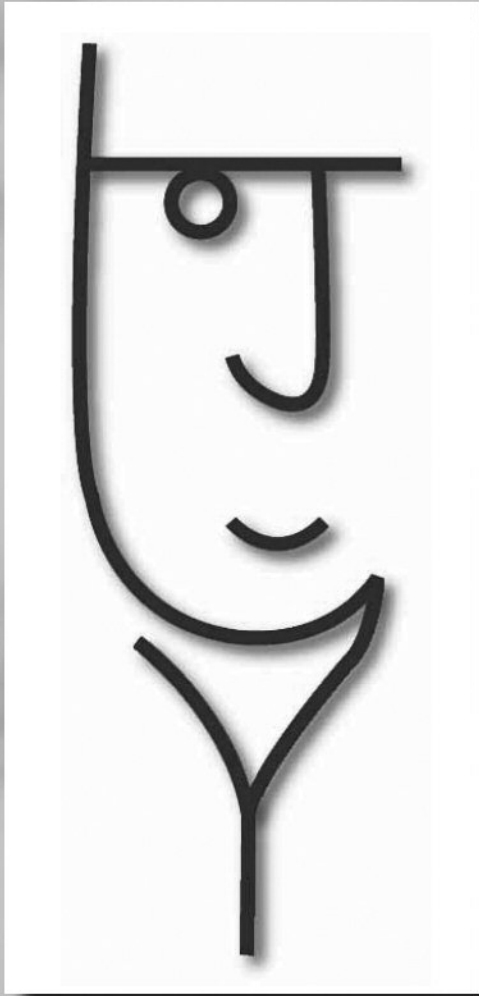


REJOINING

JOY



Volume II

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*Destressing*

*Gerald Young, PhD*





# REJOINING JOY

## Volume II

### Destressing

## ALSO BY DR. GERALD YOUNG

### Books

Young, G. (2019). *Causality and Development: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Young, G. (2017). *Revising the APA Ethics Code*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Young, G. (2016). *Unifying Casualty and Psychology: Being, Brain and Behavior*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Young, G. (2016). *Rehabilitation Psychology [Course Kit]*. Toronto, ON: York University Bookstore.

Young, G. (2014). *Malingering, Feigning, and Response Bias in Psychiatric/Psychological Injury: Implications for Practice and Court*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.

Young, G. (2011). *Development and Causality: Neo-Piagetian Perspectives*. New York: Springer.

Young, G., Kane, A. W., & Nicholson, K. (2007). *Causality in Psychological Injury: Presenting Evidence in Court*. New York: Springer.

Young, G., Kane, A. W., & Nicholson, K. (Eds.) (2006). *Psychological Knowledge in Court: PTSD, Pain, and TBI*. New York: Springer.

Young, G. (1997). *Adult Development, Therapy, and Culture: A Postmodern Synthesis*. New York: Plenum Press.

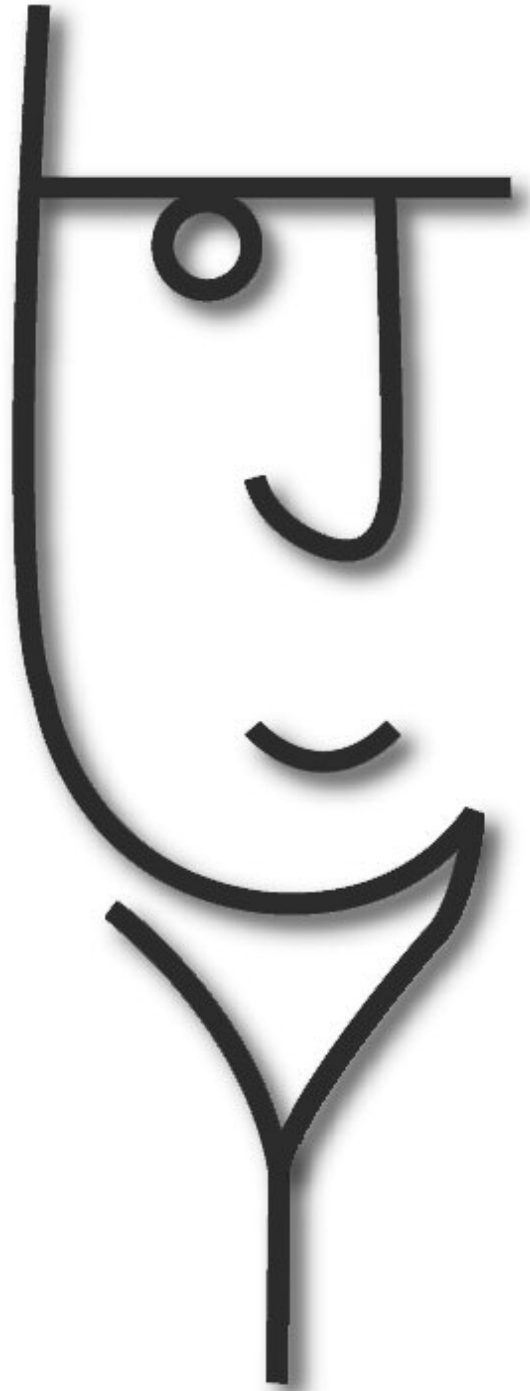
Young, G., Segalowitz, S., Corter, C., & Trehub, S. (Eds.) (1983). *Manual Specialization and the Developing Brain*. New York: Academic Press.

### Journals

Young, G. (Founding Editor and Editor-in-Chief) (2008– ) *Psychological Injury and Law*. New York: Springer.

The 2014, 2007, and 2006 books are books on psychological effects of traumatic events, and the like, in relation to personal injury law. The 2018 book is on ethics. The 2019, 2016, 2011, and 1997 books are on casualty and life span development. You may also consult the journal for which I am editor-in-chief, entitled, *Psychological Injury and Law*. To see my work in the area of psychological injury and law, consult the websites [www.asapil.net](http://www.asapil.net) and [springer.com](http://springer.com). To see my work in the area of self-help consult [www.rejoiningjoy.com](http://www.rejoiningjoy.com).

# Rejoining Joy



Gerald Young, Ph.D.

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2nd Edition with updates, 2016

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Aside from minor updating, the first 10 figures in Chapter 17 were replaced. Also Chapter 30 was moved into the first volume to replace a section that was used in an academic publication. To replace Chapter 30, I just took sample workbook exercises from Volume VII. Finally I reduced the number of essays in Volume I. Note that there is a recent Volume IX on blogs, and a tenth book in the series for children. Please check the website: [www.rejoiningjoy.com](http://www.rejoiningjoy.com)

*To my Family and my Clients*



# REJOINING JOY

## Destressing Volume II

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## Destressing Volume II

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DR. GERALD YOUNG** is a Full Associate Professor Psychology at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He is also a practicing psychologist dealing with rehabilitation and with counseling. He undertakes research on two major topics. The first is on psychological injury and law [five books]. The second is on child development. His most recent books are entitled: *Causality and Development: Neo-Eriksonian Perspectives*, and *Revising the APA Ethics Code: New Principles and Sub-principles* (both published by Springer International Publishing, Cham, Switzerland). In 2016, he received an outstanding trauma research award (lifetime) from the Canadian Psychological Association. He has received a research leader award from his university. He also received an award from the American Psychological Association for media contributions, which attest to the value of the self-help book series. He is the editor of the leading journal in the area of psychological injury and law (*Psychological Injury and Law*, PIL, springer.com), and was the president of its housing association (ASAPIL, see [www.asapil.net](http://www.asapil.net)).

Dr. Gerald Young has gained the trust of his clients and of his professional colleagues in his professional practice in clinical psychology. He has helped numerous clients over the years; and his reports have been presented to court, including for the Supreme Court of Canada. As a Full Associate professor



at York University, he teaches students the courses of Rehabilitation Psychology, and Abnormal Child, Adolescent, Adult, and Advanced Development. For further description of Dr. Young's research leadership, see (<https://www.glendon.yorku.ca/research/two-glendon-researchers-recognised-for-the-2017-york-university-research-leaders/>)

"There is unity in my university teaching, my research, my practice, and the self-help book series. With much passion, I have dedicated my professional life to the area, and the self-help books reflect that passion and the skills that I have learned and developed and want to communicate to the reader."



## FOREWORD

**R***ejoining Joy* is a self-help book series on stress, emotions, pain, managing stress and resilience, trauma and recovery, and dealing with a range of daily issues, such as raising children and functioning well at work (see [rejoiningjoy.com](http://rejoiningjoy.com)). The series is not a self-help one in the traditional sense, for it is more about improving our ways of living and growth. It does not simply ask us to be more positive, happy, or better. Rather, it shows the reader how to accomplish these and related goals in a realistic manner. It does not simply give the reader positive statements about the self to learn. Rather, it helps facilitate the reader in *learning new ways of living and growing* by dealing better with the negatives and increasing the positives.

