

Finding Calm During the Storm: Stress Management for Everyday Life



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calvin and hobbes

by WATERSH

GET UP, CALVIN!
I'M NOT GOING
TO CALL YOU AGAIN!

I BET.
...

YOU'RE GOING TO MISS
THE BUS! NOW GET OUT
OF BED!

YOU DON'T
KNOW THE
ANSWER? THEN
SIT DOWN.

Hey, Twinky, want to
see if there's an
afterlife?

NO, YOU CAN'T GO PLAY
UNTIL YOU FINISH YOUR
HOMEWORK.

JUST EAT YOUR FOOD.
YOU DON'T NEED TO
PLAY WITH IT.

STOP STALLING
AND GET IN THE
BATHTUB.

NO, YOU CAN'T
STAY UP A
LITTLE LONGER...
GO TO
BED.

HAVE A GOOD NIGHT'S
SLEEP. TOMORROW'S
ANOTHER BIG DAY!

... SIGHHHHHH...

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3-14 1985

“Just Suck It Up, Buttercup”

- ▶ Stress can have a huge impact on a person
- ▶ It's not a matter of “toughing it out” or “sucking it up”
 - ▶ Example: A glass of water
- ▶ Instead, finding ways to manage it that work for YOU is most important
- ▶ Understanding how you respond to stress is key
- ▶ There are good ways...and not-so-good ways
- ▶ Game Plan for this Talk:
 - ▶ Look at what stress is and how its impact on a person
 - ▶ Look at what underlies stress
 - ▶ Good Stress management techniques (and destructive stress management techniques)



What is Stress?

- ▶ A feeling of emotional or physical tension
- ▶ Your body's reaction to harmful, challenging, demanding, or any other situation which might be an issue
 - ▶ Fight, Flight, or Freeze
- ▶ In small doses, this isn't too bad. In big doses or over long periods of time, though...
 - ▶ Will start to impact emotions, behaviors, thinking ability, and physical health
- ▶ Everyone handles stress differently
 - ▶ Symptoms of being stressed out can differ greatly depending on the person



Symptoms of Stress

- ▶ Physical Symptoms
 - ▶ Low Energy
 - ▶ Headaches
 - ▶ Upset Stomach (and other GI issues)
 - ▶ Body aches, pains, muscle tension
 - ▶ Increased heart rate (possible chest pains)
 - ▶ Insomnia
 - ▶ More likely to get sick
 - ▶ Lack of sex drive/ability
 - ▶ Grinding teeth, clenching jaw
- ▶ Creates a lot of wear-and-tear on the body
 - ▶ adrenaline, cortisol, and norepinephrine



Symptoms of Stress

- ▶ Emotional/Cognitive Symptoms
 - ▶ Worrying
 - ▶ Racing thoughts
 - ▶ Difficulty focusing
 - ▶ Poor judgment
 - ▶ Agitation
 - ▶ Feeling bad about yourself (self-esteem)
 - ▶ Loneliness
 - ▶ Worthlessness
 - ▶ Lack of desire to have a social life
- ▶ Many of the symptoms here begin to turn into depression or anxiety if unchecked

