

## ***IN CHARGE*** **A Stress Management and Problem Solving Course**

This stress management course is called ***IN CHARGE***. The course meets weekly for six sessions. Class size ranges from 8 to 12 individuals. Participants are presented with an overview of stress symptoms and their development. Subsequent sessions introduce a variety of stress management strategies, with participants encouraged to apply these strategies to their individual problems with stress.

### **Resources**

- *New Harbinger Publications* produces books and materials for clients, books for professionals, and audiotapes and related materials, such as relaxation tapes.  
<http://www.newharbinger.com/index.cfm>
- *Bull Publishing* (<http://www.bullpub.com>) sells a relaxation tape, “Time for Healing: Relaxation for Mind and Body” that includes a 30-minute tape for progressive muscle relaxation and a 30-minute tape for guided imagery.

### **SESSION 1 – Orientation and Information for Those Considering Joining the Class**

#### **I. Introduction**

##### **A. Review credentials and experience**

#### **II. Assess Participants’ Expectations for the Class**

- A. What sort of things do you think the classes will cover?
- B. What particular issues/topics would you like to see addressed?
- C. Leader’s view of stress and stress management

#### **III. Present Model of “How We Do Stress”**

##### **A. Stress is normal!**

Everyone at least from time to time doesn’t handle a particular situation as well as they would like.

##### **B. Signs of stress?? Review effects on:**

1. Our body – sweat, heart racing, stomach upset
2. Emotions – anger, frustration, fear, self doubt
3. Behavior – mistakes, short tempered, clumsy, impulsive
4. Thinking – have trouble stepping back and taking long view, trouble concentrating

C. What sorts of situations lead to stress??

1. Major life events

- a) moving
- b) taking a new job
- c) marriage
- d) new family member
- e) vacation/holidays

2. Hassles—day to day irritations

Distribute *Daily Stress Inventory* and review examples of different peoples' responses to different items

D. What's the difference between stressors and stress??

- 1. These kinds of life events and hassles are common in our lives. But the stress we feel in response isn't just something that automatically happens to us! **STRESS IS SOMETHING WE DO!!**
- 2. Use different ratings on *Daily Stress Inventory* as an example of how our reactions to these "hassles" influence how stressful they are

E. How exactly do we do stress?? Present model.

- 1. **WHAT WE DO** – worry, feel tense or anxious, make simple mistakes, get angry, feel blue or hopeless, get in arguments with family or friends
- 2. **WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE** – to avoid or lessen the hassle or stressor
- 3. **HOW WE INTERPRET** the hassle or stressor to make "mountains out of molehills"

IV. Discuss Program Components as They Relate to the Model (How to TAKE CHARGE of stress)

- A. For **WHAT WE DO**, can learn ways to ***directly manage stress***, through deep breathing, relaxation, yoga, relaxing activities (long walk, long bath, etc.), distraction, self affirmation, "counting your blessings," etc.
- B. For **WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE**, learn ***problem solving and social skills*** that avoid or minimize stressful situations and hassles
- C. For **HOW WE INTERPRET**, learn how to ***examine how we see stressors*** to "avoid making mountains out of molehills" or "borrowing trouble."

V. How Do We Tell Which We Should Do??

"Grant me the courage to change the things I can, to accept the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference."

**IN CHARGE** helps you decide which situations can be changed AND, when stressors cannot be changed, teaches strategies to better "accept" them and change our ways of dealing with them.

Review in terms of model in Figure 1.

VI. Discuss Advantages of Group Format

- A. Nice to know you're not the only one who has these concerns
- B. Learn from each other as well as from me
- C. Sometimes you can see these patterns more objectively in others before you recognize them in yourself
- D. Social support to help change your reactions

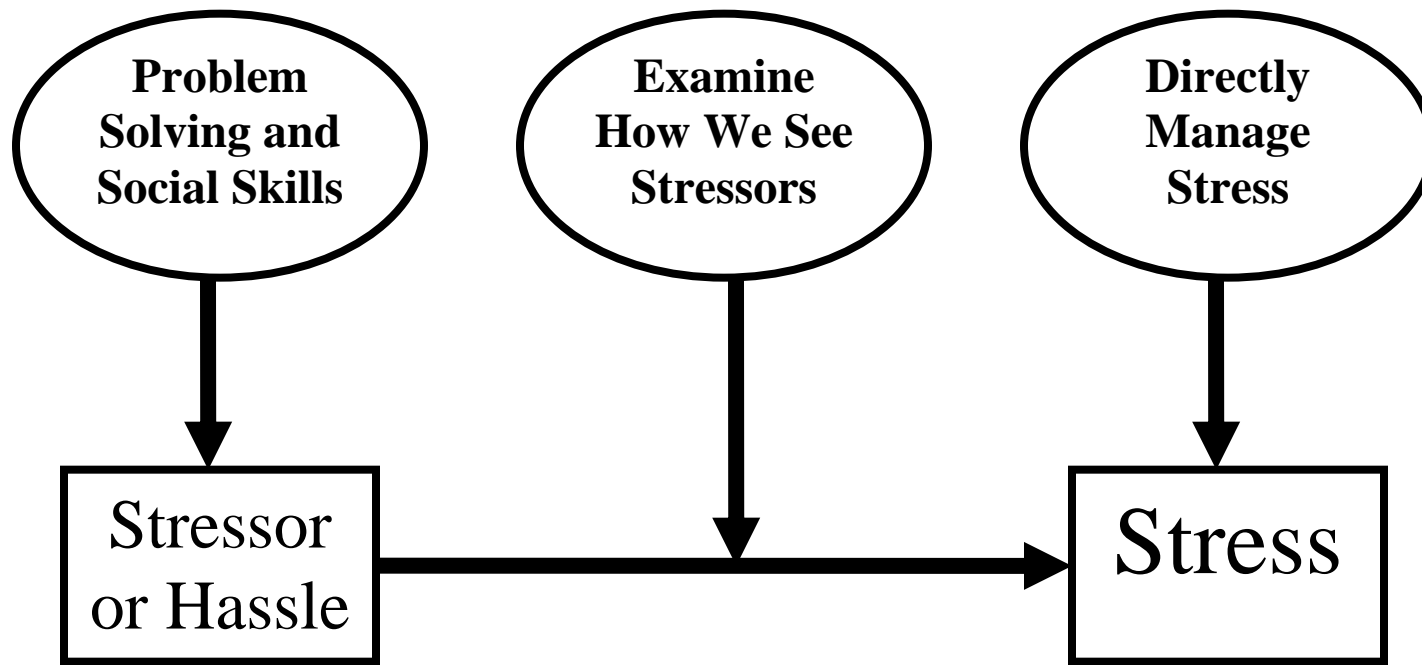
VII. Discuss Confidentiality

- A. No one will be pushed to self-disclose examples that you're uncomfortable sharing
- B. Don't need to identify specific persons involved in your stress problems
- C. Ask that everyone in the group is respectful of other's privacy and not discuss people's examples outside of the class

VIII. Discuss Logistics

- A. Time and location of next 5 meetings
- B. Provide contact information if any questions or comments before then

Figure 1 – *IN CHARGE* Model of How We *Do* Stress



### DAILY STRESS INVENTORY

[**Note:** There is nothing sacred about this particular list of hassles. You may want to select a subset of, say, 10 – 20 of that you think would be pertinent to your population, add some that you identify, and then add those suggested by your participants while eliminating those that seem not to be pertinent to your participants.]

