



e-quilibrium

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Resilience

As a psychologist, one of the things I often hear during the holiday season is, "We should have you talk to our group about holiday stress!" So I'll address this topic here.

Among the common ways to define stress is to view it as the experience of discrepancy. It may be a discrepancy between the demands of a situation and the resources one has to cope with those demands. It could be a discrepancy between current circumstances and desired circumstances (goals). Similarly, a discrepancy between expectations and reality is frequently experienced as stressful. Holiday stress can be understood as one (or more) of these types of discrepancies. The implication is that managing stress involves some modification of:

- the demands of the situation
- one's current circumstances
- one's expectations or goals
- one's resources

Determining which area (or combination of areas) to modify involves clarification of the discrepancy. What are the demands I am experiencing? What are my resources? What are my expectations or goals and how are these not being met by current circumstances? In which of these areas can I make some change? It's important to remember that even if we can't change demands, circumstances, or resources, we do have control over our own expectations and goals.

Effective coping involves resilience, that is, the ability to adapt and persevere when one experiences discrepancy (or

adversity). Following are what I consider to be among the important factors in being resilient.

Self-care. Our well-being is challenged when we experience stress, so this is precisely the time when we most need to emphasize a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, health behaviors tend to become more negative in stressful periods. Therefore, stress management needs to include attention to sleep, diet, and exercise.

Perspective. Stress and negative emotions tend to narrow attention, so that our perspective is inclined to become more limited. Therefore, questions designed to broaden attention can be very useful. What is the bigger picture here? How important will this seem a week from now? A month from now? A year from now? What's another way to look at this situation?

Change. Certainly change involves discrepancy, that is, discrepancy between how things were and how they are now (or are becoming). Sometimes we work very hard at trying to protect things from change, when, in fact, there is no life without change. Rather than resisting change, it is generally more effective to consider how one can adapt to or be a contributor to change.

Problem-solving. The most important resource we have for coping with stress is our ability to think. Most situations in which we experience discrepancy or adversity can be viewed as problems to solve. I like to use the acronym CADDIE to remember the steps in problem-solving:

- Clarify the problem
- Generate Alternatives for addressing the problem
- Determine the consequences of each alternative
- Decide which alternative to utilize
- Implement the decision
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the action taken

Relationships. Having supportive relationships is arguably the most important ingredient in well-being and quality of life. Nurturing such relationships on an ongoing basis means that support is more likely to be available during stressful periods.

Resilience and health... my wish for you for the holiday season and the New Year!

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