

The American Institute of Stress

CONTENTMENT

Your source for science-based stress management information

Volume 10 Number 3

Fall 2021

Finding Contentment on an Unclear Path

*Inside: A Teacher's Way Out, By Jen Butler • A Remedy for Traveling Uncharted Territory, By Sharon Montes
• Talking to Your Kids About Stress, By Cynthia Ackrill • Are You Languishing? By Charles Grantham and Rebecca Ryan
• Creating Calm at Home, By Michelle Anne • Navigating Grief After a Sudden Death, By Jeff Jernigan*



The mission of AIS is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.

AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.

Your source for science-based stress management information

CONTENTMENT

We value opinions of our readers.

Contentment is a quarterly magazine published in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. *Contentment* magazine is indexed by EBSCO and archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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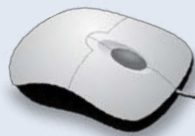
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Obtaining credentials from The American Institute of Stress is a designation that sets members apart as stress experts and reflects their commitment to the advancement of innovative and scientifically based stress management protocols. The AIS Seal and credentials inform the public that the certificate holder commands advanced knowledge of the latest stress research and stress management techniques. For physicians and other healthcare practitioners, it designates your practice as an advanced treatment center for stress-related illnesses.

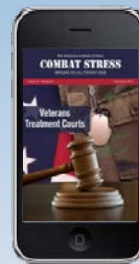


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The American Institute of Stress is a 501c3 non-profit organization, headquartered in Weatherford, Texas. We serve the global community through both online and in-person programs and classes. The Institute is dedicated to advancing understanding of the role of stress in health and illness, the nature and importance of mind/body relationships and how to use our vast innate potential for self-healing. Our paramount goal at the AIS is to provide a clearinghouse of stress related information to the general public, physicians, health professionals and lay individuals interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

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The American Institute of Stress is an executive producer of *Body Electric: Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine*, a documentary film aimed to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body. This 68 minute movie, by British producer/director/writer Justin Smith, is available online and on DVD for purchase through AIS.



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Editor's Message

Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS
Editor



As fall moves into the northern hemisphere and the pandemic refuses to loosen its grip on our world, evolving questions and continued confusion have replaced our (unrealistic) hopes of returning to pre-pandemic “normal.” By nature, we love certainty and feeling that there is a “right” answer to every choice, but the issues that plague us now are complex and play out polarity theory—there is an upside and downside to every choice we make. There is no clear “right” answer to what’s best for our future or the future of our children or our planet, and that alone can feel stressful.

In this sea of uncertainty and stressors, what can we “control?” What can we do to take care of ourselves and those around us, honor the layers of grief, and build up our stamina and resilience? How can we support the children and their educators facing yet another year of disruption and conflict? How do we better integrate mental well-being into our life choices and hopefully, culture?

One thing is certain—we need each other. Together we can make sense of what we are feeling and find ways to emerge stronger. Once again, I am so proud to share the wisdom of this amazing group of contributors, experts in the field helping us to understand our minds and hearts, make some sense of the challenges, and learn the science-based, concrete choices we can make now to thrive.

As the school year begins, we wanted to give particular support to the teachers (what heroes!) and the children whose lives and education have been so disrupted. We have included several articles chock full of specific tools to help them cope. You may see some repetition of suggestions across several pieces—please know that these are the tools we know make a difference and often practice ourselves. **Jen Butler, MEd, BCC, DAIS** reviews the many challenges plaguing teachers these days—you are not alone if you are feeling more stressed! Then she provides a comprehensive list of tools to make a difference right away.

Sharon Montes, MD, FAIS expands on her Resilience Recipe in the Summer 2021 issue with a wealth of pragmatic tools to help us prepare our minds for learning and teaching. Meeting the uncertainty and stress ahead with a well-stocked toolkit builds the coping confidence we need to shift the potential toxicity of stress to resilience. Dr. Montes even offers more resources at the end of her article.

I dream of a world in which our kids start learning critical stress management life skills and learn about the power they have within to make a difference in their experience of life, health, and happiness from the moment they enter the world. And while more and more schools do offer these, too many adults never had this education and struggle to help their kids with stress, often feeling shame for

their own stress. My article discusses talking to kids about stress, because it is a wonderful opportunity to grow resilience and well-being together. I hope it empowers you to have conversations that build confidence.

Another timely topic, languishing, is addressed by, **Charles Grantham, PhD, MSH, FAIS, APF** together with his colleague, **Rebecca Ryan, APF**. This term has been tossed about by the media as so many folks struggle to understand this sort of malaise and loss of vitality that seems pervasive in the pandemic fatigue phase. Together they dive deeply into the meaning of languishing as it exists on a spectrum between mental illness and flourishing. They discuss the confluence of factors that landed us here, and the choices we can make to move forward out of languishing into flourishing. The principles work for building all types of psychological immunity—the key to navigating the uncertainty with resilience and health.

Michelle Anne, PCC, DAIS illustrates the power of awareness and consciously dealing with the feelings and sensations of discomfort with a story which will resonate for many. How do we get our calm back when we are triggered? She offers her experience blending Eastern and Western approaches to rewire our minds to move beyond the automatic stress reaction. In so doing we can create more calm and stable environments in ourselves and in our

homes, setting us up to approach our changing world from a more secure and positive foundation.

And lastly, while *Contentment* traditionally focuses on stress more than trauma and mental pathologies, we recognize the full spectrum and enormity of emotional experiences during these tumultuous times. Grief, in particular grief associated with sudden death, has touched too many, challenging some of us firsthand, and affecting many more who care about those who are grieving. **Jeff Jernigan, PhD, BCPPC, FAIS** offers a short piece on how to navigate grief in the case of sudden death. He reminds us how personal the process of grief is. We need to be careful about our expectations, mindful of the ripple effects, and find ways to be present with such complex emotions.

Pick out a few ideas and tools that feel helpful to you and experiment or play with them with curiosity and compassion. Subtle shifts in how we frame our stress and respond to it can make such a huge difference in how we experience it. Share your insights; share these resources. Together we can emerge stronger and healthier!

Take care of YOU,

Cindi



THE COST OF STRESS.

The more we learn, the more vital our mission becomes.

The American Institute of Stress is the only organization in the world solely created and dedicated to study the science of stress and the advancement of innovative and scientifically based stress management techniques. AIS provides the latest evidence-based knowledge, research and management techniques for stress and stress-related disorders.

Groundbreaking insights and approaches. World-changing mission.

Hans Selye, MD, PhD (1907–1982), is known as the father of stress research. In the 1920s, Selye coined the term “stress” in the context of explaining his pioneering research into



the signs and symptoms of disease curiously common in the majority of people who were ill, regardless of the diagnoses. Selye’s concept of stress was revolutionary then, and it has only grown in significance in the century since he

began his work. Founded in 1978 at Dr. Selye’s request, the American Institute of Stress (AIS) continues his legacy of advancing the understanding of stress and its enormous

impacts on health and well-being worldwide, both on an individual and societal level.

A forthcoming AIS initiative – called **Engage. Empower. Educate.** – will leverage the latest research, tools and best practices for managing stress to make a difference in a world increasingly impacted by the effects of stress out of control. We hope you will consider supporting this critical outreach campaign.



[Click to view *The American Institute of Stress Case Statement*](#)

A campaign to Engage. Empower. Educate.

The AIS campaign will support three key initiatives:

Engage communities through public outreach



Improve the health and well-being of our communities and the world by serving as a nonprofit clearinghouse for information on all stress-related subjects.

The American Institute of Stress produces and disseminates a significant amount of evidence-based information, but there is a need to share this material with a wider audience in the U.S. and around the world.

Support for this initiative will provide funding to expand the organization's public outreach for its website and social media, documentary films, magazines, podcasts, blogs and courses.

Empower professionals through best practices



Establish credentials, best practices, and standards of excellence for stress management and fostering intellectual discovery among scientists, healthcare professionals, medical practitioners and others in related fields.

AIS provides DAIS (Diplomate, AIS) and FAIS (Fellow, AIS) credentials for qualified healthcare professionals.

The AIS seal means a practitioner has training and experience in stress management and access to the latest stress research and techniques. It designates their practices as advanced treatment centers for stress-related illnesses.

Support for this initiative will provide funding to continually update best practices in the field.