The series is based on figures and accompanying text, mostly created by psychologist Dr. Gerald Young in sessions with his clients. The text for each figure is described in one to several paragraphs and, usually, includes a positive message. In his clinical work, Dr. Young encourages people to tell better stories about themselves, to find inner qualities and strengths, to learn destressing skills in order to add to them, and to use appropriately these qualities and strengths in solving problems.

### **There are eight volumes in the book series**

The first volume presents essays, without accompanying figures for the most part, including an essay on an introduction to psychology, and another on therapy. The next volume, the first with figures and accompanying text, is on stress and destressing. The next two volumes are also in this figure-text format. Specifically, the third volume in the series is on emotions, such as worrying, but also it includes positive feelings, such as love. The fourth volume deals with daily living relating to children, work, change, and so on. The fifth volume has neither essays nor figures and accompanying text, but presents artwork meant to be relaxing. In a sixth book, the reader is provided a self-contained workbook of psychological exercises. In addition, the series includes a seventh book based on excerpts from the best material from books in the series. The eighth book is on sayings for living, loving, and learning. The reader should find them inspirational. They emphasize the major theme of the book series—that when life is difficult, we can still do our best and do it well. We can choose to find techniques, strategies, and ways of living to help us in dealing with stress and trauma. I created over 20 sayings for over 20 themes.

Together, the books are aimed at having the reader not only rejoin joy, but also keep it.

## Detailed Volume Descriptions

1. The first volume in the book series presents in a straightforward manner essays introducing psychology and how to live life more happily and effectively. The essays are meant to cover the basic topics presented in the remaining books, and they include pertinent definitions and explanations of concepts, although the reader does not have to read these essays before reading the other books. The topics in the first set of essays range from what are the fundamentals in psychology, to how to deal with stress, to how cognitive behavioral therapy works. The second set of essays is more literary in the first part and more scholarly in the second. The essays range from short ones that are more inspirational and motivational, to ones on change and on stages in development and their implications. Key themes relate to growth and responsibility.
2. The second volume is on destressing. This volume marks the beginning of the major use of therapeutic figures. In this volume, I explain basic concepts about stress and I explain behavioral techniques on how to destress. I emphasize various cognitive techniques, such as keeping our hope, optimism, and positive attitude. We learn that when confronted with stress, we have options in our behavior and we can be in control. I go on to explain that having some stress can be growth promoting and that we can learn to live effectively with it. This first book in the series concludes with a chapter on recovering—stress is a start and dealing with it is our goal.
3. The third volume of the book series deals with negative emotions, such as worry and sadness, and specific emotional problems, such as drinking or dealing with pain. The volume moves from these negative and most basic emotions to positive ones, for it concludes with chapters on love and motivation, in particular. The main theme of this volume is that we can use emotions to our advantage, that emotions color all our activities, and that we can control them when they are negative. This third book in the book series concludes with a chapter on rewriting the stories that we tell about ourselves so that they are more positive.
4. The fourth volume in the book series is about improving the quality of our daily living. It deals with more complex topics, such as the self, communication, handling children and adolescents, coping with change, and managing work and family life. It includes a chapter on inspiration. It terminates with a description of major points of view in psychology, including the biopsychosocial perspective. This reflects the integrative effort that I have taken in writing the book series. To better understand our psychology, we need to look both

- inside and around us, both at our bodies and our mind, both at our thoughts and our emotions, and both our bad habits and good ones. We all have core positives waiting to grow.
5. The fifth volume presents two-dimensional artistic line drawings intended to relax and inspire. Many of the drawings are about nature and animals. Many are about people and family. I do these drawings quickly, illustrating that, with a single line or a series of lines, we can both express ourselves and relax in doing so. The accompanying text for this book emphasizes the role that we all have to play in helping nature survive. I added text related to nature and our need to protect and preserve it. By acting to save the planet, its habitats, its animals, and its plants, we engage in the best forms of destressing.
  6. Book six of the book series represents its crowning achievement. It consists of excerpts of the best material, especially from books III, IV, and V of the first five books in the series. I selected those figures and accompanying text that provide the clearest description of the book series' major messages and its best therapeutic self-help skills. The excerpted book offers a concise presentation of the book series contents, allowing the reader to consult the complete series for more in-depth reading.
  7. Book seven presents workbook exercises that have the reader review and reflect on the contents of Books III, IV, and V of the book series. The exercises emphasize empowering our inner positive psychological core and good habits, or strengths and advantages, while helping readers toward altering negatives, bad habits, and so forth. Each of the exercises begins with an introductory paragraph, so that the reader can read the book by itself, without reference to other books.
  8. The last volume of the book series presents inspirational sayings for living, loving, and learning. The sayings were written based on work with clients. They offer a basis for rejoining joy and gaining in life. The third through fifth book of the series concern stress, emotions, and daily living, and there are 10 chapters in each book. For each chapter, there are about 50–100 sayings and bolded sentences that are like sayings. They cover topics such as increasing positives, ensuring success, and improving relationships. In the sayings book, there are over 20 topics related to destressing, emotions, and daily living, including at work and with family. There are over 20 sayings per topic. They will motivate, inspire, and help to promote good habits while helping to inhibit negative ones.

# AUDIENCE

## Market

The book series was written mostly starting with *clients* right in their sessions. I would make for them the therapeutic visualizations that I have described in order to illustrate what I wanted them to learn and to apply in their distressing and rejoining joy. However, the book series is not just aimed at clients in need of mental health services. It aims, as well, for the self-help and self-healing *market, in general*. Many people need and seek simple techniques to use in their attempts to distress and rejoin joy, and they also seek books that further their sense of meaning and fulfillment, inspire them to change, and facilitate their growth. Therefore, the book series can be of great help to the general reader, given its motivational, inspirational, and reflective contents.

Because of its contents and the way it is written, *psychologists* and other mental health professionals will also find that the book series can be helpful in their practice. The contents of the books can be used effectively with their clients, just like I have used them with mine. For example, psychologists can use the therapeutic visual figures and their associated text to make crucial points in session. The sayings and art can be used to motivate and inspire. The essays can help flesh out therapeutic work, both in terms of facilitating reflection and for giving clients at-home reading assignments.

The advantage of my approach lies in its inclusive nature. I cover so many themes, with one chapter usually per theme. Within each chapter from the three books in the book series that have figures and matching text, there are at least 10 figures. Some are meant to present the same or similar information in different ways. However, most are quite distinct from the others. Because there are about 500 figures in the book series, and they cover a full range of topics, the mental health professional can select from much choice in the material covered by the books for the particular needs presented by clients in sessions. The therapist using my book series can design individually tailored groups of readings and figures for clients to consult.

## Who Needs to Read the Book Series?

1. Anyone who has confronted any kind of stress, not just those coming from accidents, should read the book series.
2. Anyone who wants to learn how to handle effectively stress, negative emotions, and bad habits will profit from the book series.
3. Anyone who needs advice on communication, relationships, love, children, teenagers, families, work, and taking responsibility of any kind will keep coming back to the series.

In short, the book series will be useful for almost anyone. Moreover, its attractive visual and workbook format makes for easy reading and good learning.

People of all ages will find the book series interesting and informative, from teenagers to the elderly. Some of the graphics and workbook exercises might seem more appropriate for young people and others for adults. However, readers of all ages, whether they are young or young at heart, will find the book to their liking.

### **The Book Series Has Taken a Unique Approach**

1. The approach taken is cognitive-behavioral, narrative, interpersonal, and developmental. The books emphasize that ultimately we are responsible for ourselves, but we create that sense of responsibility by active participation in our social relations and daily life, and by actively finding solutions to the problems that may arise in our roles. Even when the worst tragedies happen to us, we can still be in control, learn from the experience and grow, stay ourselves, and be helpful to others. No matter how bad things seem, there is always something that we can experience, adapt to, and live through with inner positivity and peace. Even in the most extreme stress and negative emotions, we can turn to those parts of us that are more positive and peaceful, make them expand, and rejoin joy. We can learn to emphasize our positives and work with our negatives, to make us better people and to make our future better.
2. The most important point about the book series is that it will be helpful to readers because it presents a wide range of useful strategies, techniques, and ideas for use in daily life. The book series is not just for people who are undergoing stress, whether through great tragedies such as serious accidents or in the hassles of daily life. The counseling given in the book series also is useful to prevent stresses from growing out of hand, to head off bad habits, and to promote good habits. We all can develop control in our lives and prosper psychologically in our daily activities. There are eight books in the series and it is comprehensive in the topics discussed and the education and instructions given.
3. In addition, the book series reflects an integration of my practice, teaching, and research, yet stays at the level of my clients and the general reader. This allows me to keep the client in focus in therapy, and facilitate their self-growth, inner peace, and relations with others in their daily lives.
4. The *Rejoining Joy* book series is unique because it makes extensive use of visualizations, illustrations, drawings, figures, diagrams, graphs, charts, tables, and so on. In the book series, for the most part, I refer to them as "figures." The advantage of using the visual modality is that it captures simply the message that is being communicated. Moreover, visualizations are like verbal metaphors. They suggest, inspire, make people think,

and so on, and often avoid direct instruction. Thus, they can function as powerful therapeutic tools. Within each chapter, the figures are loosely organized. It is not necessary that they be read in sequence from first to last. Each figure is meant to be a self-contained unit. Although there is accompanying text, each figure can be understood without reference to it. Similarly, the text can be read and understood without reference to any associated figure. Therefore, the reader can read the text on its own without reference to the figures, or can flip through the figures without reference to the text, or go back and forth between them.

