



Serving the Chippewa County Area

Winter 2008

NEWS AND NOTES FROM PATHWAYS

STRESS... *What is it? (*)*

Stress is a term we all know and use often, but what does it really mean? It is hard to define because it means different things to different people. Stress is a normal reaction to life for people of all ages. It is caused by our body's instinct to protect itself from emotional or physical pressure or, in extreme situations, from danger.

Stressors differ for each of us. What is stressful for one person may or may not be stressful for another. Each of us responds to stress in an entirely different way. How a person copes with stress - by reaching for a beer or cigarette or by heading to the gym - also plays an important role in the impact that stress will have on our bodies.

By using their own support systems, some people are able to cope effectively with the emotional and physical demands brought on by stressful and traumatic experiences. However, individuals who experience prolonged reactions to stress that disrupt their daily functioning may benefit from consulting with a trained and experienced mental health professional.

Stress - The Body's Response

The stress response is mediated by a highly complex, integrated network that involves the central nervous system, the adrenal system, the immune system, and the cardiovascular system. Stress activates adaptive responses. It releases the neurotransmitter norepinephrine, which is involved with memory. This may be why people remember stressful events more clearly than they do nonstressful situations.

Stress also increases the production of a hormone in the body known as "corticotrophin releasing factor" (CRF). CRF is found throughout the brain and initiates our biological response to stressors.

During all negative experiences, certain regions of the brain show increased levels of CRF.

Interestingly, almost all drugs of abuse have also been found to increase CRF levels, which suggest a neurobiological connection between stress and drug abuse.

Mild stress may cause changes that are useful. For example, stress can actually improve our attention, increase our capacity to store, and integrate important and life-protecting information.

However, if stress is prolonged or chronic, those changes can become harmful.

Stress and Substance Abuse

Stressful events may influence profoundly the use of alcohol or other drugs. Stress is a major contributor to the initiation and continuation of addiction to alcohol or other drugs, as well as to relapse or a return to substance use after periods of abstinence. Stress is one of the major factors known to cause relapse to smoking, even after prolonged periods of abstinence.

Children exposed to severe stress may be more vulnerable to substance use/ abuse. A number of clinical and epidemiological studies show a strong association between psychosocial stressors early in life (e.g. parental loss, child abuse) and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, impulsive behavior, and substance abuse in adulthood.

** Information excerpted from the website of the National Institute on Drug Abuse".*

Stress and Youth

Stressors for youth can come from a number of sources. Some examples below were described in the e-newsletter “Connect with Kids.”

www.connectwithkids.com

Scheduling/Over scheduling

Anyone who works with youth recognizes the need for structure in children’s lives.

This, of course, includes a certain amount of scheduling...necessary for youth and their families to plan their days and weeks. Scheduling provides predictability and minimizes the stress of last-minute arrangements. However, it is not always easy to achieve a balance between homework and extra-curricular activities, time with friends, and time to just “hang out and veg” with friends or by oneself.

“Experts say let your children choose their after school activities, choose how busy they want to be, but watch for signs of burnout.”

Perfectionism

Anxiety can also come from being a perfectionist. In a study of 36 children in third through fifth grades, researchers found that children who rated high on perfectionism exhibited significantly more anxiety and dissatisfaction with their performance on computer tasks than their low-perfectionism peers did, even when both groups performed equally well. The problem is not the setting of high standards but rather their distress and inability to accept the mistakes they make in the course of learning.

Academics

Experts say, for many teens, even when they do well, they still think they could do better. Parents should help kids understand that being perfect isn’t realistic and help them create balance in their lives – beyond academics.

Social/ Peer Pressure

Especially as they enter the teen years, young people become pre-occupied with their perceptions of what is “socially acceptable” or “cool” among their peers, and struggle with what really feels right or OK for themselves. This is developmentally typical, but for some youth it becomes magnified and a significant source of stress.

Family Stress

Young people *will* be affected if there is stress in their family situation. The degree to which they are impacted will be greater if no one is talking about the source of the family stress and allowing discussion of what is going on.

Seasonal Stress

As we enter the holiday season, we are all subjected to additional stressors. With the current economic situation, families are having to cut back on gift buying, as well as travel and entertaining. The holiday season in itself often spawns unrealistic expectations, leading to frustrations and resentment when they are not attained.

Holidays are particularly stressful for persons in recovery and their families and loved ones.



Coping With Stress

For all age levels:

- Simplify your life-style. Make lists which balance “shoulds” with activities that provide relaxation and fulfillment.
- Take time for reading/ exercise/ enjoying music, according to your preference or those things you enjoy with family and friends.
- Make time for yourself and your individual preferences.
- Make time to talk with friends.
- List and prioritize “shoulds.”
- Be honest about potential stressors and calculate the degree to which they are necessary to your situation. Plan strategies for minimizing their impact on yourself and those around you.
- If you or a family member is in recovery, plan ahead on how you will deal with “triggers.” (Talk about this with your significant others.)



Holiday Entertaining: As we approach the holiday season *Pathways* urges everyone to be mindful of “traditional practices” which may contribute to our Western Wisconsin high ranking (nationally) of being tolerant of irresponsible behaviors related to alcohol consumption. Make a holiday resolution to initiate subtle changes in potentially negative practices.

- ❖ *Family Gatherings:* Be aware of what children are observing. If you do serve alcoholic beverages, acknowledge that alcohol is not appropriate to be served to minors. Offer attractive non-alcoholic alternative beverages. Prepare “fun” beverages to serve to youth.
- ❖ *Holiday Parties:* Be a responsible host/ hostess. Again, prepare and offer attractive non-alcoholic beverages. Allow and encourage guests to pace themselves. Always stop serving alcoholic beverages toward the end of your event. Offer coffee. Give attention to any guests who may have over-indulged, and take appropriate measures to ensure their safety.
- ❖ *See that alcohol is **not** the “main event.”*

Raising the Tax on Alcoholic Beverages

Fact: Each time the state of Alaska raised its alcoholic beverage tax, fewer deaths were caused by or related to alcohol, according to a study that examined 28 years of data.

Fact: Raising taxes on beer, wine and liquor immediately reduces the number of deaths from alcohol-related diseases such as liver disease, oral or breast cancers, and alcohol poisoning.

Fact: Wisconsin’s current tax on beer is about six-tenths of a cent per 12-ounce bottle.

Check out additional facts on the back of the gold sheet and consider this information as you read about the current proposals for a “slight” raise in the beer tax.

Show & Tell

By now many of you may have seen the street banner designed for this project. It has been hung across Jefferson Street in Chippewa Falls. The Youth Issues Committee is planning to have this banner displayed at multiple sites throughout the county in the coming year.

If you attend Micon Cinemas in Chippewa Falls, watch for the “Show & Tell” message to be screened with the ads prior to the showing of the movie. We’d like your feedback!

Harvest of Caring

The 14th annual Harvest of Caring was hosted by Pathways on October 27.

This event celebrates the collaborative efforts of the many individuals and organizations who work together in the Chippewa County area to minimize the negative consequences of substance abuse and addiction, and to promote pro-active efforts to create healthier community environments related to these issues. Jerry Gallagher of WQOW TV 18 was again the MC for this event. This year the “Community Service Award” was presented to the Youth Issues Committee of the Chippewa Health Improvement Partnership. The award, received by Rhonda Brown in behalf of that group, honored their years of work in promoting Positive Youth Development in Chippewa County

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