Below are a variety of common stressors or hassles. Read over each event. If the event did not occur, leave it blank. If the event did occur, indicate the amount of stress that it caused you by placing a number from 1 to 5 in the space next to that item (see numbers below).

- 1 = Not very stressful
- 2 = Caused a little stress
- 3 = Caused some or a moderate amount of stress
- 4 = Pretty stressful
- 5 = Extremely stressful or upsetting

Please answer as honestly as you can so that we may obtain accurate information.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) ___ Performed poorly at a task</li> <li>2) ___ Performed poorly due to others</li> <li>3) ___ Thought about unfinished work</li> <li>4) ___ Hurried to meet a deadline</li> <li>5) ___ Interrupted during task/activity</li> <li>6) ___ Someone spoiled your completed task</li> <li>7) ___ Did something you are unskilled at</li> <li>8) ___ Unable to complete a task</li> <li>9) ___ Was unorganized</li> <li>10) ___ Criticized or verbally attacked</li> <li>11) ___ Ignored by others</li> <li>12) ___ Spoke or performed in public</li> <li>13) ___ Dealt with rude waiter/ waitress/salesperson</li> <li>14) ___ Interrupted while talking</li> <li>15) ___ Was forced to socialize</li> <li>16) ___ Someone broke a promise/ appointment</li> <li>17) ___ Competed with someone</li> <li>18) ___ Was stared at</li> <li>19) ___ Did not hear from someone you expected to hear from</li> <li>20) ___ Experienced unwanted physical contact (e.g. crowded, pushed)</li> <li>21) ___ Was misunderstood</li> <li>22) ___ Was embarrassed</li> <li>23) ___ Had your sleep disturbed</li> <li>24) ___ Forgot something</li> <li>25) ___ Feared illness/pregnancy</li> <li>26) ___ Experienced illness/physical discomfort</li> <li>27) ___ Someone borrowed something without your permission</li> <li>28) ___ Your property was damaged</li> <li>29) ___ Had minor accident (broke something, tore clothing)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30) ___ Thought about the future</li> <li>31) ___ Ran out of food/personal article</li> <li>32) ___ Argued with spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend</li> <li>33) ___ Argued with another person</li> <li>34) ___ Waited longer than you wanted</li> <li>35) ___ Interrupted while thinking/relaxing</li> <li>36) ___ Someone “cut” ahead of you in line</li> <li>37) ___ Performed poorly at sport/games</li> <li>38) ___ Did something that you did not want to</li> <li>39) ___ Unable to complete all plans for today</li> <li>40) ___ Had car trouble</li> <li>41) ___ Had difficulty in traffic</li> <li>42) ___ Money problems</li> <li>43) ___ Store lacked a desired item</li> <li>44) ___ Misplaced something</li> <li>45) ___ Bad weather</li> <li>46) ___ Unexpected expenses (fines, traffic tickets, etc.)</li> <li>47) ___ Had confrontation with an authority figure</li> <li>48) ___ Heard some bad news</li> <li>49) ___ Concerned over personal appearance</li> <li>50) ___ Exposed to feared situation or object</li> <li>51) ___ Exposed to upsetting TV show, movie, book)</li> <li>52) ___ “Pet peeve” violated (e.g. someone fails to knock, etc.)</li> <li>53) ___ Failed to understand something</li> <li>54) ___ Worried about another’s problems</li> <li>55) ___ Experienced narrow escape from danger</li> <li>56) ___ Stopped unwanted personal habit (e.g. overeating, smoking, nailbiting)</li> <li>57) ___ Had problem with kid(s)</li> <li>58) ___ Was late for work/appointment</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

Any stressors that we missed???

- 59) \_\_\_\_\_
- 60) \_\_\_\_\_

## SESSION 2 – Identifying Personal Hassles

### I. Business Items

- A. Count attendees, welcomes (If >12 participants, consider running a 2<sup>nd</sup> class and asking people to generally commit to one time or the other)
- B. Pass out schedule with locations and topics for each class
- C. Sign consent forms
- D. Other logistics and organizational issues

### II. Review Model of Stress (as a refresher and for people who missed orientation)

- A. Stress is something we do (optimistic because it also means it is something we can undo!). We have choices and do not need to passively & simply let situations get the best of us.
- B. How do we “do” stress?
  1. Hassle or stressor occurs
  2. WHAT WE DO – worry, feel tense or anxious, make simple mistakes, get angry, feel blue or hopeless, get in arguments with family or friends
  3. WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE – to avoid or lessen the hassle or stressor
  4. HOW WE INTERPRET the hassle or stressor to make “mountains out of molehills”
- C. Discuss program components as they relate to the model (How to TAKE CHARGE of stress)
  1. For WHAT WE DO, can learn ways to *directly manage stress*, through deep breathing, relaxation, yoga, relaxing activities (long walk, long bath, etc.), distraction, self affirmation, “counting your blessings,” etc.
  2. For WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE, learn *problem solving and social skills* that avoid or minimize stressful situations and hassles
  3. For HOW WE INTERPRET, learn how to *examine how we see stressors* to “avoid making mountains out of molehills” or “borrowing trouble.”
- D. Discussion of model through examples
  1. Before discussing group members’ own hassles, may want to discuss several sample hassles/stressors from accompanying sheets.
  2. Ask group for examples of hassle situations in the previous week; spend 1 or 2 minutes getting description of each stressor
  3. Discuss ways in which the source of the stressor may be changed
  4. Discuss ways in which the individual might directly manage their stress response through relaxation, meditation, deep breathing, etc.
  5. Discuss ways in which the reaction to or the interpretation of the stressor may be changed

**Note well:** Not all types of response will be equally appropriate for each stressor, so mention ahead of time and remind participants during the discussion that addressing the source of the stressor or interpretations of the stressor may be more or less appropriate for different stressors.

- E. Discussion of individuals' hassle situations in pairs or small groups.
  - 1. Have participants break out into pairs or groups of 3 or 4 to discuss individuals' stressors.
  - 2. Emphasize that breaking your hassle situations down in terms of things that can be changed, ways to change interpretations, ways to directly manage stress response, etc. is first step in "taking charge" of stress.
  - 3. May seem common-sense, but the time between the occurrence of a situation and our experience of stress is very rapid. We may experience this as automatic and not notice how we could have reduced the stressor, altered our reaction to it, etc. We don't typically stop and think about what we're thinking, so this exercise should help us recognize how we "do" stress.
  - 4. Also, once we get caught up in the physical and emotional aspects of stress, it's hard to make or carry out the best decision regarding course of action. This exercise will also help participants more astutely evaluate the impact of various ways of handling stress.
  
- F. Discuss some of these examples—use these as evidence that the model of stress presented is valid and workable.

III. **Homework:** Track your own stressors during the coming week, using the form, *IN CHARGE* Personal Tracking for Week Two – *Noticing My Stress Patterns*

**IN CHARGE**

**Sample Hassles and Stressors**

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**HASSLE or STRESSOR:**

My husband has been drinking excessively for a number of months now.

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**WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE:**

Talk to him about his drinking and its impacts on me and the family.  
See if I can help him with some of the things that are bothering him  
Seek help from professionals, health workers, our family, or our church

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**WHAT I DID:**

Angry when he drinks. Depressed most of the time. Lack of energy. Eating more and gaining weight.  
I yelled at him. It didn't help. He just got angry with me and drank more.

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**HOW I INTERPRETED THE STRESSOR:**

What am I doing to cause this?? I guess I haven't been a good enough wife.

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**HASSLE OR STRESSOR:**

My supervisor gave me a project to do, but then kept giving me unnecessary, unwanted advice on how to do it.

