

Stress, What We Can Do About It

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Abstract

When we talk about the holistic health triangle, we deal with the whole body: structural or physical, chemical-nutritional or detox, and mental-emotional or spiritual. This paper deals with the mental-emotional aspects of the body, showing how we create stress and suffering in our lives and how we can deal with this stress constructively.

Introduction

It is quite clear to me that stress is here to stay. It seems to be a natural part of living. What we need to learn though is how to deal with the stress in our life. But before we can learn to deal with our stress, we have to learn what is the cause of our stress, what lies behind it.

What is stopping us from getting what we want out of life? Why are we constantly badgering ourselves about what people say or do, or about what they don't say or do, or about our wants and desires, our hurts and our disappointments, about our feeling of being intimidated?

Do you ever wonder why we keep creating the same situations over and over again? We can change relationships, or change jobs, and still create the same pattern of stress and suffering. Is it the job or relationship that is causing the problem or is it our own internal emotional programming? The changes needed to reduce stress are within ourselves, but how do we change the internal programming?

It seems like we keep churning over in our minds things we don't have instead of concentrating on things we do have. What we have a tendency to do is to create more stress and suffering. If our happiness depends on what other people say or do, we are in deep trouble.

Addictions and Preferences

Ken Keyes, Jr., author of the well-known *Handbook to Higher Consciousness* (ref. 2), helped me to get started on the Road to Happiness. His basic premise is that **ADDICTIONS ARE THE ONLY CAUSE OF SUFFERING.**

In this context **suffering** means any form of mental stress, and **addictions** refer to any emotion-backed demand. An addiction is something you may want and when you don't get it, you create suffering. If you are concerned about what people say or do and create being hurt, disappointed, angry, or annoyed when they don't behave as you want, this is an example of an addiction, which you may or may not be aware of.

What can we do about addictions and the resulting stress? If we wish to eliminate the stress, we must learn how to up-level our addictions to preferences. A **preference** is a desire or demand, something you want, but, unlike an addiction, you do not create suffering or emotional stress if you don't get your preference.

The difference between an addiction and a preference can be explained as follows. If you are addicted to getting approval from someone, you will create suffering if you don't get the approval, but as a preference, you will not create any suffering or emotional stress if you don't get the approval. Yes, you would still prefer to get the approval, but considering it is only a preference, you don't have to create the suffering and stress when it is not forthcoming. As a preference, you can still continue to work for approval, you just don't choose to create the stress and suffering if you don't succeed.

This is one way that we can delete stress. In fact, experience shows that you are more likely to get what you want, if you can come from a non-addictive frame of mind, since the absence of stress allows you to perform more effectively.

OUTSIDE EVENT WHAT IS	+	ADDICTIVE PROGRAMMING	=	SUFFERING
OUTSIDE EVENT WHAT IS	+	PREFERENTIAL PROGRAMMING	=	HAPPINESS

If you have a tendency to create stress even though you up-level your more obvious addictions to preferences, then you need to look further for more subtle addictions.

Remember that it is only our internal emotional programming that determines our addictions. To up-level our addictions to preferences, we need to modify our internal programming. The changes that are needed are within ourselves. If we can change within, we won't be so antagonistic toward others and ourselves.

Accepting What Is

One of the first things we have to do is to not deny our feelings. We have to get out of our rationalizing heads and into our gut level where we instinctively feel our emotions. This became quite apparent to me when I was working on regaining my health. In my head I wanted to be healthy, but a little voice in my gut asked, "Do you want to bet?" Through muscle testing we discovered that for me at a subconscious gut level being sick was a way of life and my body didn't want to change that.

Before I could start getting well I had to accept that part of myself that wanted to be sick. Accept the unacceptable. Being healthy for me was very threatening, because I no longer had a built-in excuse for getting out of things I didn't want to do. Being sick had become a way of life, although I wasn't really consciously aware of that. And my subconscious programming to be sick was going to strongly resist change and giving up that built-in excuse.

The **what is** in my life was that I was sick. What was causing my suffering was my addictive demand that I not be sick. I was emotionally rejecting the **what is in my life**. I had to look at my internal emotional programming to see why I was keeping

myself stuck on being unhealthy. The changes I needed to get well were entirely within myself.

