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Dealing With Stress in HEALTHY Ways



- Understanding and Accepting Healthy Stress
- Obstacles to Healthy Mind Development
- Investigating and Controlling our Self-Talk
- Appraising our Priorities in Healthy Ways
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4 Dealing with Stress in HEALTHY Ways

4A LESSON

Understanding and Accepting Healthy Stress

This lesson examines specific situations that require tolerating healthy stress and provides helpful guidance to cushion and endure such frustrations. In addition, 4A Lesson lists several reasons why people choose to avoid this type of stress.

4A



"When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it."

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company and first manufacturer of an affordable automobile that revolutionized transportation. (1863 – 1947)

Please note: This lesson group is at an emotionally higher level of learning, and will require more time and effort than previous lessons for absorbing the content and supplements, as well as for mastering the in-depth self-governing skills included.

STUDYING THE DYNAMICS OF STRESS

Stress, by definition, amounts to experiencing anywhere from a slight discomfort, to intense physical, mental, or emotional pain. Stress can upset our physiological and psychological equilibrium, no matter whether we our struggling with a beneficial challenge, or trying to weather a traumatic experience. Studying the dynamics of stress helps us learn to more accurately judge the difference between the *healthy stress* we need to endure, and the *traumatizing stress* we must try to reduce. Learning to withstand healthy stress is an integral part of our emotional growth, and is one of the *most powerful steps* for improving self-control and overall mind operation.

Accepting healthy stress involves mustering the power for dealing with that which is difficult, yet with concerted effort, within our grasp to understand and accomplish. Not unlike the worthiness of a mother's labor pains, although rarely so agonizing, we suffer through healthy stress for championing optimal outcomes.

No doubt, maintaining a healthy emotional equilibrium requires our making intelligent adjustments to our feelings and behavior. We understand these adjustments as *self-control*, a subject of Lesson 3B, where it was covered in-depth. Psychologists have identified *self-control* and *intelligence* as two main traits that produce an immensely broad range of benefits. Increasing our understanding about healthy mind development and improving self-control are central to solving most of the problems that plague the world today.

Increasing effort for self-control, while stressed, allows us to resist unhealthy choices and to embrace the benefits of healthier options. Nonetheless, our minds are more naturally wired for avoiding the *discomfort* of healthier options.

Biology gives you a brain. Life turns it into a mind.

Jeffrey Eugenides, American novelist and short story writer. (1960 -)

When stress is involved, we are more inclined to:

1. Resolve a problem in the easiest way possible.
2. Follow natural emotional considerations, rather than intelligent guidelines.
3. Pursue frivolous entertainment, rather than meaningful activities.
4. Desire luxurious comfort, rather than suffering worthwhile pain.
5. Accept overindulgence, rather than a more practical, healthier balance.
6. Operate from a self-centered mode, rather than showing genuine concern for others.
7. Overstress, rather than apply the necessary effort for reaching a rational perspective.
8. React impatiently, rather than patiently.
9. Ignore, rather than identify a bad choice for what it is.
10. Not even consider psychological counseling.



While a gamut of physically healthy choices is promoted today, wiser *behavior* can be downright stressful in practice! Yet the consequences of accepting unhealthy choices compares to the lure of cheese in a mousetrap, except that the repercussions are usually delayed.

Also worth mentioning here are the many psychological studies revealing that people perform relatively poorly on tests of self-control when they have endured a previous, seemingly unrelated act of self-control. For example, a dieter may easily avoid a sweet roll for breakfast, but after a stressful day of making difficult decisions at work, s/he may have a much harder time resisting a rich dessert.

Nonetheless, ignoring self-control often creates a conflict of interest with our own well-being. Since the mind can not only ignore, but also justify, deny, or exaggerate so easily, we can miss to recognize that the mind is allowing such distortions to our thinking. Unfortunately, the mind can too easily remain indifferent. Adding quality direction to the self-control equation empowers us to better manage stressful feelings more intelligently.