One result of this format is that, at times, there are repetitions. For example, the idea of having a positive attitude is a common theme in the book series; instead of seeing this repetition as a drawback, we can see it as positive because it allows for the accentuation of important themes. The reader should note that, although the focus of the book series is on figures, graphs, and so on, such visualizations have their time and place. For example, if using the book series, the therapist should not only use visualizations. It is important to see each client as an individual with particular problems in particular stressful situations and, only when it is appropriate, should visualizations be used.

That being said, in our streams of consciousness, we find not only words and ideas, but also visual images, both of what has happened

in the past and what can happen in the future. Therapists can use more effectively the human penchant to visualize. Often, the visual modality is neglected in our thinking process regarding more positive stories that we can tell to ourselves and to others. The current book series aims to rectify this oversight through its many therapeutic visualizations. Narratives need not be verbal alone.

5. The book of introductory essays includes essays that explain psychology and explain psychotherapy. The author wrote these essays instead of using cumbersome footnotes or endnotes.
6. The art and nature book is a “green” one, for it encourages readers to respect and love the planet and its animals. The art consists of simple line drawings, illustrating that any one can undertake art, and at any age. Also, the themes are peaceful, motivational, and inspirational, such as ones on families, flowers, dancing figures, and art based on a visit to the holy land.
7. The workbook consists solely of workbook exercises, each having a brief introductory text. Most exercises and their introductions fit on one page. Each exercise consists of two questions, asking for up to five possible answers, or at least things to think about. Other workbooks use more text for each exercise, so there are fewer exercises in other books than in the present work-

book. Each of the exercises is aimed at creating a sense that one can succeed in taking charge of life's difficulties. The workbook was written so that it can stand alone, and be read without reading any other book in the series.

8. The book of sayings is a collection of sayings used as margin material, but it turned out important in its own right. For the most part, other collections of sayings involve those not written by the authors, but by famous writers and public figures. Because the sayings are tied to the book series, all of them are psychological in nature, which is unlike the case for other books of sayings. The reader will find the sayings are consistent with the major themes of the book, and therefore reasoned, motivating, inspiring, and promoting positives while helping to control negatives.

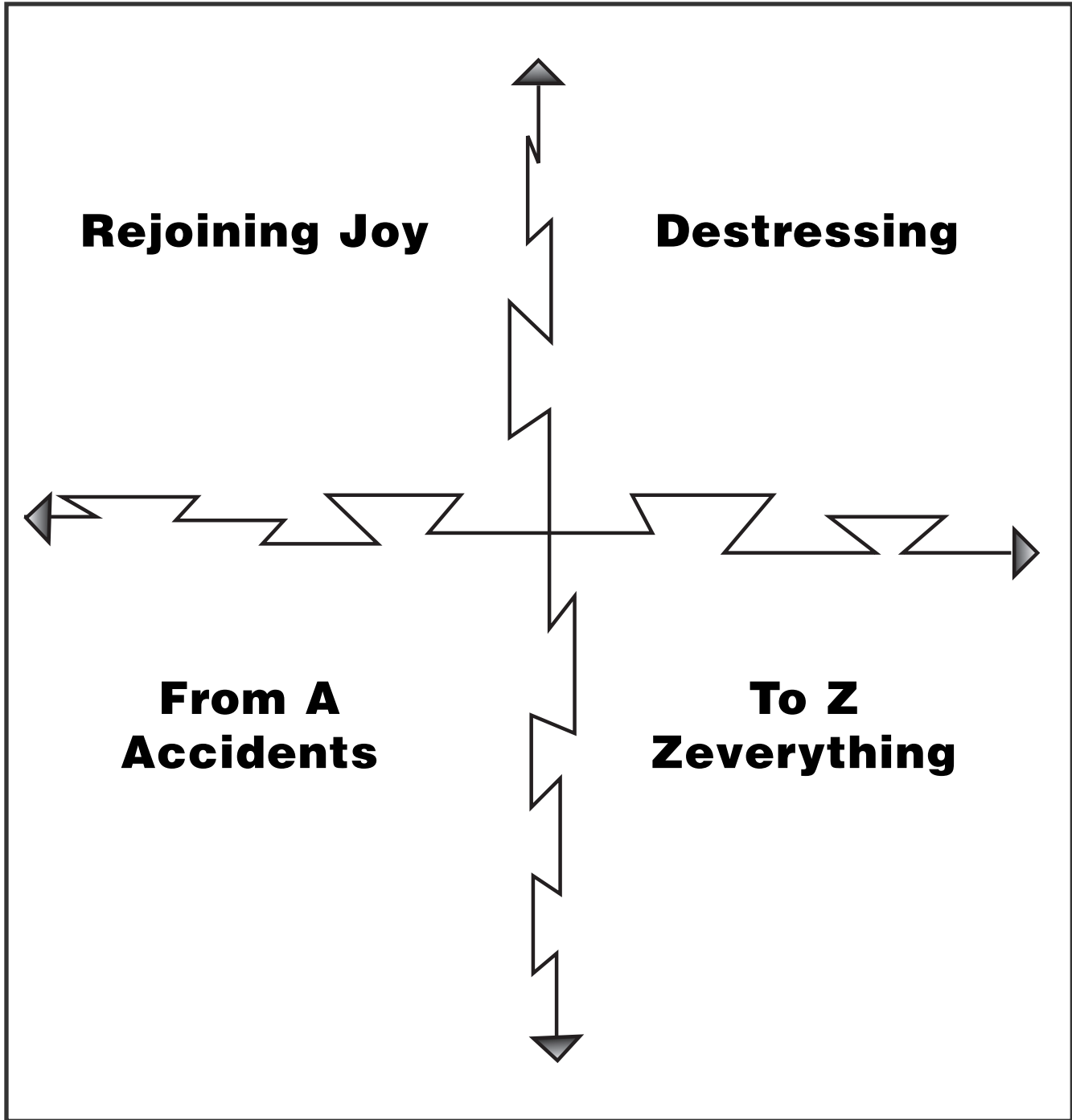
Readers should note that the book series may not apply fully to them. Some parts might strike home, while others may be too advanced or may not address personal situations. On the other hand, readers may find that some parts have raised points that they have avoided. A good response would be to say to oneself, "I didn't realize that this book series could help me with this situation. I will keep going in my reading to help me with it."

In summary, I have written a self-help book series with unique features. There are eight books in the series, and the total pages across the books that are available to the reader number almost 2,000 pages. The book series should be appealing to the general reader, as well as mental health professionals and their patients. It will have a long shelf life, so readers should keep it on their reading list for years to come, and consult the full series, available at [www.rejoiningjoy.com](http://www.rejoiningjoy.com).

Note that in this series, I have protected the confidentiality of my clients. In this regard, at the few points when I do refer to particular clients or case studies, their background characteristics, situations, and issues have been altered in order to protect their anonymity.

# REJOINING JOY: DESTRESSING

Stress infiltrates every aspect of our life. So can destressing and joy.





## BOOK CONTENTS

### What the Book Series is NOT

To better differentiate how this book series is different from other books similar to them the market, we need to know what the book series is not.

1. The book series is not on one particular topic, such as how to handle stress, depression, or pain, because it covers all these matters. Dr. Young, in his sessions with clients, deals with the full range of issues that come up after accidents and in life.
2. The book series does not give simplistic answers on how to cure or how to deal with all critical problems that people face because there aren't any such simplistic answers, despite what some people or authors might preach. Books that simplify by giving catchy titles and cute phrases may inspire for the moment, but they do not create long-lasting helpful effects. The approach in the present book series is to not only inspire and teach, but also to have readers learn and apply the strategies in the series, and therefore improve their ways of living.
3. The book series is not a complex scientific explanation of psychology and its therapies. There are not a lot of theoretical explanation, references to the literature, and footnotes. Dr. Young has written scientific books and articles on therapy, but the goal of the present book series is practical and it is aimed at the mass market. The book series speaks to the reader at the level of the reader and gives a bibliography that the reader can consult for further information. Therefore, the book is balanced by being not too simple yet not too complex.
4. The book series is not simply text, because it includes many visuals. For each visual, there is usually an associated paragraph or page, and the visual and the text should be examined together.
5. The book series is not dry and humorless. To the contrary, it includes humor when necessary, it includes some catchy sayings, and there is much to excite the imagination.
6. The book series is not another self-help book project that will not help people. We are coming to understand that self-help books have temporary effects and even some harmful ones. For example, by painting everything rosy or minimizing the difficulties in dealing with problems, other self-help books may overlook the serious problems people have in dealing with stress. Or, they may give very simple solutions that can only work in some situations, but lead to difficulties in others; so in the end, they limit the person and have opposite effects to those intended. The

present book series is more realistic, never promising too much. However, it always offers good ideas and strategies, it motivates, and it always gives hope. **Life is a Lesson and we are both its teacher and student.**

7. The book series is not just for accident survivors. Indeed, it will be helpful for most people who want to learn how to handle stress of any kind, and rejoin joy. Also, it will be

helpful to any one wishing to grow and transform for the better. Often, psychology is considered as a discipline that deals with helping people with their problems. The approach of the present book series goes beyond this, because psychology can help all of us, no matter what our age, to learn to improve our psychological wellness, positivity, quality of life, ways of living, and joy in living.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**T**he book series on Rejoining Joy owes much to my teachers, some of the best of whom have been my clients. It is their stories that have inspired me. Often, it is their ideas and solutions that I put into written and visual form. Often, they are like psychologists, and I simply facilitate the dialogue that they are having in their own minds about which course of action to follow, which advice to accept, and so on.