Educate all through the development and dissemination of evidence-based information



Develop and provide information, training and techniques for use in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Some of the research-based information AIS develops and disseminates includes:

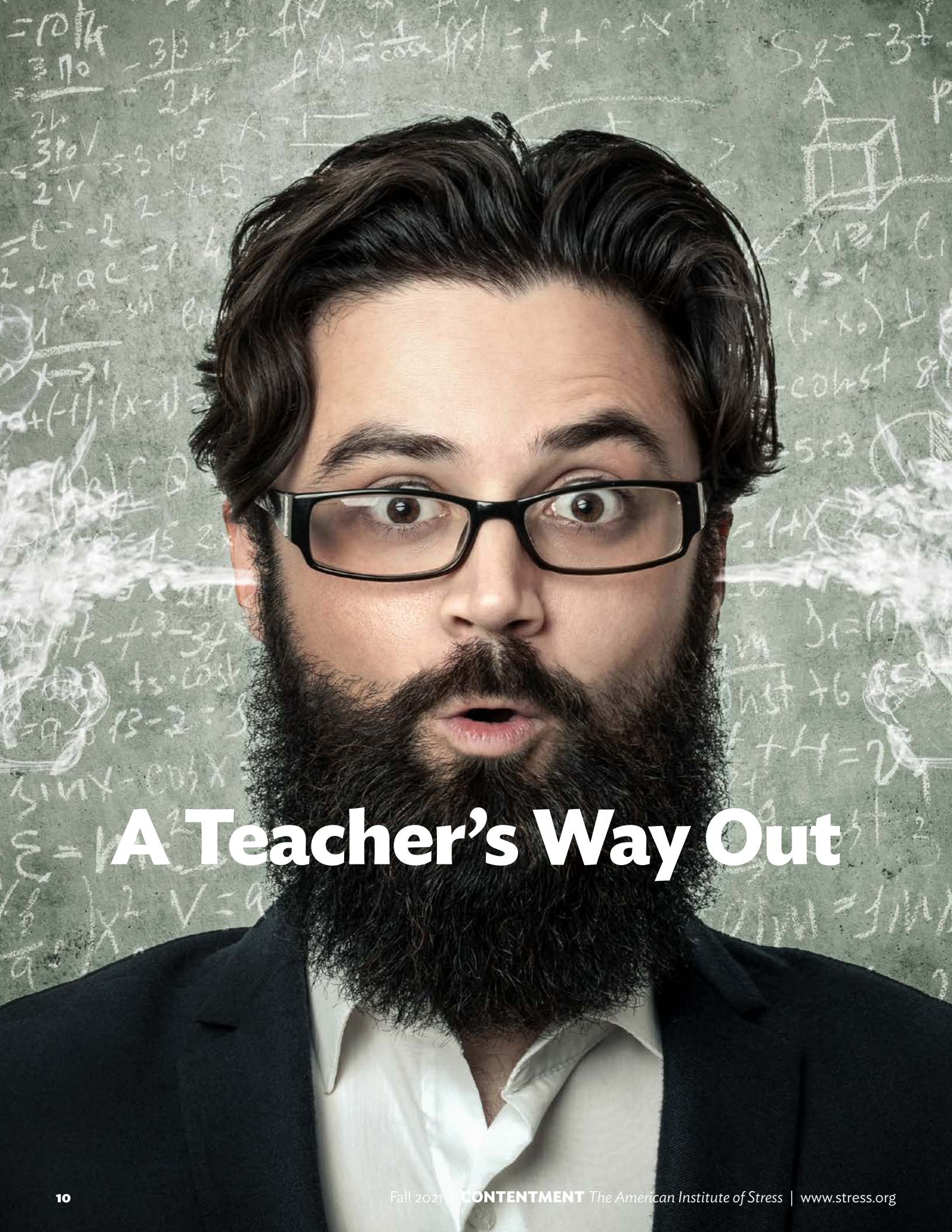
- Productions – *Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress*, a six-part documentary featuring some of the world's leading experts on stress. Released in March 2021.
- Publications – *Contentment* magazine and *Combat Stress* magazine for service members, veterans and first responders.
- Podcasts, webinars and website resources – The free podcast series *Finding Contentment*



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A Teacher's Way Out



By Jen Butler, MEd, BCC, DAIS

Teachers are looking for a way out; out of debt, out of the hole they feel, and out of their profession altogether.

According to one survey, three in four teachers reported frequent job-related stress, compared to 40% of other working adults and 27% of teachers described symptoms of depression versus 10% of the general, adult population. Most concerning, one in four teachers said they were “likely” to leave their jobs at the end of the 20-21 school year where, on average, only 1:6 were wanting to leave prior to the pandemic.¹

Some of the top stress triggers impacting the mental wellbeing of educators are:²

1. Imbalance of home and work demands — 85% claim³
2. Lack of administrative support
3. Difficulty of maintaining contact with students and their families
4. Supporting students’ social-emotional health
5. Keeping students engaged during virtual and hybrid educational settings
6. Addition of technology without adequate training

These triggers created the top five emotions claimed by teachers: frustration, overwhelm, stress, exhaustion, and last, happiness.

All teachers deserve more of the latter than the former. To help them achieve that we’re going to focus on ways

According to one survey, three in four teachers reported frequent job-related stress, compared to 40% of other working adults and 27% of teachers described symptoms of depression versus 10% of the general, adult population.

to reduce stress in any moment, anytime, anywhere.

Breathing

The number one, stress-reducing technique EVER! Most of the time you're breathing wrong. Yup, there actually is a right and wrong way to breathe. Under stress, our brain increases our heart rate which causes us to breath faster and more shallowly. This then reduces the amount of oxygen getting to our brain for critical thinking and increases the volume of carbon dioxide in our lungs. It becomes a cycle of stress evoking systemic failure throughout your mind (cognitive), body, and soul (affective).

When feeling the signs and consequences of stress do what I call the 5-10-10 rule immediately:

1. Take a deep inhalation through the nose for a count of 5 letting your core (belly) extend out as far as it will go.
2. Exhale slowly for a count of 10 through your mouth moving your belly all the way inward toward your spine.
3. After each exhale think a positive statement to yourself such as, "This is only a moment," or "Yes I can/I will."
4. Repeat the above 10 times.

Healthy Eating

Stress directly impacts our ability to ward off diseases. Our immune system takes a serious beating when cortisol flows throughout our bloodstream. Ensuring you have a well-balanced diet is vital to keeping your immune system at peak performance.

To boost in the moment coping: eat a piece of fruit, veggies, or healthy fat snack (avocado), hummus, or dark chocolate.

Humor

There's a level of expectation and desire for life to be fun and exciting,

so it's easy to become frustrated with work and relationships when they turn into the dreads and doldrums.

Here are some ideas for lightening the mood: 1) get a 'joke of the day' app on your phone; 2) look for the funny in things — when you intentionally look for humorous situations they start appearing everywhere; 3) have theme days in your classroom to liven up the environment; 4) have your students do their hard work, but also ask them to bring in funny jokes and stories to share each day.

Act as if...

Stress at its basic core is based on our worldview. When we have a different worldview, we think/feel/act differently so our stress is different. In any moment choose to "Act as if..." This can be acting as if you are happy, which then reinforces your thoughts of happiness, and create feelings of happiness. You can do the same for your job — act as if you love your job and you will find a new passion within.

To begin the process of Act as if...ask yourself this simple question, "If I were to act as if I'm X (happy, in love, patient, smart, good enough), how would I be acting right now?" Then proceed to act as such.

Socialize

Talking with a friend and sharing your stress, connecting, gaining validation, and getting a different perspective of your situation helps you purge some of your tension. According to a 2011 study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, researchers monitored a group of children and found that those participants who were with their best friends during unpleasant experiences logged lower cortisol levels than the rest of the participants in the study.⁴ This is one of hundreds of supporting studies

Talking with a friend and sharing your stress, connecting, gaining validation, and getting a different perspective of your situation helps you purge some of your tension.

that shows people have lower stress levels when they regularly socialize with people they enjoy. They also navigate stress triggers more easily in the presence of their supporting peers.

Here's what to do now: 1) when stressed bring someone else into the situation and ask for help, they might handle it better; 2) reach out to a friend or loved one via text.

Journaling

To analyze and learn more about your stress type, response, and how effective a coping method is, experts suggest using a stress journal or diary to collect data and face facts.

Journaling is one way to circumvent the Theory of Self-Deception⁵ and get into our own minds. To use this technique in any moment, carry a small

notebook in your pocket throughout your day and jot down your thoughts and feelings. Then review it before you leave for home each night.

Hydration

The link between water and increased stress levels is well documented.⁶ All of our organs, including our brains, need water to function properly. If you're dehydrated, your body is already under physiological stress and you're pushing its limits forcing it to manage external stressors throughout your day. Just being a half-liter dehydrated can increase your cortisol levels and result in physiological stress. To the body, stress is stress, and it responds the same way regardless of the stress trigger.

To increase your water intake, carry a water bottle with you everywhere and sip





consistently. Don't let others make you believe drinking water is "unprofessional."

Exercise

When it comes to exercise and stress coping, duration of the movement that has more effect on your stress levels than intensity. A fierce game of table tennis or bowling can be equally advantageous as CrossFit and P90X.

Try the following to stress less now:
1) march in place for 30 seconds; 2) bring light weights/bands to school and do arm strengthening exercises. How else can you work in more movement for you and the students?

Centering

Centering is a method of coping that allows you to channel nervous / anxious / fearful energy and release it in a

way that triggers your relaxation response. Because of its use of physical, mental, emotional, and existential approaches, centering increases concentration, focus, and critical thinking. Additionally, blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels decrease making it a powerful tool in coping with stress.

Focusing on your center grounds you in the present and reminds you of balance, control, and intention. There are three basic steps to follow to become centered:

1. Become aware of your breathing, making sure it is deep, slow, and filling your abdomen.
2. Find your physical center of gravity, which is typically just below your waist, and focus your mind on it while you breathe deeply at least five times.
3. Release your negative energy by

visualizing yourself pushing the negative energy outward away from your body.

PMR

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) has been around since the 1920's and promoted as one of the leading techniques to reduce anxiety, stress, and tension. Over the decades multidisciplinary studies show PMR has biological, physiological, and psychological impacts on how our bodies respond to stress triggers.

The premise behind PMR is that you hold each muscle group in a state of extreme tension for several seconds, and then release into a deep, relaxed phase. The process of this helps interrupt your body's fight-flight-freeze response when you are experiencing stress. This simple exercise can be done in any position — standing at the front of the class,

sitting in a car, laying down on the couch — anywhere and at any time. There are plenty of relaxation apps that will guide you through this easy tool.

