

The AAAbc's of Stress Management

Stress management is a decision-making process. When we are feeling the effects of a stressful life position or a stressful lifestyle, we have three major ways we could deal with that stress:

Alter it

Avoid it

Accept it by

building our resistance or

changing our perception

All three of these approaches can be effective coping techniques. The trick is choosing the proper approach for the situation at hand and the person involved.

ALTER - implies removing the source of stress by changing something. Problem-solving, direct communication, organizing, planning and time management are common techniques for altering stress.

Ex. Someone who has a lot of tasks to accomplish could alter that stress by developing a schedule of when she/he wants to do each task.

AVOID - implies removing oneself from the stressful situation of figuring out how not to get there in the first place! To conserve stress energy, people sometimes need to walk away, let go, say "no", delegate, withdraw, and know their limits so they can "live to fight another day."

Ex. A person who already feels like she/he has too much to do could avoid more stress by recognizing his/her limits and not taking on any more jobs.

ACCEPT - involves equipping oneself physically and mentally for stress. The b and c of the AAAbc model represent this physical and mental preparation.

b stands for building resistance. People can increase their capacity to tolerate stress physically through proper diet, regular exercise, and systematic relaxation techniques. Relaxation and exercise provide double the bonus of releasing stored up tension as well! Mental resistance is bolstered through positive affirmation, taking time for mental health, getting clear about goals/values/priorities. Social resistance is strengthened by building and maintaining support systems, investing in relationships, clear communication and intimacy. Spiritual resistance is especially important in times of high stress. Meditation, prayer, worship, faith and commitment strengthen people.

c stands for change. One way to Accept stress is to change the way you perceive the situation yourself. Changing unrealistic expectations and irrational beliefs such as "I should succeed at everything I try" or "I must take care of everyone's needs" is a good start. Building self-esteem and cultivating a positive attitude help as well, e.g., saying "It's a difficult job but I can do it" instead of "It's a difficult job...I can't do it."