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**WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE:**

Reassure him that the job will be done by scheduling times to report to my supervisor about progress, ask questions, get input on supervisor's concerns, etc.  
Ask boss to describe in detail aspects of the project about which he has specific concerns or ways in which he would like it to be done.

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**WHAT I DID:**

I became tense and nervous. My need for cigarettes increased.  
I got frustrated and finally told him off. This caused more problems.

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**HOW I INTERPRETED THE STRESSOR:**

He doesn't think I can do a good job on my own—he doesn't trust me! If he doesn't like the way I work, he can do it himself!

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**HASSLE OR STRESSOR:**

One of my coworkers is always interrupting me wanting to talk about her personal problems.

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**WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE:**

Close my door or change my furniture arrangement to discourage casual drop-ins  
Practice clarifying my need to stay with my work, perhaps by suggesting limited but specific times for personal talk, e.g., lunch once a week

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**WHAT I DID:**

Felt frustrated. Found myself getting angry with her even though she's a nice person. Getting behind in my work—make mistakes when I try to rush through it.  
Couldn't bring myself to say anything to her. Avoided her when I could. Sometimes stayed late to catch up on what I didn't get done earlier.

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**HOW I INTERPRETED THE STRESSOR:**

I wish she wouldn't want to talk to me so much about this. I can't tell her though because I'll hurt her feelings.

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**HASSLE OR STRESSOR:**

I seem to have a hard time understanding how to use the computer when everyone else at work is very good at it.

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**WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE:**

Take computer course  
Discuss with trusted co-workers how they feel about the computer work – they may feel as unconfident as I do  
Initiate quality circle within our work group to discuss ways to enhance our use of computers.

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**WHAT I DID:**

Felt frustrated, depressed. Muscle tension and headache when I would try to use the computer.  
Make a LOT of mistakes.  
Dropped out of computer class. Did not ask instructor for help. Did not follow up on other people's offers to help—became irritable with them when they offered assistance.

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**HOW I INTERPRETED THE STRESSOR:**

I'll never be able to learn how to do this! There's no way I can get as much work done if I have to rely on other people or write everything out by hand! I guess I'm just not as smart as I thought I was.

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***IN CHARGE***  
Description of Individual Hassles or Stressors

HASSLE OR STRESSOR:

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WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE:

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WHAT I DID:

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HOW I INTERPRETED THE STRESSOR:

***IN CHARGE*** Personal Tracking for Week Two – Noticing My Stress Patterns

Day	Describe what seemed to be the major stressor or hassle of each day.	Describe What You Did (stress experienced), What You Could Have Done (to avoid or lessen stressor), or How You Interpreted the Stressor	Overall, what was your levels of stress each day (1=None; 5 = Extreme)

### SESSION 3 – Directly Managing Stress

#### I. Review of model and their awareness of their own stressors and responses to them

Referring to the *IN CHARGE* Personal Tracking for Week Two – *Noticing My Stress Patterns*, discuss how they have thought about their stressors since last session, what stressors they may have noticed, what options for handling stress they may have begun to see for themselves

- A. What stressors have you experienced in the last week – any that you hadn’t recognized before?
- B. How have you “done” stress – how have you responded to these stressors?
- C. What ways have you recognized you could have done something to avoid or lessen the hassle or stressor?
- D. What ways have you seen your interpretations of the stressor or hassle contributing to your response to it?

#### II. Introduce Approaches to *Relaxation* – Directly Managing Stress

- A. Today we are going to talk about ways you can do things directly to manage or minimize your stress reactions. We will cover deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation. We will also discuss other things you may find helpful like yoga, physical activity, taking a long bath – anything you find helpful for relaxing when you are feeling stressed.
- B. **Deep Breathing** is about as simple as it gets. All you have to do is sit quietly, perhaps close your eyes, and take slow, long breaths. Try it now. If you’re comfortable, close your eyes, and take a long, deep breath – continue to inhale for about 5 or 10 seconds. Hold it for a second or two, and then exhale slowly. Let’s just try that for about a minute [leader may continue to pace the breathing: “That’s it, inhale slowly, slowly, slowly, now hold it a second or two, now exhale very, very slowly.”] How did you respond to that, how did it make you feel?
- C. **Meditation:** A lot of people think meditation involves some mysterious religious or mystical perspective. Actually, it is just pretty simple clearing your mind of “clutter” and allowing yourself to sit quietly for a few minutes. People who do it regularly report feeling more relaxed and peaceful. They also report being able to get a better perspective on things that might otherwise bother or upset them. Here’s a simple approach.
  1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position, cross legged on the floor or on a cushion or a bed if you like
  2. Close your eyes
  3. Try to relax all your muscles as much as you can
  4. Breathe through your nose and each time you breathe out, say the word “calm” or some other word of your choice.

5. When ideas or thoughts come into your mind, just notice them a little and then bring your mind back to the word “calm.” Don’t try too hard to focus your attention in any one direction. You can follow what comes to mind while gently working your way back to “calm.”
6. Practice this for 10 or 15 minutes at least once a day for a week and see what it may do for you.
7. You may experience new or fresh views of old bothers when meditating, seeing them in a broader light – seeing the forest rather than the trees, the “big picture.”

D. **Deep Muscle Relaxation** Play 10 – 15 minutes of progressive muscle relaxation tape and provide for sale to participants if they want to work on this approach at home (*New Harbinger Publications* produces books and materials for clients, books for professionals, and audiotapes and related materials, such as relaxation tapes. Go to: <http://www.newharbinger.com/index.cfm>. *Bull Publishing* (<http://www.bullpub.com>) sells a relaxation tape, “Time for Healing: Relaxation for Mind and Body” that includes a 30 minute tape for progressive muscle relaxation and a 30 minute tape for guided imagery.)

**Note:** An important value of deep breathing, meditation, or progressive deep muscle relaxation is that **if you practice them** a bit each day, you will **get pretty good at using them to relax quickly**. Then, when you are feeling that you are starting to get stressed or anxious, you can use it as a **way of minimizing or keeping a lid on those stressed out feelings**.

- E. **Other Approaches:** What other approaches can you think of for relaxation or reducing stress? As we noted earlier, there are all sorts of ways that people do this, from taking a walk or a warm bath to yoga or hobbies.
1. Let’s make a list – tell me what are ways that you have been able to reduce stress.
  2. [After have generated 10 – 20], what do you see as the advantages of each of these, the disadvantages
  3. Think for a minute or two. Which of these would be one that you would like to get better at?

### III. Assignments

- A. During the next week, I’d like you to practice at least once a day some stress management approach – deep breathing, meditation, or one of these we just generated.
- B. Use the form I’m handing out to keep a record of your daily practice, how it went, and how you may have begun to notice it was helpful in reducing some of your stress.
- C. At the same time, continue to rate your daily stress levels and note the major stressor or hassle you encounter each day.

**IN CHARGE** Personal Tracking for Week Three – Practicing Relaxation

Day	Describe what seemed to be the major stressor or hassle of each day.	Practiced Relaxation (Yes or No)	How did the relaxation practice go? Write down any particular feelings you had during your practice.	Overall, what was your levels of stress each day (1=None; 5 = Extreme)

## SESSION 4 – Taking Charge of What We Do

### I. Review of Previous Sessions(s)

#### A. Relaxation?

1. How has practicing at home influenced how relaxed you are able to feel?
2. How much has it been useful in the midst of actually feeling stressed out?

