

Know your stress

Are there times you feel 'pushed to the limit' or overwhelmed?

What causes stress is different for each person. In child care or school-age settings, a late parent, a whining child, too much paperwork or your own lack of sleep might cause stress. Writing down what causes you stress can be a good first step in bouncing back from stress.

Think about those times when you feel stressed. List up to six stressors in your life.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Think about how easy it was to list the sources of stress in your life. Could you quickly write them down? Or was it a challenge to come up with six stressors? Are the sources of your stress at work or at home?

Follow up:

Now that you have listed your sources of stress, look at your list again and star the top three.

Coping with stress

How you deal with stress is very individual. You may tune out everyone around you, become anxious, write in a journal, overeat, talk to someone, ask for help, pray, or use some other coping strategy.

All of these actions can be put into one of three general categories listed below. As you read them, look at your “Know your stress” list from above and think about how you usually respond to stress.

Avoid the stress

You may avoid stress or not deal with the source of stress head-on. An example of trying to avoid stress is ignoring a co-worker rather than talking to her about a problem. Extreme stress at work might cause you to call in sick or use a vacation day to avoid work altogether. Although a break or pause is sometimes needed, total avoidance doesn’t resolve the stressful situation. In fact, avoidance can make problems worse, leading to even more stress.

Problem solve

You may try to solve a problem to reduce the stress. This is a positive step towards dealing with the stressful situation. An example of coping with stress by problem solving might be to plan a meeting with your director to strategize how to work with a family who is repeatedly late for pick-up, a cause of great stress for you. Problem-solving strategies not only fix problems and reduce stress, but can also help by preventing stress from happening.

Get emotional support

Stressful experiences can bring many emotions to the surface such as anger, sadness, frustration, anxiety, and more. Asking for help is a great way to get emotional support. For example, you may vent to a co-worker about a problem, seek the advice of a mentor, use positive self-talk, or try an outside source such as a yoga class to help handle the stress. Emotional support is often reinforced in social settings and experiences. Connecting with others socially, even for simple conversation, can offer helpful encouragement. Emotional support can help you manage and cope with the stress in a positive manner.

How do you cope with stress?

Use the top three stressors that you starred on the “Know your stress” list to respond to the questions below to help you think about and identify how you are dealing with stress. There is no right or wrong response.

Top stress factor 1: _____

• Emotionally and physically this makes me feel:

• I respond to (or cope with) this stress by:

• This stress happens (check one): ☐ constantly ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely

Top stress factor 2: _____

• Emotionally and physically this makes me feel:

• I respond to (or cope with) this stress by:

• This stress happens (check one): ☐ constantly ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely

Top stress factor 3: _____

• Emotionally and physically this makes me feel:

• I respond to (or cope with) this stress by:

• This stress happens (check one): ☐ constantly ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely

Reflection activity:

Review how you responded to each of the three stress factors. Next, think about which type of coping style (avoid the stress, solve the problem, get emotional support) best defines how you deal with your top three stress factors. Beside the identified stress, name which type of coping mechanism you used—avoid the stress, solve the problem, get emotional support—or maybe you used a combination of coping mechanisms.