

Approaches for Students to Lead a Stress free life

Dr. K. S. Kanti

Educational Consultant,

Hyderabad.(A.P)

Kanthi_vakkalanka@yahoo.co.in

Abstract: Appropriate stress is a juncture for self-growth; it is also a motivation for people to progress actively. It not only affects our thoughts and feelings but our behavioural models, as well. However, overstress causes problems and discomfort, and can have serious effects on people. Many techniques cope with the stresses life brings like Autogenic training, Social activity, Cognitive therapy, Conflict resolution etc. Cognitive therapy for stress rests on the premise that it's not simply the events in our lives that cause us stress; it's the way we think about them.

Key Words: Stress, Academic Stress, Cognitive Therapy

I. Introduction

Stress is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living-- necessary because without some stress we would be listless and apathetic creatures, and unavoidable because it relates to any external event, be it pleasurable or anxiety producing [6]. A person's response towards stress depends on whether an event is appraised as a challenge or a threat [4]. Challenging stimulus can lead to positive outcomes such as motivation and improved task performance while threatening ones or distress can result in anxiety, depression, social dysfunction and even suicidal intentions.

Along with the improvements during the scientific era and the rapid development of information, competitiveness among people has become increasingly intense, as a consequence, people have become busier and, therefore, stress is a natural consequence. Even though appropriate stress is a juncture for self-growth, it is also a motivation for people to progress actively. It not only affects our thoughts and feelings but our behavioral models, as well. However, overstress causes problems and discomfort, and can have serious effects on people [6].

II. Academic Stress

Academic stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students or lecturers [3]. Academic Stress is inescapable. Everyone experiences it to varying degrees. Below are the roots and causes, and why it manifests in students:

1) *Competition in Academia*

Students starting from their school, college and university, at every level want to do well. Initially you find this competition to be a healthy competition where students try to encourage one another & help each other but slowly it changes, we come across students ripping each other to shreds by comparing and contrasting their performances. This happens among friends too. This competition leaves the students with academic stress.

2) *Race to the Finish Line*

Another major trigger for academic stress is eagerness to win the race of life. Students study hard for personal fulfillment, enrichment and excitement, more than these it's because they want a bright future and a rewarding (more importantly, well paid and possibly even prestigious) career. This starts in the L.K.G itself when the teacher asks the students what they want to be when they grow up. As Soon as the student enters the professional course they are set to race the race of life. Their desire to finish quickly, start careers & earn big bucks leaves them with stress.

3) *Piling up a Plate the Size of Tasmania*

Here we need look into extracurricular. Extracurricular activities and academic studies are like bread and butter. You can't have one without the other. Today students are expected to perform well in academics as well as in extracurricular activities also because extracurricular are being used as a tool to look attractive for the employers. Just like overloading text books & subjects, too many activities at the same time also become overload and leave the students with academic stress.

III. Techniques to Manage Stress

Many techniques cope with the stresses life brings. Some of the following ways induce a lower than usual stress level, temporarily, to compensate the biological tissues involved; others face the stressor at a higher level of abstraction:

- Autogenic training
- Social activity
- Cognitive therapy
- Conflict resolution
- Exercise
- Getting a hobby
- Meditation

IV. Cognitive Therapy

Cognitive therapy for stress rests on the premise that it's not simply the events in our lives that cause us stress, it's the way we think about them. For example, two people may be caught in traffic. While one person could view this situation as an opportunity to listen to music or get lost in thought and become (or remain) relaxed, another person may focus on the wasted time or the feeling of being trapped, and become distressed [2]. One such Cognitive approach is *The Decision Making Approach*.

V. A Decision making Approach To Manage Stress

According to Rebecca Mason, Nancy and Donald Tubesing presented a model for dealing with stress in their book *Structured Exercises in Stress Management*, called the "AAABC's of Stress Management" [5]. This approach views stress management as a decision making process involving three basic ways to deal with stress:

- Alter it
- Avoid it
- Accept it by
- Building our resistance or
- Changing our perception

The AAABC method begins with simpler strategies and moves to more complex techniques. All of the approaches can be used effectively to cope with stress.

Altering means changing something about the source of stress. Problem solving, direct communication, organizing and time management are common techniques.

Avoiding refers to removing oneself from the stress or preventing the stress. Techniques involve walking away, saying "no", setting boundaries, being assertive, or delegating.