The first thing I had to do to correct this situation was to accept myself not being healthy. What you resist persists. That isn't saying I had to like being sick. We have a tendency to deny how we really feel, our hurts, disappointments, sadness, anger, disgust. This is where all the stress comes from. We need to accept an awareness of how we are really making ourselves feel, to stop telling ourselves things are OK when they really are not.

We create our own reality; so let's start taking responsibility for it. Nobody is doing it to us. We do it to ourselves, and that is OK. Just be aware of what our internal programming is. "An angry person lives in an angry world, and a loving person lives in a loving world." (Ref. 3) Remember everybody is doing what he or she needs to do. They are working out of their own programming, and it does not mean anything about us.

When we talk about taking responsibility, we are talking about taking responsibility for our feelings, for our own emotional programming. We always have a choice on how we feel at any particular moment. Have you ever noticed how one person might be angered by a certain situation and another person will think it is funny and not create any anger. It is their internal programming that created their very different reactions to the same situation.

We can learn to take full responsibility for everything we experience. **"It is our own internal programming that creates our actions and also influences the reactions of people around us."** (Ref. 3)

Everybody is our mirror. Usually what we don't like about someone else, or about what

they are doing or saying, is something we wouldn't like about ourselves. When we can start accepting ourselves the way we are, then we can start accepting others the way they are. When we talk about acceptance in this context, we are referring to the emotional level only. We do not mean that we necessarily approve of the situation or may not try to change things (from a preferential space) at a later time. What we are accepting is the here and now moment, the **what is** in our life.

Affirmations

Another way to decrease stress is to use positive programming. Again what we want to do is to change our addictions to preferences. The use of affirmations can be very helpful if they are being used in this way. On the other hand, using an affirmation that supports the addictive demand will keep creating the same stress of suffering over and over again.

Even though you are using affirmations, they may not be the best affirmations for you. We want to use affirmations we can live with. Muscle testing is a useful technique for checking to see if an affirmation is energy building and thus stress reducing.

As an example, I recall a client in 1982 who came to me crying, angry, annoyed, disgusted, etc. She was not able to concentrate on her work because her mind was addictively dominated by her eighteen year old daughter, who was drinking excessively, smoking pot, and using hard drugs. "What can I do?", she cried. "Can't she see how she is abusing her body? I don't want to have anything to do with her. When she calls for me to come to get her in the car, I just tell her, 'Don't come home.' Go stay with your filthy friends. You know I don't approve of your behavior!" And on and on she went with her lament, making herself right and her daughter wrong.

Now this client was committed to holistic health. She had healed herself from smoking, alcoholism, and cancer, using holistic health techniques. She also believed very much in the use of affirmations. The affirmation she was using was, "I can forgive myself for

abusing my body". She was saying this affirmation over and over again to no avail. It was at this point I started using muscle testing to check her for her use of affirmations. By using muscle testing we were asking her body whether she accepted the affirmation at the gut level. This took me out of the picture and put the responsibility back on her shoulders, letting her make the decision whether she wanted to use the affirmation or not.

When I tested her arm as she was saying her affirmation, "I can forgive myself for abusing my body", her arm unlocked. She started crying again. I asked her if she could accept herself when she was abusing her body by drinking, smoking, and having cancer. She replied that she couldn't. In her mind there was no way that she could accept or forgive herself for what she had done. So saying the affirmation was meaningless to her. It was only words.

The insight I got was that for her using the word "forgive" was a confirmation that she had done something wrong. Jesus said, "Forgive them for they know **not** what they do." This is quite different than saying, "forgive them for what they have done." We need to learn to not blame ourselves for our past problems. We can see these as valuable lessons that can help us to act in a more constructive way next time. Blaming only prolongs the stress and suffering and blocks us from moving on to a more productive attitude.

As the session went on she started to see how her daughter was her mirror. She couldn't accept her daughter drinking, smoking, and taking drugs, and abusing her body, because she couldn't accept herself when she had abused her body by doing the same. Her daughter was only her mirror reflecting all the things she didn't like about herself. This is why she was creating so much stress and suffering over what her daughter was doing.