Another special set of teachers has involved my family, including my late mother (Rosalind) and my late father (Samuel), my wife (Lelia) and our children (Carina, Joy, Victoria). They have been great teachers about children and parenting, as has been our grandchildren. In turning to rehabilitation psychology, I owe much to Stephen Swallow, who was an excellent supervisor and mentor. Other important teachers whom I have had in my student and professional life have included: Jim Alcock, John Crozier, Thérèse Gouin Décarie, Neville Doxey, Michael Lewis, Edward Meade, Ronald Melzack, Gert Morgenstern, Marvin Simner, and Peter H. Wolff. To all these people, I say a hardy THANK YOU.

I would like to thank the following people who have helped put together the book series. Orden Braham of ePromotions completed the computer graphics following the hand written figures that I gave him, and he turned them into the professional quality so clearly evident. Beth Crane of WeMakeBooks.ca worked

diligently setting up the pages in their attractive format and provided timely advice, as well. Moreover, she greatly improved on the organization of the contents of the figures. Kim Monteforte set up the pages for the sayings book. Also Cindy Cake expertly put together the child alphabet book, which has been placed on the website for the book series ([rejoiningjoy.com](http://rejoiningjoy.com)). Finally, Heidi Lawrance contributed to the last phases of preparing the book series for the website. The website itself is an excellent one, thanks to her work and that of Nathan Lawrance and Donna Lam, who worked so creatively on it.

Carina Rock had worked arduously on the first draft of some of the graphics, and Arthur Demerjian has helped her in this regard. More important, Carina Rock has provided photographs for the book series, the excellent quality of which is noticeable. These are, first, from the holy land and its nature preserves. Also, she took pictures in New York State. Brian Rock has added wonderful pictures of Switzerland. Joy Cohen provided the pictures of Toronto. Not to be left out, I added pictures from my visits to the San Francisco area and the Phoenix area (where conferences took place). Carina Rock and Joy Cohen have contributed some artwork to the series (Carina: the introductory art to Volume IV; Joy: Figures 29.11 and the loon in Northern Bird in Volume V). They collaborated in writing the essay entitled, "Harmony."

Polly's parents have given kind permission for me to reproduce her epitaph (text for Figure 29.11) and the Foreword to the sayings book.

Editors and proofreaders must have patience, and, and I give Joy Cohen, Carina Rock, Victoria Young, Catherine Leek, and Shayna Buhler many thanks. Jessica Chan and Darcy Winkler provided pertinent advice. Don Bastian provided incisive feedback from an editor's perspective that led to improvements in the final draft. Finally, a colleague, Andrew Kane, provided feedback on the essay, "On Psychology," demonstrating his effective writing skills.

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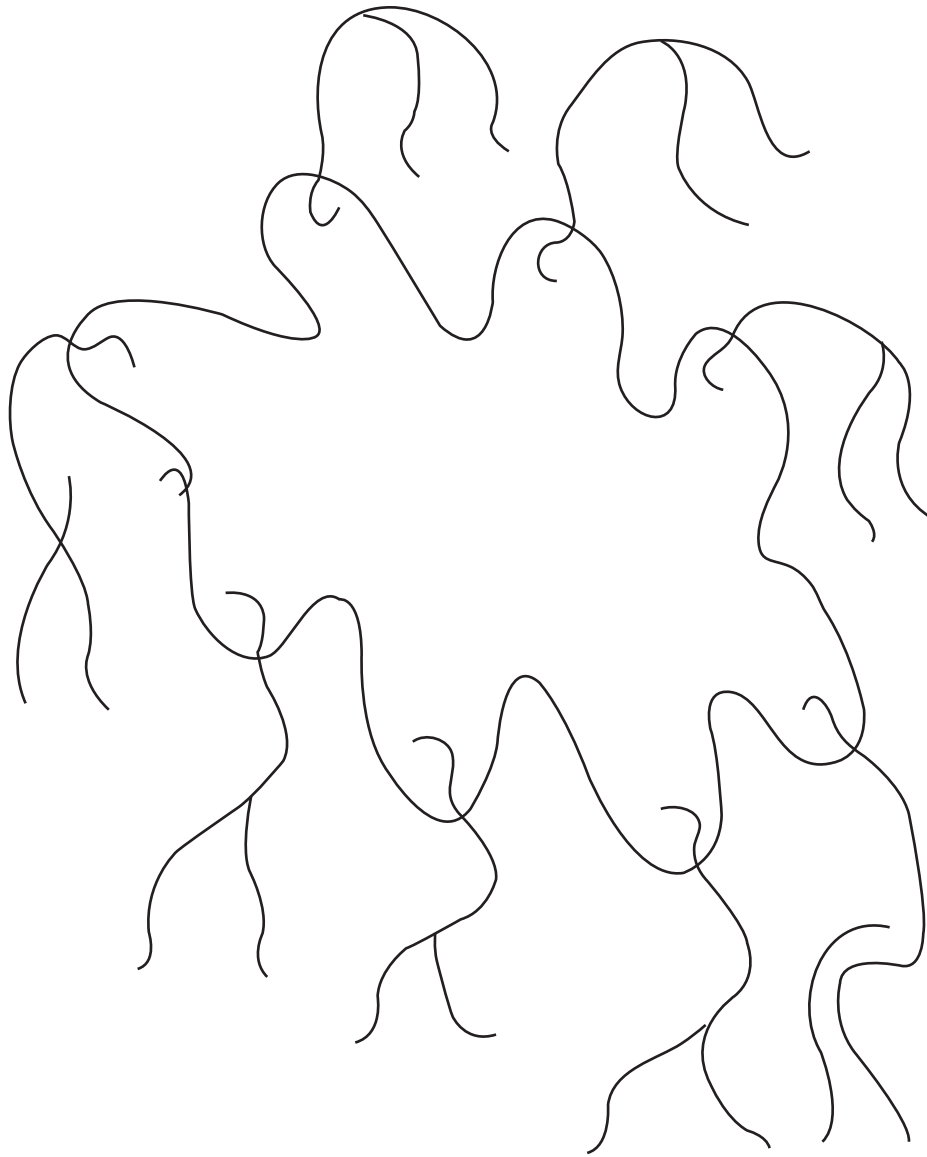
I wish to thank Plenum Publishing Company (now called Springer Science & Business Media) for their kind permission to use full or adapted versions of material from my 1997 book, entitled *Adult Development, Therapy, and Culture: A Postmodern Synthesis*. The material forms the basis of the following figures in this series: E2-2, E2-3, E2-4, 7.5, 18.4, 26.5, 28.10, and 29.9. The poem entitled "A Healing Poem" is reproduced from that book, as is the essay "Reflections for Adults in Transition or

Crisis." The art piece introducing Volume IV is taken from the cover of the Plenum book. Springer gave kind permission to take excerpts from chapters in my 2006 and 2007 books for the appendix in the book of essays. The first appendix is constituted by an excerpted, condensed version of a chapter by Young and Yehuda (2006). The second appendix is mostly constituted by excerpts from a chapter by Young, Kane, and Nicholson (2007), and by excerpts from an undergraduate BA research thesis by Janice Dias, written under my supervision, and published with permission by the authors. Parts of the essay entitled "Rehabilitation Psychology" are based on an article that I published in 2008 in the Springer journal that I edit, *Psychological Injury and Law*. Springer also gave permission to use material from my book in press for a section of the introductory essay on psychology and for two figures.

Many thanks to Mark Biernacki, LLB, of the law firm Smart and Biggar, for securing copyright and intellectual property rights for the book series and the website.