### II. Introduce Methods to Take Charge of “What We Do.”

- #### A. Directly Managing Stress – Relaxation – can help you feel better. In some cases, that may be all you need or want to do (this is particularly true if the hassle is short-term or infrequent).

##### Examples???

- difficult relative visits once a year
- annual evaluation
- airplane flight
- holidays
- temporary increase in workload
- difficult salesclerk, waitress, etc.

- #### B. **But**, if the hassle is ongoing, long-lasting, frequent, excessively stressful, feel better strategies may not be enough.

##### Examples???

- ongoing conflict with spouse
- difficulty managing children
- problems with someone you work with everyday
- ongoing work overload
- ongoing financial problems
- ongoing poor physical health (e.g. overweight)

- #### C. In these cases, we may have to change the way we actually deal with the situation in order to reduce stress to a satisfactory degree. There are two sets of skills for this:

1. **General Problem Solving** – ways to identify approaches to “changing the things I can”
2. Skills for Coping with Stressors and Hassles, including:
  - a. Asserting yourself and your feelings
  - b. Social skills
  - c. Family and relationship skills

### III. Problem Solving Background

- A. Sometimes when we're already caught up in the emotional and physical aspects of stress, it's more difficult than ever to think of better ways OR any ways of resolving our difficulties. It feels like "EVERYTHING is wrong & there's NOTHING I can do!"
- B. Sometimes we've just never had the opportunity to learn effective ways of handling problems. We may have drifted into ineffective problem solving
  - 1. Rely too much on prescription medicines, drugs, or alcohol
  - 2. give up easily and avoid issues (be passive)
  - 3. become dependent on others to bail us out – a big problem if those others are no longer available to us
  - 4. Others??? Discuss.

### IV. Primary Steps of Problem Solving

- A. **Pinpoint the Problem** – be as specific as you can be about what the problem is, where and when it occurs, what leads up to it, how you currently respond to it, how you feel after the problem occurs, how others feel after the problem occurs.
- B. **Generate Alternatives** for Dealing with the Problem – Initially, don't worry about the quality of possible solutions, just worry about generating a bunch.
- C. **Choosing a Plan** – from the alternatives generated, choose a strategy for solving the problem.
- D. **Try It** – Try out the strategy you chose and see how it works.
- E. **Revise and Try Again** – Depending on how it worked, revise your strategy, choose a different one, or, if need be, go back to Pinpointing the Problem and begin the problem solving steps over again.

### V. Additional Steps of Problem Solving

- A. Getting Help – the plan you have chosen in #3, above, may require some cooperation, new skills, or something else to make it work – e.g., you and your spouse may be able spend some time without the children to renew your relationship if your sister-in-law is willing to baby sit every couple of weeks or so
- B. Learning skills – frequently, our plans for coping with a problem lead us to recognize that we need to learn some skills we may not have. These may be fairly concrete, like learning to read food labels in order to reach our goals for eating a healthy diet. Or, they may entail more complex, social skills like those we'll discuss in a little while.

### VI. Complete Problem Solving Exercise with Group

- A. Have someone identify a problem
- B. Pinpoint the problem with the individual
- C. Generate alternative strategies with group – Individual who volunteered their problem cannot talk during this to avoid critiquing or "yes butting" the ideas generated.



Emphasize to group that they need to do the same thing when solving problems on their own. They need to turn off the “censor” inside them and just generate alternatives before deciding which ones make sense and which do not.

- D. Individual who volunteered their problem chooses from among strategies generated, explains why they think it might work, specifically how they will plan to implement it, what problems they may encounter, and how they will tell if they are successful.

## VII. Skills for Coping with Stressors and Hassles

- A. Sometimes solving a problem requires some pretty skillful behavior on our part.
  - 1. If we want to talk to our spouse about their drinking, we may need to brush up on our skills about how to raise problems with someone we care about without antagonizing them.
  - 2. Or, if we want to talk to our boss about the workload we are carrying, we may need to make sure we are comfortable getting into this kind of a discussion with the person who is responsible for our paycheck.
- B. Discuss group members’ awareness of these kinds of dimensions of some of their problems.
- C. We are handing out some materials to help you with these kinds of skills. They are:
  - 1. Getting to Know Your Feelings
  - 2. Asserting and Self Representation
  - 3. Social Skills
  - 4. Family and Relationship Skills

This material has lots of simple suggestions for how you can enhance some of your skills for solving some of the problems you face.

- D. The hand-out, Getting to Know Your Feelings begins with some approaches to understand your own feelings better. When we are faced with something that’s a challenge for us, our feelings sometimes get all jumbled up – we aren’t sure whether we feel like crying, shouting, or running away. Clarifying your feelings is a first step to “reading the situation” and figuring out how you want to approach some problem.
- E. The hand-out on Feelings also has a guide (“Which One Sounds Familiar?”) to which of types of skills (assertion/self representation, social, family and relationship) may be most appropriate for you. Consider this in working with them. [give examples from guide]
- F. The **three hand-outs, Assertion and Self Representation, Social Skills, and Family and Relationship Skills** contain simple suggestions for improving your skills in these three areas.

## VIII. Building your skills for solving your problems

- A. Consider some of the hassles or stressors you have identified in the last few weeks. How have some of them involved problems that you might be able to handle better if you were a bit more skillful at asserting yourself, getting to know people, or dealing with family members and relationships?
- B. Ask group members to volunteer their thoughts about problems for which they might want to develop some improved assertion/self-representation, social, or family-and-relationship skills. Consider the guide, “Which One Sounds Familiar” and discuss how different skills might be appropriate for different situations or feelings.

IX. Homework

- A. Use the IN CHARGE Problem Solving Guide to identify a problem, pinpoint the problem, identify alternative strategies for addressing the problem, and choosing and trying a solution.
- B. Read over the hand-outs on Assertion and Self Representation, Social Skills, and Family and Relationship Skills. Identify which of these might be helpful for addressing some stressor or hassle you face. Complete the Problem Solving Guide regarding how you propose applying this to a particular stressor or hassle.

## ***Getting to Know Your FEELINGS***

The preceding parts of this manual talked about controlling the circumstances that may trigger some problems. But remember, we said some of our problem patterns may also revolve around your own feelings and frustrations. You may eat the wrong things or too much when you feel tense, anxious, sad, or frustrated. In addition to controlling the external cues--TV, visiting with friends--the internal cues need to be controlled.

Look at the feelings listed in the box *Which one sounds familiar?* Circle the feelings that lead you to eat too much or lose control of your eating.

What's the best way to deal with this? You can't just bury the feelings or try to ignore them. Biting your fingernails, counting to 10, or going for walks might help for a while but research shows these feelings can lead to loss of control over eating unless you develop some New Patterns, some New Skills for coping with them. The next part of this manual gives you some hints for developing new patterns and skills. It's divided into five sections:

Section 1. Feeling Better About Yourself

Section 2. Asserting Yourself and Your Feelings

Section 3. Social Skills

Section 4. Family and Relationship Skills

Section 5. Stress and Stress Management

Here's an example: Suppose a strong cue for your eating is having a conversation with your teenage daughter that makes you feel incompetent or frustrated. Learning how to communicate more effectively with her may help--Section 4 on Family and Relationship Skills should be helpful. If you really feel like a failure when this happens, try the hints in Section 1 on Feeling Better About Yourself.

### **Get to Know Your Feelings So You Can Cope With Them**

Eating has become so automatic in your life that you may be unaware of the moods, thoughts, and feelings that prompt you to eat. You may not really focus on what feeling leads to our own action.

