plan. So regardless of your score, keep reading and know that there are weeks, months, and years with dramatic change requiring you to up your self-care efforts.

2. Spot Your Distress before Burn Out

“Every stress leaves an indelible scar, and the organism pays for its survival after a stressful situation by becoming a little older.”

Hans Selye

Another way to assess your level of distress is to turn around or lay on the floor to take an inventory of how you are doing in the moment. Please practice observing yourself before you are in a state of burnout.

I recall three times when I was in a state of burnout. One was when I dropped out of high school. I could not keep up with the expectations, the changes involved, in the higher grades. At home, Dad made life challenging with his anger management issues. He used to call me stupid and I began to internalize that message, “You’re stupid.” I knew I was in trouble when I broke out in eczema, had fainting spells, strep throat, and head aches.

A second time was when I just had a new born baby and was trying to keep up with our older daughter, Kelly, who had undiagnosed Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. I had crying jags and a mess of health issues including cardiac arrhythmia panic attacks. Lastly, the most significant burn-out event involved hiring, training, and managing various support workers for our daughter. Every time one quit or we needed to fire one, I was back at the drawing board. The changes became overwhelming. Again, I started to have symptoms of distress.

Dr. Cary Cherniss, the burn-out expert, defines burnout as . . . exhaustion and a reduced sense of accomplishment due to long-term involvement in a demanding situation.

Please recognize your symptoms and do what you can to intervene on your own behalf. When you burn-out, you are of little help to others or the world. Self-care comes first.

Here is a sample of what to look for when you take that pause to ask yourself, “How am I doing?”

Notice your Mental State. Do you:

Get confused in your thinking?

Have critical self-talk?

Struggle to make decisions?
Question your competency?

Notice your Physical State. Do you:

Have headaches?
Feel regularly fatigued
Have frequent colds and flues?
Have troubled sleep or insomnia?
Grind your teeth?
Have tightness in your chest?
Experience constipation?

Notice your Emotional State: Do you feel overwhelming:

Anger?
Sadness?
Hurt?
Grief?
Depression?
Worry or anxiety?
Hopelessness?
Helplessness?

Notice Your Behavior: Do you:

Have poor hygiene?
Withdraw from others?
Respond to others passively?
Respond to others aggressively?
Over or under eat?
Over or under sleep?

Now continue reading to take better care of your dear self and minimize the above distress symptoms!

PART TWO

FIND YOUR BODY FASCINATING

“Pressure and stress is the common cold of the psyche.”

—Andrew Denton

1. What’s Up with Your Flesh and Bones?

“Take care of your body. It’s the only place you have to live.”

—Jim Rohn

Here, we are going to take a deeper look at the importance of our body wisdom. Not long ago, stress researchers made a significant discovery. We can reduce our distress and age indicators by attending to our body on a regular basis.

The Canadian Stress Institute has listed more than 300 body stress indicators. They include physical manifestations such as constipation, indigestion, nausea, anemia, brittle fingernails, nervous ticks or twitches, insomnia, anxiety, bone spurs, dry skin, high blood pressure, ulcers, swelling, stomach cramping, and headaches.

You get the picture! I once heard someone say, "Eight percent of the ailments we take to the doctor's office we created through over-stressing ourselves and/or poor lifestyle."

Then the question arises, “What do I do with that stress in my body?” Many people take time off from work, make appointments for a massage (a good idea), or hang on until their next holiday (not a good idea).

Discover the truth of your body to minimize your stress response.

2. Calm Down and Take a Breath!

“Do not turn your attention elsewhere in your search for the truth, for it is nowhere else to be found but within your body.”

Your body is your container of light and dark moments, complete with profound and complex feelings and active energy. You can take a break from your thoughts, your feelings, and your relatives. However, taking a break from your body would be like taking a break from life. It is not possible. Even during meditation, you still need to breathe!

Right now, in your chair, please focus on your breath entering your body cavity. Notice the fullness or shallowness of the breath expanding and contracting your body. Be aware of how much energetic space your body, in concert with your breath, is taking up in this room. Would you like less or more space? Your body will tell you how close or distant you want to be from others. Be your body's observer. Pay attention to its powerful wisdom.

Stories are hidden in your body, they vibrate deep in your cells, flow through your nervous system, creak in your bones, tighten in your muscles, run through your blood vessels, and sit under or on your skin. While your mind plays games and many of your beliefs are culturally and family programmed, your body holds your personal truth.

Your Body Speaks! But Are You Listening?

Seeing body truth in others is often easier than seeing it in ourselves. We also may literally see body truth in contradiction to spoken words. You have seen the person who says, "Yes" while shaking her head *no*. You've also seen the guy who says he feels relaxed while his fists are tensed, and he speaks through clenched teeth. Then there is the person who says she feels happy while her body frame is slouching.

Our language reflects how we use our physical form to express who we are and how we manage our lives:

- *She has her head on straight.*
- *I can look him in the eye.*
- *His tongue speaks with forked words.*
- *Bookkeeping is a pain in my neck.*
- *He carries the world on his shoulders.*

- *That was a load off my shoulders.*
- *I put my finger on the problem.*

Dive Deep: How to Check in With Your Body

You can experience the knowing of your body right here and right now. Here are some suggestions:

1. Appreciate your head with its eyes – short-sighted, near-sighted, hard or soft. Appreciate your nose and its mechanism for cleansing the air – your mouth, jaw, and tongue. Notice what it is like to relax your jaw. Let your mouth gently drop. What movement, sounds, words, and stories live in your head – particularly if you let the mind chatter come to quiet? Focus on your head. Feel its weight and position on your shoulders. Notice how busy, or not, your mind is with thoughts. You have a fine mind in your head. It has helped you figure out many things in this world. Your brain has taken in ideas, information, and beliefs – sometimes dizzying or crowding your head. However, if quiet, your mind knows how much space and busyness or stillness it wants. Notice your head as is.
2. Check your neck and throat. Do lumps or gasps of freedom live there? Sometimes your neck may want a rest from keeping your head on straight. Perhaps a straight head is overvalued. What would a balanced one be like? What would it be like to take a caring neck break? What movement, words, sounds or stories live in this area?
3. Your shoulders carry responsibility. What are you carrying on your shoulders? Breathe into that area and notice, just notice, if you want your shoulders feeling stronger and heavier or lighter and easier.
4. Your chest carries emotions. Notice what images arise for you when you breathe into that area. What are you carrying on your chest? Have you tucked some tender memories or images away in your heart? If you had a sign on your chest what would it say? Notice if there is a rhythm, sound, song or story in your chest.
5. Notice your elbows and arms. Reach back to your heart and follow the message down your arms, into your hands. What shape wants to be created? What movement wants to come? Have you any idea about the story your hands want

to tell? Those who are deaf have learned to use their hands to do their telling. Appreciate your hands for all their gracious serving.

6. Check your gut, noticing how much space this area takes. Your center of power may rest here. Focus on your belly button, where your baby body began its independent functioning. This was once your attachment to life, to your mother. Now you take in life energy as you breathe in and out. Imagine breathing in and out of your belly connected to life itself. Notice your life rhythm. Notice your story of strength or fear.
7. Bring your focus to your hips. Imagine your hips moving sensually on a dance floor. Experience the potential power of movement while you connect your upper and lower body. I wonder if you have a sexual sound or story that lives here.
8. Move on down to exploring your thighs and knees. Your knees may be locked or hanging loose yet providing a supportive connection. Notice that unlocked knees allow the vertical flow of energy from feet to head, from earth to sky. You may have wild, happy knees or tired ones. Notice how they are right now. While you focus on your legs, imagine them as tree trunks. What kind of tree would they be? How sturdy, how strong, how developed? Appreciate your legs.
9. Your feet have traveled far, run from fear and skipped to loved ones. Have you ever worn shoes too tight for your feet? I wonder how they fought back. How did they take care of themselves? Imagine your feet's dance and your feet's story. Is there a sound your feet are making, right now, in the shoes you are wearing? Is there something your feet would like right now from you? Feet may feel neglected carrying all your body stuff. Give appreciation to your feet and all that they support. If your feet can feel connected to the ground, the rest of your body parts are free to sing their song, dance their dance, shake their fear, leap their joy and come to rest on solid ground.