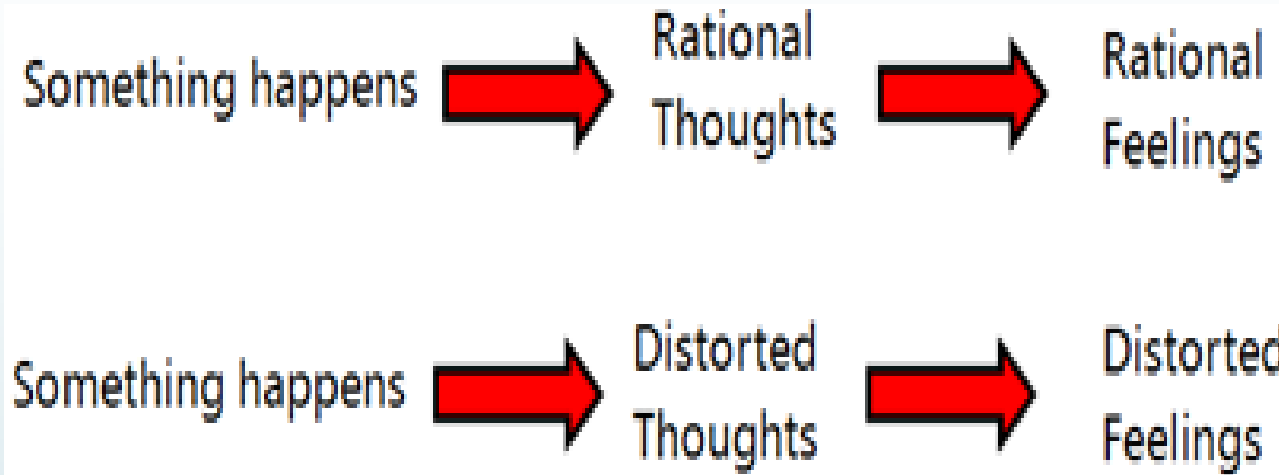


What Kinds of Things Cause Stress?

- It differs from person to person
 - Resilience plays a big part in how we handle the day-to-day
- Good Stress (what makes us feel excited)
 - Starting a new job
 - Moving to a new place
 - Getting married
 - First dates
 - Having a baby/our own children
 - Riding roller coasters
- Bad Stress (what catches us off-guard and needs immediate attention)
 - Stressful job/being laid off
 - Living in a high-crime area
 - Divorce
 - Breakup
 - Having a baby/our own children
 - Too much stress, in general (even if it's "good stress")