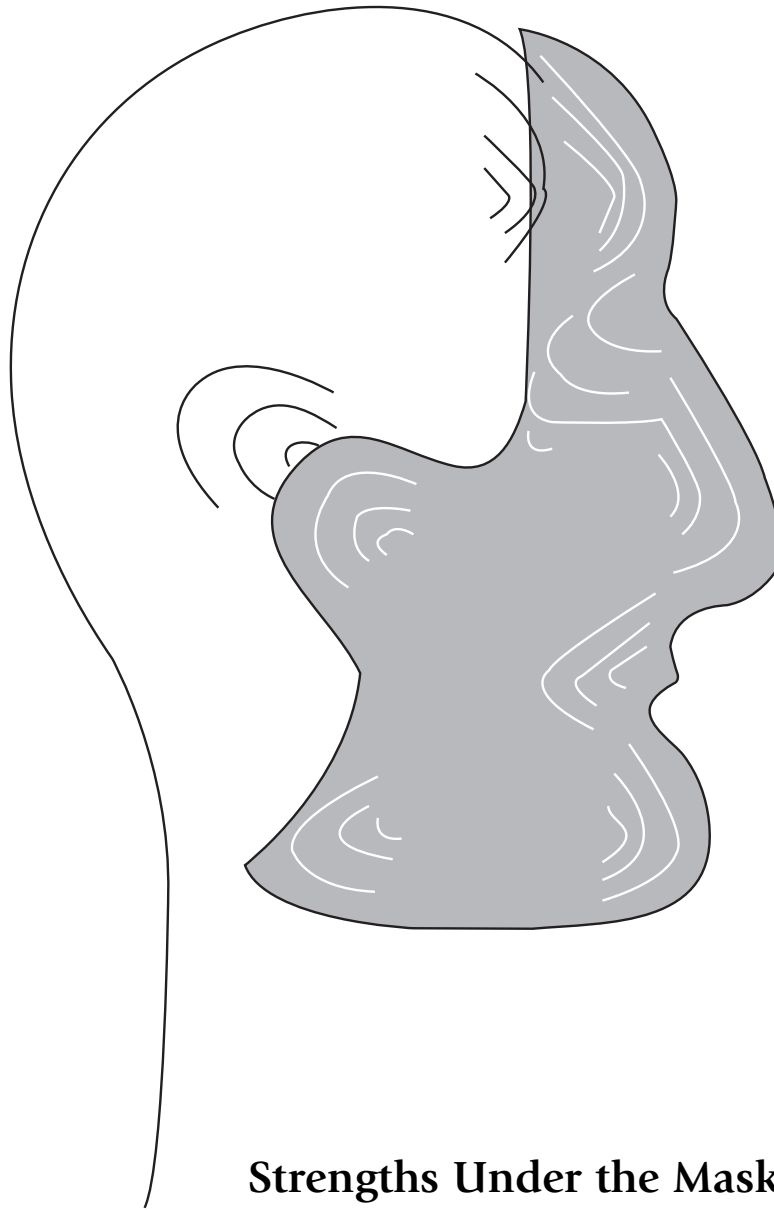
If you would like to order material related to *Rejoining Joy*, such as the artwork or the photographs, kindly visit [www.rejoiningjoy.com](http://www.rejoiningjoy.com).

Gerald Young, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
Glendon College, York University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
October, 2018



## Dream Dance

The joy of music, rhythm, and dance invigorates life and provides the best source of destressing. We are connected in the smooth flow of coordinated, undulating bodies and the powerful chant of multitudes singing. Music and dance empower both individual and group. We sing in unison in choirs, or dance together to the trance of drumbeats. Or, we simply absorb the enchanting melodies that we hear at symphonies, at concerts, on the radio, or from our electronic devises. We listen to music as we fall asleep and it carries into the reverie of our dreams. **Music is to life, as life is to life.**

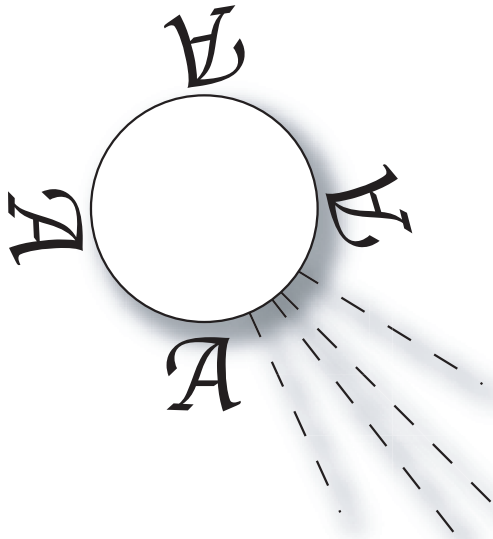


## Strengths Under the Mask

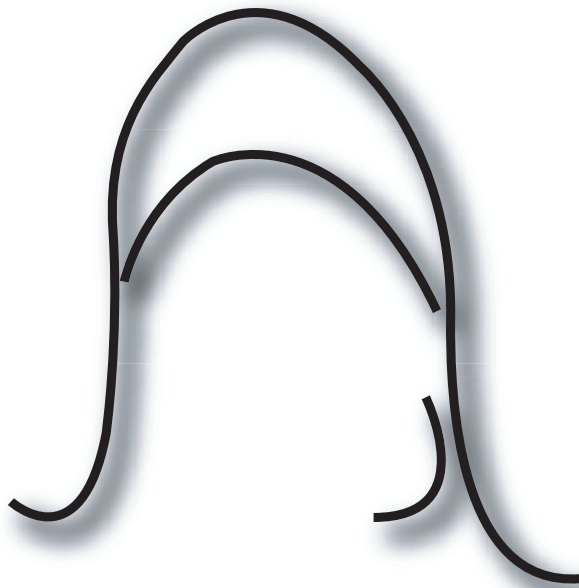
Each of us has a unique set of core strengths that make us special. Each of us has weaknesses that can be improved by self-exploration, social support, and good advice. What others see in us is not a measure of what we know to be true of ourselves. At the same time, we may be confused about who we are, what are our strengths and virtues, and where we want to go and grow. **When times are difficult, we need to know that we have positive psychological anchors that can help us stabilize, preparing constructive change.** These can be found by being vigilant to our depths. By seeking inside, we will find constructive paths to the outside. By taking constructive paths on the outside, our inside anchors will grow.

# Chapter 1

## *Stress and Destressing*



*"A" is for  
always trying.*





.....  
*Psychology gives theory  
and techniques.  
You give positives  
and practice.*  
.....

.....  
*When we decide to  
take control, stress  
cannot take advantage.*  
.....

**I**n this first chapter of the book, the therapeutic visualizations and accompanying text deal with general themes in stress management, or in destressing. Most importantly, I emphasize that we can be in charge even when stress is present. For example, psychological techniques can help. **Each of us starts at a different level in our ability to deal with stress, but as long as we are using and seeking better stress management skills, we are handling stress in the best way possible.**

When our personal and social resources are overtaxed by the perception of a stressor as overwhelming, we experience stress as a negative. When exposed to a stressful situation, we express an immediate internal physiological response. The word “stress” can be used to refer to the contextual factors that provoke the stress response, to the subjective perception or evaluation of the context, to the physiological response itself, to a general state being experienced, or to a combination of all these. The contextual factors causing such internal feelings are called stressors. The collection of these stressors, the particular situations in which they have arisen, and our collective reactions to them are all considered parts of stress. In this sense, stress refers to the whole process of its onset due to a stressor, its continuation as we try to deal with it, and the particular physiological, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive or thinking changes that take place in us due to it.

Figures 1-1 and 1-2 have been prepared in order to give a broad overview of psychology, and how we can use it to our advantage in order to destress and to rejoin joy.

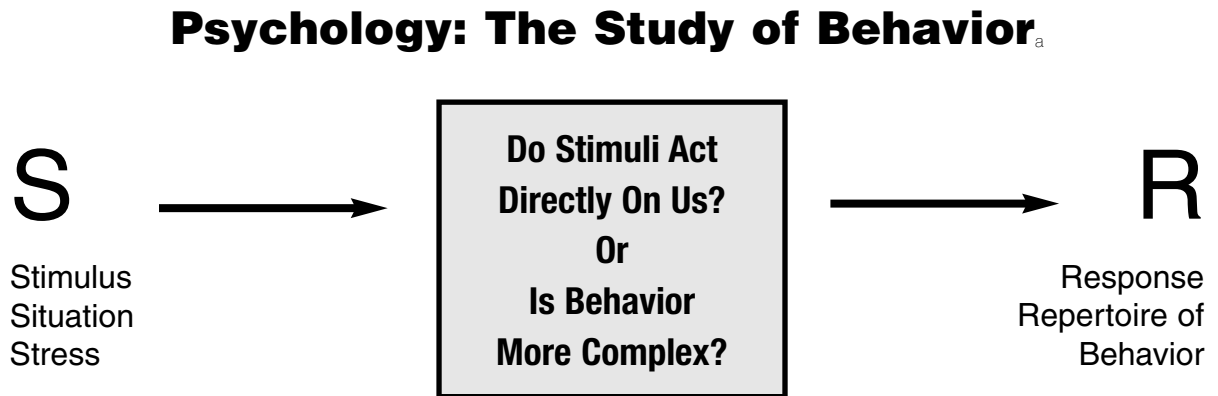
Figure 1 is comprised of four separate figures (1 a–d), informing us that behavior and its development are complex affairs.