3. If You Don't Take Care of Your Body, It Will Bite You!

"Worry and stress affect the circulation, the glands, the whole nervous system, and profoundly affects heart action."

—Charles W. Mayo, M.D

In North America, the health and wellness industry is a billion-dollar business. In hundreds of ways, we are being encouraged to look after our bodies. The messages can be boiled down to three key points:

1. Eat nutritious food three to five times a day. Minimize sugar, bad fats, and processed food.
2. Exercise regularly in three ways: Cardiovascular exercise to pump our heart rate, stretching for flexibility, and lifting weights for strengthening our bones and muscles.
3. Get adequate sleep.

You may have heard the phrase “sitting is the new smoking”. New research emphasizes the importance of movement; “Being active is good for your health; sitting too long, isn’t.” This information from the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences emphasizes the dangers of sitting without movement for prolonged periods of time. Their recommendation is to do some movement every 45 minutes.

Tighten and Release Your Stressed, Screaming Body Parts

Add this to your daily routine: after locating strain in your body systematically *let go*. Check in regularly throughout the day and release tension. Do this at least every 45 minutes. The Canadian Institute of Stress found . . . *“a short amount of time each day to be good to themselves reduced their stress levels by almost half.”*

I call noticing and releasing tension in your body, 30 Second Quickies. Oops! Don’t go there! Too late!

What I mean is that they take 30 seconds or less to do. Start with the following list and discover other small ways to take care of yourself intermittently throughout your day.

Here is a short list of 30 Second Quickies:

- Do a neck & shoulder roll
- Shake your right hand, then your left hand
- Stretch your muscles up & down, left & right

- Drink a glass of water
- Watch a breath go in and out
- Tighten your teeth & then relax your jaw
- Massage your scalp
- Brush your teeth
- Squeeze your face into a prune shape (remember to release!)
- Yell (especially into a pillow or in your car)
- Rub lotion on your hands & anywhere else on your body
- Get or give a hug

4. Give Your Body a Rest . . . and Sleep!!!

“Sleep is the best meditation.”

—Dalai Lama

The Alberta Motor Association estimates that 15 percent of all drivers have reported falling asleep while driving. Dr. Ward Flemons, medical director of the Alberta Lung Association’s Sleep Centre at the Foothills Hospital says, “Between 30 to 40 percent of the population receives insufficient sleep.” Obviously, many of us need to sleep better and improve our sleep hygiene.

Need more reasons?

When you are sleep deprived you are 6 to 7 times more likely to have a car accident. Also, chronic sleep loss can increase your chances of having diabetes and gaining weight. More than that, for many people, sleep deprivation affects their productivity, focus, relationships, and ability to smile. Of course, all of this increases your stress levels.

Both Cindi Leive of *Glamour* magazine and Arianna Huffington of the *Huffington Post*,

encourage women to go to bed earlier, stay longer and have a sweet nap. Huffington reported a wake-up call when she collapsed from exhaustion resulting in a broken cheekbone and stitches over her eye.

In addition, to making you more accident prone, walking around sleep deprived can make you vulnerable to headaches, illness, stress in bones and muscles, weight gain and plain grouchiness. That then affects your energy to face challenges, to create harmonious relationships and to make wise decisions. You've heard of brain fog, right? Well, I get brain blizzard...avalanche! When I don't get enough sleep, my head feels as if it is filled with toilet paper!

Consider this: sleep deprivation is used to torture prisoners because it makes the prisoners crazy and willing to admit to anything. We need to have our brains functioning to face the challenges we have taken on and we need sleep to help our brains function.

Dr. Michael Breus, Ph.D., author of *Beauty Sleep: Look Younger, Lose Weight, and Feel Great Through Better Sleep* recommends a minimum of 7.5 hours of sleep. Experiment to discover how much you need.

Twelve Ways to more Zzzzzzz!

1. Go to bed at a consistent time. After brushing your teeth and washing your face, say, "I love you," if not to a lover, to yourself and then hit the sack.
2. Develop some relaxing bedtime rituals like bubble baths, listening to soothing music, light reading, star or navel-gazing.
3. Exercise earlier in the day rather than revving your body into high speed at night.
4. Be selective about your TV viewing—Arnold Schwarzenegger seldom sings lullabies.
5. Minimize alcohol as it can disturb your stages of sleep, even creating an internal alarm bell startle waking you up in the middle of the night. Avoid that kind of Ding Dong.
6. Minimize stimulants like caffeine and nicotine. Instead, try some warm milk or

chewing on some Tums—calcium calms.

7. Remember Phyllis Diller’s advice to, “Never go to bed mad. Stay up and fight.” It’s good advice! Sort out your problems rather than take them into your dream world.
8. If you’re lucky enough to sleep with someone, snuggle up to their heartbeat. It can warm your ticker and calm your mind. Babies know how to do this, and you can relearn.
9. If that lucky bed partner snores loudly, give yourself permission to sleep in separate bedrooms.
10. If you have thoughts spinning in your head, breathe and focus on your feet, even rubbing your feet on the sheets. We want your excess energy moved down, lower in your body. It’s called *grounding yourself*.
11. Designate a WORRY CHAIR somewhere outside your bedroom to dump your daily troubles. Pick them up in the morning—if you must.
12. If your troubles are large, to the point of continued sleep disturbance, which may include night terrors, arrange for some counseling.

However, if you have insomnia or suspect you have sleep apnea or another type of sleep disorder, please have your doctor refer you to a sleep specialist.

PART THREE

TAKE YOUR THOUGHTS FROM WOE TO WOW!

“The truth is that there is no actual stress or anxiety in the world; it’s your thoughts that create these false beliefs. You can’t package stress, touch it, or see it. There are only people engaged in stressful thinking.”

—Wayne Dyer

Remember my story of when I imagined my hubby was wounded and lying in a ditch? That imaginary story triggered a distress response. There was no bear chasing me. There was no crisis. There was only a story in my head. Beware the stories in your head!

1. Sweet Talk to Yourself: Yes, Like a Lover!

“The mind is its own place and can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven.”

— John Milton

Our thoughts can trigger our bodies into a distressed state. Coping, thriving, and self-care are aligned when we develop the ability to accept and give ourselves affirming messages. If we can develop a habit of catching irrational or impulsive thinking we can protect ourselves from some unnecessary distress.

a. Watch Your Thinking

We can begin by developing a habit of catching thoughts that are harmful to our well-being. Counselor and author, Rick Carson, described these negative messages or *stinking thinking* as originating from Gremlins, nasty little internal creatures whose constant nattering beats up our psyche.

We owe ourselves the resolve to channel our 60,000+ thoughts a day into supportive and optimistic self-talk.

If we linger on a thought, replay it repeatedly or if it hits us at a vulnerable moment or is uttered by a powerful role model, it can become rooted in our unconscious as a belief. Beliefs ground our actions. Let's break this process down:

- 1) **Situation:** Words are spoken or an event occurs that stimulates a thought.
- 2) **Belief:** If the thought or self-talk is frequently repeated, it becomes a core belief in the unconscious mind.
- 3) **Feeling:** The deeper the belief, the stronger the corresponding feeling state.
- 4) **Reaction:** Feelings generated in unconsciousness, result in reactions rather than mindful responses.