Conclusion

Stress is pervasive in education, proven by both studies and testimonials from educators across the country. The triggers bombard teachers from areas they expect, such as students' needs or parental concerns, but also from unpredictable stressors in which they have no training or skills to manage. The pressure mounts and negative emotions rise. Stress quickly builds and teachers continue to look for a way out.

The good news is that the more you learn about stress and your particular response to it, the more opportunity you will have to make a real difference in your experience of it. You can experiment with

Stress is pervasive in education, proven by both studies and testimonials from educators across the country.

Produced by The American Institute of Stress

MISMATCHED: YOUR BRAIN UNDER STRESS

6-part documentary series exploring stress and what we can do about it

FEATURING SOME OF THE WORLD'S LEADING EXPERTS ON STRESS

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the wide variety of tools proven to build stress resilience, finding what works best for you. And...you can mentor and help teach the next generation that they, too, have choices that will reduce their stress in the moment and for the future.

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Jen Butler is the owner, founder, and CEO of JB Partners, a company committed to reducing stress of private-practice owners, small businesses, and large organizations through intuitive and powerful programming, one-to-one coaching, and comprehensive consulting.

While earning two bachelor's degrees - one in Public Health Administration and the other in Educational Psychology - Jen worked in hospitals, private practices, and became a paramedic, learning first-hand the challenges and relentless stress faced by medical professionals. Building on her education and 25-years of experience in learning & development, Jen Butler has worked with entrepreneurs, small business owners, corporate leaders, and executives on how to obtain sustainable profitability with less stress and more fulfillment. Jen is also a Diplomat of The American Institute of Stress. If you would like to learn more about the great programs at JB partners just go to jbpartners.com.



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A Remedy for Traveling Uncharted Territory

*Resilience Recipes: Stress Proof Your
Teaching, Learning and Immune System*

“In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

– Eric Hoffer

By Sharon Montes, MD, FAIS,
Founder of Living Well Health Group

In times of change how do we all continue to be successful learners? How do we develop the reserve of resilience that allows us to recover from past stress, be present in the current moment and have the capacity to engage in future learning with curiosity rather than dread?

We are starting another school year. Stores are filled with shelves of notebooks and bins of glue and pencils. This year the usually joyful annual ceremony of back to school sales is clouded by our memories of last year. Last year people all over the world were faced with multiple challenges of how we create safety for self and others and adapt to change in all areas of life. We had to adapt to online learning; adapt to the merging of living, working, and teaching and learning spaces; adapt to the mixture of increased work and increased social isolation. Meeting these challenges provided different learnings for each of us. While we adapted, we emerged stronger, though many of us with a bit of fatigue from all that adapting.

As we enter this school year, I see and hear the wave of uncertainty that continues to color our conversations. How can we look at the unfolding of the next few months? There is no return to normal. How do we prepare to succeed as learners of all ages? The literature on stress teaches that it is not stress itself that has negative health effects but the story we tell about stress. In 2012 Keller published the results of an 8-year study that followed 30,000 American adults. His research showed that people who believed that “stress is harmful to health” had a 43% higher death rate.¹ Woven in with all this is the idea that not only do we need to manage our stress to be better teachers, but that managing our stress also helps us improve our immune system.

I believe that we are entering uncharted territory. I remember the maps inside the front cover of those science fiction and Tolkien books from my adolescence. The mapping with names and images of the known world contrasted with the unexplored world labeled, “the sea of mystery,” filled with images of dragons.

As we prepare for the start of another school year entering this sea of mystery or uncharted territory, what are the

learnings we can take from last year that we can apply to this new school year? How can we ride those dragons into creating safe space for ourselves and those we serve? Or more pragmatically, how can we defrag and reboot our nervous systems to prepare to be at our best to learn and teach. Learning happens best when we feel safe at the cellular level. We create that safety by blending body-mind-body practices.

In the Summer 2021 issue of *Contentment Magazine*,² we introduced the concept of Resilience Recipes. These recipes blend activities (ingredients) that nourish our vagus nerve to help us feel safe and centered at the cellular level. These activities also work to calm our adrenal glands, so we produce less stress hormones and also stimulate the part of our brain that produces oxytocin aka nature's antidote to stress hormones. Setting up our body — our physiology — to learn, starts with the resilience recipe ingredients of integrating breath,

integrative movement, mindfulness, and playful sound/positive choice.

Intentional Breath

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.”

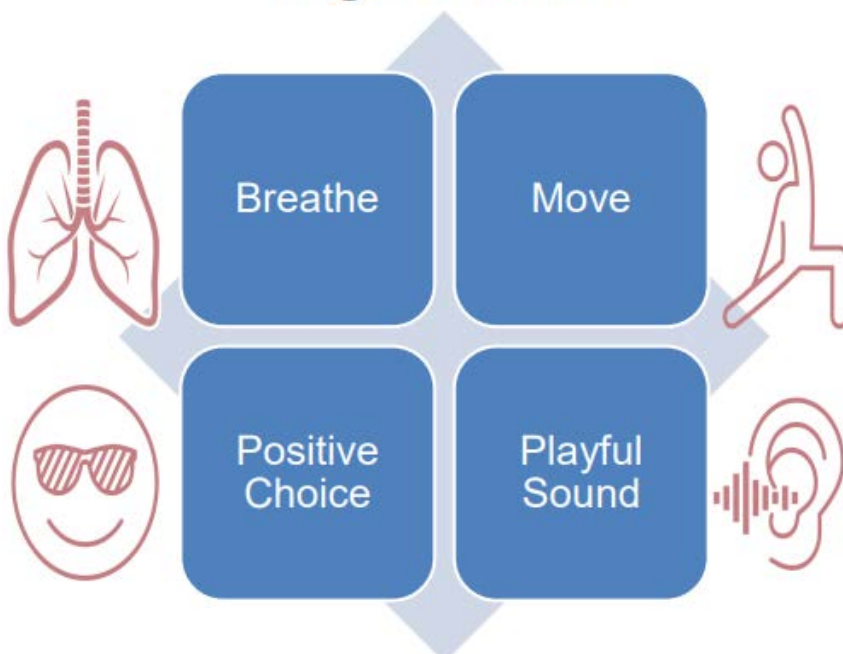
— Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*³

When teaching people to use breath to return to center and safety at a cellular level, we use a 4-step process. Sometimes when people have accumulated trauma at a cellular level, they may have baseline patterns of shallow rapid breathing. Asking them to change that pattern to promote relaxation can lead to temporary increase in stress. So before asking them to slow down or deepen their breathing we ask them just to notice and count their breaths.

Breathing techniques that activate the messages of: “I am safe. I am relaxed. I am ready to learn” include:

1. Drawing awareness to here and now with each breath in the body by counting your breath. The goal is to be able to count 12 breaths without your mind wandering to the past or future. Notice when your attention wanders, and each day gradually improve focus to achieve the ability to stay present until you have counted 12 continued breaths. I find it useful to use my fingers to help me stay focused during counting.
2. Increase the duration of exhale compared to inhale during each breath. This nourishes the vagus nerve that sends message from head to bottom of belly that we are safe and can relax.
3. Time your breath cycle to last 10 seconds from inhale to exhale. This

Resilience Recipe Ingredients





rhythm, called resonant breathing, harmonizes and balances our breathing, heart rate, and nervous system. A balanced, alert, and calm nervous system helps our brain to be more receptive to learning.

4. Abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing — by expanding our abdomen when we inhale and pulling the belly towards the spine when we exhale, we allow downward movement of the diaphragm. This not only allows for more oxygen exchange, but it also promotes relaxation.

(Science note: By activating the receptors at the bottom part of our lungs when we breathe, we activate the parasympathetic (rest and relax) part of our nervous system. When we breathe using mainly the upper part of our lung, it activates more of the sympathetic

(flight/fight) nervous system — kind of a body-mind-body catch 22. When we are stressed, our breathing patterns can create greater sensations and emotions of stress and continue to promote stress responses. This is where using the brain to consciously choose to take three slow deep breaths allows us to interrupt the cycle and create another body-mind-body feedback loop.)

The repetition of intentional breathing several times throughout the day creates new pathways that support our ability to stay calm in body and mind. Anchor these breath practices on an object or action so you do them at least five times/day. For example, notice your breath when you walk through a door; when the phone rings; when you look at or touch a ring, bracelet or watch; when you rub your ear; when you go to the bathroom. Even a mini break of three intentional breaths repeated through

the day builds your “choice” muscle, making it easier to choose calm.

Integrated Movement

“Get out of your head and get into your body. Think less and feel more.”

— Osho

Stress can get stuck in our bodies, especially in our nervous system and in our fascia. (Fascia is the white fibrous tissue that scaffolds, surrounds and connects our muscles, nerve fibers and organs. When we are stressed it contracts and the tissue and organs it surrounds and supports contract too.)

Certain types of movement have the ability to help us release this accumulated physical stress and create a calm alert brain. When we move our body, we send signals that activate our brain — changing the electrical and chemical messages. When we move different parts of our body

in different directions, we activate different parts of our brain. When we add rhythm and mindfulness, we create an active, integrated brain that is ready to learn.