In **Figure 1-1a**, we see that behavior needs to be examined both in terms of the responses that constitute its actions and its action tendencies and also the stimuli that elicit it in its contexts. Behavior is comprised not only of muscle movements, but also of physiological activity and nervous system activity, including in the brain. Together, these movements and underlying components are expressed in contexts, and often are considered responses to those contexts.



**Figure 1-1a**

Psychology is a discipline that has both a scientific and a practicing side. It is concerned with the study of behavior, and applications to help people having psychological difficulties. Behavior varies in terms of the stimuli, situations, and stresses that elicit it in the environment and the responses that result. Psychologists seek to understand the causes of behavior, questioning whether it is sufficient to understand stimulus-response connections.



The context of the environment in which our behavior develops produces positives and negatives in our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions. The context embodies many aspects to which we can react, including people's actions and events. The context also consists of many aspects that can act on us, especially people's actions and events. The components in the environment to which we are exposed are called stimuli, situations, conditions, contexts, elicitors, events, and so on, but also stress. A major positive aspect of the context is that it consists of people who care for us, such as our parents. Parents often give children affection and reinforcements, such as using praise after appropriate behavior or buying favourite toys, respectively. The context also provides negative elements, including work difficulties, home troubles, and social and political problems, which can be a major source of our stress.

The causes of behavior are never simple to ascertain and, at times, they remain unfathomable. Some schools of thought simplify too much their understanding of what determines behavior. As we shall see throughout the book series, my approach is that behavior is the product of multiple influences, from the biological, such as the brain, to the environmental, such as the social, to the personal, such as motivation. Moreover, the latter types of influence

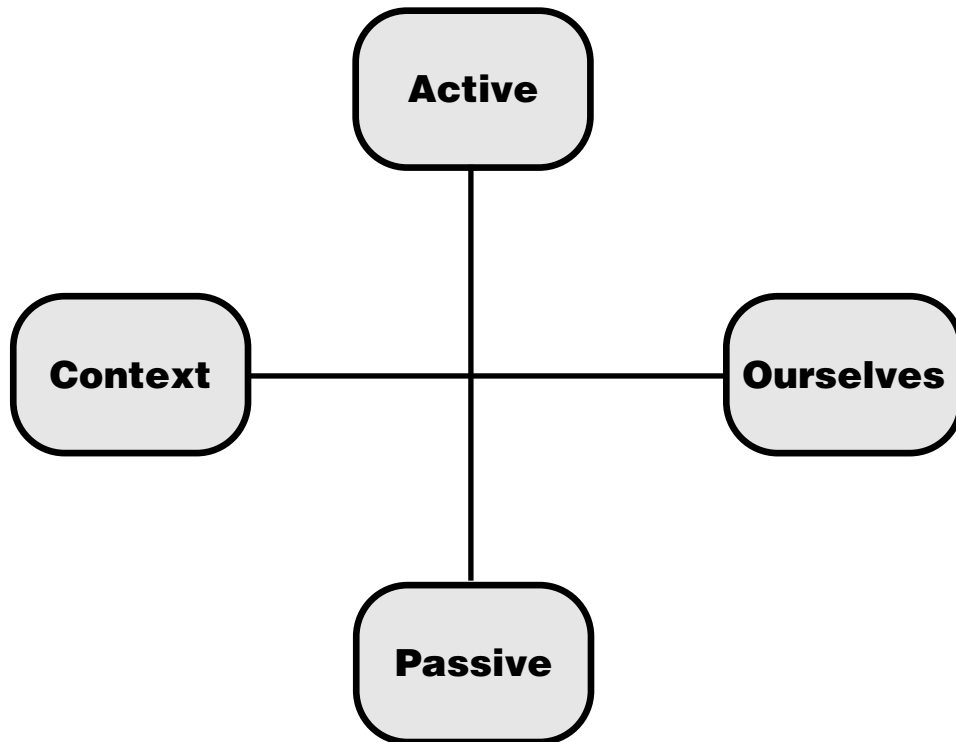
.....  
*Even Stress laughs  
at humour.*  
.....

.....  
*Psychology is life's course.*  
.....

**Figure 1-1b**

Our behavior varies in terms of an active-passive dimension. As well, the environment can be considered more active or passive.

## Psychology: The Study of Behavior<sub>b</sub>



.....  
*Stress answers to us—when  
we answer to ourselves.*  
.....

.....  
*Laugh a little. Live a lot.*  
.....

on behavior are crucial. We can have a voice in the unfolding of our own behavior, being actively involved in the direction it takes.

Figure 1-1b indicates that there are two major ways to look at human behavior—either as a passive reaction to context or as an active action in context. The passive view of human behavior suggests that stimuli in our environment elicit behavioral response based on our history of experienced reinforcers and ongoing and anticipated reinforcers. In the active view, our manner of approaching, dealing with, and reacting to the environment is more important in understanding our behavior than is the nature of the reinforcements experienced. In this view, as conscious adults, we always have a choice in determining what things, people, events, stimuli, and reinforcements should be of focus. What

are the priorities in our context, deserving our attention, concentration, planning, and evaluation? Because we are active beings who are conscious, capable of learning, flexible, determined, and wise, we can find solutions to the stresses about us. The environment also can be considered active or passive; that is, does it impinge directly on us or not, does it convey an urgent sense to respond or not, and so on.

Thus, **despite the continual presence of stress in our lives, we are not reduced to reactive responses to stress, without thinking.** The stress may be a direct type or not directly involving us. However, no matter what the type, our perception, or appraisal of the importance and degree of the stress, is critical to how we behave. No matter what the perception, we all can learn to confront stress actively by

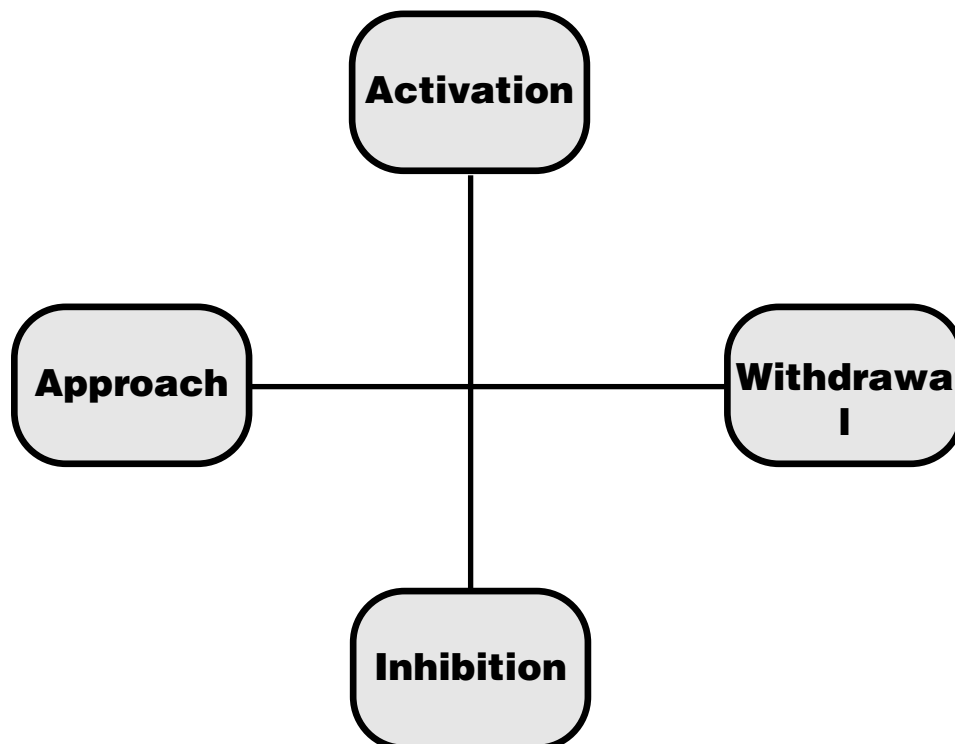
.....  
*When we decide to move  
against stress—it moves out  
of the neighbourhood.*  
.....

.....  
*Life!  
The study of psychology.*  
.....

**Figure 1-1c**

Behavior may seem complex but, in the end, it involves tendencies to start and stop, go forward and backward, and the like. The question that psychologists pose is that, beyond behavioral tendencies, how much does behavior include emotions, self, mind, motivation, the unconscious, and so on, or is it simply a reduction to muscle movement, physiological responses, and other biological manifestations, such as brain activity, as activated by stimuli in one's environment or context?

## **Psychology: The Study of Behavior.**



---

*Smiles open the doors  
that stress closes.*

---

---

*Biological evolution has  
given us all the tools  
that we need for  
psychological growth.*

---

---

*Our individuality  
is our commonality.*

---

using our coping skills in conjunction with other resources, and put it behind us once we start dealing with it.