The thought to reaction/action sequence looks like this:

Situation > Unconscious Belief* > Feeling > Reaction/Action

*Engrained by repeated thoughts

This pattern works for yucky, self-critical, self-put-down, self-judging, self-discouraging, self-attacking and self-blaming thoughts, as well as yummy, self-caring, self-affirming, self-esteem-building, self-appreciative, self-empathic and self-forgiving thoughts.

Example of Self-sabotaging Self-talk

Situation > Unconscious Belief* > Feeling > Reaction/Action

*Engrained by repeated thought

Made a mistake > "I am stupid"* > Insecure > Cry and give up

*I unconsciously give meaning to the event

The philosopher, Andrew J. Bernstein wrote, "Stress is a byproduct of subconscious beliefs you have about the world. You can't choose not to believe something. You believe it because you think it's true. To eliminate stress, you must learn to challenge these beliefs so that you see them differently."

By repeatedly affirming my thought, "I am stupid" I turned it into a core belief. Most often the way we end the phrase "I am" is a core belief. Pay attention to it. The truth is

“I am a lovable, capable, resilient, and fun person. Yes, I am.”

The wonder of becoming an adult is that you are responsible for your life, including your thinking and beliefs. Yes, also the wonder of being an adult is, if you want, you get to drive a car, or buy a house, or hike Mount Everest! But I digress, so back to our thinking patterns.

Learn to say, “Cancel! Cancel! That was _____ (Fill in the blank. E.g. “Dad’s, “My sister’s” . . .) idea and I have a different thought and belief. I believe _____
_____ (Fill in the blank. E.g. “I have creative smarts and learn from mistakes.”)

Learn to tell yourself *the kind truth* . . . over and over again.

Now, the pattern looks like this:

Situation > Unconscious Belief* > Feeling > Reaction

*Give new meaning to engrained thought

Made a Mistake > “I learn from mistakes”* > Empowered > Refocus and do it!

*Work at ingraining new and healthy thought

b. Whip Your Thoughts into Supportive Shape!

What negative and false thoughts were programmed into your mind and have been rooted as painful mantras in your head?

Publisher, Robert Collier, said, “Any thought that is passed on to the subconscious often enough and convincingly enough is finally accepted.” The good news is that the unconscious can be reprogrammed by awareness and effort.

Notice your self-talk. Anchor and reinforce your supportive messages. They are the brain’s *good guys*. Watch yourself at work and at home. Notice when it is hard to think clearly. Identify the destructive thoughts, beliefs, and chatter—the brain’s *bad guys*—then clear them out.

Say to yourself, “*Stop!*” then repeat what you want to believe. Here are some sample thought-shifts to assist you:

- I am inadequate. ▼ I do the best I can.
- I am not good enough. ▼ I am as deserving as anyone else.
- I cannot trust my judgment. ▼ I am learning to trust my judgment.
- I am a failure. ▼ I have succeeded at...
- I am not in control. ▼ I control my own actions.
- I am powerless. ▼ I have choices.
- I am weak. ▼ It's alright to sometimes feel weak.
- I have to be perfect. ▼ Making mistakes is okay.
- I did something wrong. ▼ I can learn from my experience.
- I cannot trust others. ▼ I can choose whom to trust for what.
- It's not nice to say no. ▼ I can say *yes*, *no* or *I want to think about it*.
- I am stupid. ▼ I have (physical, emotional, mental, social, musical, mechanical or mathematical) intelligence.

Be easy on yourself. Dr. Al Siebert, the resiliency researcher, cautioned about overdoing or forcing thought affirmations. If you've spent 15 or more years grooving some damaging thoughts into your unconscious mind, it will take significant time to delete and replace them. Newly inserted thoughts require cultivation, time and attention.

Be persistent and vigilant. Start with one harsh belief. Write out your new and nurturing thought. Post it. No one at home or work needs to see it but you. Repeat it. Make healthy and vibrant action choices based on your improved mindset.

As a pioneer in positive thinking, Norman Vincent Peale said, “Change your thoughts and you change your world.”

2. You've Got Limits, Right? Then State Your Boundaries

“When we fail to set boundaries and hold people accountable, we feel used and mistreated.”

—Brené Brown

Personal boundaries provide an effective strategy to handle stress. Without boundaries, we can easily become overwhelmed. We need to know when to draw a line and say, “Enough!”

Think of personal boundaries as similar to survey lines between neighboring properties. The line says, “My property begins and ends here.” Some people mark their boundaries with a brick wall—hard, no entry gate and give no sense of who or what is on the other side. Some people have boundaries similar to a fallen down fence—leaving the rest of us questioning whether we’re welcome to enter or not. Some people appear to have no boundaries until they yell at us for crossing an undefined line. Just as *good fences make good neighbors*, healthy boundaries make healthy relationships.

Anne Katherine wrote in *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin*, “With good boundaries, we can have the wonderful assurance that comes from knowing we can and will protect ourselves from the ignorance, meanness or thoughtlessness of others.” You have physical, verbal, emotional, relationship, spiritual and sexual boundaries. To maintain your boundaries, you need to choose wisely when you say *yes, no or it depends*.

a. Mind Your Values

Basically, clear boundaries help you protect your value system, which in turn protects you from unnecessary stress. It’s stressful to have your values violated. Many values have to do with your personal story or history. Your values are those qualities, people, behaviors and things you hold as important or worthy. You can identify your values by noting how you invest your time, money and energy.

On the following chart, note your five most important values. Consider the values in which you invest the most money, you spend the most time seeking or developing and where your energy and focus goes:

acceptance	balance	comfort
achievement	beauty	compassion
adventure	belonging	commitment
acknowledgement	caring	communication
animals	challenge	competition
appreciation	change	control
art	children	cooperation

courage	intuition	resilience
creativity	joy	respect
dignity	justice	responsibility
discipline	kindness	reverence
diversity	law and order	risk-taking
economic	listening	sacredness
education	logic	security
emotional	loyalty	seniors
equality	love	sensitivity
enthusiasm	manners	sensuality
ethics	maturity	sex
excellence	modesty	sharing
fame	money	silence
faith	music	spirituality
family	mystery	sports & fitness
feelings	native culture	solitude
financial	nature	success
freedom	nurturing	synergy
friendship	orderliness	teamwork
fun	passion	tenderness
generosity	patience	thinking
gentleness	peace	tolerance
harmony	personal	touch
health	development	truth
helping	play	trustworthiness
home	pleasure	unity
rights	power	vision
humor	prayer	winning
humility	prestige	wisdom
idealism	privacy	others?
influence	recognition	
integrity	reliability	

When you clarify your values, intentions, and boundaries, your messages become clear and less emotionally driven. You will declare what is acceptable and unacceptable in a

calm and non-judgmental manner. The only person over whom you have power is yourself. To put your personal power into action you can declare what you will and will not do and then *follow through*.

a. Use a 3-Point Boundary Declaration

Here is how to create a **3-Point Boundary Declaration** using your values:

1. **VALUE:** “Speaking respectfully is important to me.”
2. **FEELING:** “I feel hurt.”
3. **RESULT:** (state what action *you* will take)

Positive: “*If you choose to speak respectfully, I will stay.*”

Negative: “*If you choose to swear at me, I will leave.*”

It’s up to you to follow through on your end of the boundary declaration. In the above example, you maintain your boundary by either staying or leaving.

Your Turn! Create Your Own Boundary Statement:

VALUE: _____ is important to me.”

FEELING: “I feel _____.”

RESULT:

Positive: “If you choose _____,

I will _____.”

Negative: “If you choose _____,

I will _____.”

Remember to follow through.

c. Muddled Moral Dilemmas

Sometimes values conflict with one another. Career women often value the stimulation, intellectual challenge, and extra income of employment. Yet they may feel guilty about leaving their children in alternative care. There is no right or wrong. Remaining in integrity when in a moral dilemma requires effort and soul-searching.