Managing your diet will be easier if you keep in touch with your feelings, likes and dislikes, worries, and irritations. Start taking your feelings into account. Instead of just saying to yourself, "I feel like eating something," ask yourself what feeling is leading you to this. If you can get in touch with what you're feeling you can try to choose a response other than eating. When tempted to eat something you shouldn't, ask, What am I feeling? Why? What do I really want now? Usually, what you really want is not food!

**Which Ones Sound Familiar?**

Your major problems are when:

Key sections of this Manual

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| • You feel lonely   | Social Skills                        |
| • You feel awkward at a party, shy, self-conscious  | Social Skills                        |
| • You feel frustrated that family and friends don't seem to pay much attention to your feelings | Asserting Yourself and Your Feelings |
| • You feel like you're being taken for granted by boss, colleagues                              | Asserting Yourself and Your Feelings |
| • You feel shy  | Asserting Yourself and Your Feelings |
| • You feel distant from spouse or partner   | Family and Relationship Skills       |
| • Kids seem uncontrollable  | Family and Relationship Skills       |
| • You can't reach your teenager   | Family and Relationship Skills       |
| • You know you're "making mountains out of molehills," but...                                   | Feeling Better About Yourself        |
| • You feel like a failure, incompetent, guilty  | Feeling Better About Yourself        |

## Assertion and Self Representation

Sometimes we feel stressed because we don't know how to "stand up for ourselves." Learning to stand up for ourselves doesn't mean becoming overbearing and aggressive. One way to look at it is "self representation." We were not put here to be treated poorly by others. But others cannot read our minds. If we don't tell them what we think or what we need or, when it's reasonable, what we want, they won't be able to tell. So we have to speak up for ourselves to enable others to treat us well!

### Asserting Yourself and Your Feelings

Most of us feel that sometimes we can't say what's on our mind or that we can't reach out to people. There are many reasons for this--we're shy, anxious to be polite, worried about others' reactions, trying to avoid an argument, or afraid of rejection.

Here are some examples:

John fumed as he stormed out for his morning break. His supervisor had just asked him to stay after work to put in some extra hours on a project. The boss requested this all too often, and this time meant he was going to have to miss watching his oldest son pitch in the ball game, for the third time in a row. "Denise is responsible for getting this project done, too. Why doesn't he ever ask her to work late? Why am I always the one who has to stay?" John thought as he headed for the cafeteria.

What could John have done?

- Communicate Feelings. Perhaps John should have told the boss how much his son was counting on him to show up for the ball game. Don't **assume** that people know the extent to which certain requests are difficult for you.
- Suggest Alternatives. John could have suggested that Denise stay this time--pointing out that she shares responsibility for getting this project completed. Of course, pointing out alternatives won't always get you out of the office on time for the ball game, but, in general, speaking up (calmly) will make you feel less frustrated and powerless.

**Definition:** Assertiveness is expressing yourself comfortably without hurting others or denying their needs. Assertiveness covers a range of positive and negative feelings--from being able to ask someone (politely) not to cut ahead of you in line, to saying "I love you."

Think about how to express both your positive and negative feelings better. Are there particular times when you have trouble saying how you feel (see box)? Ask yourself what sorts of situations you could be more effective in. Sometimes saying how you feel and what you want early in an interaction can prevent an unpleasant ending to the conversation.

**When Do You Have Trouble Saying  
What You Feel?**

1. Can you say "No?"
2. Does getting or giving compliments make you uncomfortable?
3. Do you find criticizing or being criticized difficult?
4. Are apologies hard for you?
5. Do you avoid telling people they've made you angry? Do you end up blowing your stack, and not necessarily at those who actually upset you?

**Practical Parts of Being Assertive**

OK, so assertion is expressing feelings, positive ones as well as negative ones. That sounds nice, but how do you do it? Here are some suggestions.

**STEP 1:** Identify your feelings--you can't express 'em if you don't know 'em! When we're not assertive, we often just feel disgruntled and out of kilter without knowing why. Try to figure out what you're feeling. If you're confused because you can't put your finger on it, start there--"Gee, I'm feeling uncomfortable with this and I can't figure out why."

**STEP 2:** Figure out what others are feeling. Expressing your own feelings will be more effective if you can make the connection between what you want and what others want. If you really want to go to a movie but your spouse just went to a movie last night, it will be helpful to show you understand this.

**STEP 3:** Express your understanding of the other person's point of view. "I know you just went to a movie last night and are feeling pretty tired tonight." Starting off by letting the other person know you care about what they think may help them to care about your feelings.

**STEP 4:** Express your feelings. "I really have had my heart set on going to a movie all week."

**WARNING:** Here's a place you can get in trouble. Don't *jump to solutions*--you'll make others feel pushed around. Just state your feeling so everyone can see what's "on the table" without feeling pushed into doing something.

**STEP 5:** Ask for the other's thoughts. "Is that pretty much how you feel?" "How do you see it?" You want to make sure you're dealing with what's important to others. Also, you want them to feel involved, not just "talked at."

**STEP 6:** Suggest a possible solution or compromise. Try to make sure that you are willing to compromise--the goal of assertiveness is *cooperation, not winning*. "I really

wanted to go to a movie, but that's gonna be a pain for you. Maybe we should relax tonight but make a definite plan to go see *Gone With The Wind* Saturday."

**STEP 7:** Ask for the other's response or suggestion. "Does that sound OK? Maybe there are other possibilities we should consider." As with Step 5, the important thing is to keep the other involved.

You can continue this process until you reach a good compromise or until you reach a stalemate, in which, at least, you feel you've made yourself understood.

What if you lose? Suppose the other person doesn't cooperate. That's not the time to pick up boxing gloves. Go back to Step 1. Start with your new feelings--frustration, disappointment, whatever. Here's an example, still sticking with the movie.

**STEP 1:** Identify your own feelings--maybe you're frustrated because you want to compromise but also want to see *Gone With The Wind*.

**STEP 2:** Figure out other's feelings--maybe they're so drained they'd rather stay home.

**STEP 3:** Express understanding of the other--"I'm not sure I understand how you're feeling. Is working this out seeming like an awful chore."

**STEP 4:** Express your feelings--"Maybe we should stay home tonight, I don't know. But, if we are going to go out I'd really like to arrange it so we can do something to relax — I need a break after working so hard the last three days."

### **Escalating**

If you can't work much out, your statements of your own feelings (Step 4) can escalate. Make sure they escalate — smooth, gradual increases — not leaps. Here's a sequence of escalating statements on the movie example:

"I'm feeling we're stuck. I'd really like to go to a movie but I don't want to make it real hard for us."

"I'm feeling frustrated. I know it's been a hard week for you but I'm not sure why we can't work out a way to go to a movie tonight or sometime soon. Anything else you want to do is OK with me."

"Maybe I'm missing something, but I can't understand why we can't work in a way for me to go to a movie this weekend. I'm really feeling bothered by this."

### **Three Dimensions of Assertive Behavior**

In working on being more assertive, try thinking of these three aspects of what you do and say. Remember, you want to express your own feelings and invite cooperation. You're not looking for a fight.

- Content of the message: feelings, facts, requests, rights, opinions.
- Way the message is delivered: eye contact, posture, gestures, timing, listening, voice, facial expression, distance.
- Situation in which you communicate the message: where you are, what relation you have to the person you're with, what has gone on in the past of relevance to this. What you say will be acceptable and appropriate depending on what's already been said.

By this time you're probably tired of the movie example. Actually, after several back-and-forths, the conversation would probably turn in another direction as it becomes obvious the problem isn't the movie but that one person wanted to stay home or maybe have some time to themselves, etc. In any case, continuing to work with identifying and clarifying your own and the other's feelings (Steps 1 through 4) will help keep your feelings from being squelched or silenced while also working towards cooperation.