Sometimes, when dealing with stress, all that is required is an emotional first-aid kit. With necessary knowledge, we can quickly treat and heal minor emotional wounds. This lesson provides a number of symptoms of various maladies, as well as precautions and emotional first-aid remedies. One critical item for our first-aid kit is a list of powerful mantras for calming our temperament and relieving stressful feelings. Such a list is provided herein as a lesson supplements, entitled *"Motivational and Stress Reducing Self-Talk."* By memorizing several of the comments and questions listed on this supplement, we have an excellent means for healing ways to motivate and calm ourselves.

Occasionally however, our emotional ailments are too complicated to treat by merely utilizing an emotional first-aid kit. Understanding the symptoms of emotional problems that require professional attention is as important as knowing the symptoms of serious physical problems. Below is a list of symptoms that warrant professional psychological attention. If you find yourself suffering from any of these conditions, please consider counseling. Performing these lessons in conjunction with therapy may contribute significantly toward your psychological improvement and renewed emotional well-being.

"An unfortunate thing about this world is that the good habits are much easier to give up than the bad ones."

W. Somerset Maugham, author. (1874 - 1965).

13 Counselor-Worthy Symptoms:

1. Experiencing severe anxiety.
2. Suffering serious or chronic physical illness.
3. Experiencing (or causing) physical, mental, or sexual abuse.
4. Recognizing obsessive-compulsive behavior, panic, post-traumatic stress, or eating disorders.
5. Dealing with drug, alcohol, or other behavioral addictions.
6. Suspecting major mental illness, e.g. schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (manic-depression).
7. Suffering from mild depression for more than two weeks.
8. Having thoughts of harming yourself or others.
9. Dealing with emotional problems or frustrations that are reducing your productivity.
10. Dealing with threatening conflicts, difficult decisions, or other stressful dilemmas.
11. Experiencing divorce, a death, financial issues, health problems, or other major stressors.
12. Having trouble dealing with healthy stress.
13. Poor self-care or personality change.
14. Withdrawal, increased agitation, or feelings of hopelessness.
15. Caring for others who are experiencing serious health issues, a major loss, or other calamities.

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A deficiency in our emotional cognizance and a nutritional deficiency both endanger our well-being. Medical doctors and physical fitness trainers promote the appreciation of particular foods, exercise, and therapy for healing our bodies when things go awry. Similarly, advanced understanding that counselors or coaches may share can contribute wonders to our emotional health, providing helpful suggestions, explanations, and treatments.

Studying the dynamics of healthy stress reminds us *that it is all too human for us to take the path of least resistance. Whenever we tolerate what is difficult and demanding because it is important to accomplish, we are applying healthy stress. Often we just need a better understanding and helpful tools for assisting us in fending off nature's consequential influence on our emotions. It is important to know when we only need an emotional first-aid kit, as well as a time to seek a counselor or emergency room treatment.*

UNDERSTANDING HEALTHY COMMAND OF THE MIND

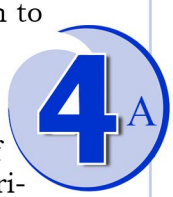
The development of useful products, services, and treatments over the years has made our lives more comfortable and less stressful. We have learned that life is happier when we can *do* what's fun and *have* what is luxurious. Lately, however, the happiness equation has *matured* to include a few, more down-to-earth factors, notably in our attention to physical health, emotional stability, and relationship harmony. Improving these more meaningful *happiness* factors requires our developing an in-depth comprehension of ourselves and tolerant of others. To develop such insight requires us to build a healthier command of our minds and improve our self-parenting skills.

To some degree, all of us were introduced and taught detailed instructions for increasing healthy command in our youth. We learned a *mass* of unwritten rules, guidelines, and limitations throughout our childhood for reaching a safer, civilized adulthood. Adults were responsible for teaching us do's and don'ts about security, ethics, diplomacy, and spiritually healthy ideals. In adolescence, we needed healthier command of our minds for studying the many school subjects at hand, while struggling with peer pressure and other new responsibilities.

> *Happiness is not the absence of problems, it's the ability to deal with them.*
>
> Steve Maraboli, motivational speaker, bestselling author, and behavioral science academic. (1975 -)

Arriving at adulthood, we took charge of managing our own lives, free from the reins of parental authority and began to parent ourselves. Continuing our emotional and intellectual development was now up to us alone. Unfortunately, many of us became too busy with jobs and family to consider learning more about healthier command of our mind.