Gosh, Me say No? What a Dilemma!

You may be like many people who say *yes* when they want to say *no*. Many of us were sold a bill of goods that it wasn't nice to say *no*. The result can include a loss of self-respect, overextending ourselves, becoming ill or blowing up at others with resentful feelings. Oprah Winfrey refers to this tendency as *The Disease to Please*.

As kids, many of us were trained in the habit of pleasing grown-ups so we might receive needed attention and love. We worked to *make them* feel happy, so they would say or do something to *make us* happy. We worked to *make them* feel appreciated, so they would say or do something to *make us* feel appreciated. We worked to *make them* feel proud of us, so they would say or do something to *make us* feel proud.

That becomes a lot of others *making us*. This is an example of an *external locus of control* or dependence on others for our care and satisfaction. As children, it is true that we have little control and power. We did depend on our caregivers. But, at some point, we benefit by declaring our adulthood, making decisions that reflect our matured values and sticking to them.

In some ways, one of the developmental tasks of becoming an adult is to act as our own caregiver, to be our own loving and guiding parent. One of the hardest and necessary parental jobs is saying *no*. If saying *no* is a challenge for you, begin to have an internal dialogue that is lovingly supportive and yet self-controlling. "I value my time. I will decide if, and when, I will give it away." If you are consciously trying to say the word *no* less to your children you can also rephrase *no* by saying "yes, but not until you've finished your homework" or "yes, but first we have to save up our allowance to buy it!"

Hearing *no* for children and adults can be disappointing. After all, don't we make a



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request when we believe someone can give us what we need or want? We can easily interpret the word, *no* as rejection.

Acknowledge when you feel proud of yourself. Of course, it's wonderful to receive care, appreciation, and encouragement from others. Enjoy it while not relying on the outside to *feed* you. Choose to absolutely live your own truth and nurture your own self-respect. Learn to say *yes* and *no* to reflect who you are. You will earn your own respect, if not that of your co-workers and family. It is distressful not to be true to yourself!

Ten Ways to Help You Say No

"No is the world's most powerful stress management word."

1. Ensure that you give *no*, *yes* and *it depends* consideration.
2. Give yourself time to consider the request by saying, "I'd like to think about it."
3. Repeat the request before saying, "Thank you for asking but *no*."
4. Offer an alternative with, "*No*, but what I will do is..."
5. Suggest that someone else is better suited for the task.
6. When appropriate, explain why you are saying *no*. "I'm saying *no* because..."
7. State the conditions that will help you meet a request. "After I finish this assignment I will do it."
8. Explain what is not good for your group, team or company. "The most effective use of my time is..."
9. Show you care. "I hear you are in a bind and I wish I could do more but..."
10. Ensure you say *no* in an appropriate manner and not in violation of company policies or procedures.

Ten Tips to Avoid Worrisome Workaholism

1. Prepare a daily To Do list including one column for business and one for personal. If later you think of another To Do and it's not urgent, save it for the next day.
2. Exercise each morning so that self-care is taken care of before work begins.
3. Don't be the last person to leave the office at night.
4. Delegate.



5. Avoid taking on responsibilities that don't belong to you. Say, "No!"
6. Take a lunch break every day. If it can't be an hour, take a half hour.
7. If you *have* to work on the weekend, pick one day. Never work both days.
8. Find someone emotionally with whom you can verbalize your concerns about workaholism. Accept advice and put it into action!
9. If you work from a home office, avoid working into the night by making plans to read a book (non-work related) or go see a movie.
10. Forecast for the future. Set long-term goals with achievement dates. If you tend to do projects immediately, cut larger and longer assignments into smaller pieces that fit into your normal schedule.

Contributed by: SUZY WILKOFF

3. Dare to be a Pollyanna: Boost Your Optimism

"While you can't control your experiences, you can control your explanations."

—Martin Seligman

We were in a heated argument when suddenly he yelled, "Stop being such a Pollyanna!" My optimistic tendency was evident and frustrating to my colleague's sensibility. We were both feeling distressed.

a. Let's Compare Optimism and Pessimism

Optimists tend to see the cheery side, to believe that people are doing the best they can, to picture success rather than failure. Those with a more pessimistic attitude tend to call those with optimism *naïve and out of touch with reality*.

Those with a hefty dose of optimism tend to experience their pessimistic friends as discouraging and gloomy, as exemplified in this line from Michel de Saint-Pierre. "An optimist sees a light where there is none but why must the pessimist always run to blow it out?" There is a tendency for optimists and pessimists to find each other a tad irritating, and at the extreme, distressing.



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In 1990, Martin Seligman released his ground-breaking book, *Learned Optimism* in which he made a number of mental health-related findings.

When Life Goes Miserably

Seligman describes pessimism as a habit of explaining painful life happenings as permanent, all-encompassing and personal. Pessimists tend to use words like *always* and *never*. Their optimistic neighbors use the mantra, “This too shall pass” and speak with words such as *sometimes* and *recently*.

- **Pessimist:** “I made a mistake. I’ll never succeed. I’ll always be at the bottom of the rubbish bin.”
- **Optimist:** “Hey, so what? Sometimes I make mistakes, but I learn from them.”
- While pessimists tend to generalize their disappointments, optimists focus on specific incidents of discontent.
- **Pessimist:** “All managers are bossy.”
- **Optimist:** “I felt discouraged when my manager told me to redo the report.”

When Life Goes Merrily

Explanations of happiness by pessimists are temporary while those who exercise optimism give a permanent explanation based on their character or abilities:

- **Pessimist:** “Ah, it was a fluke. My competitor didn’t know what she was doing so I got the contract.”
- **Optimist:** “With my talent, uniqueness, flexibility and charming character, I will continue to attract clients.”

b. Emphasize Your Internal Locus of Control

Seligman studied how pessimists tend to internalize responsibility when circumstances are negative. They think they are worthless, talentless and unlovable. They say things such as, “I’m stupid. It’s all my fault.” They tend to blame others or circumstances



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outside themselves thinking, “They are so stupid; they don’t know a good thing when they see it.” In contrast, the danger of extreme optimism is the tendency to avoid responsibility for one’s part in an unsuccessful event. However, pessimists’ tendency to regularly and inappropriately accept responsibility is a sure formula for depression.

Based on positive psychology findings, there are several advantages to developing an optimistic perspective. Since it supports depression, pessimism is associated with a weak immune system. Pessimism feels down — blue, sad, worried or anxious.

Optimism and pessimism can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Because pessimists tend not to create or face challenges, they fail more frequently — even when success is possible. Seligman says, “The best thing one can say about a pessimist is that his fears were founded.”

Alternatively, optimism encourages happiness and, therefore, is associated with vitality. Optimism feels up — hopeful, confident and cheerful.

Optimist: “I enjoyed the challenge regardless of the outcome.”

Optimism needs restraint when the cost of failure of a choice is clearly too high. Then we need to slow down and look at reality. It may have been an optimist who invented the automobile and a pessimist who created the brakes and the airbag.

b. Face Your Freaky Fears

Dr. Phillip McGraw said, “Eighty percent of our decisions are based on fear.” If that’s true, we live in a pessimistic culture that could use some optimistic balancing. Here are some optimistic how to’s:

- Challenge your fear by questioning if it is logical.
- Realize your beliefs are just that — beliefs. They may or may not be factual.
- Ask if your beliefs are useful and supportive to your work and life.

- Argue with yourself. Say, “Stop!” to pessimistic self-talk and replace with some optimistic thinking. “I know enough. I do enough. I am enough.”
- Ask, “What’s the worst that could happen? Do I have a strategy to deal with that outcome?” If not, create one.
- Do something for those less fortunate.
- Develop your optimism muscle by seeing the bright side. Change Bad News into Good News: “I don’t like the extra weight on my hips but I lost weight before and I can do it again.”
- Count your blessings.

