

by Fiona Hoban

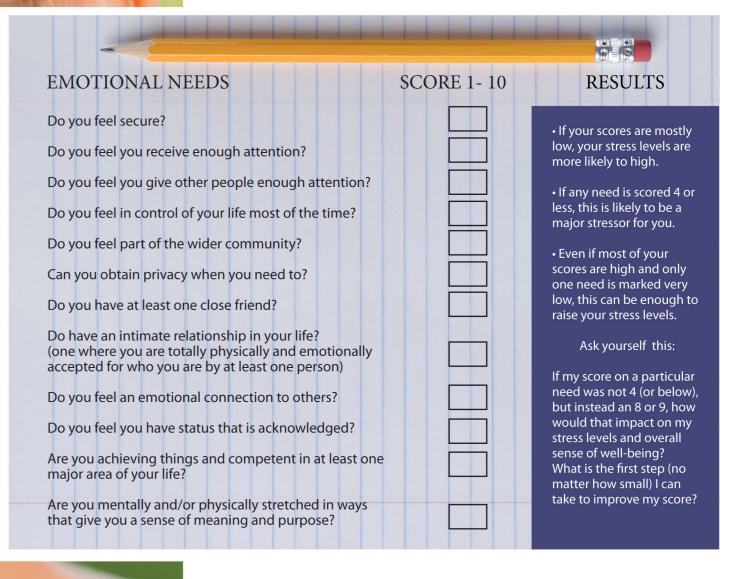


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id you ever take a little time off for yourself, or maybe treat yourself to a massage and then realise 'I had no idea how stressed I was'? Stress can be very deceptive. We are often stressed without being aware of it (although those who live and work with us are usually very aware!)

It's a good idea to take a regular check on our stress levels. Mindfields College in the UK came up with the Emotional Needs Audit as a way to do this. They argue that our level of stress depends on how well our emotional needs are being met, and how well we can cope when they are not. Rate, in your judgement, how well the following emotional needs are being met in your life now on a scale of one to ten (where one means not at all, and 10 means being very well met) by ticking the appropriate boxes...



ometimes it can be quite straightforward to address a low scoring emotional need. For example, I may be feeling really low and realise that it is because I am not being mentally and/or physically stretched. I can then do something about this and decide to take up a hobby or start exercising etc. However, it's not always as easy as that. For example, I may not be feeling very secure at the moment because I have been told my job is gone at the end of the month.

In the current economic climate it is not so easy to address this issue and 'do something about it'. When this is the case it is important to have good coping mechanisms in place.

How we cope with a situation is far more important than situation itself. We all need to make sense of what happens to us. The way we do this has considerable bearing on our well-being and stress levels. Psychologists have found that we tend to make sense of what happens to us according to various 'attributional' styles. I call them the 3 'P's:

- Personal how personally we take events that happen.
- Pervasive how much of our lives we assume the event will affect.
- Permanent how long we assume the event will last.

If I use the previous example of being told that I've lost my job - my attributional style may be that I take it very personally; I go on to imagine that my entire life is ruined, and that the situation will never end and I'll never find another job again. It's obvious how such an interpretation or perspective will affect my stress levels. An alternative attributional style would be to understand that the job loss is not a personal reflection of me, and whilst

it may affect some areas of my life, it wont affect all areas of my life and that in time, the situation will improve. Such an attributional style is far more positive and far more effective at keeping stress levels in check.

So if things are pretty tough for you at the moment, I'd encourage you to realise it's probably nothing personal. It need not impact on all areas of your life and it won't last forever. Challenge the way you react and respond to life's difficulties try to adapt a more effective attributional style. Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council recently wrote to all world leaders saying, "Positive thinking is no longer something for drifters, dreamers and the perpetually naïve."