Integrated movement involves a combination of different movements:

1. **Moving in all three dimensions in space** — up and down, side to side, and front to back. Think of different movements as activating different areas in your brain. For example, when you move the right arm it causes electrical and chemical changes in the left side of your brain. Moving your left arm causes electrical and chemical changes in the right side of your brain.
2. **Crossing midline** — The easiest midline to imagine is the line running down the front of your body dividing the right and left sides of your body. You can cross this midline with your eyes; head — bending it from side to



side; arms and legs. Think of this as integrating and pulling together the action on different sides of your brain.

3. **Adding some rhythm and balance** (repetition, shifting weight from side to side, front to back) pulls in the activity from another part of the brain which helps sharpen and integrate our senses for learning.

Examples of integrated movement include; walking, dancing, swimming, gardening, some forms of yoga and qigong.

Additional integrative movement include:

1. **Hand to Knee Cross:** do this seated or standing. Start slowly to coordinate the movements. Your right hand/palm crosses your body to touch your left knee. Then your left hand/palm crosses your body to touch your right knee. If seated gently lift the knee to meet the hand — to degree of comfort. If standing you can march or dance as you alternate sides crossing hand to knee. Then add the rhythm 1-2 1-2-3 bringing opposite hand to opposite knee to the rhythm of, “Ha, Ha, Ho, Ho, Ho.”
2. **Nose to Ear:** Hold your right ear with your left hand while you touch your nose with your right hand, then change hand positions and bring your right hand to your left ear and your left hand to your nose. Try to do this in synchronicity as you chant, “Ho, Ho, Ha, Ha, Ha.” Slowly increase the speed. Try it with your eyes closed.

Mindfulness and Positive Choice

“Mindfulness isn’t difficult; we just need to remember to do it.”

— Sharon Salzberg

Mindfulness consists of two main techniques.

1. **Observing our sensations, emotions**

and thoughts. Our thoughts bounce from past to future attached to emotions. Frequently worry or fear when our mind travels to the future and regret or anger when our thoughts travel to the past. By cultivating the awareness that we are not our sensations, emotions or thoughts, we have greater ability to be present here and now.

2. **Naming** — by naming our sensations and emotions we activate a different part of our brain. We are wired to react out of the part of our brain that is focused on survival and defending ourselves. With mindfulness and practice we can strengthen the pathways that act from wisdom and connection.

When we observe and label our sensations and emotions, we also notice that our sensations, emotions and thoughts are transient. The observer part of us allows us to reframe and create new meaning. Am I excited or afraid? It is the same inner chemistry with different meaning with different long-term health effects. Crum and colleagues recently described using mindfulness and some other self-regulation techniques to help people shift their perspective of stress from being bad to “it can be good for me.” With this change in perspective the stress responses can be changed to help achieve a goal.⁴

Mindfulness allows us to sit with “reality” as it is accepting the flow of sensations, emotions, and thoughts. While positive choice allows us to accept and reframe, to use our capacity for words, to create stories large enough for everyone to live and grow in. Many years ago, my acupuncturist asked me two questions that forever changed how I used my words to describe life events.⁵ (Video discussion link below.)

One example of using mindfulness and positive choice, as well as playful sound, is

Examples of integrated movement include; walking, dancing, swimming, gardening, some forms of yoga and qigong.

We can explore the uncharted territory of this new school year using curiosity and a commitment to using our always accessible tools of breath, movement, and the ability to reframe.

a classic laughter therapy exercise that was taught by Dr Annette Goodheart, author of *Laughter Therapy*.⁶

Health in Your Hands: Consider something you are dealing with that leads to contraction — physical; mental; emotional. As you call to mind this challenge, notice where it is in your body sensation — aware of a feeling in your body. Place that issue in the palm of your hand. Now bring that hand with the palm facing your face up close to your face. Plaster your palm against your nose so that all you can see is your hand. Now as you breathe add a gentle laugh to your exhale. With each exhale slowly allow your hand to move away from your face. Notice how your awareness changes. What do you see? Any change in body sensation?

Another positive choice exercise is:

Gratitude for Be Here Now:

1. Thank yourself
2. Thank person either side of you
3. Thank all that is around you — air, earth, chairs, tables

With choice, breath, movement, and gratitude our perspective and awareness can expand.

Playful Sound

“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.”

— Thich Nhat Hanh

This is the Resilience Recipe ingredient that most adults find quite challenging to integrate on a regular basis. While many people have a regular gratitude practice, they don't have a regular laughter practice. Though some people rely on humor, movies, tickling, and jokes to get their dose of laughter, there are real health benefits from just choosing to laugh because you can. Laughter yoga and laughter wellness clubs and events provide a safe space

in-person and online for people to laugh on a regular basis.

One easy way of getting laughter sounds into your life is to use LA-LA-LA lyrics to any song. This sound to music — lifts the palate, nourishes your vagus nerve, and activates both sides of your brain. I use one of my favorite variations of this exercise when my dad has a fit of grumpy mood. I will sing Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee by Henry J van Dyke, using a loud deep BAA-BAA-BAA -BAA sound. It doesn't always improve his mood, but it definitely helps me feel happier.

Other laughter exercises to play with:

1. **Cry and Laugh:** Cry as you lean forward, laugh as you stand back up. Repeat a few times. Or alternate
2. **Anger / Laughter / Choice:** using gibberish, express anger with a partner. Then move into laughing, knowing you have choices about being angry. If doing this alone, be angry with your reflection in front of a mirror, and then break into laughter.
3. **Gift of Laughter:** Hold the gift of laughter in your hands. It is a present that you choose to give yourself. Where and when do you receive it? Practice sharing and receiving laughter with others in a group.

Conclusion:

As a community we can explore the uncharted territory of this new school year using curiosity and a commitment to using our always accessible tools of breath, movement, and the ability to reframe. Let's use our beautiful brains and bodies to prepare us to be ready to learn and have strong immune systems. We blend the wisdom of health traditions that have helped humans adapt to stress for thousands of years with the science that shows us that “Individuals who appraise stress as challenging, as opposed



to threatening, and hold beliefs that stress can be enhancing and facilitate pursuit of valued goals, as opposed to debilitating and suboptimal in goal pursuit, cope more effectively and exhibit better outcomes.”⁷ By combining breath, movement, mindfulness, and positive sound throughout the day, we create the inner environment that allows us to teach and learn with ease and joy.

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Talking to Your Kids About Stress

Empowering Their Resilience

By Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS

It's yet another school year plagued with uncertainty, risk, and disruption. Your kids are stressed. You're stressed. And you're not sure how to help.

We know that "coping confidence," or feeling like you have the tools and resources to handle a challenge is critical to resilience and whether or not stress is actually toxic.¹ But how can you help your kids develop this confidence when you could use a little yourself?

How Stress Shows Up for Kids

Firstly, it's important to recognize that though the automatic stress reaction wiring is universal, the way in which repeated or prolonged stress manifests in each parent or child is very variable. Some people are naturally more resilient. This may be a combination of factors: genetics, family stories/expectations, cultural influences, life experience. Signs and symptoms may show up mentally, emotionally, physically, or behaviorally. The more you learn to recognize your early signs of stress overload, the faster you can make small adjustments to change your experience.

Here are some typical changes you might notice if your children are struggling with stress:

- Increased crying, irritation
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Difficulty concentrating, increased disorganization/forgetfulness

- Reverting to outgrown behaviors
- Increased sense of urgency, frustration
- Moodiness
- Change in school performance
- Change in social interaction, withdrawal
- Increased aches, pains, or physical symptoms
- Increased colds or illnesses
- Substance abuse

Of course, as parents, you see can over-read just about anything you observe, or project your own stress and worries. Take a few long deep breaths, read on, and then decide if you and/or your child would benefit from learning some new ways to handle stress.

A note about stress vs. anxiety: while they share many characteristics, anxiety is more of an internal reaction that persists past the external stressful situation. There are plenty of resources to learn more about the differences.² And please, if you have lingering concern that you or your child may really be at risk or are dealing with persistent anxiety or depression, please reach out to consult with a health professional. There are so many helpful, and often non-pharmaceutical, ways to address anxiety.

5 Ways to Talk About Stress

What you say really matters — to them and to you. And... don't over think that! Make stress a safe topic and let your kids know that we are ALL on the path of learning more about how to handle ourselves and our lives. We all make mistakes and hopefully learn from them.

It's important to recognize that though the automatic stress reaction wiring is universal, the way in which repeated or prolonged stress manifests in each parent or child is very variable.

Do not even try to pretend you can sneak your stress by your kids — it affects the quality of your interactions and shows up in physiological changes in parent and child.³

The important part is to **stay curious and compassionate and explore together**. Sprinkle insights, reflections, and questions in only when appropriate and the mood/tone feels neutral to happy. This is more about framing stress in a useful way than going on the lecture circuit — we all know how well a parental agenda can backfire!

1. **Just do it!** Do not even try to pretend you can sneak your stress by your kids — it affects the quality of your interactions and shows up in physiological changes in parent and child.³ Stress is contagious even when you don't speak it. Humans are wired to pick up each other's stress, especially the non-verbal cues, because that helps alert us to possible danger. (If I just saw a tiger outside our cave, it's good for you to get your heart rate ready, too.) Kids tune into your every breath and grimace and tend to take it personally. Remember watching your parent's faces to see if you were "ok?" Kids learn from how you talk about handling life's pressures.