Optimists and pessimists have been around since Noah. Was he a pessimist to believe the flood was coming or was he an optimist to believe his idea of an ark would help all those critters? Optimists are known for their action and hope. Now consider these tips to more often think like an optimist.

Ten Tips to Increase Uplifting Optimism

1. Move like an optimist! It is impossible to feel depressed while smiling, walking briskly or dancing to happy music. Most songs are about unhappy topics. Throw them away so you don’t brainwash yourself into feeling sad. Sing and dance to happy songs.
2. Self-talk can hurt or uplift you. You can look in the mirror and recite a long list of negative descriptions or you can look in the mirror and speak kindly to yourself. Think of how you would treat someone you care about and then treat yourself in that way.
3. Visualize your negative thought gremlins and see yourself swooping them up in a canvas bag. Tie them up with mental ropes and fling those gremlins deep into the ocean. Then take a deep breath and feel free.
4. Spend five minutes when you first wake thinking about your blessings. Say them out loud. Feel grateful for the sun rising, your good health, a comfy mattress, and pillow

or the roof over your head when it rains. It doesn't matter what you are grateful for, it only matters that you are grateful. Dig deep and find five minutes worth of gratefulness each morning.

5. Write five sentences to ask yourself. Tape them on the bathroom mirror or put them someplace you'll see first thing in the morning. You might ask, "What could possibly happen today that will be better than what happened yesterday?" "What will I learn today that will help me grow in the direction of my goals?" These questions presuppose that something will happen to lead you the way you want to go.
6. Write a list of your life goals. You deserve to have a plan and not have life happen to you. Look for one of the dozens of books and teachers who show you effective ways to figure out your goals.
7. List everything you have accomplished from learning how to ride a bike to earning a Ph.D. Place it somewhere convenient, so you can easily add to the list. The more, the better. This list can be a life-long project.
8. Consider the influence of your friends and [the people] with whom you spend the most time. If people typically feel upbeat, they will lift you; if they typically feel angry or depressed, they will drag you down.
9. Read uplifting books like Jack Canfield's ***The Success Principles*** and actually do the suggested activities.
10. Look deep into a mirror. See your spirit and think about the saying, *You are not a human being having a spiritual experience; you are a spiritual being having a human experience.*

Source: JULIE DONNELLY

4. Don't Be A Worry Wart

"Ninety-nine percent of things you worry about don't happen; the other one percent you can't do anything about, so why worry at all?"

—Lois Hole



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Let us define worry as “to feel or experience concern or anxiety.” Here’s what happens: As explained above when you imagine a danger your body reacts as if it is happening. A fight or flight response kicks in with increased heart rate, deeper and heavier breathing, and hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) are released into your bloodstream. There is a third response called *collapse*. Your feelings become numb.

Worry can also result in headaches, bowel problems, sleep disturbance, weakened immune system, memory issues and loss of appetite for food or sex. This distress affects relationships as well – “Sorry dear, back off! I’m too busy worrying!”

Chronic worrying can turn into its big brother, anxiety. Some of our biggest worry topics were explored a number of years ago in *Psychology Today*.

What People Worry About and the Facts, Maam!

Odds of dying in a shark attack: 1 in 3.7 million

Odds of dying from drowning: 1 in 1.134

Odds of dying from being struck by lightning: 1 in 79,746

Average annual risk of being killed in a plane crash: 1 in 2 million

Average annual risk of being killed in a car crash: 1 in 7,700

Lifetime odds of being killed in an assault involving a gun: 1 in 321

Remember these are American statistics. Indeed, Canadians worry too!

10 Ways to Stop Frightfully Fretting

Overcoming worry and anxiety requires some focus and effort.

1. Make a list of the scary, future events you worry about. The fears might be items such as worry that your child will marry THAT loser or you might die from lung cancer. Keep writing until you have ten or more events you fear. Then score each item from (0) **I have no control** to (10) **I have total control**. Where you have significant control lower the risk by taking action. Where you have little or no control let go.
2. To let go, notice your thought and your body distress, take in a big breath and



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let it out while thinking, “Let it go!”

3. Read Richard Carlson’s little book, ***Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff***.
4. Post the serenity prayer where you can read it daily. *Grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference.*
5. Contain your worrying thoughts by disciplining yourself to only worry while sitting in a particular spot. Choose an uncomfortable Worry Chair. Sit there until you are ready to focus on something productive.
6. Edit your thoughts.
7. Practice optimistic thinking.
8. Focus on all the reasons you have to be grateful.
9. Consider seeking professional counseling.
10. Volunteer to help those who have a better reason to worry than you.

5. Lighten-Up! Loosen Your Tight Thinking

“Buy something silly and wear it. A Groucho Marx nose, mustache, and glasses are my favorite. When the stress seems unbearable, when you’ve really reached the limits of your endurance, go into a bathroom, look into the mirror, put on your glasses, and ask yourself, “How serious is this?”

—Loretta LaRoche

I felt sadness, heaviness, and distress from the time my mother became very ill, shrunk to skin and bones, and then died. T’was stressful! Eventually, there was time to gather, rejoice in the sweet moments, and join in on her favorite tunes. She requested that we sing a rousing version of Jesus Loves Me. I could sense her giggling from above!

a. See It’s True! How Laughter Lightens

Researchers report several health benefits of laughter which include:



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- stress is reduced
- blood pressure is lowered
- the immune system is strengthened
- creativity increases
- the mood is elevated
- muscles relax

You cannot tighten your muscles when you either laugh or cry. Try laughing or crying and feeling distressed at the same time. It is next to impossible. So, laugh until you cry or cry until you laugh. On top of all the health benefits, people enjoy connecting to someone with a light-hearted approach. Having a sense of humor does not necessarily mean you are known for rousing ripples of laughing convulsion.

Developing a sense of humor merely requires the ability to look at and think about life from a different and fun perspective. Those that use it share a good laugh with friends or find ways to not take themselves so seriously. You can be the initiator of a humorous perspective or the appreciative recipient — the humorist or the humored.

Most of us, at some time or other, crack a smile, if not a gut-wrenching guffaw. You can begin by identifying your favorite smile makers as an indication of your humor preferences. Professional humorists range from comic strip and cartoon creators to stand-up comics, from late-night show hosts to writers and philosophers. They use thinking and language that includes:

- exaggeration
- irony
- satire
- over-literality
- jokes

- fun lists
- word plays such as riddles, rhymes, and puns

They may employ observational incongruities, self-deprecation, insults, mimicking, storytelling, and slapstick. Their presentation style may be eccentric, angry, gross, rude, child-like or idiot-like. Content is endless, although politics and sex are two favorites.

Pay attention to when your thinking dances with delight. Stress will be nowhere to be felt! Then up the ante and practice laughing at your life's absurdities.

b. Use Fun Tactics to Tackle Your Thinking

1. Identify a problem. Ask a friend or support person to listen, without offering solutions. You want to simply and loudly release your woes. Wallow, wail, whine, groan and cry with exaggeration. Maybe the two of you will end up laughing.
2. Have a soothing or fun song that you sing to yourself. One of my favorites is, "On a clear day, rise and look around and you will see who you are. On a clear day how it will astound you, that the glow of your being outshines every star."
3. Rewrite a silly ditty. Mary Had a Little Lamb.
Suzy had a dis-stressful day.
Mistakes happened wherever she'd go.
And no matter where Suzy went
The parking meter man would know.
4. Develop some fun and affirming self-talk:
 - What other people think of me is none of my business.
 - The road to success is made through mistakes.
 - If one person tells me I look like a horse, forget it. If two people tell me I look like a horse, I might want to pay attention to my behavior. If three or more people tell me I look like a horse, it's time to check the price of

saddles.