Moreover, **Figure 1-1c** shows that we are not simply automated machines always responding in the same way. To be sure, behavior is a matter of doing or activating movement, but also it concerns inhibition or stopping movement. Activation can involve either approach or withdrawal. Therefore, in behavior, we can find active approach, active withdrawal, inhibition of approach, and inhibition of withdrawal. In one way or another, most behavior is an active approach. Sometimes, however, we can only move forward by not stopping, that is, by inhibiting withdrawal. In another example, shyness may be an inhibition of approach, whereas social anxiety may be more of an active withdrawal.

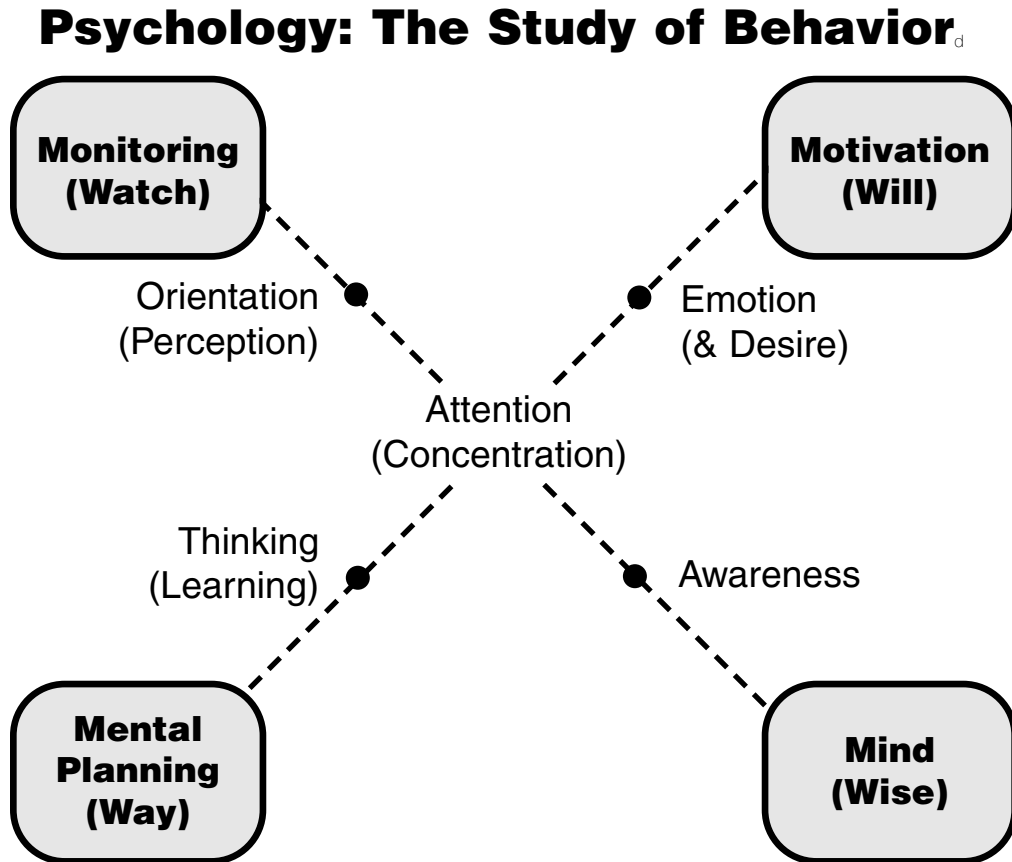
What determines which of these four basic ways of behaving is deployed in one circumstance or another? Certainly, the positive or negative quality of the context, situation, or circumstance in which we find ourselves plays a predominant role. However, **psychology is not only about uniform responses by everybody to the same qualities in the environment. It is also about individual differences in people, and how the same environment may lead to different responses in different people.**

**Figure 1-1d** indicates that we have choice about where we orient our highest functioning human skills, including our thinking and awareness, because our high functioning skills permit that choice. The nature of a person's stress is not always understood as a straightforward reflection of the nature of the stimuli in the environment. Stress is never experienced the same for two people. The nature of stress often depends more on the perception of the person at the receiving end, not on the objective nature of the stress. Also, people differ immensely in their response to a stimulus (stress) in terms of the way that they are willing to pay attention, store material, remember, recall, concentrate, think, be flexible, be aware, be motivated, and make a plan, monitor it, and execute it flexibly.

We can decide actively whether a difficult situation will be a source of stress or a source of learning how to deal better with life in the future. It's not just—where there's a will there's a way. It's also—where there's a way (an effective plan), there's a will. They feed each other. Plans work out when we

**Figure 1-1d**

The basic functions that help us adapt to the environment include simpler functions, like paying attention, and more complex ones, like planning. Many psychologists believe that behavior cannot be reduced only to reactions to stimuli in the environment, because mind exists, or at least there is a mind in relation to the body, and so on.



work them. We should aim to monitor our plans in relation to our goals, our long-term vision, and the strains and stresses in our daily environment. If we do this, all the while respecting and protecting others around us, our plans succeed more, life better fills with joy, stress is better controlled, and we become more conscious, wiser moral beings who can keep growing. **Once we realize that we have a say in how we behave, we will tell ourselves to behave in the best way for us and for others.**

.....  
*Use a tried and true  
method—try the truth.*  
.....

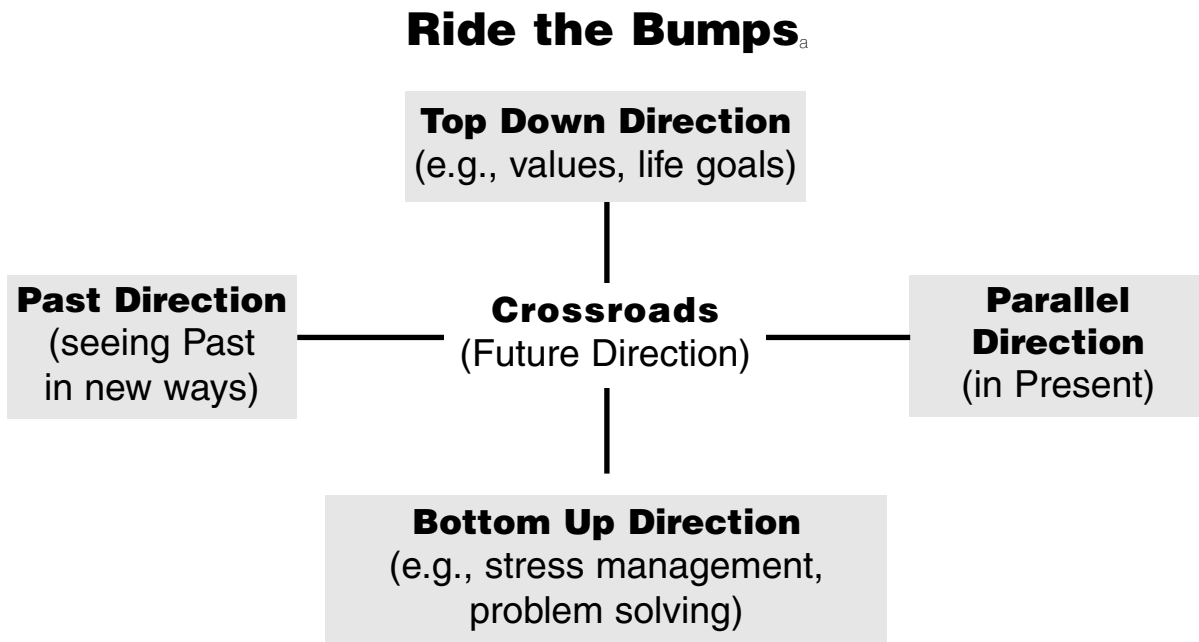
.....  
*If we treat stress for what  
it is—it becomes a "was."*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is what we make of it—  
make it leave!*  
.....

.....  
*We can break up stress for good  
—by working on the bad.*  
.....

**Figure 1-2a**

We navigate our behavior through the changing environment that we encounter over time. But, at the same time, we bring our own desires, wishes, motivations, and plans into the mix, influencing the environment around us as we proceed. We are not simply the workings of machines, but aim toward a future that we partly define, and we try to manage the interferences and stresses that emerge as we move into the future.



.....  
*Give yourself a promotion—  
Tell yourself you will not use  
again that bad habit.*  
.....

.....  
*One and one makes two.  
Heart and head make one.*  
.....

**Figure 1-2a** indicates that various psychological techniques for destressing can help us better manage stress. We can see stress as a problem that we can try to solve, and we can learn to use relaxation techniques and the like as means to control the negative effects of stress. However, aside from these “bottom up” techniques to help us get through stress, there are also “top down” issues to consider. For example, are we comfortable with the grand themes of life that govern much of what we do, such as our highest goals and values? When we are not sure that our current higher-order life goals, values, and moral visions are appropriate or best for us, it becomes hard for us to absorb and use lower-order destressing techniques; we cannot focus on the simple when the complex is vague or is too much on our mind.