It All Begins With Your Perspective





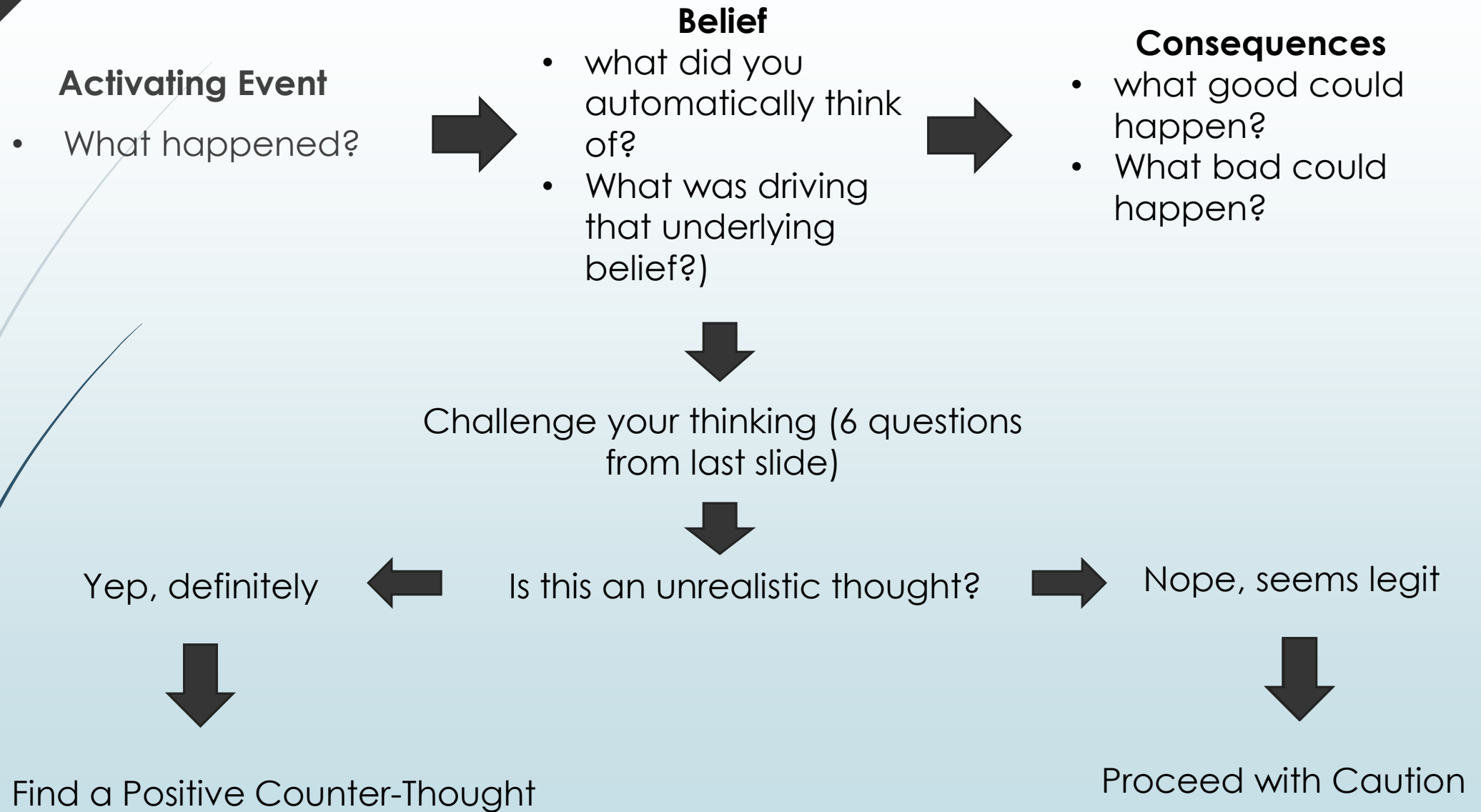
Changing Perspective

- ▶ How we think and interpret the information that comes our way plays a big role in how well we manage it
- ▶ Challenging negative thinking and how we interpret situations can be beneficial
 - ▶ 6 Questions to ask yourself regarding thoughts:
 - ▶ What is the evidence for (or against) this belief? Am I exaggerating?
 - ▶ Are there other possible interpretations/explanations for this situation?
 - ▶ Even if this is true (or partially true) will this make a big difference to me in a week? A month? A year? Will I be okay, even if the situation is true?
 - ▶ What are the odds of the bad thing happening? How likely is it that this bad thing I'm anticipating will really happen?
 - ▶ What would happen if I didn't believe this anymore? What would change?
 - ▶ How useful is it to me to think this? Will it get me what I want?

Recognizing the “Stinkin’ Thinkin’” of Daily Life

- Otherwise known as **Cognitive Distortions**
 - **Magnifying/Minimizing:** exaggerating/minimizing the importance of events
 - Catastrophizing: The worst thing is going to happen. I just know it.
 - **Overgeneralization:** It will happen that way because that’s how it’s worked in the past
 - **Magical Thinking:** behaviors will influence unrelated situations (bad things shouldn’t happen to good people)
 - **Personalization:** It’s my fault, and I am responsible for everyone’s happiness
 - **Jumping to Conclusions:** trying to make sense of a situation with little evidence
 - Mind Reading: interpreting what others think/believe without any evidence
 - Fortune Telling: Expecting things to work out poorly without any evidence
 - **Emotional Reasoning:** I feel _____. Therefore, I am _____
 - **“Should” statements:** belief that everything should be a certain way
 - **All-or-nothing thinking:** thinking in absolutes (always, never, every)

How To Examine Your Thoughts (Flowchart Edition)





Coping Skills and You

- ▶ Finding proper coping skills that work for you is an important part of managing daily stress
- ▶ Important things to remember about Coping Skills:
 - ▶ **Practice makes perfect.** Even when you don't need it, so you'll know to do it by heart when a bad situation comes up
 - ▶ **There is no "one size fits all."** What works for someone else may not work for you. The trick is finding something that best works for YOU!
 - ▶ **Think about why a coping skill is helpful.** Why does focusing on something else help? What about that part is most helpful? It might help you to find other, similar coping skills that might be useful or even find what lies at the heart of why you're struggling
 - ▶ **Coping skills are not a fix-all.** While they are useful to help you calm down and think clearly, you still have to deal with the situation that got you worked up in the first place. If it is not, the chances of your situation improving get smaller.
 - ▶ **Never, never, never, never, never, never give up!** Just because something doesn't work doesn't mean nothing will ever work. Keep trying to find what works best for you!