- It could be worse. I could be dead.
- There's always somebody doing better than me and somebody doing worse than me. At least I have me.
- A weakness named can become a strength.
- "I think I can. I know I can" just like the Little Red Engine that Could.
- Maybe the biggest joke of my life is my seriousness. It must be an illusion of grandeur to imagine I am so important.

Humor can help you sustain a more positive, upbeat attitude while dealing with daily distressing hassles. Every now and then, reflect on a different situation and ask if you just might have taken yourself a little too seriously. It might be time to lighten up!

PART FOUR

HOW ARE YOU FEELIN’?

“Your intellect may be confused, but your emotions will never lie to you.”

—Roger Ebert

Managing your feelings and emotions are key to managing stress and vice versa. At one time I had an anger management problem. I would try to stuff my emotions of fear and inadequacy with our young children deep down. Then the tension would build along with the distress. Then the explosion would happen; usually in angry, self-esteem harming words — “You kids are driving me crazy!”

Through significant self-reflection and therapy, I changed my angry pattern. I discovered the authentic feelings underneath those angry explosions.

Authentic feelings inform us of what we want, what is important to us, what we value, what is working for us, and what is not. At the same time, feelings tell little, if anything, about other people or the external world. We need our fine brains, observations, and effective listening to help us seek understanding of others and situations.

1. Grasp the Importance of Freely Feeling

“We can’t selectively numb emotions. Numb the dark and you numb the light.”

Brene Brown

Feeling means to touch or have an emotion (Oxford Dictionary). *Emotion* means the feeling part of awareness as compared to thinking (from the Medical Encyclopedia).



Feelings tell us our internal state of being:

- Hot, warm, cold or freezing
- Free, loose, centered, stretched, strained

Feelings let us know

- What we want
- What is important to us
- What we value
- What is working for us and what is not

Feelings are experienced through the body's systems of muscles, nerves, and organs. We all have the ability to feel emotions but we each feel differently about different aspects of life. My hubby feels excited and energized just thinking about wilderness canoeing while I feel disgruntled and bored at the thought of the isolation. I feel excited and energized just thinking of attending a personal growth retreat while he feels disinterested.

Accept the Paradox of Feelings

A feeling (the muscular contractions, speeded breath or adrenalin flowing) diminishes, calms or changes as it is experienced. The energy in the feeling actually *lets go*. Pushing away or ignoring the feeling does not work. The body can experience physical pain or at worst, break down. That is why having someone listen to us helps us shift our feeling state.

Feelings are typically responses to our thoughts and beliefs. Most of our misery is created by stinking thinking or damaging self-talk often implanted in our early years. Of course, if a child believes she has lost the support of her parent, she will understandably feel insecure.

As a child, the feeling was appropriate to the situation and message. But, as an adult, the stinking-thinking reaction is inappropriate. When we lose our ability to think clearly, we are triggered psychologically into the past and are literally reliving an old feeling that is no longer appropriate to the present situation.

2. You're Ok! I am OK. Our Feelings are OK!

“Feelings or emotions are the universal language and are to be honored. They are the authentic expression of who you are at your deepest place.”

—Judith Wright

Authentic feelings were present when you were a baby and before you were flooded with care-giver messages. *Baby feelings* are body responses that act as a thermometer to inform you about your unique likes, desires and wants. Imagine caring for a baby. Listen to the sound of:

- the *sad* cry with the message that she doesn't have what she needs. She needs her diaper changed.
- the *scared* cry when a stranger comes to change her diaper. She fears the loss of her most beloved parent. She needs to be assured that she is safe.
- the *hurt* cry when the diaper pin (accidentally, of course) pricks her skin and causes pain.
- the *mad* cry, a secondary emotion, which tells her she has the energy to get what she wants, her mother.
- the *glad* coo when mother appears. Baby has what she wants!

Why is anger a secondary emotion? Typically, we feel sad, hurt or scared before anger kicks in. The baby tries to meet her needs first with a softer sad, scared or hurt cry. If those needs aren't met, she will up the volume with a loud, demanding scream: “It's survival, Mom!” especially when the bottle does not come. Our baby is in trouble if she stops crying for her needs.

Those who struggle with expressing anger appropriately benefit from slowing down their reaction and asking, “What do I feel first, before the anger comes?” In healthy relationships, we ideally get our needs met in the sad, hurt or scared/concerned realm before having to fire up feeling and expressing fury. We’ll examine this concept more in the next part of the book.

If all babies feel sad, hurt, scared, mad or glad, why is it that grown men and women appear to have different capacities in expressing these feelings?

The Boy Code

Dr. William Pollack coined the phrase *The Boy Code* to explain that boys (remember there are exceptions) are socialized to swallow and deny their feelings. Even more, if they express vulnerable feelings such as sad, hurt or scared, they are often rejected and shamed with derogatory remarks.

You need your mind to figure out the world and your feelings to figure out yourself. That’s using your emotional smarts. Feeling the feeling and expressing it are important. Regrettably, boys and men are still at risk of being called nasty names like a *wuss*, *wimp*, and *girl* (as if that is a derogatory term), if they show any sign of feeling sad, hurt or scared — the soft and vulnerable feelings.

So, males typically swallow their tears or are shamed with, “Big boys don’t cry.” What does that leave the socialized male to express? Anger or happiness! No wonder your male co-worker or boss becomes more aggressive when faced with vulnerable feelings. He doesn’t have experience identifying, experiencing or managing them within himself, let alone expressing them to someone else. He’s left in the even more uncomfortable position of helplessness.

The Girl Code

In the meantime, little girls have typically (remember there are exceptions) been socialized to avoid expressing anger. "It's not ladylike. It's not nice." Since anger is the energy to help you get what you want and need, for generations, women have been dependent on men, their knights in shining armor and saviors, to rescue them, the damsels in distress.



Just watch a Jane Austin movie to see this dynamic played out. The suffragettes of the 1920s and the feminists of the 1970s were perceived as out-of-control women because they courageously expressed anger. Consequently, we have learned in myriad ways to confuse our core, natural or baby feelings with unconscious adult reactions.

3. Separate Old Fragmenting Feelings from Now

“Everything that triggers us, everything that upsets us, signals an issue within ourselves that we must address.”

— Akriq Brost

It takes diligence to learn how to separate old, triggered and inappropriate emotions or reactions from present moment feelings. When you are triggered by an event or remark, ask yourself: “How old do I feel?”

If you feel like a two-year-old, excuse yourself and sort out how much of your reaction is related to your past and how much has to do with the present situation. Note what you are feeling and what, if anything, you need. For example, when you are at work do you feel:

1. Enlivened?
2. Neutral?
3. Burned out?

1. If your answer is *enlivened*, that personal information affirms the good fit of your workplace.
2. If your answer is *neutral*, you may ask yourself, “What can I do differently to feel *enlivened* by my work?”
3. If your answer is *burned out*, you need to ask yourself, “What do I need to do differently to look after myself?” You might consider engaging with a

supportive and listening friend or seeking help from a professional.

Retrain yourself to be more in your body. Begin to notice the signals in your body and give them names.

4. Become Bravely Body/Feeling Aware

“If your emotional abilities aren’t in hand, if you don’t have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can’t have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.”

— Daniel Goleman

Awareness of what you are feeling is the beginning of managing your feelings; that is, calming them. It is as if our emotions are like babies squealing or crying for attention. Give them attention. Take a breath. Focus on your body and give those feelings a word of acknowledgment.