Accepting means to equip oneself physically and mentally for stress by building resistance. We do this by caring for ourselves in four areas of our life: physical, mental, social and spiritual. *Physical* self care involves proper diet, adequate sleep, exercise, and learning and practicing relaxation techniques. *Mental resistance* is fostered through taking time for mental health, maintaining a positive attitude and being clear about our own goals, values and priorities. *Social resistance* increases when we communicate clearly, build and maintain support systems, and invest time and energy in relationships with friends and intimate partners. *Spiritual resistance* is strengthened through practices such as prayer and meditation, but also includes other activities that give life meaning.

There are some stressors however, that require more than the strategies above. This type of stressor is a reality that we have to learn to live with. It is not going to go away.

The only thing we can change about this type of situation is how we are looking at it. This involves using a variety of cognitive techniques that help us change the way we perceive the stress. Changing irrational beliefs such as “I should succeed at everything I try” or “because he doesn’t like me I am a loser” can decrease our stress [5].

Reframing or redefining a situation is another option. The situation is happening anyway, so the best way to deal with the stress is to choose a positive way to look at it. To do this, ask yourself what other ways can I look at this situation? Try and come up with as many other options as possible. It can help to ask yourself what is good about the situation. For example, if your classmate is out on medical leave and you are doing her work as well as your own, other perspectives might include having better rapport with the teacher, a chance to learn new skills or an opportunity to shine in your class. You can also ask yourself what you might learn through dealing with the problem. Focus on what is controllable and on what exists, not on what doesn’t exist. If you continue to focus on things you have no control over, or what you wish you had, stress just gets worst [5].

Many of us are stressed worrying over what might happen. David Posen, on his web site, calls this “long distance worrying”. Some people can’t imagine not worrying because the only other option seems to be to deny the problem and be complacent until blindsided. Posen advocates choosing a middle ground between worry and complacency, that of concern. While worry involves emotions and is problem oriented, concern is solution oriented, and helpful instead of stressful [1].

Posen’s term is “creative worrying” and he recommends facing the issue directly by asking four questions: What is the worst that can happen? Is it likely to happen? If it does happen, how will I handle it? What can I do to prevent or prepare for it? Once these questions are answered, you have done all you can do, and you have a plan-- then the problem is easier to let go[1] .

VI. Some simple Tips for students to lead a stress free life

Apart from the above mentioned approach, some simple tips are given below which will help the students to reduce their stress levels.

Manage time to manage stress

Effective time management is a key approach to preventing avoidable stress. Students should keep themselves organized and plan ahead. Anticipate their peak stress times and clear their schedule as much as possible to be able to focus on the most important assignments, exams and other schoolwork. They should keep a running “to do” list, and keep doing the tasks on their list in order of their priority.

Keep out of the rut with routines

Students need to work on developing productive, healthy routines; they will notice a dramatic drop in their stress levels. Routines automate certain decisions about time management and work that can help them stay on top of their schedule. Adequate sleep, a good diet, and exercise are crucial to preparing their mind and body to handle daily stressors. Developing regular study routines will help them to keep up with school work and prevent the need for last-minute work on deadlines and cramming for exams which can add to their stress.

Habits

Many coping mechanisms are not effective at alleviating stress and may, over the long term, be harmful. For example, smoking, alcohol and drug use, and indulging in junk food binges are simply means of masking the stress. Students should know what is best for their body and their emotional and mental health; they should break away from bad habits and form good ones. Finally, consider talking to someone else about the problem. Sometimes another person can add a perspective that you had not considered.

“Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response TO what happens. And RESPONSE is something we can choose” ~ Maureen Killoran

VII. REFERENCES

1. David Posen, M.D. *How we create stress for ourselves*. Retrieved from <http://www.davidposen.com/> visited on March 22nd, 2013.
2. Elizabeth Scott, M.S. *How does cognitive therapy work for stress?* Retrieved from <http://stress.about.com/od/professionalhelp/a/cognitive.htm/> visited on March 22nd 2013.
3. Fairbrother K, & Warn, J. (2003). *Workplace Dimensions, Stress and Job Satisfaction*, J. Managerial Psychol. 18(1): 8-21.
4. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. New York: Springer.
5. Rebecca Manson. *A decision making approach to managing stress*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/pub/feap/work-life/newsletters/cognitive-approaches-to-managing-stress.pdf/> visited on March 22nd, 2013.
6. Purna Prabhakar nanadamuri & Gowthami .Ch. *Sources of academic stress –A study on management students*. Retrieved from <http://jms.nonolympictimes.org/Articles/4.pdf/> visited on March 22nd, 2013.