



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health

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## Health Services Newsletter

### Staff Wellness— Managing Stress

Working in a Head Start program can be an extremely rewarding and demanding career. It is inevitable to feel stress in the workplace and some stress is natural and even healthy. Good stress helps to focus on a task or perform at a higher level. Unfortunately, negative or chronic stress can take a toll on your health and effectiveness as a Head Start team member. Caregivers who are stressed find it more difficult to offer praise, nurturance, and the structure young children need. This can lead to children exhibiting even more challenging behaviors. Harmful levels of stress can create a negative impact on the body.

#### What are some signs and symptoms of stress?

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling tense or irritable
- Frequent illness
- Headaches
- Nausea/dizziness
- Increased/decreased appetite
- Difficulty sleeping

To manage stress, it is helpful to recognize your stressors and how to minimize any negative effects. When you are stressed, it is easy to react before even realizing you have reached your tipping point.

- Try to answer the following questions:
- What causes me stress?
- How do I know when I am stressed?
- What do I do when I'm stressed?
- How do I relieve my stress?



*Stress doesn't just effect you; it also impacts your relationships with children in your care and with coworkers.*

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#### FOR YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

#### YOU CAN TAILOR THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO INCLUDE IN YOUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER:

We all experience stress in our daily lives. Sometimes stress can be harmful and make everyday things feel overwhelming. Our children are even affected by how much stress we are under as parents. It can cause them to act out, have trouble sleeping or concentrating— all things important to how well they learn at Head Start. If you feel overwhelmed, talk to our health manager (or family service worker) to help you create a plan to manage your stress. They can also offer techniques for you and your child to cope with stress at home.

## MANAGING YOUR STRESS

Now, that you know what causes you stress, it is important to learn how to deal it. Below are some stress management techniques you might consider adding into your daily life, at home and the office. Many techniques build our ability to cope with stress over time. Other techniques offer “in the moment” coping strategies for when we feel overwhelmed. It is helpful to practice both types of strategies for when stressful moments occur.

- **Be active:** Being physical active reduces our body’s immediate reaction to stress and builds our ability to cope with future stress. Find an activity you enjoy and try to dedicate time each day or even each week to being active.
- **Eat healthy:** Drinking plenty of water and choosing healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables can help you stay healthy and fight the physical symptoms of stress.
- **Get enough sleep:** Sleep is the time our body uses to relax and repair the damage stress can create. Try to find a regular time for bed that allows 7-8 hours of sleep a night.
- **Breathe:** Belly breathing or deep breathing exercises are a proven way to reduce stress. Find proper techniques at [www.echmc.org](http://www.echmc.org).
- **Visualize:** Visual imagery is a proven way to help reduce stress. It helps you to relax by focusing on a place or image that brings you comfort. It also allows you to slow down and breathe. Sometimes it’s helpful to participate in a “guided” visual imagery tour. Find more information including a guided visual imagery video on [www.echmc.org](http://www.echmc.org).
- **Me time:** Find time for yourself each day to relax and take a few deep breaths, even if it is only a short time.
- **Giving yourself a time out:** If you find yourself becoming overwhelmed by a stressful situation, take a moment to leave your environment and take a walk, calm down, and then return to address the issue. This is a great opportunity for staff to support each other and provide backup when a colleague needs a break.
- **Keep a stress log:** Recording your reactions to stressful situations is the best way to determine how to best help yourself. It also allows you to see a bigger picture about what is going on in your life and how you manage.

Learning to manage stress in a healthy way may not come naturally. When starting any new behavior, it is important to develop a strategy for using it ahead of time. Think about one thing that causes you stress and one sign that you can recognize as being stressed. Then identify a technique you will use for dealing with your stress in a healthy way. Keep this plan handy at work and home as a reminder. This will increase the chances of the new behavior being successful.





## Legs Up a Wall

Operation Breakthrough, Kansas City MO. This trauma focused Head Start program utilizes a common yoga pose to provide staff with a stress relieving exercise that can easily be fit into the program day.

“The restorative yoga pose, **Legs Up a Wall** has become a frequent practice in our Clinical hallway. After learning and experiencing the immediate impact of this simple stress reducer; therapists can be found in a play room with their legs up a wall following an emotionally demanding session with a client, before meeting with a frustrated parent or after being called into a crisis. It was valuable for these skills to be taught to the whole team at the same time; everyone comprehends its’ usefulness. I have found by giving clinicians permission to engage in self-care strategies “on the clock” they have increased self-awareness; moving from knowing they are stressed to doing something about it, which makes for a more productive and energized employee. Additionally, therapists have translated this self-care skill into a hands-on transition activity that helps children calm down for nap in the classroom.” - Brijin Gardner

## SUPPORT OTHER TEAM MEMBERS

Health Managers can be a great resource to start staff wellness or stress management activities into their program. It is important to get “buy-in” from all staff, especially your Program Director, but you have the skills and knowledge to help others understand the importance of stress management and implement strategies for managing stress as a program.

- Offer a stress reduction workshop. Find resources, including posters, and PowerPoints at [Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#).
- Organize regularly exercise breaks for staff including walking meetings.
- Create a comfortable space for staff breaks.
- Schedule time when staff are available to offer breaks to others.
- Put resources or posters of stretches, breathing exercises, or other stress management techniques in the break room.
- Use stress management techniques before staff meetings or before children arrive/leave for the day.



## RESOURCES

### **ECLKC RESOURCES:**

*Stress Reduction and Yoga:* [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/mental-health/adult-mental-health/health\\_art\\_00562\\_08260.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/mental-health/adult-mental-health/health_art_00562_08260.html)

*Stress and the Developing Brain:* [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/mental-health/social-emotional-development/health\\_art\\_00527a1\\_081705.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/mental-health/social-emotional-development/health_art_00527a1_081705.html)

### **OTHER RESOURCES:**

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development- *Taking Care of Ourselves: Stress and Relaxation:* <http://www.ecmhc.org/relaxation.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Physical and Mental Health of Head Start Staff: The Pennsylvania Head Start Staff Wellness Survey 2012.* [http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2013/13\\_0171.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2013/13_0171.htm)

*Let's Go Healthy Workplace Toolkit* <http://www.letsgo.org/programs/workplace/healthy-workplaces/>

*Fostering a culture of health and wellness for Head Start children, families, and staff.*

### **NATIONAL CENTER ON HEALTH**

#### **Our Goal:**

To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

### **CONTACT US!**

The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to

[nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org) or call (888) 227-5125.

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<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center>

***School readiness begins with health!***

