

The following article was written by Bev Schroeder, school social work at Kokomo High School. It was submitted for use in the INSSWA Networker, but was too large to include. Because this is such an excellent article and so timely, we did not want to edit it in order to fit it into the newsletter. We are sending it to you separate from the newsletter so that you may enjoy the article in its entirety. It will also be available on our web page. Bev is one of INSSWA's East Central regional representatives.

The thermometer is rising, driving to work during daylight brings great joy, and graduation conversations tell us that the end of another school year is near. And what a year it has been! This article is not to recap the events of SY 2009-2010; there have been many words written on that topic. Looking back over the past year, we can certainly reflect on all of the levels of stress we have faced . . . students whose parents have lost their jobs, and, for the first time in the student's life, s/he is too worried about the next meal than to worry about that "D" in math, or for acting out behaviors in class; our own kids' problems; our own stress of worrying whether we will find a pink slip in our mailbox; illness; marital problems; problems of the world; and on it goes!

Regardless of the source, stress is all around us. We see it in the eyes of our co-workers, students, administrators, and even when we look in the mirror. What causes stress for you may not be stressful for someone else. Sometimes stress is helpful – it can encourage us to meet a deadline or get things done. But long-term stress can increase the risk of diseases like depression, heart disease and a variety of other problems. According to the American Institute of Stress,

“Increased stress increases productivity – up to a point, after which things rapidly deteriorate, and that level also differs for each of us. It's much like the stress or tension on a violin string. Not enough produces a dull raspy sound and too much an irritating screech or snaps the string – but just the correct degree of stress creates a beautiful tone. Similarly, we all have to find the right amount of stress that permits us to make pleasant music in our daily lives. You can learn how to utilize and transform stress so that it will make you more productive and less self-destructive.”

Stress is difficult for scientists to define because it is a highly subjective phenomenon that differs for each of us. Things that are distressful for some individuals can be pleasurable for others. We also respond to stress differently. Some people blush, some eat more while others grow pale or eat less. There are numerous physical as well as emotional responses as illustrated by the following list of some common signs and symptoms of stress.

1. Frequent headaches, jaw clenching or pain
2. Gritting, grinding teeth
3. Stuttering or stammering
26. Insomnia, nightmares, disturbing dreams
27. Difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts
28. Trouble learning new information

4. Tremors, trembling of lips, hands
5. Neck ache, back pain, muscle spasms
6. Light headedness, faintness, dizziness
7. Ringing, buzzing or "popping sounds"
8. Frequent blushing, sweating
9. Cold or sweaty hands, feet
10. Dry mouth, problems swallowing
11. Frequent colds, infections, herpes sores
12. Rashes, itching, hives, "goose bumps"
13. Unexplained or frequent "allergy" attacks
14. Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
15. Excess belching, flatulence
16. Constipation, diarrhea
17. Difficulty breathing, sighing
18. Sudden attacks of panic
19. Chest pain, palpitations
20. Frequent urination
21. Poor sexual desire or performance
22. Excess anxiety, worry, guilt, nervousness
23. Increased anger, frustration, hostility
24. Depression, frequent or wild mood swings
25. Increased or decreased appetite
29. Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion
30. Difficulty in making decisions.
31. Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed.
32. Frequent crying spells or suicidal thoughts
33. Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness
34. Little interest in appearance, punctuality
35. Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping
36. Increased frustration, irritability, edginess
37. Overreaction to petty annoyances
38. Increased number of minor accidents
39. Obsessive or compulsive behavior
40. Reduced work efficiency or productivity
41. Lies or excuses to cover up poor work
42. Rapid or mumbled speech
43. Excessive defensiveness or suspiciousness
44. Problems in communication, sharing
45. Social withdrawal and isolation
46. Constant tiredness, weakness, fatigue
47. Frequent use of over-the-counter drugs
48. Weight gain or loss without diet
49. Increased smoking, alcohol or drug use
50. Excessive gambling or impulse buying

Regardless of how many times we, as professionals, have attended seminars over this topic, during trying times such as these we forget the importance of self-care. We work with our students on coping strategies, stress reduction techniques, and self-regulation. But, somehow, when it comes to our own well-being, we forget, or we don't have time, or we have to take care of someone else, or (you fill in the blank).

I don't think it would be a stretch to think that for many of us, the past year has brought all kinds of new stress-related experiences. At a time when jobs are on the line, how often do you "beat yourself up" because you think you didn't do enough? Typically you pride yourself on your realistic point of view, but perhaps the events of the past year have

made you wonder what **is** realistic! Unfortunately, perhaps the best thing to do right now is to be reminded again to think about caring for yourself . . . what you **can** control!

This reminder comes with a solution. On June 15th, the East Central and the Northeast INSSWA Regions are sponsoring a Summer Seminar, offering three informative presentations (more info can be found in the Spring 2010 Networker); one focusing on this very topic. It's o.k. to put your personal needs ahead of others this time; after all, won't others benefit, as well?