I suggested that she put down on paper about five affirmations that she thought she could live with. I gave her one also, "I can accept myself when I abuse my body." (Note: affirmations usually are most effective when structured as a positive statement in the present tense; this helps to keep us in the here

and now moment.) I muscle tested each one of the six affirmations to determine which ones she responded to with positive energy. The only one that muscle tested strong was the one I had suggested. She decided to use that affirmation, "I can accept myself when I abuse my body."

Don't reject the **what is**. Acceptance is on the emotional basis only. She didn't have to like what she had done in the past. She can keep her opinion that it was not a healthy thing to do. She can work on changing the situation, which she did, curing herself from drinking, smoking, and cancer. By using this affirmation she is now up-leveling her addiction that she not abuse her body to a preference.

When I saw her again she was all smiles. Her daughter stopped drinking, smoking pot, and using drugs. When she was able to accept herself, she was able to accept her daughter just the way she was. She was able to relate to her daughter from a loving, caring space, rather than from an angry space. With this change, her daughter no longer needed to persist with her provocative behavior. Then she and her daughter were able to live together in harmony.

Taking Risks

We are like a baby monkey in a tree reaching out for a higher branch while still having his tail wrapped around the branch he is on. He is reaching out, but still holding on for dear life. He is afraid to let go for fear he might fall. Afraid to take the risk of letting go. If you don't take the risk, you may never know whether you can do it or not. So we keep ourselves stuck. We keep doing the same things over and over again even though they don't work. We act as robots. You have to let go of past addictive negative programming to move on.

When we refer to **programming** in this context, we are referring to everything that we constantly tell ourselves with our endless mind chatter. These are the tapes that run endlessly and continually shape our automatic emotional responses.

What we are talking about letting go of is our negative, self-sabotaging programming by taking charge and changing what we are

telling ourselves. We have to take that risk in order to grow and to reduce our stress and suffering. Sometimes it is not as bad as you might think. Look for the positive potential in something we might label as a bad experience. Ask yourself what is the lesson you can learn from this, rather than what went wrong or who is to blame.

What is stopping us from getting what we want from life?

This reminds me about a client who went to her boss, asked for a raise, and got a 25 cent an hour raise. She was very upset and created a lot of hurt, disappointment, anger, and disgust. She even thought about quitting. She thought she was worthy of a bigger raise, like \$2 an hour more. The bottom line is that it is best to be specific about what you want. If you think you are worth \$2 an hour more, ask for it. If you are too general, you take pot luck. Put out for what you want, but don't be addicted to getting it. You have to take a risk. Feel good about what you want.

My husband, Hap, used to say to me all the time, "If you want something, tell me what you want. Don't ask me what I want." It is often very risky asking for what you want or telling the other person what you want for fear that they will say no. So, when I wanted to do something, I would ask Hap if he wanted to do it, and frequently he would say no. I finally realized that if I asked Hap to do something I wanted to do, without telling him that I wanted to do it, he would say no if he didn't want to do it. But if I told him what I wanted to do, he still had a choice. Most of the time he would agree to do it support me. That was a gift he could afford to give.

One day when we were visiting my mother in Pennsylvania, I said to Hap that I would like to go to Michigan to the ICAK 20th anniversary meeting. Hap said fine. My mother and sister jumped all over me. "You didn't even ask him if he wanted to go, you told him you wanted to go." What she didn't understand is that I didn't tell him he had to go. I just told him I would like to go. He could have said yes or no. If I would have asked him if he wanted to go without telling him that I wanted to go, he may have said no. Then I would be creating needless suffering and stress.

How To Stop An Argument

It takes two people to make an argument, and only one person to stop it. To coin a phrase, there are two sides to every coin.

In my counseling sessions I use a pillow with a different design on either side. I hold it so that I see one side and the client sees the other side. It is amazing how many times we would sit and argue about what we saw. The bottom line is that what the other person is seeing or saying is just as right as what you are seeing or saying.

When you are having an argument, what the other person really wants to hear is that you heard what they are saying. Merely acknowledging what the other person said and deleting your need to respond with your own version will usually end the argument, often with surprising results.