In the beginning, this process will feel uncomfortable and you may want to push away the feelings. Addictions are merely ways people try to avoid disturbing feelings. They swallow or ingest a substance that numbs the feeling. Or they do an activity like sex, gambling, eating or gaming to escape their feelings. That’s all an addiction is; a way to soothe our little hurting selves. Learn to tolerate the painful feeling. The Prophet, Khalil Gibran, wrote, “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.”

Ask yourself, “What do I feel?” When appropriate, share that feeling with those who are emotionally safe to do so.

Body/feeling words to help with your emotional awareness and expression:

Low State High State

DOWN **SAD** MISERABLE
LOW GLOOMY DESPONDENT
BLAH DISCOURAGED DEPRESSED



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BODY MESSAGE: You *do not have* what you want, need or value.

DISAPPOINTED **HURT** CRUSHED
LET DOWN WOUNDED DEVASTATED
BELITTLED PAINED DESTROYED

BODY MESSAGE: What you want, need or value has been *taken away*.

UNEASY **AFRAID** TERRIFIED
NERVOUS FEARFUL FRIGHTENED
TROUBLED SCARED DESPERATE

BODY MESSAGE: What you want, need or value is *at risk* of being taken away.

AGITATED **ANGRY** BITTER
DISTURBED CHEESED LIVID
IRRITATED EXASPERATED HOSTILE

BODY MESSAGE: You have *the energy to acquire* what you want, need or value (secondary emotion).

CONTENT **HAPPY** THRILLED
SATISFIED CHEERFUL JOYFUL
PLEASED GLAD ECSTATIC

BODY MESSAGE: You *have* what you want, need or value.

Consider printing off these words and posting them somewhere convenient to remind yourself of how you might be feeling.

5. Damn It! Better Manage Your Anger!

(Did I say that? Forgive me, I just lost it!)

“As far as having peace within myself, the one way I can do that is forgiving the people who have done wrong to me. It causes more stress to build up anger. Peace is more productive.”

—Rodney King

It is challenging to make sense of the complicated emotion of anger. Yet, it is well worth the effort as it fuels distress hormones like no other feeling. I know. During my angry out-of-control years I was repeatedly ill.

Here are some basic **Feeling Angry Concepts**:

1. Anger is the most energy-charged and hot feeling. It is often experienced in the body by increased heart rate, rapid breathing, adrenaline rush, and hyper-alertness. When in a high feeling state “cool thinking” is distorted by a heated brain. It is smart to familiarize ourselves with this emotion and monitor it so we don’t end up “steaming off.” We can learn to number our anger from 1 to 10 in intensity and learn to say, “I feel angry” when we are at a 2 or 3 and not wait for the 9 to 10 explosion.
2. As described above, anger is a secondary emotion. First, we feel hurt, sad or afraid before anger is triggered. When a baby feels sad, through hunger, for example, she gently cries. But if no one delivers the beverage we will be treated to a full-blown screaming message to “GET MY DINNER HERE!!!”
3. Anger’s energy can be so intense that it can shut off our ability to think. It can *fry* our brains. When we build up a lot of angry energy we are wise to dissipate some of it before we act. We can clean the garage, run around the block, breathe or use the old favorite, count to ten.
4. Distorted thinking can fuel useless anger. Blaming others or ourselves, exaggerating problems, assuming the worst and thinking in terms of *always* and *never* can escalate our anger.
5. Sleep deprivation, illness, fatigue, stress, poor self-esteem, and conflict can exaggerate our poor thought patterns and add to out-of-control anger.
6. When we better manage and relieve stress, we better manage and relieve our feelings of anger.

You will not be able to move **quickly** from feeling angry to having fun, joy, and



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laughter. But if you feel triggered into a tirade, here are some tips to speed the way:

1. Examine your past understanding of feeling and managing anger. What needs to change?
2. Ask yourself when you feel angry, "*What am I feeling underneath the anger?*" You are probably feeling powerless, overworked, unappreciated or all three. Say it out loud, **"I feel powerless!"**
3. Ask yourself what you need. Others may not be able to give you what you need. Please identify what you need and give it to yourself or seek out those who can. You may need someone to say, **"You are doing the best you can."** Or **"It's OK to take a break from your responsibilities."** Or **"You deserve support and help."**
4. Write in your day timer **ME TIME**. Having fun or relaxing doesn't happen any easier than going to the dentist. It often requires planning and commitment.
5. Prepare yourself. The next time you notice yourself yelling at others try these changes:
 - Change whatever you are yelling to, **"I love you!!!"**
 - Say out loud to them and to yourself, **"Oh! Oh! I haven't been taking good enough care of myself. Excuse me I'm going to go do that!"** Then do it even if it is to make a cup of tea.
 - Do something different. Surrender and lie down on the floor. Notice how ridiculous you look.
6. Don't make fun, play and laughter another chore. Some days perhaps a good cry would lighten the atmosphere faster and more compassionately.
7. Avoid conflict about issues over which you have no control.
8. Spend regular time doing what nourishes you.

Prevent Anger Overflow

The following options can be used to manage the energy of anger and to prevent inappropriate expressions of it. Which of the following do you already use and which could you begin to use?

Get Physical

1. Walk or jog
2. Cycle
3. Do Tai Chi or Yoga
4. Dance
5. Play Squash or Tennis
6. Clean

Self-Talk: Thoughts and Beliefs

1. Identify and challenge distorted thinking
2. Talk to yourself and calm yourself
3. Check for core feelings: sad, hurt and scared. Express them: *I feel . . .*
4. Ask yourself what your body's message is

Talk Out Loud

1. Count to 10
2. Say "I feel angry about..."
3. Say what you want: "I want..."
4. Speak in a low and normal voice

Self Encourage

1. Give yourself acknowledgment for self-control
2. Notice your strengths
3. Notice your loving qualities
4. Acknowledge others

Humor

- Take time to laugh at the funny side of life

Do a Time In

1. Call someone on the phone
2. Join a support group
3. Arrange for counseling

Time Out

1. Call for a “time out”
2. Read a book on anger management
3. Take a course on stress or assertiveness

Journal

1. Write in an anger log
2. Write in a journal what is happening
3. Make a list of what to do when you feel angry and do them

PART FIVE

WHEN IN DISTRESS,

IMMEDIATELY DO NOTHING

“Mistakes and pressure are inevitable; the secret to getting past them is to stay calm.

—Travis Bradberry

No matter how evolved we’ve become, we sometimes find ourselves triggered. Few of us are trouble-free and walking on water . . . yet! Having a strategy or two to get out of the middle of a distressing muddle can help.

Here are some tools to help you calm your distress.

1. Don’t Beat What’s Hurting! Accept What Is

“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

—Reinhold Niebuhr

1. Accept the feeling as it is. Breathe and notice the feeling in your body. It’s optional if you give the feeling a label such as *sad* or *hurt*.
2. Notice how old you feel. Breathe some more.
3. Tell yourself, “It’s only a feeling. It will pass.”
4. Once you feel calm and your brain can fully function:
 - a. Decide if this strong feeling was sparked by old programming or is *clean*.
 - b. Notice what thought or belief is behind the feeling. Is it appropriate for the

situation? Is it true? Is it more of a judgment or assumption than an observation of facts?

- c. Use your problem-solving brain to decide if action is required.
5. Practice self-compassion. Remind yourself of the truth. We all have our unique gifts. In self-esteem terms no matter the situation, you are loveable and capable.... period.

How is this feeling information going to help you at work? Daniel Goleman wrote in *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, “Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.”

Most of us have done it. We have walked out on a loved one, slammed a door, said something we regretted or burst into rage or tears. I have been there screaming, “I will go crazy if you don’t do that!” I needed to learn emotional regulation skills. By the way, I did!

We tend to worry too much, resent too much, complain too much, and feel angry too much. Toddlers are known for their temper tantrums and teenagers are known for their sullenness or screeching “I hate you!” Regrettably, sometimes, some adults are also known for not managing their emotions.