Of course, I'm not saying tell your 3-year-old son that you are worried about losing your job. But it is helpful for him to hear you say, "Mommy feels sort of jumpy/grumpy right now and needs to do her belly breaths to feel calmer. Want to do them with me?" (Lie down on the floor together, with hands on your bellies — this can be a great teaching moment and comic relief.)

It is effective to tell your 14-year-old daughter that you are feeling a little overwhelmed right now so you might have been less than patient with her — you are sorry you didn't handle your feelings so well. Tell her you know that is a sign that you need to take a little time to clear your head (exercise/

breathwork/etc.) and think about what matters most and what has worked before. This models how to sort out life challenges. Then ask her what makes her feel more in control when she feels overwhelmed.

2. **Demystify it.** Stress is part of all life — not something you can completely avoid. You actually need some stress to get motivated to do your best.⁴ There is nothing "wrong" with you if you feel it — you haven't "failed life!" It is natural for it to make you feel more alone. It is a normal reaction, your brain protecting you, calling your body to action to keep you safe from a perceived threat, from being "not ok." It is critical inside information. Kids like to learn about their brains — use that!

You get stronger than your stress by learning more about it. Explore together what tends to trigger it for each of you, what you typically feel, how to use these inside feelings (self-awareness) to make adjustments and better choices. Learn tools to find calm in the moment and learn skills to build resilience and strength for the future.

3. **De-demonize it.** Research shows it is more powerful to embrace stress than to reduce it.⁵ Realize that what you say about stress out loud and between your ears colors your perception of it and teaches your children how to label what they feel. Minds are meaning-making machines, assigning meanings to inputs. Is this a mountain ("I'm doomed!") or a molehill ("I've got this!")? This is your "stress lens."

Becoming aware of and adjusting your lens gives you power to radically alter how much energy you spend on a problem, how much misery you feel, and even how much needless shame compounds the situation. Science

also shows that stressed brains tend to be more negative and more 'black and white.' And these tendencies are amplified in a culture of drama, superlatives, and rampant fear.

Recognize this, adjust your own thoughts/language first, (maybe do

you own breathwork first!), then ask questions to help your child put his/her worries in perspective without minimizing their very real feelings. Figure out what is really at stake, what is still in his/her control, and what matters most. "I'm curious, on a



scale of 1-10, how big is this problem? What feels scary about it? What parts of this can you control? What's most important?" (Note: this is much easier once you help your child get physically calm, so their smarter brain cells get some blood flow back.)

And while you're at it, you can de-demonize vulnerability, the source of so much stress and shame. Instead, learn and teach more about the power of vulnerability.⁶

4. **Ask more than tell.** This one has multiple benefits. Get curious; be specific; use humor and play; minimize judgment. Making the world safe for yourself and others to be fully human is a gift to all.

- a. **Build self-awareness,** critical to resilience, and too often drilled out of us in the pursuit of success. Ask your children what they feel in their bodies when they are worried. Teach them (or use an online guided visualization) to scan their bodies and notice where they feel the stress. Share what you notice.

These feelings become cues to check-in and think about what they need to be "ok." ("When my brain gets buzzy, I know I need to do a calming exercise, or I just can't think as well.") Ask what they need right now so they learn to better identify and advocate for themselves.

Pinterest abounds with engaging charts of feelings and emotions that you can download. The Center for Nonviolent Communication also has great resources, many of which have been put into image form on Pinterest as well.⁷ (Example: needs wheel for adults.)⁸

- b. **Model curiosity,** a powerful skill. Getting curious shifts blood flow back to the frontal lobe, giving access to problem solving creativity. It depersonalizes the problem and teaches cognitive flexibility. ("I'm curious, what do you think your teacher was really upset about when he yelled?")
- c. **Build self-efficacy** by helping your child explore how to solve his/her own problems, brainstorm to get unstuck, access inner knowing, and understand that some of the best learning happens when things don't go right. Ask what has worked well before? Then ask your child to list as many possibilities as he can for what he can do now —at least 10 (to get his mind unstuck). You can get silly.

STRESSED?

Stress is an emotional habit, an indicator there's a puppy upstairs [your brain], chewing up your house, your shoes and your underwear. Learn how to train the puppy and begin your path to stress elimination.

BEGIN TRAINING



Fun always enhances learning, and brainstorming promotes creativity, a true resilience skill. Ask her what she “feels” is the best solution to promote trusting her instincts. Ask him to play out the possibilities in his mind to teach consequences. (“If you tell your friend that you saw him cheat, how will you feel? How will he feel? What good might come out of it? What’s at risk?”)

5. **Leverage Strengths.** The human mind is wired with a negative bias,⁹ keeping you vigilant for possible danger and making problem-focused thinking an easy default. Yet Positive Psychology research reveals that a positive mindset and strengths-based approach will help you and your children cope and bounce back.¹⁰ It does take intention and attention to shift from the problem perspective to optimism, but simple questions can make a huge difference in your child’s outlook.¹¹

It is important to note, this is NOT about glossing over difficulties in a “Pollyanna” fashion or encouraging magical thinking. It is about authentically bringing attention to strengths that promote self-efficacy and broaden perspective in the moment. Have each family member map his/her strengths with an easy survey.¹² Ask your child what makes him/her strong? What has worked for him in the past? What strength might

be helpful right now? Your questions have so much power!

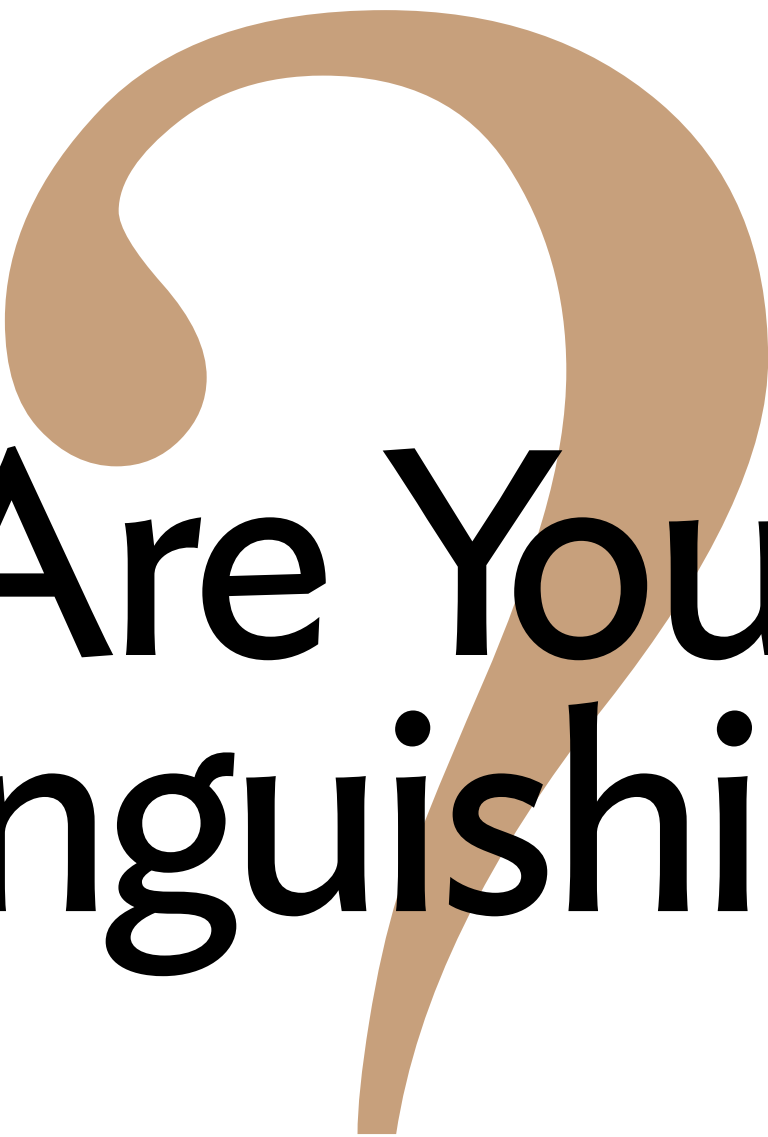
The old saying, “Place your own oxygen mask first,” still applies. Breathe! Do that again. And then get creative about partnering with your kids to explore the world of resilience together. You are not supposed to have all the answers, nor a magic wand to erase their stress. But you can start to have conversations that will serve them (and you!) for years to come.

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Cynthia Ackrill is a leader in the field of leveraging stress for optimal productivity, health, and happiness. With a background in primary care and advanced training in applied neuroscience (a look under the hood!), certification in wellness and leadership coaching, she combines the science of human performance with wisdom, humor, and heart to address the critical relationships between thinking styles, behavior choices, performance capacities, leadership effectiveness, health, joy, and deep career/life satisfaction. She edits *The American Institute of Stress Contentment* magazine, is on the faculty of multiple leadership/coaching programs, and contributes widely to the media, including *Katie Couric*, *CNN*, *Today Show* and *Huffington Post*.





Are You Languishing



By Charles Grantham PhD, MSH, FAIS, APF
and Rebecca Ryan, APF

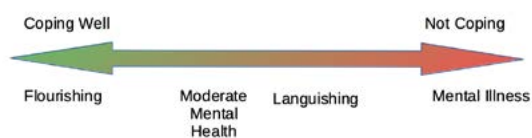
Post-Pandemic Context

To be in a state of languishing. This is a typical person's psychological response to moving out of pandemic lockdowns and social interaction restrictions. In our view, it parallels the grieving process (Clarke, 2021).¹ What are we grieving? Our loss of 'normalcy.' We lost it, we know it's not coming back to 2019, and it hurts. Languishing is somewhere between bargaining and depression in the grief process. Our intent here is to help readers move more quickly through the grieving process.

