

5 WAYS TO REDUCE FAMILY STRESS



www.marthaalvarez.com

All families have some degree of stress. Whether it is your individual stress or collective stress, the way you handle and cope with stress will impact your health and happiness.

The following 5 strategies can help reduce family stress. Start now!

1. Breathe.

Focused breathing is the number one stress buster! Deep, focused breathing increases the supply of oxygen to your body and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes "rest" to calm the body down.

There are many different types of breathing exercises you can do, but let's keep it simple:

- Make sure your shoulders drop and your muscles relax. Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose as you feel your belly expand. Make sure your chest rises very little. Do this for a count of (4) four.
- Hold that breath for a count of (3) three.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, while pursing your lips slightly. Feel your belly going back in. You may hear a 'whooshing' sound. Do this for a count of 5 (five).
- Repeat this breathing exercise 7 to 10 times.
- Remind yourself to practice this breath several times a day, even if you are not stressed. Make calm breathing a habit.

2. Use “I” statements.

Ineffective communication can increase the stress levels in your home. Many arguments start because of poor communication. Families that use good communication skills to resolve conflict and differences build healthier and stronger relationships.

“I” statements help communication by removing the blame that accompanies “you” messages. “I” messages help you communicate four things:

- The feeling you are having.
- What behavior you are responding to.
- Why (the unmet need) you are feeling/responding the way you are.
- What can meet the need that you have.

For example, *I **feel** angry (the feeling) **when** I am interrupted while I am speaking (the behavior I am responding to), **because** I feel that what I am saying is not important (belief and unmet need). **What** I want is to share my opinion uninterrupted (how the need can be met).*

Another example:

Instead of saying, “*Why don't you call me?*”

You can say, “*It's a relief to know that you are well and safe. I appreciate it when you call me.*”

Communicating is about sharing what's on your mind. Being respectful, thoughtful, asking questions and remaining open minded allows family members to express their needs, wants and concerns in a supportive environment that fosters communication.

3. Mind your feelings in a healthy way.

Your body responds to the way you think, feel and act. Intense negative emotions can be overwhelming and create havoc for your body and mind. Your thoughts and emotions stimulate chemicals in your body that set in motion a set of positive or negative physiological events that influence things like gastrointestinal function, blood pressure, the perception of pain and immune function. Learning to deal with negative emotions such as guilt, sadness, anger, resentment and frustration will help you stay healthy and happy.

Here's how to manage your emotions:

- **Identify the feeling/emotion** - Get clear on what you're feeling. Thoughts, feelings/emotions and action are all influenced by each other.
- **Notice what triggered the event or thought.** - Triggers are experiences that remind you of the past. Stop. Breathe . Notice the trigger.
- **Change your self-talk** into positive statements and thoughts.

Try some of the following phrases to change your mindset:

- "This will pass"* - All situations are transient. Nothing stays the same forever.
- "I can do this"* - You can achieve what your mind believes. Just don't give up.
- "Nobody's perfect"* - People make mistakes. I am open to improvement.
- "I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction."*
- "Thoughts are just thoughts- they are not necessarily true."*
- "Just because it happened once, does not mean it will happen again."*
- "I choose not to let this ruin my day."*

4. Keep it simple.

Life is filled with opportunities, desires, challenges and expectations but you don't have to say "yes" to all of them. Overcommitting and stretching yourself too thin is a sure way to add stress to your family. When you complicate your life, you disrupt your natural flow and ease.

Every time you say "yes" to something you are saying "no" to something else. Prioritize what's really important, plan realistically and then say "no" to everything else.

Don't worry about what others are going to think or making someone unhappy just because you don't say "yes" to what they want. Chances are that the opportunity will come up again.

It's more important to choose those things that really make a difference in your life. Choose to do things that make you and your family happy. Re-commit to your family. Check in with them and re-evaluate their interests and how much time they want to dedicate to different things.

So ask yourself, *"What can I do to make life a bit simpler for me and my family?"*

Simply your life and tend to what matters most.

5. Take a moment for yourself.

With today's busy lives, time is not always on your side. Make it a practice to set aside at least 30 minutes out of the 1,440 minutes in a day just for you. No phones, no computers, no interruptions.

First thing in the morning usually works out very well for most people. Just get up a little bit earlier. If that is not an option, maybe you can arrive to work a bit earlier, or take some time for yourself during lunch.

