Understanding Stress in Today's Society

Last year I wrote about stress and this year it remains an important topic worth sharing more about. My experience in counseling and teaching psychology have led me to information I feel is valuable to share with students and families.

Can't we just avoid stress? Unfortunately, the answer is no as we all experience stress. Did you know that some stress is helpful? Manageable stress allows us to overcome adversity, gain tools, grow, and face and walk through stress better in the future. Stress is important for growth. Stress lets us know something is wrong and readies us to respond to a challenge or solve a problem.

What has changed with stress and coping? If you're a parent, you might find yourself thinking, why is this causing my child stress? I faced that and much more and it didn't have the same impact on me. My child should have skills to get through this. You're not alone in these thoughts yet the way stress is viewed and perceived, and the coping skills youth have to face and walk through it are different from in the past.

What do people report regarding stress? The American Psychological Association (APA) has identified a mental health crisis. Research points to less coping ability when it comes to facing stressors which in turn impacts reported declines in mental and physical health. Surveys find people reporting both higher stress levels and less ability to cope well (feeling overwhelmed by stressors, turning to less healthy coping methods, for example) than in the past. Along with this, people report getting less sleep due to stress which can have a cascade of negative impacts on both our bodies and minds. Groups most impacted include parents and young people (APA, 2020, 2021) making this an ongoing and relevant topic for all of us! (Ivey et al., 2023)

What impact does perception have? Research demonstrates that how we perceive a stressor, the event/situation/happening that causes stress (our body's response) often has more impact than the stressor itself. In other words, if we view a stressor as overwhelming and feel we cannot impact the outcome, it is much more difficult to walk through than if we view it as something we have the skills/tools to face and look for the positive in the situation. It doesn't mean it's easy to walk through but our perception has a large impact on how we proceed, mind and body, when facing a stressor.

What does all this mean for me? Understanding stress in today's society can help us model and teach positive, healthy coping skills. Research in neuroscience finds that listening while being present in the moment, and demonstrating empathy positively impacts the brain. While as parents we may want to help our kids avoid stress, if we allow them instead to walk through it with support, skills developed and abilities to cope in the future increase. While much support can be found in the research regarding these concepts, we can boil it down to the idea that as we care for our kids, families, and each other, we positively impact their (and our) minds and bodies. Your support and empathy for others encourages them to work through adversity and build resilience. (Ivey et al, 2023)

We all experience stress, and **some good news** is that manageable stress helps develop healthy coping skills and build resilience. Further, understanding how stress is perceived can assist us in guiding our youth through it in healthy and positive ways. I am happy to assist students as they explore stress and stress management. I meet with students individually and facilitate groups regarding these topics.

Please know I am a resource for all CP students and families. If you would like to discuss these topics further, you're welcome to stop by my office, email or call me anytime!

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