Formal Definition

In formal English, "languishing"² is a state of being listless, decreased vitality, dispirited, or assuming an expression of grief or emotion appealing for sympathy. In today's common parlance, it means 'to be in a funk' or just feeling 'meh.'

In a real sense, what is it?



Psychologically, it is between 'flourishing' and 'depression.'

Unfortunately, languishing, if left unattended, can lead to emotional stress and significant mental health issues. Consider, "The risk of a major depressive episode was two times more likely among

languishing than moderately mentally healthy adults, and nearly six times greater among languishing than flourishing adults."³

Another by-product of a languishing state is a precursor to burnout. We're all familiar with job burnout.⁴

"Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness in the workplace, and by chronic negative responses to stressful workplace conditions."

Remaining in a prolonged state of extreme stress is not conducive to good mental health. This is one of the reasons we are calling attention to languishing. Even after we have been vaccinated, social distancing protocols are relaxed, and we return to a partially co-located workplace, the post-pandemic effects will remain and perhaps intensify.

We submit that proactive action is required. We call this process of 'getting ahead of the curve' "**strategic foresight**" — a technique routinely practiced by professional futurists. We think it is time this methodology is brought to the healthcare field and the practice of wellbeing.

Why Today?

It is interesting to note that the use of 'strategic foresight'⁵ brought us to discover and explore 'languishing.' We routinely practice searching for 'weak signals'⁶ which presages more significant events and trends in the medium and long term.

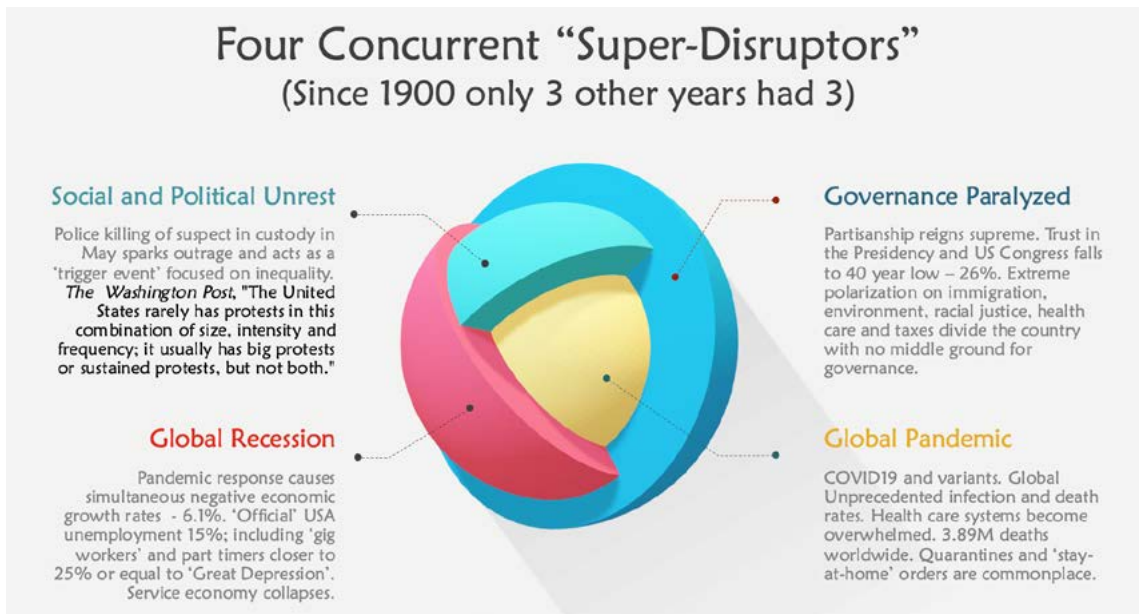
In early 2020 (before COVID became

Languishing, if left unattended, can lead to emotional stress and significant mental health issues.

the meme of the day in mass media), our environmental scans revealed a set of 'nested' weak signals, all converging on the social-psychological impact of a severe global pandemic. The Spanish Influenza in 1918, the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, and the Ebola virus were lessons from history, but these signals seemed stronger and were amplifying each other. Here's what we saw coming.

What does your languishing signal light look like overall? Are you Green to go, stuck in the Yellow, blinking Red, or full Stop? Frankly, most people today are stuck in Yellow at best or flashing red. If you are full stop in the red zone, contact us for a free "Self-Care First Aid Kit." Other than that, here are some ideas of things to do to get you back in the

Green zone and flourishing again.



So, why now? Why today? It is the confluence of four major societal disruptors which given rise to a unique social-psychological environment. No wonder we are stressed to the limit. One note is that these effects are 'nested.' That is, they reinforce each other. Disease begets economic recession, which amps up protests and feeds into election intensity and validity of the outcome.

Self-Check

Where are you on the 'languishing scale'? Here are three easy questions to help you locate yourself on the spectrum between flourishing and being depressed.

	A Lot More	A Little More	About the Same	A Little Less	A Lot Less
Motivation to get things done					
Ability to focus on task at hand					
The Time I spend in Solitude					

What can you do? Four Ideas

- The power of boundary setting.** We are great proponents of Cal Newport's "Deep Work."⁷ His central idea is to reduce multi-tasking stress and interruptions of

our natural cognitive rhythms. We need to divide the day into segments of 'deep work' (high, focused concentration), rest, and 'shallow work' (free-floating unstructured time).

It makes sense, especially if it is combined with synchronizing with our circadian rhythms. The rub, admittedly, is that your teammates need to respect your boundaries. Expectations need to be re-set and agreed to. "I don't do phone calls nor Zooms from 8 – 11 AM." Stopping work at 5 PM local time is a hard boundary. You'll get some pushback, but if everyone on the team employs the same strategy, you'll be amazed at how quick things move into a productive rhythm.

- The power of reflection.** Most of us are notorious for wasting time on trivial, non-essential tasks. We go down rabbit holes and don't emerge for hours.

And the pandemic work-at-home environment has encouraged this because there are no visible governors. We use an 'Allocation of Energy' template to solve this problem. If you keep track of all the things you do in a typical week, you can go back and sort them into five piles:

Just about everyone we have seen using this can save up to 15% of their time. You get extra energy (time) to start and speeding things up from stopping and slowing down others. And yes, it takes personal discipline. Want to move out of the languishing zone? This is an excellent first step.



3. **The power of place.** We've written about the power of workSPACE design.⁸ But the best testimony of the power of this technique comes from neurobiologist Fred Gage (2010)⁹ who summed it up with this quote: *“Change the environment, change the brain, change the behavior.”*

First, get out of your work cave. Then, get up and move around. Go for a short outdoor walk during your 'resting' time, for example. Next, go to one place to read, another to sort 'shallow work,' and yet another for your 'deep work.' Next up is to make sure you can adjust lighting levels, sound, temperature, and volume of air circulation.

This workSPACE design is a whole science unto itself, but these are the basics to explore.

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Professional and Continuing Education

The four courses below are available through a partnership with MUIH Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) and are certified by The American Institute of Stress. PCE provides advanced, superior quality, skills-based offerings leading to relevant credentials and real-world application. As a PCE learner, you can quickly expand your knowledge and distinguish yourself as a leader in your field. Additionally, various professional organizations and boards may accept these courses for continuing education requirements. **CLICK TO LEARN MORE.**

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4. **The power of relationships.** Lastly, and in our view, most importantly, is designing, developing, and managing your social network. Those human resources are your well of inspiration and resiliency. It would help if you had more than the typical three trusted intimate friends. Reach out and build a network you can use not only in times of stress but when you feel yourself slipping into that state of Solitude. We like to call it

Psychological Immunity for Flourishing

You get to exit the grief cycle and move onto acceptance of your new reality. The secret is realizing YOU are creating the new reality — you are in charge. In summary, escaping the grief cycle and moving from languishing to flourishing is about developing psychological immunity. Another of our favorite authors, Deepak

Chopra (2021),¹⁰ talks about having emotional resiliency, self-reliance, emotional honesty, detachment, and emotional intelligence. The overall key is having self-awareness and presence in the moment. How present are you? Ask yourself (honestly) how long can you keep your



your own ‘Personal Board of Directors,’ a phone call or a few keystrokes away.

It would be best if you had a Mentor as a general life compass guide, an Education advisor to help you gain new abilities, a Challenger who acts as your guardrails, a Financial advisor to ensure stability, and an Ethical advisor be your spiritual guide. Meet with these people regularly. Be open, honest, and above all, take their advice to heart.

Please don’t kid yourself, this is a lot of work, and frankly, most people don’t want to engage with it because all these techniques in combination will force you into an uncomfortable zone. But then again, if you are languishing, you are already in that zone. So, what do you gain?

attention focused on the task at hand? Mere seconds? Minutes perhaps? It takes practice.

All the techniques we describe here can set you on the pathway to immunity. It is moving forward out of languishing. In Chopra’s words, it means creating a meditative mind. It’s a bit beyond the scope of this article to dig deeper into the what and how of that. But put simply, start by consciously, and with intent, setting a new plan of action and immunity.

“Whether this message inspires you spiritually or not, at the core of our present troubles is the need to find consolation and a refuge from turmoil. Nothing is more practical than psychological immunity, which everyone

needs and should know about for wellness to be truly complete and enduring.”