No doubt, the human mind is a phenomenal instrument, with magnificent reasoning power and potential, yet with too little emotional training, the human mind does not seem to grasp emotional jeopardy very well. Our limited understanding of healthy command often causes aversion to the very things that would reap us the greatest rewards.



Humans can fall prey to a similar limited tolerance as other creatures, when it comes to accepting mild pain. We can become as dangerous as a wild animal to a veterinarian who is simply trying to remove a splinter from its paw, lashing out at anyone who reminds us of our human foibles. Our denial or avoidance of other's concerns can also cause us more serious problems, just as an animal with a splinter unattended.

Understanding a healthy command of the mind reminds us *of how important mindful leadership direction is for developing an emotionally well-balanced mind. No doubt, the human mind is a phenomenal instrument, with magnificent reasoning power and potential, yet with too little emotional training, the human mind does not seem to grasp emotional jeopardy very well. Our limited understanding of healthy command often causes aversion to the very things that would reap us the greatest rewards.*

APPLYING HEALTHY COMMAND WHILE STRESSED

We must understand that our effort toward practicing healthy command represents a conscious endeavor for applying our most sensible reasoning. During the 19th Century, Henry David Thoreau, American author, poet, and philosopher wrote poignantly about conscious endeavor: *"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor."* As we begin each day, we would do well to remind ourselves that our EQ growth depends greatly upon such a conscious endeavor.

Healthy command is vital for consciously examining and accurately evaluating stress. Are we trying to reduce understandable frustration, or are we in the midst of healthy stress or discipline that we should endure? Only through conscious investigation is there the chance for handling our difficulties in a healthier and more active manner. As mentioned earlier, the way the nervous system is wired, we can quickly exaggerate or wrongfully determine the need for fight or flight, like that of many other creatures. Thus, understanding the way the body and mind work, scientifically, can also help us understand the dynamics of how our emotions naturally affect us while stressed.

From a scientific standpoint, coping with stressful moments triggers an alert system in the body that sets off biological changes, including those to our *stress hormones.* Researchers have found that stress resilient people have a higher level of the stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline, when coping than others who aren't so resilient. Thus, laboratories have developed stress hormone supplements for those with little resiliency. Perhaps we should consider that, if we are having difficulty dealing with stress, we may also be deficient in stress hormones.

When experiencing extreme anger or sadness, as well as other emotional blows, consider the similarity of the debilitating feeling to a physical muscle spasm or hypothermia. Whether dealing with physical or emotional situations, we must know healthy ways to calm our suffering. Emotionally, when we reach a tense state of mind, the pain can desensitize our better judgment, while at the same time exaggerating the seriousness of the problem at hand. Sadness, fear, or anger can cause an unwarranted panic attack, impulsive behavior, or even suicidal thoughts when we don't know and apply appropriate treatment or action.

"My biggest motivation? Just to keep challenging myself. I see life almost like one long university education I never had. Every day I'm learning something new."

Richard Branson, English businessman and investor. (1950 -)

If we have little understanding about emotions, desensitizing our connection to better judgment is much easier than for someone who is well educated about emotions. With advanced knowledge, we know how to avoid such tension in the first place, or how to more quickly maneuver the mind back to a stable state.

At times, we also must observe our behavior through the magnified lens of brutal self-honesty. Such detective-oriented sleuthing enables us to see ourselves as outside observers. Yet be aware that self-honesty is very humbling and can occasionally cause stressful embarrassment as we recognize our own wrong doings or inappropriate behavior. Demanding self-scrutiny that increases self-awareness is taxing and requires a careful approach, even to healthy stress.



Similar to physical exertion, you should be careful not to overexert your mind, psychologically, by trying to accomplish what is too difficult too soon, or too much at one time. If you are usually highly productive, running into too many roadblocks can be devastating. Should you begin to feel overwhelmed by your self-observations, watch that you do not become discouraged-ed Be sure to consider whether you are expecting too much too soon or need to consult a counselor.

