



STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR EARLY CHILDCARE PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS

Amy McDuffee, LPC
Family Guidance Center of Alabama

EVERYBODY GETS STRESSED

- Children are stressed when their caregivers at home are stressed. Family caregivers engaging in conflict, abuse, substance use, mental illness, and neglect can impact a child's behavior and ability to focus on learning. Children enter the daycare/learning center setting already primed to be sensitized to that caregiver's stress.
- Caregivers/educators are responsible for many aspects of a child's education and well-being from organizing learning activities to managing any given child's behavior within a larger group of children who also require attention. Caregiving requires use of physical, mental, emotional, and other personal resources. These caregivers can have multiple stressful situations throughout the day.
- Caregivers who are stressed in learning settings may find their teaching skills suffer, classroom management feels overwhelming, or that it is more difficult to maintain a positive relationship with the children under their care.

CURRENT STRESSORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- The COVID-19 pandemic created a longer lag of learning performance between virtual learning and return to the classroom. Remote learning created more work for educators due to creating lesson plans for both virtual and classroom learning at the same time. There were challenges for children with remote learning because of technology issues and distractions in the home setting.
- Difficulty finding and keeping staff in schools and childcare facilities due to lower pay. Less staffing makes it more difficult for teachers to take paid absence from the classroom for needed time off to do self-care.
- Children are better able to thrive when their caregivers are stable and able to role model positive responses. In Virginia, preschool teachers reported a rise in depression from 15% pre-pandemic to 33% in 2020. Pressure by parents and administrators to meet expectations, less resources, and lack of support contributes to teacher burnout and leaving the profession.

EMOTIONAL LABOR CAN HELP OR HURT

- Emotional Labor is the suppression of our feelings in order to sustain an outward appearance while promoting the proper state of mind of others. Service employees from nurses to teachers restrain their own emotional displays as part of the expectations of their job.
- Early childhood educators engage in work that is highly emotional as well as physical and mental while providing supervision and care, handling behavior, resolving conflict and working with parents. Engagement in emotional labor can result in emotional exhaustion as teachers are expected to stay positive, calm, and encouraging while performing many tasks throughout the day.
- Teachers may pretend emotions they don't really feel so that they conform to expected emotional display rules. Other teachers may actively change inner feelings to express the emotion they wish to display which requires more significant effort. Either way can create a sense of strain. Emotional exhaustion results in feeling emotionally overextended by one's work. Teachers are more likely to experience burnout due to being in a "caring" profession.
- Teachers who use emotional well-being strategies find it helps with emotional labor. Strategies include journaling, practicing calm verbal responses prior to meeting with an angry parent, exercising or meditating for 15 minutes, paying attention to inner feelings without judgment, and talking about what happens in the classroom to a supportive person.

WHAT WORRIES YOU MASTERS YOU

- Stress is the response of the body to any demand that exceeds the mind's ability to cope. The response is negative, painful and something to be avoided.
- A positive view of stress is that it is more of a challenge that is sought out and used for personal and professional growth. Stress heightens our awareness, mental alertness, and improves our performance.
- The stress response is a state of arousal that gives us the energy levels required for tackling a stressful situation. The body goes into a "fight or flight" response. Stress is a problem when reactions are severe, frequent, or occur over a long period of time.
- Stress results in changes to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems where stress hormones prepare the body for action. Any situation that we perceive as a physical or psychological danger can promote this physical response.
- Stress affects all the systems of the body.

Short Term Effect of Stress:

- Breathing becomes shallow and rapid, shortness of breath
- The heartbeat increases
- Blood pressure rises
- Adrenaline and cortisol hormones are released into the blood
- Senses are heightened
- The liver releases sugar into the blood
- Muscles tense and tighten
- Blood flow increases to the brain and major muscles



Long Term Effect of Stress:

- Headaches
- Back and neck pain
- Asthma attacks
- Panic attacks
- Hypertension/heart attack/stroke
- Chronic fatigue
- Diabetes
- Depression/Anxiety
- Immune disorders
- Heartburn
- Nausea
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Bowel problems
- Continuous activation of the nervous system leads to wear and tear on the body



LIFE IS A PUZZLE UNTIL YOU FIND THE MISSING PEACE

Coping with stress involves a variety of strategies that helps adults and children find inner calm and peace:

- Gentle stretching exercises to release muscle tension like Tai Chi.
- Deep breathing by slowly inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth while thinking "I breathe in calm and breathe out stress".
- Naming as many animals as you can think of as a distraction.
- Gently shaking your hands or using the thumb on one hand to massage in a circle on the palm of the other hand.
- While your eyes are closed, imagine filling the room with a color that makes you happy every time you breathe out.
- Dance to slow music then dance to fast music
- Yoga poses
- Smell a candle or flower with your eyes closed



- Squeeze a stress ball
- Take a walk and count your steps. Notice the feel of the sun on your face, the breeze of the wind, sounds of bird calls, etc.
- Color in an adult coloring book
- Eat more healthy foods and rest more often
- Take time for hobbies, watching movies, reading or any activity that you enjoy
- Practice self-compassion and using self-encouragement
- Join a gym, spin class, go hiking or fishing
- Write down things you worry about and divide them into two categories: Things I Can Control and Things I Can't Control. Take the items in the Things I Can Control category and brainstorm solutions.
- Break down tasks into steps. If you need to do a lot of housework, focus on one room a day or one task a day.
- Learn to say no if you tend to overcommit your time.
- It's okay to ask for help from family, friends, professionals, and support groups.
- Cut out things that harm your sense of peace and well-being like listening to the news or drinking more caffeine to stay awake.

SOURCES ABOUT STRESS

<https://www.verywellmind.com/tips-to-reduce-stress-3145195>

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/easy-at-home-relaxation-activities-to-help-calm-kids>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/body>

Purper, C.J., Thai, Y., Frederick, T.V. *et al.* Exploring the Challenge of Teachers' Emotional Labor in Early Childhood Settings. *Early Childhood Educ J*(2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01345-y>

7 Main Challenges For Early Childhood Education Teachers

Last updated: August 31, 2022

•College Values Online | 2022

•<https://www.collegevaluesonline.com/challenges-facing-early-childhood-education-teachers/>

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ARE WELCOME

Please take the next 5 minutes to ask questions or offer your thoughts about stress:

1. Do you recognize times you exhaust yourself emotionally?
2. Do you identify symptoms of stress when happening?
3. Do you use strategies to care for yourself both at work and outside of work?
4. Did you learn anything today that surprised you?