Closing Words

One last idea as a starter toward immunity and resiliency: **Tell your story.** Think back over the past year and look at how the pandemic affected you? What changed about how you saw your purpose in life? What changed about how you experienced your work? And finally, how did these events affect how you live in a community with family, friends, and neighbors? Write your personal story. Please share it. And listen to other stories.

Additional Resources

- <https://www.carpentersmith.com/business-coach/are-you-languishing/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>
- <https://hbr.org/2020/02/if-youre-overworked-learn-which-tasks-to-hand-off>
- <https://www.stress.org/military/combat-stress-magazine> *Living Alongside the Corona Virus*, Jeff Jernigan, PhD, BCPPC, FAIS; *Combat Stress Magazine* Spring 2020, American Institute of Stress.

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Dr. Charlie Grantham is the Founder of Awakeningtowholeness.net, where he pursues his priorities of teaching, writing, speaking, and mentoring — focused now on wellness, wellbeing, and wholeness. He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Maryland in 1980. He has published eleven books and several dozen technical papers. He is a "go-to" resource for the media on a wide range of workplace issues — ranging from psychology to public policy.

He also is a certified Master of Healing Arts is a credentialed Reiki Master/Teacher. He is a Vietnam combat Veteran, having served eight years in the US Army as a Chief Warrant Officer in the Intelligence Corps. Careers followed that time in academia as a professor and in multi-national technology companies as an Executive Director of Research and Development.

Dr. Grantham offers a comprehensive curated resource for those experiencing severe stress, "Self-Care First Aid Kit." Contact him at cegrantham@gmail.com for your free copy.




Rebecca Ryan is a futurist, author, and entrepreneur, and the founder of NEXT Generation Consulting. She has held residencies at the Alliance for Innovation, the Governing Institute, and the Association of Government Risk Pools and is the board chairperson, faculty member, and Roshi at the Institute for Zen Leadership. She is the author of *The Next Big Things: The Future of Local Government* (2015), *ReGENERATION: A Manifesto for America's Future Leaders* (2013), and *Live First, Work Second: Getting Inside the Head of the Next Generation* (2007).





CREATING
CALM
at HOME



By Michelle Anne, PCC, DAIS

Creating a stable, secure, and loving home environment is foundational to creating the positive outlook we need to go through this next phase of transitions. But how do we do that when so many of us are triggered and stressed?

Stressors of any level unconsciously trigger us into a reaction.

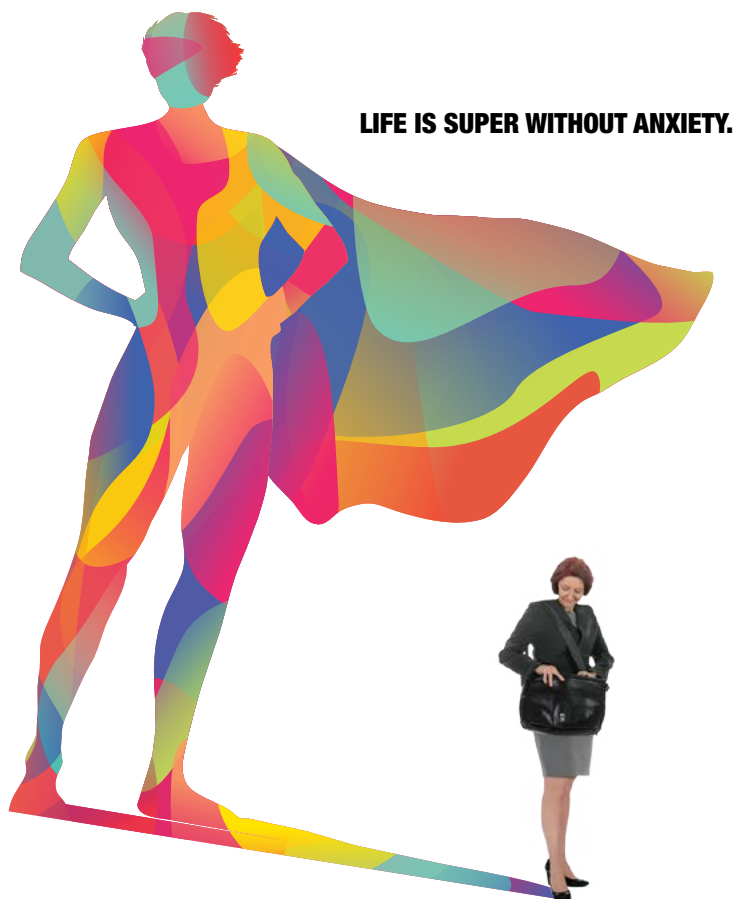
Most of us recognize the feelings evoked by this fictional, but all too typical, scenario:

Last night my spouse, Ben, was upset with me for watching a television program with my son, Joe. This didn't make much sense to me, but I listened and said, "I love you," and drifted off to sleep. This morning, I awoke feeling peaceful, but when I saw Ben's back to me, I soon remembered he was upset with me. I touched his back and softly whispered, "Good morning, I love you." Returning from the bathroom, I sensed something was still upsetting him, so I sat next to him and spoke from my heart. Again, I expressed that I loved him, but I noticed he was holding his breath. I asked him if he wanted to say anything and he said, "No! Sally, if I said something it would just create a bigger issue." I understood and decided to go about my workday.

Throughout the day, I checked in with him. He was still visibly upset. By dinner time I asked if he would like to eat together. He said, "No." Later that evening, I wandered into my empty college daughter's room, aware of and confused by the palpable silence in the house. As I'm lying there, my son came in wondering why we are fighting. He is also affected by our silence throughout the day—we all are. The house is uncomfortable for everyone.

One drop of water has many ripples. Realizing how stress affects our behavior, affects our children, our spouse, and our work relationships is critical to consciously creating the environment of stability, security, and love that we need to traverse the uncertainty of the upcoming transitions of our lives: kids returning to school, our re-entry into the workplace, etc.

Stressors of any level unconsciously trigger us into a reaction. The bad thing



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is we wind up in an increasingly uncomfortable situation, the cause and effect creating more reactions. Many times, we are uncertain of why we are stressed or how the situation arose, but we are reactive, nonetheless.

Let's discuss and dissect the story above. Something triggered Ben in the above situation. He may or may not have realized he was stressed. When we are uncomfortable, our tendency is to react. Blaming or lashing out at another person is a common stress reaction. However, we need to remember that everyone responds to stress differently in different situations. Sally responds by withdrawing into her daughter's room. Her son responds by worrying about why they are fighting.

The good news: re-wiring your brain's relationship with stress is very possible and not hard to do. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to rewire or change, making new neural connections throughout life. What I am saying is you can get rid of the triggers!

In neuroscience we look carefully at the brain's response to stress triggers trying to understand what is happening in the brain and what triggers different people. We find a never-ending cycle... there is a trigger (person, place, or thing) that stresses us; there is a reaction; and typically, this action causes another reaction, and so on. The technical term for what we have now is "a mess." We have all been there, and too often than not, we do not know how to change the habits or get rid of the trigger that started it.

Yoga, widely recognized as a practice to bring calm and peace into your life, offers another lens for looking inside this dilemma. Many of us have had the experience of being in a yoga class when the instructor asks us to hold a posture, to go longer, to adjust our hip, hold, keep holding... The longer we hold the posture, the more likely

our brain becomes increasingly uncomfortable. We begin to think, "How long are we going to be here? Am I doing this right? Look at that person--how are they doing that? They are better than me." The brain is anything but calm and relaxed. This is a simple study of awareness, noticing that the brain is anxious when it is uncomfortable. Ok... now what?

To re-wire our habits and create the calm, stable loving home we want and need in transition, it is imperative to understand how our brain reacts to stressful situations. Stress usually derails us. Whether the trigger is within us, our spouse, our kids, or our boss, our response either defuses or escalates the situation.

Blending my study of eastern philosophy and western neuroscience, I offer you ways to reduce the triggers or end the never-ending cause and effect cycle of stress:

When our brain perceives a threat, or when we perceive the demands on it exceed its capacity, we experience a stress reaction. This usually includes an uncomfortable feeling inside our body. Something feels off, not aligned. It may feel like weird energy or a feeling of anxiousness. We all experience this a little bit differently. We need to recognize these feelings. Literally slow down and feel the energy, even if it feels uncomfortable.

Allow the discomfort to be there; accept that we feel that way. When we allow the energy to just be there, it fades like the fog in the sun. It might help to visualize the energy in the body moving, energy that wants to come up and out. When we fight the feeling by ignoring it or reacting, the uncomfortable energy and feelings increase. (Remember, what we focus on magnifies and amplifies.)

To create an environment of stability and calm in ourselves and our homes,

We find a never-ending cycle... there is a trigger (person, place, or thing) that stresses us; there is a reaction; and typically, this action causes another reaction, and so on.



we need to learn to control our reaction and relax when feeling uncomfortable or stressed. Go back to the yoga class visualization. When the instructor is having us hold the posture and we notice that tendency to feel increasingly anxious, we can deliberately begin to relax our shoulders, relax our abdomen, and wipe all expression from our face. The brain does what we tell it!! And this tells the brain to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system - or the relaxation response. By repeatedly telling the brain to relax when in an anxious state, we are hard-wiring new neural networks. Over time this will change our relationship with stressors of all kinds.