**What's the Difference Between Being Assertive and Being Aggressive?**

Don't confuse being assertive with being aggressive. We don't want to be pushy and obnoxious, always insisting on having things our way. Being assertive is a matter of ensuring equal rights for the people involved. You should see your needs and desires as important but you need to recognize the needs and desires of those you're relating to also. Assertiveness seeks balance between your needs and theirs. If you always feel out of balance, you need to become more assertive, not aggressive.

## **Social Skills**

Sometimes we feel stressed because we don't know how to cope with social situations – parties, at the workplace, etc.

### **Social Skills**

Feeling uncomfortable with others or lonely is a problem for many folks. Each of us has had the experience of not knowing how to approach someone, what to say first, or how to get a conversation going again when it stalls. Many of us living alone have good friends but also long, sometimes empty evenings or weekends. But just having others around isn't always the answer. Those who live with others may rely on food, alcohol, or cigarettes to make interactions smoother. So, both with people and alone we may get into patterns we don't like — for courage or company. Let's look at some examples:

Tom walked into the party knowing no one and immediately felt uncomfortable. His eyes scanned the room looking for a friendly face, but everyone seemed deeply involved in conversation with someone else. Tom felt conspicuous and uncomfortable standing there doing nothing.

Rita was eating lunch with her co-workers. Everyone else was discussing their children. Since Rita had no children, she was not interested in the topic. She felt excluded and as if she didn't belong.

Instead of being upset or feeling bad, Rita and Tom could have chosen other responses or activities. Rita could have found a way to enter the conversation or joined a group in which she felt more comfortable. Tom could have offered to help the host serve drinks as a way of comfortably starting to talk with other guests.

Think more about how to improve or increase your social contacts. Sometimes life changes in ways that make social interaction harder, at least for awhile. This can be because of divorce, death, a friend moving or moving yourself, changing jobs or responsibilities. These situations may lead to stress or sadness, so you'll especially want to remember our hints then about easing social interaction. As our lives or the neighborhood or the office change, they may disrupt our relationships.

It's also good to develop a wide social network. When office politics make it hard to talk with Gail or when Harry's away for a month, it will be good to have developed other friendships on which to rely.

#### **Put More Social in Your Life**

1. Join a club or team, but only if the activity is one you actually like or want to learn.
2. Invest some time in a hobby or volunteer job that will bring you into contact with others. Make sure it's one that will really give you satisfaction--not just fill your time.
3. Invite some friends — or some new people you'd like to get to know — over for cards or to go to a museum or movie.

Look to see what practical changes you can make in how you act with others. Probably there are changes that will make you, and them, feel more comfortable.

Talking with others takes skill. If your conversations don't go well you're likely to end up with anxious, angry, or sad feelings. Go over *Questions to Ask Yourself: Making Conversation Go Better*. Little changes in how you approach conversing can, over time, make you a lot more comfortable. Then, the feelings that make you eat become less of a problem.

### **Sensitivity – It's Important**

An important aspect of social interaction is being sensitive to the feelings of those you're with. Don't be so preoccupied with your own enthusiasms or worries that you don't realize what's on the mind of the friend you're with. Ask yourself, early in a conversation, how the others are feeling and how you'll let that affect what you say. How exuberant or to the point your remarks should be will depend on whether you're at an office meeting, the annual picnic, or out to lunch with an old friend. Most of this is obvious if you think about it, but many of us simply haven't thought about it. Once we do, we can see many ways to enjoy ourselves more socially.

An important part of sensitivity is knowing not to push yourself into every conversation around you. Part of social skill is knowing when not to try to join or organize a group activity. The group going to lunch to discuss the presentation they're giving next week is not one you should try to get invited to join. Similarly, don't suggest a weekend in the country to the couple who are devoting every spare minute to putting up the new wallpaper in their living room. Think about whether the situations you're trying to arrange will be attractive or interesting to others. Otherwise you're liable to get negative responses that make you uncomfortable and vulnerable. Even when you consider others in planning, your ideas won't always work. Don't give up if occasionally your suggestions are not accepted.

#### **Questions to Ask Yourself: Making Conversation Go Better**

##### Talking

- Do you talk too softly or in a monotone?
- Are your personal or critical comments too loud?
- Would talking more slowly make you easier to understand?
- Do you talk too slowly, so your listeners tend to finish your sentences?
- Is your choice of language colorful enough without being overly familiar or vulgar?

##### Body Language

- Do you stand too close or too far from those you're talking with?
- Is your body too stiff? Or are you often waving your arms and overusing facial gestures?
- Do you avoid eye contact, or make people feel you're staring at them?

##### Sensitivity

- Are you being sensitive to the needs of others? Do you turn people off by turning discussions away from their concerns to your own interests or problems? Example of someone too wrapped up in himself: "But, enough about me. Let's talk about you. What do you think of me?"
- Do you make others feel like just part of your audience? Do you let others speak?
- Do you frequently interrupt?

### **Social Skills and Self Control**

Going back to our discussion of Self Control, improving your social skills should help you refuse temptations. Practice what you'll say to the aggressive acquaintance who tries to tempt you to eat something you don't want to. Think how you will decline invitations to go out for dessert – or fried chicken. You don't need to apologize for yourself – nor get loud and angry.

#### **These suggestions will help:**

1. Think of situations in which you wish you had acted differently, and also some in which things went well for you. Use these as models to help you decide what to do in future situations.
2. Make sure you're involved in conversation. Don't just think about what impression you're making. Focus on the others. Show you're interested in their views. Ask questions. Listen to the answers. Find things to agree with the others about, or to compliment them on.
3. Watch others who seem particularly good at the skill you've decided to work on. You're bound to pick up some pointers. Tell them about times you feel frustrated or inadequate and see what they suggest. We all have these feelings sometimes and others are likely to be pleased to tell you how they faced the problem -- things they did to make being with people more enjoyable. If the people you talk to still face these problems themselves and don't have much advice, you'll still feel more at ease just knowing you're not the only one who feels angry when responsibilities pile up, not the only one ill-at-ease at a large party. If you can't talk with friends about these issues, you might try a minister, counselor, or group program on improving social skills.
4. Ask friends to watch how you're doing on the skill you choose to develop and give you feedback on your progress.
5. Remember through it all, don't give up. Not everything will work the first time you try. But your social skills will improve, with practice.

## **Family and Relationship Skills**

Of course, families and relationships can be tremendously important, helpful and wonderful in our lives – but, they can also be stressful.

When your personal life is running smoothly and you have the cooperation and support of those close to you, it's easier to make changes in your own behavior. But when you're having trouble communicating with your spouse or guiding your children, changing your own habits can seem overwhelming. Improving some aspect of your family life may really help you feel better about yourself and how you are living.

Family members can make emotional demands that challenge your efforts. Not knowing how to make family interactions meet your own needs as well as those of the rest of the family can be a real problem. Improving family skills can help with this. The examples below may seem familiar:

After dinner Sherry announced she was going for her regular after-dinner walk. Matt had been patient for three weeks, but was tired of being stuck with the dishes every night. He blew up at Sherry and they argued. She felt unfairly accused. Matt ended up going out for the walk, leaving Sherry to the dishes. She sat down, feeling hurt and misunderstood, then she had some ice cream.

Couples like Sherry and Matt might avoid confrontation if they communicate their feelings and needs to each other more clearly. Here are some hints on improving communication skills that have helped others.