A good example of this occurred when I was working in an office. I had just returned from a week-long vacation at a Ken Keyes' workshop. My desk was piled high with backlogged work. One of the other girls came into my office and asked me to get something for her. Because I did not immediately drop what I was doing and get what she wanted, she became quite impatient and started yelling at the top of her lungs, "You never cooperate around here! You never do anything for anyone else!" Now this was not the first time this sort of thing had happened with her. Previously I had always re-acted angrily and defensively. Now I tried a new response that I had learned at the Ken Keyes' workshop. I said to her quietly and with compassion, "I hear you saying that I don't cooperate around here. Thank you." Somewhat confused by this unexpected response that left no handles for continued argument, she said, "That is not what I meant." She found what she was looking for and went storming out of my office. She never accused me of being uncooperative again or made unreasonable demands on my time. All I had done was to acknowledge what she said. She had been acting out of her own programming, and her attitude meant nothing about me.

Holding Grudges

Maybe you have wondered why sometimes someone you might know very well suddenly doesn't want to be with you. This happened with my mother one time when I went to visit with her. When I wanted to give her a hug like I always do, she pushed me away. I couldn't understand what happened. My rationalizing mind said that maybe she is not feeling well. I thought no more about it.

A few days later I came to visit again. When I went to give her a hug, she pushed me away again. I couldn't figure out what I could have done wrong. I wouldn't knowingly do anything to hurt her.

She didn't want me to come near her. I created sadness and disappointment, but again I just shrugged it off, hoping that things would change. Finally my sister came to me and told me what happened and asked me to speak to her. It seems I had been planning a birthday party for the sister with whom I was staying with. I was very careful to invite all her friends so that no one would be slighted. I invited my sister with whom my mother was staying which was about forty miles away, but they couldn't come I just assumed that if this sister and her family couldn't come, my mother couldn't come either since she would be dependent on them for transportation. I never gave it a second thought to ask her directly. My mother was very upset because I did not ask her personally. And as the story goes, she went around telling everyone how bad I was and how very much I had hurt her.

I wanted to heal this breach and knew that for this to work I had to do it in a nonconfronting and nonblaming way. I went to my mother and said to her, "I hear you are very angry and upset with me because I did not give you a personal invitation to the birthday party. You have every right to be angry. If I was in your shoes I would be very angry too. I hope you will accept my apology for my error." Then I gave her a big hug and she hugged me back. She responded and the problem was over.

People have a tendency to hold onto grudges and to feel separate from another person

instead of going to the person and telling them how they are feeling.

I remember having a very good time while visiting with a friend. Two years later I met the same person again. I was very happy to see her and went to give her a big hug, but she pushed me away. I couldn't understand this at all. Finally I said to my friend that I would like to talk with her privately; so we went into another room. I said, "I am making myself feel sad, hurt, and disappointed on how you are treating me. What could I have done that you didn't like? I would like to give you the opportunity to tell me what is bothering you." She had lots to say. I just

listened. I didn't interrupt her. I didn't need to defend. She was acting out of her own programming which meant nothing about me. After she got through, I thanked her for sharing her feelings with me and gave her a hug. After that things were much better between us. She still felt a little separate, but at least we could talk.

Silently give the other person permission to feel the way they do by internally accepting them just as they are. If the other person's friendship means a lot to you, you might have to take the risk and find out what the problem is. That is the risk I had to take.

What You Can Do About Stress

1. Up level all addictions to preferences.
2. Get in touch with your emotions, feelings.
3. Do not deny your feelings.
4. Take responsibility for your own actions and emotions.
5. Use affirmations you want to live with.
6. See that everyone is just your mirror.
7. Put out for what you want but don't be attached to getting it.
8. Learn to take risks.
9. Remember, there are two sides to every coin.
10. Give the other person the emotional space to be where they are at.
11. Don't play the right -wrong game.
12. Give up the need to defend.
13. Share your feelings from a non addictive space
14. Remember you are beautiful, lovable and capable just the way you are.

Shakespeare said, "THINGS ARE NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD.

IT'S ONLY OUR THOUGHTS THAT MAKE THEM SO."

References

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