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Managing Family Stress: Coping, Adapting and Becoming Resilient

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Managing Family Stress

COPING, ADAPTING AND BECOMING RESILIENT

The family is society's most basic unit, and is meant to be a place of protection and health where people develop.



▲ Jasmine Fraser

However, various stressful experiences have often affected the family unit negatively. These experiences have had far-reaching outcomes, not just for individual family members but also for society as a whole.

Family stress is triggered by internal (i.e., illness, injury, death, divorce) and external (unemployment, socio-economic shifts, financial setbacks, ethnic and racial inequality, inequity) factors, all of which can adversely affect the roles, structure and well-being of the family. Studies have shown that stress is one of the leading causes of ill health and chronic diseases.¹ Stress triggers pathological mental-emotional conditions. Such conditions sometimes result in physical ailments if they are not addressed or mitigated in a timely manner.

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, family stress is compounded by unparalleled mental-emotional health problems as people experience added difficulties coping with the effects of stress. Untended stress can lead to crisis, a further debilitating disturbance in the family's functioning and well-being. How families handle stress determines not only their ability to survive, but also their capacity to adjust and become resilient. Consequently, families need practical ways to manage stress.

Awareness and adequate available resources can lessen the adverse outcomes of stress on family well-being and functioning.² The degree or impact of a stressful situation is determined by the three things: *the stressful event itself, available resources, and how the event is perceived* by those encountering the stress.³ Awareness of the *event* is key! Stressful events are easily identified as anything that causes significant changes in family relationships, processes, structure, roles, goals or values. Awareness of *resources* is vital! Available resources refer to physical

means that are readily available to alleviate hardship, and also includes individuals' emotional capacity to cope and adapt during stressful events. Awareness of *perception* is critical! How families perceive or assess a stressful event determines whether the incidence is prolonged, becoming an unmanageable challenge, or an opportunity for growth.

Cognition, biology, gender, culture, spirituality, values and age are variables that determine how families perceive or assess a stressful event. It is possible that with adequate support and help, families can become resilient in stressful encounters. How families *perceive* a stressful event and the *choices* they make are critical in becoming resilient. The choices people make are framed by their outlook. In a stressful event, choosing to look at the positive generates hope and gratitude — hope for something better and gratitude for what remains.

Families also can choose to strengthen the relational bond between members and neighboring communities such as the church or support groups. Increasing family bond can involve taking time to listen and extend compassion to one another as they talk about how the adverse situation affected them. In doing so, an event that could likely create tension, void and deficits among family can bring them closer together. ■

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1. R. M. Griffins (2014). 10 Health Problems Relating to Stress that You can Fix
 2. Michael Rosino, (2016). ABC-X Model of Family Stress and Coping
 3. C. Price, K. Bush, and S. Price, (2017). Families and Change: Coping with Stressful Events and Transition, pp. 6-8
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