

Stressed?

“Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.” Wayne Dyer

by **Fiona Hoban**



Fiona Hoban runs a private counselling practice in Westport, Co. Mayo. She also delivers well-being talks throughout Ireland.

For more details go to www.fionahoban.ie

Did 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...

EMOTIONAL NEEDS	SCORE 1- 10	RESULTS
Do you feel secure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If your scores are mostly low, your stress levels are more likely to high.• If any need is scored 4 or less, this is likely to be a major stressor for you.• Even if most of your scores are high and only one need is marked very low, this can be enough to raise your stress levels. <p>Ask yourself this:</p> <p>If my score on a particular need was not 4 (or below), but instead an 8 or 9, how would that impact on my stress levels and overall sense of well-being? What is the first step (no matter how small) I can take to improve my score?</p>
Do you feel you receive enough attention?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel you give other people enough attention?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel in control of your life most of the time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel part of the wider community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Can you obtain privacy when you need to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have at least one close friend?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do have an intimate relationship in your life? (one where you are totally physically and emotionally accepted for who you are by at least one person)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel an emotional connection to others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel you have status that is acknowledged?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you achieving things and competent in at least one major area of your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you mentally and/or physically stretched in ways that give you a sense of meaning and purpose?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Sometimes 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 won’t 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.”

COPING MECHANISMS TO ALLEVIATE STRESS:

1. Yoga, meditation – calms the mind
2. Physical exercise – generates a natural ‘feel good’ factor
3. Eat a balanced diet – keeps the physical body in good shape
4. Support of loved ones – a problem shared is a problem halved
5. Humour – lighten up about a situation
6. Hobbies – take your mind off things, do something you enjoy
7. Volunteer - get involved in your community, help others
8. Trust – it’ll come, it’ll go, it’ll be OK
9. Make a plan – set realistic goals
10. Focus on what you have rather than what you feel you lack