Not-So-Great Coping Skills

- ▶ While it's natural to want to do what you can to “deal” with the stressors of daily life, sometimes our means of coping can bring more problems
 - ▶ Substance Use
 - ▶ Stress Eating
 - ▶ Hitting stuff (situational)
 - ▶ Addictions of any kind (sex, TV, video games, shopping, social media, etc.)
 - ▶ Anything taken to an extreme level/frequency
- ▶ A few questions to ask yourself about your “coping skill”
 - ▶ Is it hurting me (either right now or down the road)?
 - ▶ Is it hurting others (right now or down the road)?
 - ▶ Is it helping me to manage the emotions and feelings? Or just stuff them without resolving anything?
 - ▶ Is it helping me to revisit the issue to address it after I have calmed down? Or just help me avoid it?



Setting Goals

- ▶ Gives you a sense of momentum and can help with the worry of where to actually start with something
- ▶ Making good goals is important
 - ▶ Be specific (simple and clear)
 - ▶ Make sure they are measurable (be able to check your own progress)
 - ▶ Make sure you can actually achieve your goal
 - ▶ Make them result-focused (always be looking at the end result)
 - ▶ Give yourself a time limit on completion
- ▶ Example Goal:
 - ▶ What your goal is (I want to lose 10 pounds by the end of the month)
 - ▶ How will you complete this goal (I will go to the gym three times a week)
 - ▶ Mini-goal that helps complete the main goal (I will bring a prepared gym bag on those days)
 - ▶ Mini-goal that helps complete the main goal (I will prioritize this time by putting it in my calendar)
 - ▶ I will make it a point to lessen my sweets to once a day
 - ▶ I will drink water when I am feeling cravings
 - ▶ I will substitute fruit or vegetables when I am craving candy



