

## Coping with Stress

So much of what we are reading, hearing, and seeing in the headlines of today's media communicates the uncertainty our current economy. Even though I often want to just turn away from all the drama, I simply can't! It affects my family, my work, my life, just as it affects your family, your work, and your life. I guess you could say that "we are in the same boat", but with our own unique stressors. I have had the challenge and opportunity to work with groups of people who have "been in the boat together." As the person at the helm of various projects, I would often use the metaphor of being in a small boat on dangerous water. We all have a responsibility for ourselves that impact the others in the boat with us. Some of us need to be rowing, while others are bailing water, while still others need to be resting in order to rotate into the other roles necessary to the survival of the entire crew. I know this seems to oversimplify the current financial environment we are experiencing and I certainly do not want to come across as trivializing the situation, it is a very serious and concerning challenge. However, I did want to emphasize that many are experiencing the same thing and can find people and resources that can help with the "rowing" or "bailing" as we navigate the waters ahead. It may take us time to find the right help, but in the meantime, we have to deal with the stress we are experiencing as a result of the dangerous waters we are in.

When you are under stress, you often feel overwhelmed, tense, angry and frustrated. You find yourself struggling to keep your moods and emotional reactions on an even keel. These are normal responses to stress and other people you are close to are likely having similar feelings. However, these feelings can lead to family arguments and relationship strain. Here are some suggestions on how to navigate these dangerous waters and allow everyone in your boat to remain working as a team you all get your feet back on the ground.

It is important that you first recognize the feelings you are having and be open to the rest of the family expressing their feelings as well. Everyone all handles stress differently and our emotional responses to stress is different. The family unit can provide an ideal place for expressing those emotions in an appropriate and safe environment.

Once you have recognized the source of stress and expressed it appropriately, you should find ways to take care of yourself. Make your health a priority. Eat nutritious meals and keep your body adequately fueled, ensure you get enough sleep and that you maintain healthy sleeping patterns, and exercise regularly.

You can find ways to take a break from the stressful situation. Try taking a walk, watching a movie, working in the yard, or picking up the hobby you put down when life got too busy. Another suggestion is to find time to practice relaxation techniques. You will need to find a quiet place where you can get into a comfortable position. Place

yourself in a seated position with your legs uncrossed or you could lie down. Concentrate on smooth, natural, and easy breathing while you focus on letting your body's muscles relax. You can do this several times a day to keep the emotional response of stress at bay.

If you find that things are simply too difficult to deal with, or that you feel out of control, you may need to get some help. How do you know when you need to find additional help and resources? Some of the more common indicators include: feeling depressed, sleep patterns have changed, disciplining your children too harshly, feeling guilty that you are not being a good parent, or misusing alcohol or drugs, feeling overwhelmed by life, just to name a few.

"Before your problems become too big to handle, find a trained, skilled counselor to help you and your family cope with this crisis. A family counselor can help you handle your fears, adjust to your present situation, and plan adequately for the future.

Health insurance may help pay for counseling costs. Some counselors charge on a sliding scale - depending on your ability to pay. Counseling may also be available from clergy at no charge." ([www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org))

It is important to remember that so many of us are in the same boat. When we are rested, we need to help those who have been rowing through the tough waters. Offering to help watch a neighbors children for an hour or two would allow the parent(s) time to go grocery shopping alone, give them time to go for a quiet walk, work in their yard, or get housework done. These are all tasks that, without distraction or additional responsibility, can you relax. It doesn't necessarily solve the cause of the stress you are facing, but it gives them more energy to keep rowing! If you need more information on coping with stress, handling financial challenges, providing economical and nutritious meals, or finding additional help for living resourcefully feel free to contact me at the Geary County Extension Office at 238-4161.