Applying healthy command of the mind while stressed reminds us *that such discipline requires a conscious endeavor toward learning a mass of do's and don'ts, guidelines, and behavioral limits, as well as the practice of employing them. By resisting emotional self-leadership, we are often avoiding the very things that would lead us toward our greatest rewards. Healthy options are often more painful than we wish to sustain, even for the sake of meaningful accomplishment. The best way for overpowering the natural sensations of our emotions is by gaining better understanding and by practicing a higher level of scrutiny than is readily self-evident or desired.*

ADVANCING THE MIND TO A MORE SOPHISTICATED LEVEL

We advance our emotional intelligence and mental capacities by learning particular techniques and exercises designed to improve mind function. However, learning anything that significantly improves mind function involves time and increased effort. In previous lessons, you learned about improving alertness and building sophisticated gauges, as well as engineering your thinking, all with the goal of enhancing mind function. This lesson suggests that you practice additional techniques and exercises that furnish much clearer directional guidance than otherwise possible when stressed.

Without particular understanding and tools at our disposal, emotions may too easily overpower rational judgment— crippling us, very similar to how kryptonite hijacks the power of the fictitious Superman®. For Superman's best protection, he would need to possess an acute understanding of what kryptonite is, what it looks like, and what it can do to him, as well as where it is most predominantly found— and how to avoid it. Doesn't it make sense for us to have a similar under-standing of what unsettles and cripples our lives emotionally?

Unfortunately, during real lives as humans, our emotional "kryptonite" represents much more than just a single crippling substance. We are influenced by a variety of emotional factors that reduce our ability to protect ourselves and to grow emotionally. No doubt, our emotional kryptonite too easily immobilizes us and causes many self-governing problems.

Consider the crippling pain we can endure while dieting to lose less than 1/100 of our body weight in a single day. We cannot help but wonder why the mind and body must exaggerate the intense pain of this process, while we are attempting so diligently to drop such an insignificant amount of body weight. As beneficial as this slight body change may be, it is nonetheless a very difficult human achievement for most of us, largely due to the way emotions erroneously direct us through the stress that hunger causes. As mentioned, being unable or unwilling to endure healthy stress is possibly our greatest deterrent to emotional growth and a healthier body.

"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."

Mahatma Gandhi, preeminent leader who led the independence movement in British ruled India and inspired civil rights and freedom around the world. (1869 – 1948)

Advancing the mind to a more sophisticated level reminds us *how much such an endeavor contributes toward our well-being. Even though we are prone to react to healthy stress akin to Superman's® reaction to kryptonite, a better understanding can help us recognize how emotions erroneously direct us. With increased knowledge, we will surely find it easier to develop the courage necessary for overpowering our crippling emotional kryptonite.*

AVOIDING POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

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When we don't accept healthy stress, we don't often realize having been conned by our own erroneous thinking until experiencing unpleasant consequence. Experiencing these consequences can be extremely revealing, yet often considerably more painful than dealing with healthy stress in the first place.

We may be most remorseful of the consequences we suffer when not heeding the warnings of impending danger. Practicing healthy regard for such caution strengthens our foresight and intuition. However, when potent emotional forces are at the forefront of our mind or if healthy stress is avoided habitually, our oversight becomes synonymous with ignoring the fine print of a contract. One of the supplements to this lesson entitled, *"Consequences of Not Enduring Healthy Stress,"* offers further insight worth pondering.

One last point worth noting about consequences before closing this lesson involves *common sense,* a term that we often employ when discussing what we believe everyone should understand and know to do or not do. Webster's Dictionary defines *common sense* as a sound practical judgment that is independent of specialized knowledge or training. Understanding how to manage most of our emotions requires specialized knowledge and training. This is not common sense. We must remember too that what is rational, or what we refer to as common sense, is still susceptible to being overpowered by our emotions.

Actions that we might consider as examples of a lack of common sense and stupidity are often the result of limited understanding or weak efforts toward self-control. As students of EI, please remember to refrain from ridiculing others who have been outwitted by their emotions, thus suffering remorse and unpleasant consequences. Your training should empower you to avoid being critical of others who lack helpful emotional education.

At EI Institute, we prefer to classify what others might consider common sense, as really *practical sense*, i.e. that which is rational to grasp, and sensible to employ, yet still easily stifled by our emotions. Tolerance of healthy stress can thus be a practical matter of:

1. Understanding the dynamics of healthy stress.
2. Finding incentives to endure such stress.
3. Learning to calm temperament.
4. Strengthening our emotional stamina.