Acceptance

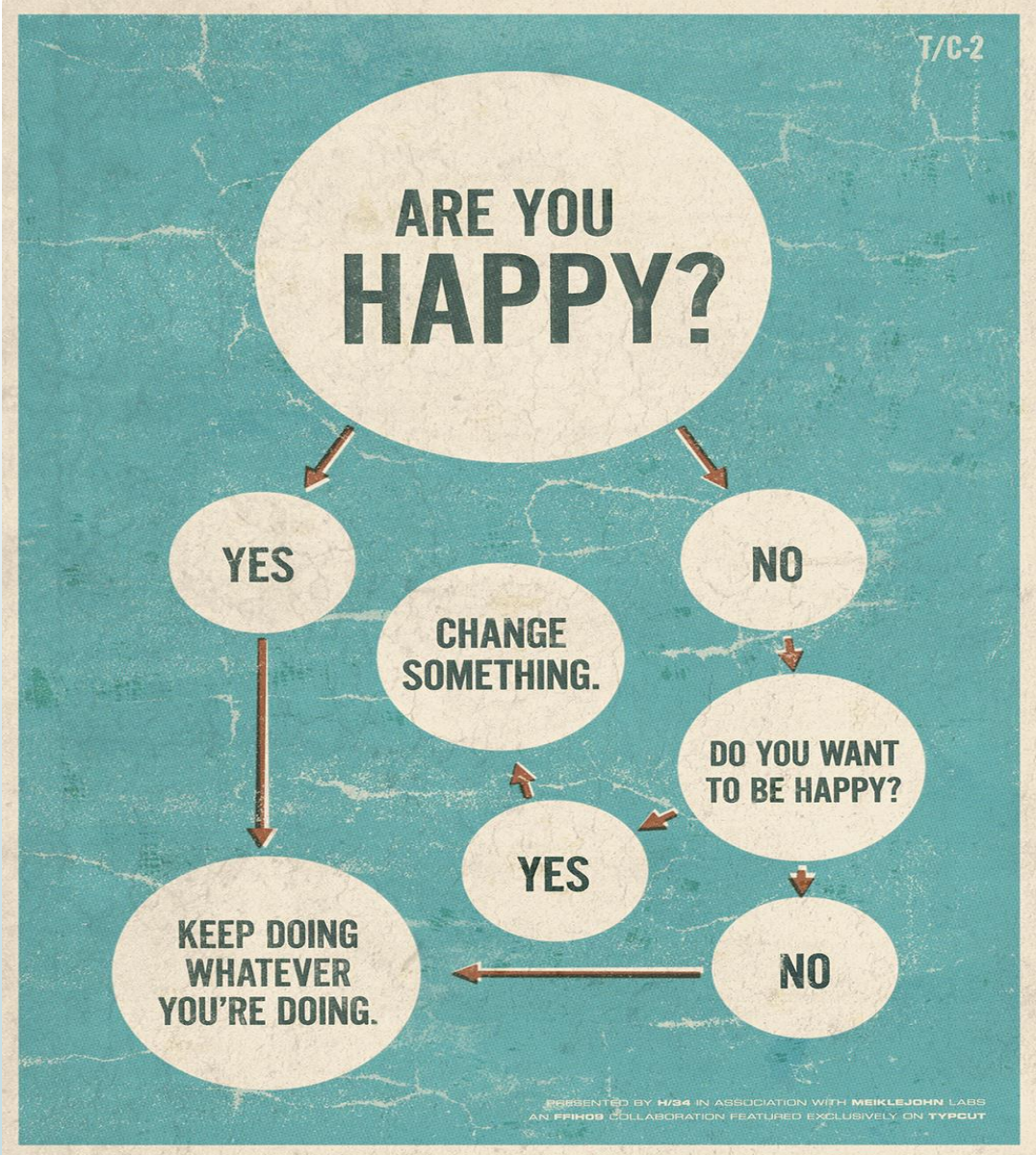
- ▶ Sometimes life happens and there isn't much we can do about it
 - ▶ Good situations and bad situations, alike
- ▶ Sometimes the only thing we can do is acknowledge that it happened and find a way to best manage what comes from it
- ▶ Feeling the feelings when these situations happen is a big part of growing and getting better
- ▶ Acceptance does not mean the same thing as giving up
 - ▶ There are still things you can do for “damage control” of the situations
- ▶ A big part of acceptance is recognizing that you only have so much control over a situation or person
 - ▶ You have control over yourself (your own thoughts, feelings, emotions, ways you handle situations, etc.)
 - ▶ You do NOT have control over other people, places and things
 - ▶ The less time you spend trying to control that which you can't control, the less frustrated you will be



Other things To Keep In Mind

- ▶ Talk about your problems, even if they won't be solved
 - ▶ Talking about stress can release hormones that help reduce negative feelings
 - ▶ Spend time with friends and loved ones, or find a good support net
- ▶ Prioritize your responsibilities
 - ▶ Complete quick tasks first. Feeling overwhelmed is never good
 - ▶ Knocking out some of the small stuff first can help clear your mind to deal with bigger responsibilities later
- ▶ Focus on the basics
 - ▶ Stress can create negative cycles. Make sure you're taking care of your basic needs
- ▶ Don't put your eggs in one basket
 - ▶ Over-involving yourself in one part of your life can lead to struggles with stress
 - ▶ Find balance in your life
- ▶ Set aside "me" time
 - ▶ Don't push taking time for yourself to the bottom of the list. Try to find some time (even 30 minutes) to do something relaxing or that you enjoy without interruptions (and only focus on that!)
- ▶ Keep things in perspective
 - ▶ Stress leads to emotions. Emotions lead to not thinking so straight sometimes

Questions? Thoughts?





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