

Stress and Human Flourishing

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Stress is how we perceive and respond to threats or challenges and can be physical and emotional. A stressor is the threat or challenge that precedes the perception and response.

Three examples of stressors are:

- a. A catastrophe is an event that affects many, such as a terrorist attack or a tsunami.
- b. A significant life change is a more personal adjustment in one's life, and is sometimes intentional. Examples are divorce, onset of a major health issue, graduation or loss of a loved one.
- c. Daily hassle relates to the everyday inconveniences that we all face. Such as a traffic jam, losing our keys or the internet going down.

Hans Selye developed the general adaptation syndrome which dove deeper into the simplistic idea of fight or flight, which is the body's natural reaction to an extreme stressor. The heart rate increases, breathing becomes faster, and even blood is re-routed to reduce pain. Selye found that this response can come about from even non-specific threats. The three phases of the general adaptation syndrome are:

- ◆ Alarm reaction: immediate response during which your heart rate increases, breathing increases and blood is diverted to the muscles. This prepares the body to fight.
- ◆ Resistance: continued increased breathing rate, blood pressure is high and hormones are pumped into the bloodstream. This keeps you on high alert, still ready to fight.
- ◆ Exhaustion: over time, this resistance phase takes a toll on your body. Without stress relief, you become exhausted and slowly your body loses the ability to fight illness and collapses.

Stress impacts our health and also our ability to fight disease. By having so many of the body's resources devoted to combatting the stress, eventually the resources become depleted and are unable to do the everyday job of fighting illness, infection and mental fatigue. The immune system is ultimately unable to do its job.

Problem-focused coping involves directly confronting the stressor. Having a conversation with the boss regarding workload, for example. If one thinks they can change things, then this strategy can be used.

Emotion-focused coping tends to be more internal. If one feels the situation isn't resolvable, they may resort to unhealthy coping such as smoking or drinking. Or they may just find other ways to deal with it, such as more exercise or spending time with friends.

Learned helplessness is a sense of one's feeling they have no control over situations, even if they do. For

example, if they suffer a series of events such as cancer diagnosis followed by a house fire followed by a car accident, they can become almost paralyzed in dealing with a preventable event such as gaining too much weight. They can lose hope and feel they are unable to control their situation. And this, in turn, increases stress levels, affecting one's health.

Seligman and Maier used dogs to conduct their experiment. The dogs were strapped into a harness, unable to escape, and subjected to repeated shocks. Later, those same dogs were placed in a situation where they had the ability to escape by simply jumping over a small hurdle. The previously harnessed dogs would not jump the hurdle. They shrank away, seemingly hopeless. Other dogs, not harnessed during the shock treatment, jumped the hurdles and escaped.

Positive psychology is focusing on optimistic and helpful aspects of one's life. Rather than fixing what seems to be wrong with your life, focus on encouraging behavior and attitude that leads to being in control, tapping into one's strengths and promoting things that bring happiness.

One factor that influences well being that we discussed in class was healthy relationships. This can be family, friends, spouses, a faith family or even co-workers. Having and nurturing happy relationships reduces stress and also promotes good health. In various studies conducted between 2010 and 2017, it was proven that these connections play a part in living a longer, healthier life. Enjoying positive relationships reduces blood pressure and stress hormones, which we know both contribute to overall health, and immune system functionality.

A suggestion I would have for someone to have a happier life is to assume responsibility for your actions. This will then make you realize that if you make good choices, study hard, work hard you will find success and happiness. If you blame others for your unhappiness, you will be less likely to make those good choices. If you believe bad things are someone else's fault, then you may also believe that good things may only be gained by chance or good luck. That good jobs, spouses and children only happen to others because they are lucky or were born rich. Taking responsibility also means taking control. Less stress, better health, better life.