

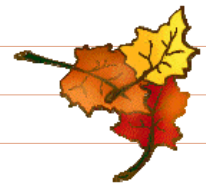


Creating Calmness

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The school year has begun! Parents, teachers, and children readjust to “back to school” schedules, while others make the most out of the last days of summer. Autumn is right around the corner. Soon the hot days will end. It will be time to take the sweaters out again for the cooler days ahead! I just love the fall season. There is something so beautiful about leaves softly falling from the trees, covering the ground with bright red, yellow, and orange colors.



September is known as the “mellow” month. With this in mind, I started to think about what mellow means to me. I often go to the park to read on a beautiful day. I usually sit on a blanket, under a tree. The blue sky is calming, along with the sun shining on my face. As I turn the pages, I’m kissed by cool breezes and touched by friendly faces walking by. There is a rhythm and routine around me. There are no time restraints. It is just me embracing nature, so easy going and serene.

“Calmness is a state of being which allows you to see and experience the world around you”

What do you think about when you hear the word mellow?

How mellow do you think you are on a daily basis?

What areas of your life would benefit from a relaxed state of mind?

What do you think it would be like to live a life full of calmness?



We all have stress in our lives. It would be unrealistic to say that we can eliminate all stress, but we can decrease it. It is important to know how to handle stress to live a healthy and happy life. You can learn how to manage your stress at a level that is healthy and comfortable.

How much stress are you carrying around right now?

Stress is defined as a condition experienced when an individual's perception of demands exceed the individual's social and personal resources. It is a feeling we experience when we lose control. Stress occurs any time something frustrates our goals or something unexpected happens. When we are anxious and irritable, our ability to cope with life situations and work effectively with others is altered.

Sources of Stress

- **Survival Stress-** This occurs when you experience a challenging event, you are under pressure, or your safety/health is threatened. Your body prepares for the "fight or flight" response, releasing adrenaline in your body.
- **Internally Generated Stress-** This occurs when you worry about events that are beyond your control, experience relationship problems, or have a very tense approach to life.
- **Environmental Stress-** Contributing factors to this stress are distractions, noise, space, clutter, cleanliness, and pollution.
- **Job Stress-** This is directly related to issues and events from the workplace.
- **Fatigue/Overwork-** This is a source of stress that builds up over a long period of time. You may try to accomplish too much in a short amount of time or you have difficulty managing your time effectively.

If I asked you, Where does the majority of your stress come from, what would you say?

A large portion of stress comes from jobs and lifestyle.

Most of us can relate to one or more of the following:

too much work (not enough fun), deadlines and time pressure, lack of support and understanding, expectations to perform beyond experience, demands from clients & organizations, health issues, financial worries, uncertainty, and family & personal concerns.

These factors contribute to a vicious cycle of stress which causes frustration, more stress, and the inability to relax.

"You will know when you achieve peace; every action and reaction you have will change"

The way we handle the stress in our lives depends on the nature of the stressor, how we perceive it, and the amount of resources available to us to address the situation. Think about your coping skills during stressful situations. What works well for you? What is your biggest challenge? What is one step you can take to improve your coping skills?

I'd like to share some stress reduction methods with you:

- **Imagery-** This is ideal for times when we are not able to change our environment to manage stress. Use your imagination to create and enjoy a relaxing situation. Imagine a place that is beautiful, peaceful, safe, and joyful.
- **Exercise/Nutrition-** Eating an unbalanced diet deprives the body of essential nutrients needed to function properly, causing body stress. Exercise improves blood flow to the brain (removing toxic waste products) and releases endorphins into the blood stream. Exercise is one of the best physical stress reduction techniques!
- **Physical Relaxation Techniques-** These include Deep Breathing, Progressive Muscular Relaxation, and "The Relaxation Response." *Deep breathing* is used with yoga, meditation, and as a calming method. *Progressive muscular relaxation* is used to relax the body when muscles are tense (You tense a group of muscles as tightly as possible, hold, and then relax). With the *Relaxation Response*, begin by sitting quietly, close your eyes, and relax the muscles of your feet (working up your body), focus on your breathing while counting your breaths. Continue these steps for 10-20 minutes.
- **Positive Attitude-** Maintaining a positive attitude will help you focus on the positive elements in every situation. A negative attitude will contribute to problems and cause added stress. Practice observing your thoughts when you are under stress. Write them down. How are they helping/hindering you? Use positive affirmations daily to counteract negative thoughts.
- **Time Management-** Learning how to prioritize effectively can eliminate stress overload. Think about your top 3 priorities of the day. Why is it important for you to complete these today? What steps do you have to take to finish these tasks? Tackling goals, projects, and work- one step at a time, will help you stay relaxed in the process.
- **Pleasant Environment-** An organized and pleasant environment reduces stress and can also increase productivity. If you live or work in an environment that is neglected, dirty, or uncomfortable, this can add to your stress. Create an environment that inspires you and makes you feel good!

Practicing healthy coping skills will help you stay positive when facing new challenges, along with increasing personal growth!

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