Reviewing the potential consequences of avoiding healthy stress reminds us *that nature allows emotions to intrude on our better judgments. By not empowering self-control, we become more susceptible to the path of least resistance and other more self-defeating inclinations. Intense effort is not a standard app in the mind, available for any healthy intent or purpose, yet avoiding effort to endure healthy stress can contribute toward many of our consequent actions.*

IN CONCLUSION: Building an Allegiance to Healthy Mind Development

Stress clearly upsets our physiological and psychological equilibrium. Thus, learning to deal with stress in healthy ways is a necessary educational endeavor. With emotions being forefront at the gateway of our thinking process, understanding how our feelings can cause us to react erroneously empowers us tremendously. A deeper comprehension enables us to direct our emotions more consciously. Otherwise, nature's ill influences can too freely manipulate our thinking below a conscious radar, causing us in turn to ride an emotional roller coaster.

"I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions."

Stephen Covey, American educator, author, businessman, and keynote speaker. (1932 – 2012)

Too often, we avoid applying effort toward doing what we don't want to do, even though we are really capable of such effort. We all have *key* moments in our daily lives, wherein it is in our best interest to either stop and retreat, or assertively move forward. Nevertheless, we can too easily bypass these opportunities for accepting our better judgment, because they involve *stress*.

Granted, leading ourselves into emotional suffering, even if in pursuit of a healthy objective is not a popular motivator for the majority of us in this world. Sadly, we may not be considering that *efforts* reflect how seriously we take responsibility for self-parenting. Our efforts also reveal how interested we really are in improving mind development.

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Sacrificing wisely for what is truly worthy ranks among the most noble and mature accomplishments we humans can strive for. While building our strength and allegiance toward healthy mind development, we should always remember that preserving our comfort in the face of healthy stress is a self-gratifying choice that stunts our emotional growth. As mentioned many times and many ways, being smart about how we react to our feelings is critical to healthy mind development.

Unfortunately, trying to modify unmanaged emotions can be equivalent to waging a major war. Winning our emotional battles compares with the mastery of tricky aerodynamic maneuvers utilized by a pilot while pulling an airplane out of a tailspin. Yet the absolute wonders of the human mind include the efforts and accomplishments of those who have been willing to learn to pilot their own emotions.

As noted in the book, *Virtuous Minds* by Phillip E. Dow, *"Every choice we make to improve our minds is another dollar in the bank. Every time we decide to be lazy or flippant in our thinking, we are taking another dollar out. When we come to make big decisions in our life, we want to find an account overflowing with intellectual capital, not one long overdrawn."* We may never be the ones to discover inventions or services that revolutionize society, but we can discover the knowledge and power that will tremendously transform our own minds.

As you review this lesson, please take time to reread Lesson 1C page 2, *"Grasping the Challenges of Regulating Emotions"* and earlier lesson supplements that pertain to self-control. At this point, remember that you are currently exploring the first lesson of group 4, not the last. As you progress through this group of lessons, the additional knowledge and unique activities should continue to strengthen your endurance of stress. Please remember that to grow emotionally, we must acknowledge our ability to ignore healthy stress, and increase our efforts to apply self-control.

Be sure to perform the activities for this lesson as they will help you better understand how you deal with healthy stress and assist in improving your reactions. Any additional time spent on familiarizing yourself with the lesson materials will build upon your allegiance to healthy mind development. After completing this lesson, we would expect you to have the capability for more frequently identifying healthy stress in your own life, and the power to start challenging your avoidance.

"Each time you use your new heightened level of self-discipline, you increase your self-esteem and self-confidence. As your self-esteem increases, you feel stronger, more powerful, more unstoppable. With new strength, you become more capable of winning no matter what life throws your way."

Brian Tracy, Canadian entrepreneur, public speaker, author,
and personal/professional development trainer. (1944 -)

NOTES



When you doubt your power, you give power to your doubt..

Leo F. Buscaglia, American motivational speaker, personal development author, and professor. (1924 - 1998)