

# Stress Management and the Individual with Special Needs

1 Hour Training

**STRESS** = Arousal of the mind or body in response to demands made upon them.

Most people already realize when they are under stress. Your stomach may hurt, you sweat, your heartbeat accelerates, etc. Not many people realize though that a certain amount of stress in our lives enables us to be productive as well as creative. Conversely, low levels of stress may leave people feeling stagnant, dissatisfied, or frustrated. Consider the following diagram:

	This is where we want to be Creative	
Headaches; stomach aches; dizziness; etc		Lack of growth: Stagnant
STRESS IS TOO HIGH	POSITIVE STRESS	STRESS IS TOO LOW

## PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS OF HIGH STRESS:

Insomnia > Fatigue

Headaches

High Blood Pressure

Shoulder Stiffness

Irritability

Tension Increased

Anger Increased

Frustration Neck

Stiffness

## STRESS UNIQUE TO WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

1. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS
  - a. Need for more time
  - b. Communication
  - c. Slow progress
  - d. Behavior difficulties
  
2. WORKING WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS
  - a. Extremes of parent/guardian involvement
  - b. Need for individual to be “fixed”
  - c. Guilt of placement of the individual
  
3. GRIEF
  - a. Grief of Caregivers
  - b. Grief of parents/guardians

## WAYS FOR YOU TO COMBAT STRESS RELATED TO INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. Self-Talk: Remember to tell yourself that you are doing the very best you can do that day. Some days you'll be able to do more; some days, less. Avoid using phrases such as “could have” or “should have”.
  
2. Changeyourenvironment: Make time to take a break from stressful activities. Take a break; short walk; something that will take you completely away from the environment. If possible, leave the house/building for a few minutes.
  
3. Projects: Get involved in a project or hobby that really interests you. It should be something that you enjoy and will allow you to focus only on that activity. It should be something that you feel is important and will give you a sense of purpose.
  
4. Spend time with individuals without special needs: Taking time for this inclusion will help you remember that we all have the same stresses and frustrations.
  
5. Settingsmallgoals: Since individuals with developmental delay develop more slowly, it is helpful to set small goals to see their progress and to not feel that your efforts are in vain.

6. Take courses: By continuing your education/training, you will have more tools to help you better perform your job and better help the individual with whom you work. Talk to your supervisor about ideas to access in the community or activities that can assist with the goals your client has.
7. Get consultations for behavioral or communication difficulties: No one has to believe “that it is all on their shoulders.” There are agencies and other professionals that would be happy to share their experience and offer treatment options. ACS Waiver provides consultation services. If you think this may be appropriate for your client, talk to your supervisor.

## WAYS TO COMBAT THE STRESS OF WORKING WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

1. Take turns with fellow staff members in dealing with difficult parents/guardians. You can find out from your supervisor if there is other staff who works with your client. If so, collaboration has been a great tool for a lot of our staff. If not, your supervisor can give you some other alternatives.
2. Keep parents/guardians informed of what’s going on with your client.
3. Give positive examples of the individual’s ability first before focusing on what they need.
4. DO NOT take their anger personally.
5. Positive self-talk.
6. Prepare parents for time when individuals are transitioning. You can get assistance with this from your supervisor or case manager.
7. Keep a folder of the individual’s work (if applicable) to show parents/guardians.

## Finally, here are some things that you can use to relieve stress:

1. Humor: Studies have proven that people who laugh on a regular basis have lower blood pressure, get sick less often, and tend to enjoy life more. Learn to laugh at yourself. Find the humor in everyday situations.
2. TimeManagement: Learn to prioritize. Group your responsibilities by what needs to be done first, second, third, etc. Rarely does everything need to be done right now.
3. Sleep: Get adequate sleep. Most adults need to get at least 7 hours a day to perform at their peak. Don't be afraid to take naps; listen to your body.
4. Diet: Limit your caffeine intake. Some people believe that the B vitamins help with stress by helping to maintain the nervous system.
5. Exercise: Regular exercise is a proven way to reduce stress. Aerobic exercise at least 20 minutes 3 times a week is all you need to experience the stress relieving benefits.
6. Relaxation/Deepbreathing: When most people are under stress they tend to breathe very shallow. This results in the body not receiving enough oxygen.
7. Self-talk: You will never achieve perfection so give up that little illusion now. Be kind to yourself; applaud your achievements; and when you make mistakes, simply acknowledge the mistake and commit to doing a better job next time.
8. Visualization: Create an image in your mind that promotes a feeling of well being. Imagine how you would be feeling if you were at that place. Maybe a little corny but it's worth a try!

**ACCESS CODE** for test: **Path2022**