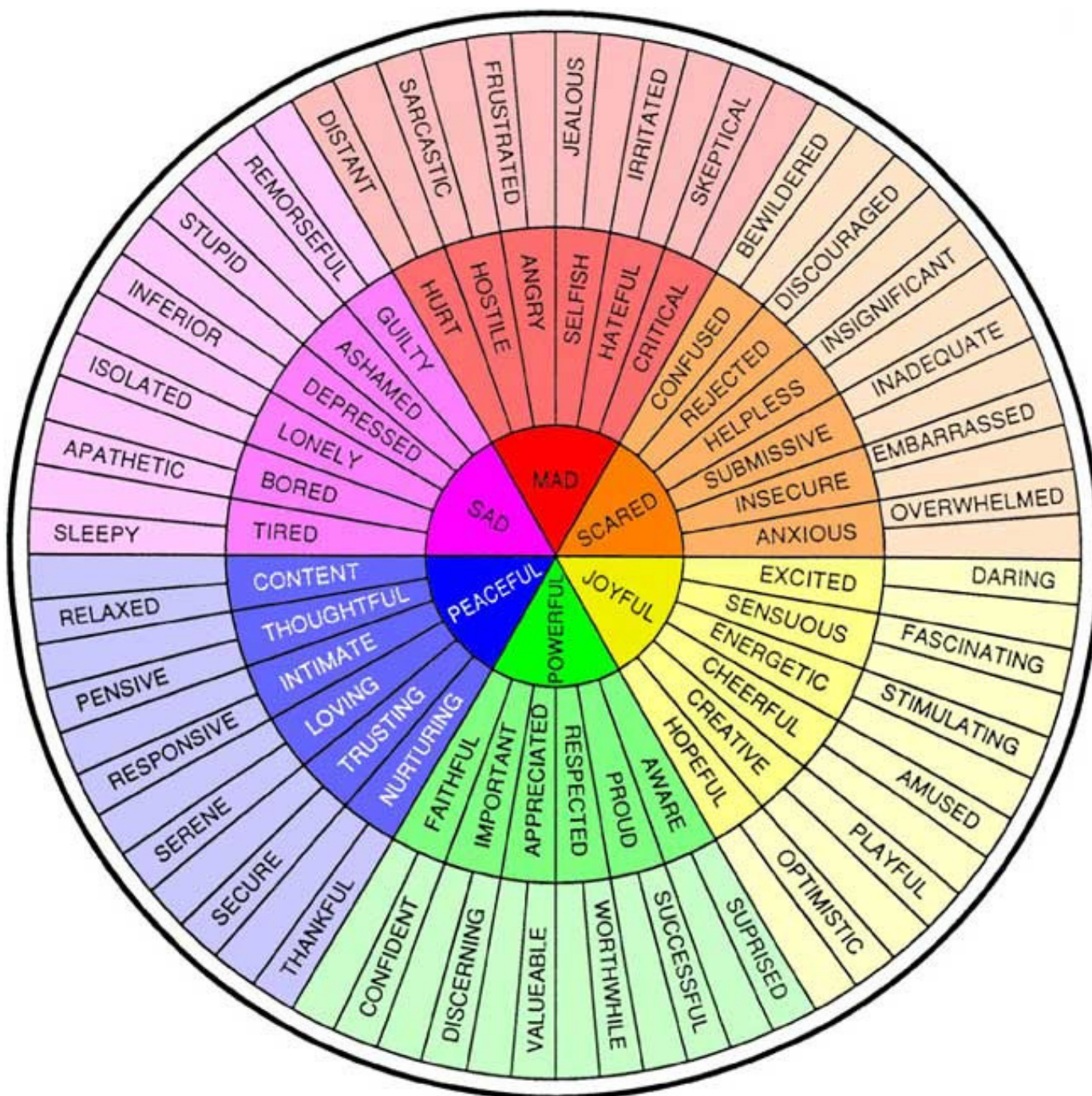
You can use this time to remind yourself of what you are grateful for, to enjoy a simple pleasure such as a cup of tea or coffee, do something great for your body - like exercise or just to create some white space-uninterrupted.

Having some time for yourself helps you unwind, think clearly, refreshes and energizes you.

Let those around you know that you are taking a mini time-out and shouldn't be disturbed unless it is an emergency. Make yourself a priority.



The Feelings Wheel



About the Author

Martha Alvarez, LMFT is a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in Miami, Florida. Her extensive training in family systems helps her guide families towards finding solutions to their everyday struggles. Through her one to one sessions + on demand digital programs, she helps you get your "happy" back - in an easy, real, no frills kind of way.



www.marthaalvarez.com info@marthaalvarez.com

Copyright © 2017 All rights reserved