1. Ask yourself what you really want. Is it really what just happened that is bothering you? Do you really want to confront your partner or other family members with it? Or, are you feeling hurt or unappreciated in some other, more subtle way? Communicating that "I need some special help this week" can be more pleasing and is more likely to be acted on than an attack or accusation that others are not doing their fair share.
2. Close the gap between what you mean and what they think you mean. When the person you're talking with responds inappropriately, assume they've misunderstood, not that they don't care. Clarify what you meant. Make sure there isn't a misunderstanding.
3. When trying to resolve a particular issue, avoid getting off the subject and bringing in other complaints. This happens when partners let their needs and wishes and frustrations get tangled in a knot. Instead of solving one question, they keep drifting into others, which makes them tired and frustrated. Stick to the topic at hand.
4. Avoid "mind reading." Often we assume that we know all the thoughts, feelings, and needs of those we know well. Frequently this is wrong and leads the other person to feel you're not tuning in. Check your assumptions by listening carefully and asking questions.
5. Don't counter each point the other makes with your own parallel complaint. If your partner complains that you failed to take the garbage out, don't counter about forgetting to feed the cat. If everything others say leads you to say, "yes, but..." the partner will not really feel as though you've understood them.

Sometimes we "yes, but..." about trivial matters to avoid mentioning our real concerns and feelings. Try saying how you're feeling instead – "Honey, meeting the project deadline at work has been so hard that when I come home I've just been too exhausted to think about my household chores." Others won't be inclined to counter you with complaints if you come to them honestly with your feelings. Along with this though, make it clear that you have understood their criticism and feelings – "Honey, I know it's been a week since you asked but..."

### **"I" Language**

In discussions of problems and emotions in a relationship, it helps to start each sentence with an "I." This forces you to focus on what you feel and tends to keep you from attacking your partner. If you express your frustration honestly ("I felt hurt when you read the paper during breakfast and didn't talk to me,") it's less likely that your partner will try to make you feel bad. (You'll be cheating if you start with "I" but turn right to blame – "I'm the only one around here who ever lifts a finger to keep the place clean.")

Better communication skills can help improve aspects of your home life. By learning to express your feelings, to ease tensions before they mount up, and to resolve disagreements without unpleasant arguing, you can avoid many feelings of hurt and frustration.

## **Communicating with Children**

Avoiding conflict with your children is as important as avoiding it with your spouse.

Consider the following:

Susan asked her boys Nick and Josh to help with the housework by putting their toys away. Nick whined that he didn't want to miss TV. Susan thought about how this response was becoming a habit, and how Josh was starting to copy it. To gain control, Susan snapped off the TV, arguing with Nick. To her dismay, he seemed to find this amusing. Exasperated, Susan sent the boys to their room and began thinking that she was an awful mother.

At some period in their lives, it is common for children to use "NO" as the main word in their vocabulary. Children who routinely refuse instructions this way may have learned that disobeying gets them their parents' attention. Susan's attention to Nick when he whines instead of putting the toys away serves as a reward for his behavior.

Refusal works. People stop asking you to do things if each request leads to argument or has to be repeated. But you can change this ploy by the child. Focus on praising the children when they're being cooperative. Minimize the interaction over refusals.

Even if refusal isn't a big problem with your children, the suggestions above can help you gain their cooperation with your efforts to manage your weight. Let them suggest ways to help. Don't hesitate to ask your family for help. Your need to lose weight is important and they should cooperate.

The skills of being a good partner and a good parent have much in common. The main points are to be clear in your own mind about what you want as well as making your wants known to others. Be calm and consistent and avoid getting sidetracked into less relevant issues.

### **Suggestions for Communicating with Children**

1. Give your children attention when they are cooperative. Let them know you notice when they are being helpful. If refusal habits are strong, have a plan to reward cooperation systematically. Points or gold stars earned for daily cooperation could be redeemed for a favorite TV show or a long bedtime story. You must implement such a system consistently to make it work.
2. Communicate clearly. Make sure your children know what you expect of them and exactly how they should cooperate. Let them know what the benefits of cooperation will be. Just like your spouse, they can't read your mind--although sometimes it seems they can.
3. Draw your children into making plans with you. Let them know how you're feeling and what you need. If you tell them honestly that you are especially tired or that you may be a little on edge, they may be more eager to help. Also give them some choices, so they feel they have some control. In our example of Susan's boys and the toys, she could have given them options, such as putting away their toys, watering the plants, or folding the laundry. Also she might have proposed a fun activity they could look forward to doing together after the housework.
4. Don't give your attention to refusals. Once you've made a clear reasonable request don't keep repeating it. If the child doesn't cooperate, you may decide to punish him mildly. For instance, you might postpone a planned activity until you get cooperation. To break the connection between your child's refusal and your attention, you might send her to another part of the house, away from you and things she enjoys. But this should be done calmly, not in anger. You are only trying to break up this pattern, not make the child suffer. After five or ten minutes you could bring the child back and repeat your original request. These more controlled ways of dealing with refusal should help you keep your own emotions under control, lessening the urge to eat in frustration.

***IN CHARGE***

**Problem Solving Guide**

**STEP 1:**

Define one problem at a time in specific terms.

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**STEP 2:**

Brainstorm as many potential solutions as possible—even if they seem silly or impossible to carry out. Don't worry about how well these might work at this stage.

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**STEP 3:**

Choose one of the solutions you have generated. Write out briefly why you chose it, how you think it might work, what problems it may encounter, how you will know if you were successful.

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**STEP 4:**

Try it!

**STEP 5:**

After you have tried resolving your problem with this choice, evaluate the effectiveness of your actions. How well did this solution work? If you're still unhappy with the outcome, think of ways to more effectively carry out your first choice OR move on to your next best choice in the list of possible alternatives.



### **Adding Skills to Your Problem Solving**

For the problem you worked on in Steps 1 – 5, above, or for some other problem, identify which among Assertive Skills, Social Skills, or Family and Relationship Skills you think might be helpful for you.

**STEP 1:**

Describe the specific problem or aspect of the problem and the specific skills you want to apply to it.

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**STEP 2:**

Describe your plan for how you will practice or work on developing this skill before applying it to your problem – talk it over with a friend, perhaps “roll-play” with a friend, etc.

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**STEP 3:**

Describe how you will try your skill with the problem you’ve identified. Write out briefly how you think it might work, what problems you may encounter, how you will know if you were successful.

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**STEP 4:**

Try it!

**STEP 5:**

After you have tried resolving your problem with this choice, evaluate the effectiveness of your actions. How well did this solution work? If you’re still unhappy with the outcome, think of ways to more effectively carry out your first choice OR move on to your next best choice in the list of possible alternatives.

## SESSION 5 – Taking Charge of What We think

- I. Review of Previous Session. Discuss efforts at problem solving, attention to social skills, etc. Look to point out and gently correct regarding
  - A. Lack of sufficient pinpointing – benefits of sufficient pinpointing
  - B. Importance of generating wide range of alternative strategies
  - C. Importance of careful choices among assertive skills, social skills, family and relationship skills, etc.

- II. Last topic, going back to original model – Examine How we See or Interpret Stressors
  - A. Discuss how we sometime make matters worse by “making mountains out of molehills,” “blowing things out of proportion,” “buying trouble,” etc.
  - B. Ask for examples from participants’ own experience with stressors they have been discussing.

- C. Introduce **Key Concept:** “blowing things out of proportion” is a habit that you can learn to replace with more sensible ways of thinking about things.
- D. Goal is not just to be “sensible,” but to think sensibly about stressors or hassles – to stop making mountains out of molehills – so you will feel less stressed and more happy!