Dr. Bruce Perry, a researcher at The Heart Math Institute who works with traumatized children, and the late, Dr. Al Siebert, resiliency researcher, have developed methods to help us regulate our emotions and, consequently, our behaviors.

2. Self-Sooth Your Inner Baby with Emotional Regulation

“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

You can learn to regulate your thoughts and calm your feelings. Let me make it clear



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that we are not suggesting denying, stifling or bottling up emotions. Feelings need to be acknowledged before they can be contained and regulated.

Think of Emotional Regulation as self-soothing. That is why parent/baby bonding, rocking, and attending to young children's needs are crucial, as is helping children name what they feel. These caregiving behaviors set the grounding for adult Emotional Regulation.

Five Steps to Blowing a Fuse: Get It! Notice It! Stop It!

Note: this process is similar to the *fight or flight* reaction.

1. A situation or event triggers the lower, primitive part of the brain (older, survival or reptilian brain). Examples: You are called a rude name, are told you have lost your job or a relationship ends.
2. The primitive brain makes associations to past trauma (often from the first 4 years of life). Examples: being left alone in an unsafe situation, shamed or verbally, physically or sexually abused.
3. A flight, fright or freeze effect is activated. Heart rate increases, nerve ends tense, breathing becomes shallow, and senses become hyper-vigilant.
4. The frontal or cortical area of the brain (thinking brain) shuts down. You cannot think!
5. A reaction, versus calm and collected response, occurs. It feels as if you are exploding with words, gestures and/or physical activity.

Dr. Perry has said, "The only way to move from these super-high anxiety states to calmer more cognitive states, is through rhythm . . . walking, running, singing, repetitive meditative breathing."

Hang In There! Five Steps to Emotional Regulation

1. A situation or event triggers the lower, primitive or older part of the brain (survival or reptilian brain).



2. Your frontal (thinking brain) is activated to remind you that you have a choice.
3. You choose to self-detach from your emotional state. You imagine being a fly on the wall as if watching yourself in a movie. You become no longer a hostage to your feelings.
4. You utilize or breathing or other self-soothing rhythms to bring you to calm.
5. You choose what to say or do next.

Five Ways to GO DEEP into CALM Emotional Waters

1. Develop a practice of breathing, meditation, yoga or dancing that you can rely upon. At the same time, develop a sense of a witness or high self who watches with detachment. *Ah-so, all is well.*
2. Practice self-compassion for those times you do blow a fuse.
3. Learn to identify your feeling states and become more comfortable with the anxiety-producing emotions.
4. Have strategies to engage in difficult conversations.
5. Deepen your sense of gratitude for moments of love, joy, and disconnectedness.

3. ASAP, Let Go of your Stressed Tears!

“Better to cry on the outside than drown on the inside.”

—Gwendolyn Jansma

Crying is the baby’s natural response when his or her needs are not met. Regrettably, we have been socialized out of our appreciation for a *good cry*. When I was leading a



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professional development seminar, a young career woman asked me, “How can you stop yourself from crying in front of your boss?” My thought was, “How sad,” as I recalled releasing tears in front of *safe managers* and, as a manager, supporting others as they cried in front of me.

The biochemist, William Frey, author of *Crying: The Mystery of Tears*, concluded that nearly one-half of tears shed are letting go of sadness. Sometimes tears express fear, anxiety, anger and even extreme happiness. Many of us cry until we laugh or laugh until we cry. Frey also concluded that tears, along with perspiration, urine and exhalation rid our bodies of toxins and other waste.

Yet, our culture has strong taboos about crying:

- “Don’t be a wimp!”
- “He broke down.”
- “She couldn’t hold it together.”
- The famous Donald Trump line, “You’re fired...especially if you cry!”

I will never forget receiving this shaming statement, “You are using your tears to control us,” from a family worker during a therapy session when I was nursing our newborn baby. I was recovering from surgery and feeling sleep deprived. My tears said, “I give up. I have nothing left inside to give.” Over the years, I have repeatedly witnessed the same reality with hundreds of other women I have supported.

Five suggestions to have a safe cry:

1. If it is risky for your manager to witness tears, breathe deeply, feel your feet on the floor and look up towards the ceiling. Looking down tends to take us deeper into feelings.
2. Another option is to imagine a bubble around yourself. As you breathe in, focus on strengthening your solar plexus or inner core. These first two

strategies help you contain tears until you can take them somewhere emotionally safe. If containing the tears is just too much, say, “Excuse me, I will be back in five minutes.” Go have your cry, blow your nose and drink some water.

3. When it is safe to do so, find a caring person and/or place to have a good cry. Let it out.
4. If the tears are stuck in your stomach, chest or throat, have a bubble bath, watch a tender movie, read old love letters or curl up on your sweetie’s lap. Relax until you can weep.
5. Don’t swallow tears.

4. When All Else Fails: BREATHE!

“What about the rat race in the first place? Is it worthwhile? Or are you just buying into someone else’s definition of success? Only you can decide that, and you’ll have to decide it over and over and over. But if you think it’s a rat race, before you drop out, take a deep breath.”

— Sheryl Sandberg

Seven Steps to Calm

Use these 7 steps to build your emotional regulation muscle:

1. Name your distress. Learn to recognize when your hands are sweaty, your heart is pounding, and your thoughts are spinning.
2. Watch a breath go in through your nostrils, into your heart, through your lungs and fill your belly.
3. Watch that same breath go out and imagine it flowing out and down to your toes. Do that again, again, and again.
4. Think of a pleasant time — a time in someone’s arms, watching a sunset or

laughing with a child.

5. Imagine yourself stepping back from the cause of your distress. You could imagine yourself sitting on the moon and noticing. Name your distress in personal terms—insecurity, fear, excluded. “Is there a better way for me to manage this present situation?”
6. Continue to notice and to breathe in and out of your heart. Gently ask yourself, “How can I take care of myself and how might I better manage this situation?”
7. Use your heart and mind to either accept the situation or take your best action.

CONCLUSION

This book provides many stress solutions to manage your distress while building resilience. But it is up to you to practice the best-fit ideas for you, your relationships, and your situation.

Please, surround yourself with supports to keep at it. I often fall off the self-care wagon, especially keeping up with my exercise routine. Then, I try something else. This time around I have an accountability buddy. We send each other a thumbs up when we've finished our daily exercises.

There are few rights, wrongs, bad or good. Explore and find what supports you. I am cheering you on. In the end, my wish for you is that you *stress less* and *live more!*

WANT MORE HELP OR RESOURCES?

Consider checking out my website, particularly the over 250 posts at <https://solutionsforresilience.com> While there, take the Score Your Resilience at <https://solutionsforresilience.com/resilience-quiz>. Also, consider having a look-see at my books at <https://solutionsforresilience.com/product-category/books>.

If I can help you in another way please contact me at 403-242-7796 or patricia@SolutionsForResilience.com.

In the meantime, here's to better managing your stress while building your resilience. Remember you are most likely *Stronger than you think!*

Patricia



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



With a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology, **Patricia Morgan** offers her expertise to strengthen personal and workplace resilience. She works with helping professionals, women and those at professional development and wellness events to lighten their load and brighten their outlook. Audiences describe Patricia's message as meaningfully fun, surprisingly insightful and delightfully uplifting.

Patricia has authored eight books including ***Woe to WOW: How Resilient Women Succeed at Work***, the Canadian best selling mini-book, ***Frantic Free: 167 Ways to Calm Down and Lighten Up*** and the award-winning, ***Love Her As She Is***, which was featured on national radio and television, including a documentary.

Patricia is a recipient of Global TV's Woman of Vision and the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers' Spirit of CAPS for her contribution to excellence in the Canadian speaking industry. Check her out at <https://solutionsforresilience.com>