Thus, by becoming aware of the uncomfortable feeling, slowing down, acknowledging it, allowing it, regulating our response, and relaxing our body, we

can switch into a different, more relaxed, and calm state of mind. This takes effort and time to cultivate.

Each time you feel stressed apply these steps (SWAT®)

1. **Slow** down.
2. **Withdraw** your focus inward to how the body feels.
3. **Accept**, allow the uncomfortable energy. (Don't label it or judge yourself.)
4. **Trigger** relaxation in your shoulders, abdomen, face. Stay there!

Re-wiring your stress response has lifelong benefits. Think of it this way... you'll have plenty of opportunity to try this in life. You can either do what you have been doing (how's that working?) or try something different.

In my 10 years of study with a guru, I have learned how quickly I have been able to deliberately re-wire my stress response

and get rid of my triggers altogether. This process has revealed an inner stability in myself, a security that I can overcome challenges in peace, bring calm to myself, my family, and a room that is anxious. (This is a great help in meetings and when I give keynotes!) Learning these techniques has eliminated my 50+ allergies; helped me create an honest, calm, prosperous home; and deepened

my relationships with my family, changing my life both on the inside and out.

Now more than ever, we need the foundation of a calm, secure and loving home to support our ability to stay positive through the changes ahead. Everyone wants to come home to a warm, predictable, stable environment. The first step is building an inner stability that will radiate throughout your life!

Michelle Anne's education includes study in Neuroscience & Leadership from Harvard University. She holds a Liberal Arts degree from Miami University. She also studied Communication Design at Parsons School of Design. Michelle is a Diplomat at The American Institute of Stress and is an ICF Certified Master Executive Neuro Coach. Michelle has acted as a Virtual First Responder for the Harvard Medical School, coaching front liners to manage the impacts of COVID-19.



In addition, Michelle has a 19 year background in Stress Management including training in MBSR (Mindful-based Stress Reduction), 10 year study in Eastern philosophy, and is honored to have been bestowed the esteemed title of Acharya (one who teaches by how they live) by a revered swami in India. For more information see <https://themasterscourse.com/>. Michelle can be reached at michelle@system2.com.

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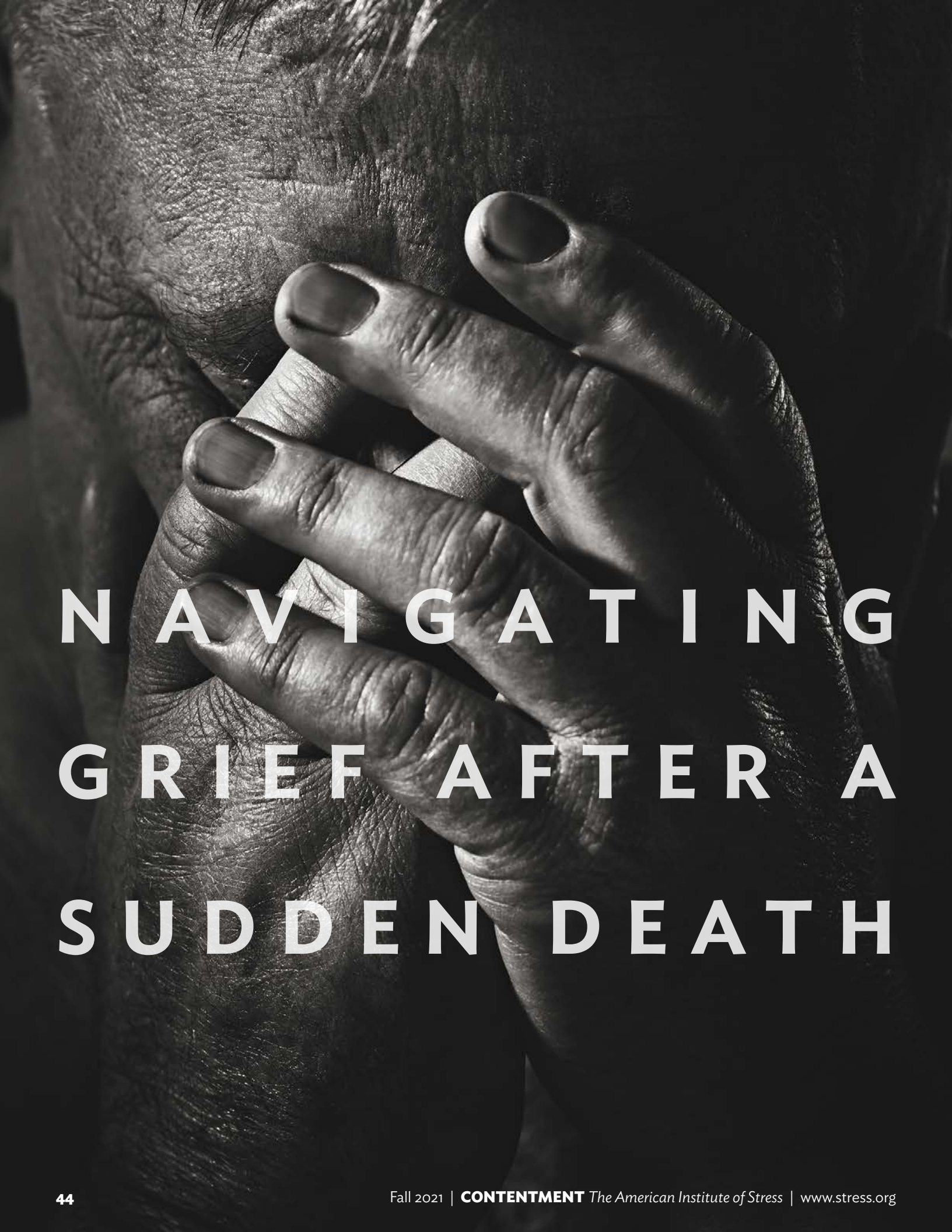
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NAVIGATING
GRIEF AFTER A
SUDDEN DEATH

By Jeff Jernigan, PhD, BCPPC, FAIS

Sudden unexpected death presents a profound, immensely complex challenge for those who remain. Grief is one of the most painful emotions anyone can ever experience. A sudden loss can bewilder and disorient everyone touched by the loss, increasing the complexity for responding and reducing ability to understand and cope with the loss. Coping with loss is a very personal experience.

With a sudden loss you are confronted not only with the trauma of loss, but the trauma of how they passed. There is no time to emotionally prepare or make sense of the situation. It is important to encourage people in these circumstances to accept support and help even though it is a time of painful confusion. Emotional pain is a real thing. It hurts.

Pain brings with it an inability to focus, numbness, anxiety, difficulty with reasoning and decision making. This will pass. Allow people time to process, be an active listener, be accepting of their responses without criticism, acknowledge their pain. You cannot process grief intellectually. Grief is not linear and is most always messy. There is healing in the mess. Grief is natural and healthy, and we have been designed to grieve, each person in their own way. Other than general guidelines, there is no magic formula for resolving grief.

Grief experts help us understand there are cycles to grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, these are not experienced by those grieving as steps or stages. We circle around in this spectrum, making forward progress and then stepping back into something we thought we were past. This recycling is normal, and we need simply to reassure those suffering a loss and experiencing these turnabouts that this is part of the process. Grief is a process, not an event.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is be present with them. Even silence during these times is therapeutic, reminding those suffering from feelings of resentment, shame, or guilt and anger that they have not been abandoned. This gives others permission to lean into their emotions, learning to live with the loss. It is important to continue expressions of concern and support well after the response of people offering condolences, flowers, meals, cards, calls, and visits has passed. The reality and depth of the situation takes much longer to settle in. Be someone the griever can trust and talk to and confide their honest feelings.

Watch for withdrawal and isolation which may not be healthy. Encourage them to not engage with normal activities and routines immediately, diving back into work and other activities. Give them permission to accept their feelings, even the ugly ones. Pay attention to any emerging medical or mental health issues. Help them experience being

Allow people time to process, be an active listener, be accepting of their responses without criticism, acknowledge their pain.

Even silence during these times is therapeutic, reminding those suffering from feelings of resentment, shame, or guilt and anger that they have not been abandoned.



listened to, understood, and taken seriously. Encourage them to get professional help if warranted.

Sudden death loss has an exaggerated effect on everyone, like ripples in a pond. Take care of yourself physically and

emotionally. Understand and honor their grief, and its vicarious effect on you. You may have your own thoughts and emotions to deal with.

Be honest. Be a heart with ears. Thank you for what you do!

Jeff Jernigan is a board-certified mental health professional known for influencing change in people and organizations by capitalizing on growth and change through leadership selection and development. Jeff currently serves Stanton Chase Pacific as the regional Life-Science and Healthcare Practice Leader for retained executive search and is the national subject matter expert for psychometric and psychological client support services.



A lifetime focus on humanitarian service is reflected in Jeff's role as the Chief Executive Officer and co-founder, with his wife Nancy, for the Hidden Value Group, an organization bringing healing, health, and hope to the world in the wake of mass disaster and violence through healthcare, education, and leadership development. They have completed more than 300 projects in 25 countries over the last 27 years. Jeff currently serves as a Subject Matter Expert, Master Teacher, Research Mentor, or Fellow in the following professional organizations: American Association of Suicidology, National Association for Addiction Professionals, The American Institute of Stress, International Association for Continuing Education and Training, American College of Healthcare Executives and the Wellness Council of America.



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