- E. Distribute hand out on “Changing How We Interpret Stressors.” This has concrete suggestions for changing how your interpretations of stressors “makes mountains out of molehills”

Here are some common assumptions that lead folks to “blow things out of proportion,” be “too hard on themselves,” etc. Any look familiar???

- I have to be perfect at all times
- If someone gets upset with me, it means I can never really trust them again.
- If a stranger acts discourteously to me, it means they think I’m “nobody.”
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- III. Steps for learning to Examine **Sensibly** How we See or Interpret Stressors
  - A. Using the form “Changing How We Interpret Stressors,” specify the circumstances, stressors, or hassles in which you tend to make mountains out of molehills. As with other problem solving approaches, be as specific as you can be.
  - B. Identify how you are blowing things out of proportion, how you are thinking about a stressor (what you are overlooking, what you are exaggerating, what you are taking too personally, how you need to see it from the perspective of the other person) in ways that lead you to feel stressed or unhappy.
  - C. Identify more sensible ways of viewing the stressor or hassle – think what you would tell someone else if they were in your shoes, how you would suggest they look at things.

- D. **Rehearse:** think ahead, “play it out in your imagination” or maybe roll-play with a friend how you want to think differently when the stressor or hassle occurs.  
**Hint:** it may be helpful to rehearse *in exaggerated form* how you currently react and then how you want to react. Sometime this exaggerated form of what you are trying to stop makes it more clear that this really is something we can control and change.
- E. As with the rest of problem solving, try it!

## **Changing How We Interpret Stressors**

Feeling bad about ourselves is a common problem. Sometimes we feel sad, anxious, or frustrated for good reasons--Bad things sometimes do happen. Other times we get down on ourselves because we judge our performance too harshly or negatively. We may tend to blow things out of proportion, think in all-or-nothing terms. Some of us over-react to incidents that should only mildly annoy us. We end up feeling very sad or angry.

### **Two Practical Steps**

#### **1. Look carefully at your feelings. Question why you feel the way you do.**

Suppose you reach for the display of snack food because you're frustrated with a store clerk who has been slow in taking care of you. Are you really in as much of a rush as you think? Is it really as important as you're making it out to be?

Suppose you feel depressed because your co-workers forgot your birthday. Does it really mean they don't care about you? If you feel loved by your family and have your fair share of good friends, does it really matter if all of your co-workers think you're wonderful?

Suppose you feel guilty because you forgot to return a form to your son's teacher. Are you expecting yourself to take care of all your family's needs? Are you expecting yourself never to make mistakes where your family is concerned?

The box "Check Your Assumptions" gives examples of mistakes people make that cause them to feel bad when they don't have to.

#### **2. Develop more realistic expectations for yourself.**

If you find yourself expecting to be perfect with your family, if you find yourself feeling you need always to be on time, if you find yourself upset whenever anyone indicates feeling less than delighted with you--whatever may be the mistakes you're making in judging yourself, figure out a more realistic way of looking at things. Just as with so many other steps in this whole program, you need to do this ahead of time.

Suppose needing always to be perfect is your downfall. Plan--do it ahead of time--a better way of looking at things. You might think about a friend who isn't perfect but seems to do a lot of good things and enjoy life. Practice how you want to remember this person when you're tempted to expect too much of yourself. Work on it ahead of time so you'll have it when you need it. The box "Changing How You Think About Yourself" contains more suggestions in this area.

### **Check Your Assumptions**

Here are some assumptions you may be making about yourself. They may make you feel bad about yourself and make you want to eat. If you make these mistakes, they're sort of set-ups to chow down!

1. I should never disappoint anyone.
2. I need to be loved or liked by everyone.
3. I should be such a good and worthy person that everyone will treat me with respect.
4. In order to be happy, I have to be successful in everything I do.
5. If I make a mistake, it shows I'm not really very good.
6. If somebody disagrees with me, it means they don't like me or don't think much of me.
7. My worth as a person depends on what other people--every one of them--think of me.
8. Life is fair. If I am a nice person, if I'm cheerful, if I do my best for others, bad things won't happen to me. If bad things do happen to me, it means I just haven't been good enough.

### **Changing How You Think About Yourself**

Here are some approaches to combating the assumptions that make you feel bad:

1. Pretend you are your best friend. How would you argue with the assumptions you're making? What would your best friend tell you to encourage you to feel better about yourself?
2. Think about how much you might enjoy life if you didn't carry around the assumptions that are making you feel bad. What would it be like if you only wanted to be competent, not perfect? What would it be like if you were content to feel that half of your co-workers were your friends and didn't need to feel you had to be friends with all of them? What would it be like if you were satisfied that your children know you love them and that you do your best even if you sometimes do make mistakes?
3. Work out a logical argument--pretend you're a lawyer--against the way you're looking at yourself. Practice the argument so you'll be able to recall it when you're tempted to blow things out of proportion.
4. Write down some things to remind yourself of when you're tempted to feel bad. Carry the list with you, so you can look at it when you're in the sort of situation that tends to make you upset.
5. Imagine a friend who does a good job of handling the situations that upset you. Imagine what positive thoughts they may have about themselves in those situations. Now think of yourself being positive in the same way. Practice this and remember it when you get into the situations that bug you.

## Changing How We See or Interpret Stressors

**STEP 1:**

Describe the specific stressor or hassle and how you tend to See It or Intepret It in a way that increases your stress.

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**STEP 2:**

Describe the specific ways in which you want to view the stressor differently. What do you want to say to yourself next time it occurs?

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**KEEP RECORDS**

Day	How the Stressor Occurred	How I interpreted the stressor – What I told myself about the stressor	How I would like to improve further the way I interpret the stressor.

## SESSION 6 – Putting it All Together

- I. Review of Homework from Session #5 on Changing How we Interpret or See Stressors
  - A. Discuss how folks were able to see how their interpretations of hassles or stressors “makes mountains out of molehills”
  - B. Review how they were able to change their habitual interpretations.
  - C. What problems did they encounter?
  - D. What benefits did they notice in terms of their level of stress or anxiety?
  
- II. Go around the circle of those attending, and ask each to describe what they have learned from **IN CHARGE**.

As individuals are describing what they have learned, point out how their descriptions illustrate key themes of the course:

  - A. Stress is:
    1. WHAT WE DO – worry, feel tense or anxious, make simple mistakes, get angry, feel blue or hopeless, get in arguments with family or friends
    2. WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE – to avoid or lessen the hassle or stressor
    3. HOW WE INTERPRET the hassle or stressor to make “mountains out of molehills”
  - B. We can reduce or minimize stress
    1. For WHAT WE DO, can learn ways to **directly manage stress**, through deep breathing, relaxation, yoga, relaxing activities (long walk, long bath, etc.), distraction, self affirmation, “counting your blessings,” etc.
    2. For WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE, learn **problem solving and social skills** that avoid or minimize stressful situations and hassles
    3. For HOW WE INTERPRET, learn how to **examine how we see stressors** to “avoid making mountains out of molehills” or “borrowing trouble.”
  
- III. Go around the circle of those attending, and ask each to describe what they most want to remember in the future when they are dealing with some of the stressors they have discussed? Write these down on a flip chart or blackboard. After all have described what they want most to remember, discuss in terms of the themes of the course.
  
- IV. Farewell – as appropriate to the setting and the audience, discuss feelings about ending the program, future opportunities for similar programs, related activities and programs available, etc.