

Tips for When Things Feel Out of Control

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According to Dr. Sonia Lupien, director of the Center for Studies on Human Stress, all stressors contain one or more of the following:

- **N** - Novelty; something new
- **U** - Unpredictability; no way of knowing it could occur
- **T** - Threat to the ego; feeling your competence is questioned
- **S** - Sense of control; feeling you have little or no control in a situation

Engaging in self-care and identifying your personal emotional regulation strategies can help you feel more in control of your emotions and reactions. The more parents are stressed, the more their child will produce high levels of stress hormones.

Using N.U.T.S to De Stress

- **Identify the which of 4 N.U.T.S. characteristic is causing you (or your child) stress**
 - Knowing the “why” makes it easier to understand your (or your child’s) reactions.
- **Take (small) steps to reduce symptoms related to the stress**
 - When we are feeling powerless or anxious, our natural tendency is often to think “You have to fix this right now or else!” But if you put that feeling aside, logic informs that you (and your child) are human and can only do so much at one time. Many times, the most important thing to do first, is to self-regulate in the moment.

7 Steps for Increasing Regulation:

1. **Pause: Decrease the reaction time between a trigger and your response.**
 - This is often easier said than done. Identifying your emotional intensity level can help.
 - Where is the intensity of your emotion on a 1-10 scale (10 highest). When we are at a 8 or above, it’s often pretty hard to engage in effective communication and we are often at risk of explosive behavior we may end up regretting. For children, it may be hard regulating above a 6.
 - During stressful times it’s important to acknowledge feelings we are experiencing, the intensity of these feelings, and understanding what our physical warning signs are.
2. **Use helpful coping skills: Each person’s coping skills may look different.**
 - The key is that these are healthy and helpful coping skills we develop an awareness of over time.
 - Examples of in the moment coping skills may include but not limited to: taking a break/time out, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, 5/4/3/2/1 grounding techniques, visualization, squeezing a stress ball.
3. **Identify the emotion. Name what you are feeling.**
 - Give your self-permission to feel this emotion. We are human and emotions are normal. A mindfulness statement such as “I notice I am feeling (insert emotion(s here))” may be helpful to say to yourself.

4. **Notice your thoughts: Are these positive and helpful or negative and unhelpful?**
 - Reframe your thoughts to helpful, positive, and accurate thoughts. Replace negative self-talk.
5. **Seek support when needed.**
 - Managing our own emotions can be difficult especially when we are alone. Sometimes working with a therapist can be helpful to find better ways of coping with our emotions finding ways to reduce the impacts of stressors on our lives.
 - If you are supporting your child, provide them validation of their feelings. Validation does not mean you agree with their behaviors but rather communicates understanding of their feelings.
6. **Engage in Regular Physical Activity to Elevate Your Mood.**
 - 10 minutes a day of physical activity COUNTS! Our schedules are busy, give yourself credit for what you can fit in and not discount it!
7. **Focus on Gratitude**
 - When problems feel endless, we often tend to fixate on the negatives. In difficult moments, tap into gratitude as an emotional reset. When you want to lash out in anger, pause... identify three things you're grateful for right now, like deep breaths, the sunlight through the window, or the ability to provide comfort to those whom you love.

Emotional regulation is a journey requiring patience and commitment. Be compassionate to yourself and seek support when needed.