Not only is it difficult to apply simple solutions to stress when we do not have a larger vision of life and our place in it, but also each stress becomes magnified in our lives. This is because our positives become hidden, or are too

difficult to perceive. When stress arrives in our lives, it is easy to be consumed by it when our higher-order goals, values and morals are not well-defined, serving as a guiding light.

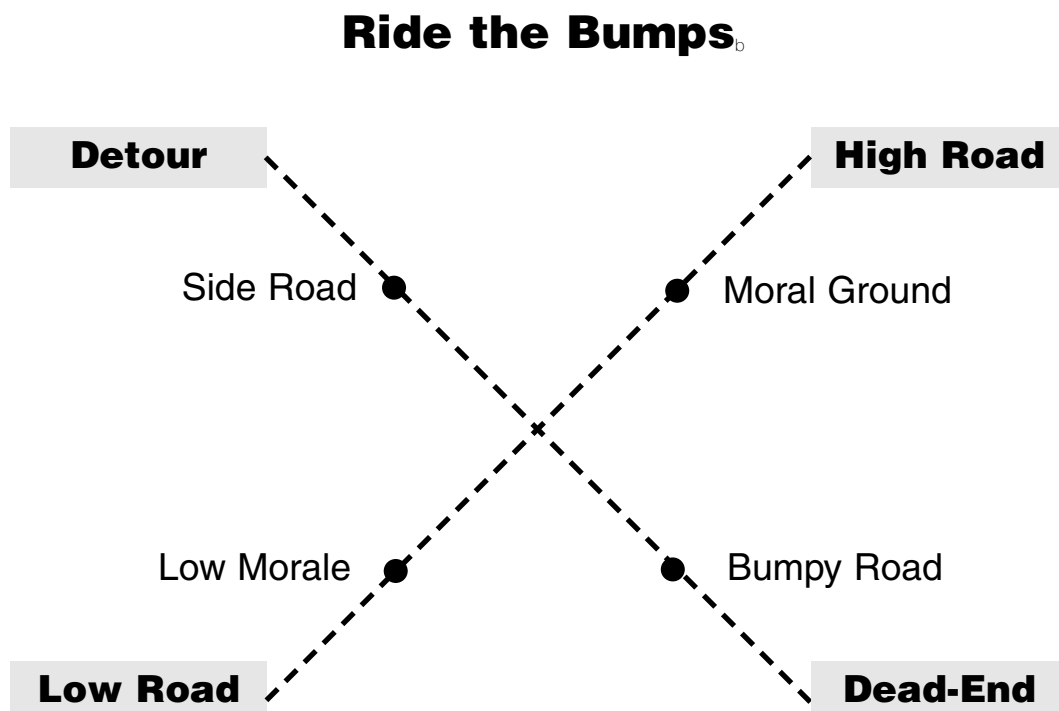
We need to keep in mind that our lives consist of more than our stress. (a) Our stress may come from the past; in this case we cannot stop being fixed on past negative experiences. (b) It may derive from the present; a problem may appear insurmountable and we become one-dimensional and lose focus on the positive parts of our lives. (c) Stress may derive from thoughts of the future. The stress blinds us and we anticipate the worst. The future becomes unimaginable and we cannot alter the negative direction in which it appears to be moving us. When we find ourselves so dominated by stress, even of the minor variety, and destressing techniques are not working, we need to consider finding the higher road. **A remedy to tragedy is to reach for life's majesty.**

.....  
*Creating good plans—  
 uncreates bad stress.*  
 .....

.....  
*To find our way in  
 dealing with stress, we need  
 to develop our internal  
 navigational and  
 positioning skills.*  
 .....

**Figure 1-2b**

As we continue on our path, sometimes the stresses and problems are so overwhelming that we are tempted to take the easy way or even the wrong way. The bigger the challenge to our sense of what is right and decent, the greater should be our resolve to have sense and be decent.



.....  
*One way of destressing is  
not to take stress so  
seriously.*  
.....

**Figure 1-2b** reinforces that there is a remedy to this malady—this subjugation to stress. By knowing our values, life goals, and future directions, we can seek higher ground. We feel confident in being on the high road, in having considered moral issues (even if we cannot always find the best answer for ourselves), and so on. When we see the positive path, detours and side roads might help us find better ways. There may be bumps, ditches, lows, and downs on the journey, but when we choose to see the best of our potential, we avoid taking the low road or reaching dead-ends.

Is our life course fulfilling to ourselves and is it helpful to others? Does each moment feel that way, or has the potential to feel that way? As long as we are moving toward these goals, life stresses become easier to handle. There is never any guarantee that we can succeed in dealing with stresses, but **when we take the high road in life, the route is never backwards. There may be the high road and the low road, and the high road may seem too high. But the low road is always too low, taking us longer, and getting us nowhere.** Moreover, it is easier to look down at the entire scene from the vantage point of the high road, and see the best path to follow.

.....  
*By being well-rounded,  
we avoid rough edges.*  
.....

**Figure 1-3** reminds us that in our efforts to destress, we should not lose focus on what we consider our essential being. We get too caught up in our daily lives and become disconnected. We no longer perceive ourselves to be whole or no longer feel a part of the world. We feel despair about our identity. Perhaps life has been too harsh and we have never found our right path. We feel that we do not know ourselves and are only living in a survival mode, having never known a vital mode. We are isolated in our thoughts, our actions, and our emotions. We feel that our basic human needs are multiple and profound, and we yearn for a better life in the psychological realm, not just the physical, but we do not know where to begin.

By asking how we can begin to seek a better psychological life, we have started the search. Even if we feel that we are getting nowhere, we have begun the movement toward an improved life where we can feel better about ourselves and where others can feel better about us. In reaching out beyond and into the self in an honest way, not hiding from the difficulties that are in us and that confront us, we will

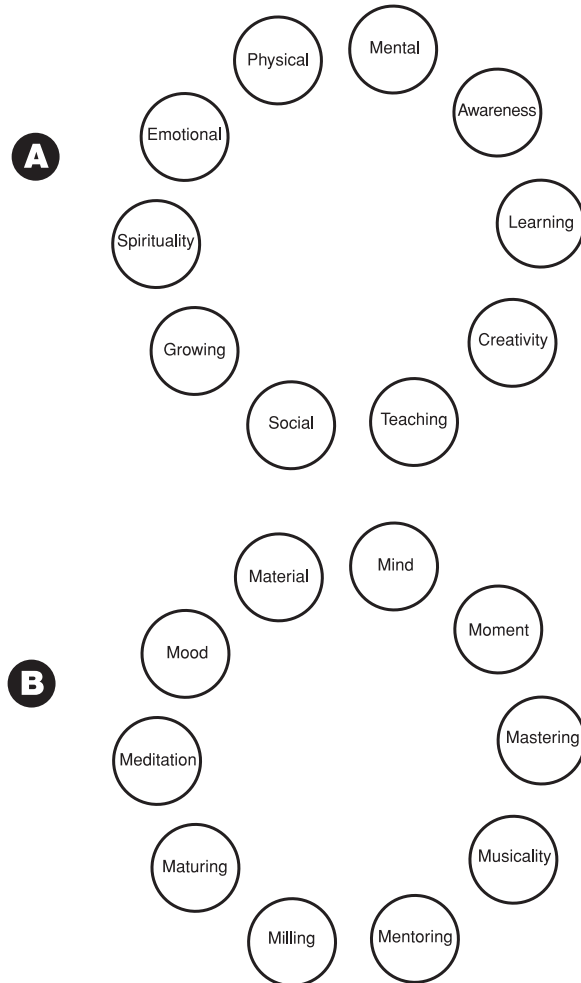
.....  
*If your brain and heart  
aren't working together,  
you'll get a stomach ache.*  
.....



**Figure 1-3**

There are so many facets to behavior and its adaptive functioning in the contexts in which we live. When we succeed in understanding this multiplicity, we will not gravitate to superficial and inappropriate solutions to problems that may arise. By extending the range of our understanding, we end up in better standing.

## One Ring For Each Finger



*Anabella wasn't  
feeling too belle,  
but when she read  
Chapter 1, she was  
feeling number one.  
This one's for you.*

*Have stress look in  
the mirror—then  
break the mirror.*

*Take one small step at a  
time—or take one small pill.*

improve our lot. Perhaps we will feel that the nature of the discoveries made, both about ourselves and about the others around us, have caused too much psychological pain and we never should have begun the search. However, change for the better depends on clear perception of what has to be changed.

When the desire to change for the better takes hold, connections automatically begin to grow. The process may be difficult and fraught with lows as well as highs, with regression as well as progression but, **when we decide to look forward, there is no looking back.** When we deeply want to see beyond our current limits, whether personal or contextual, a growth imperative sets in that takes on its own momentum. We will not accept and, therefore, we will try to circumvent any interference, delay, or blockage in our growth impulse.

Each of us is in this phase of growth, or waiting to enter it, whether we know it or not. The growth imperative is in each of us, either currently activating our growth or waiting for the right conditions in order to begin the activation. A growth imperative is seeded in each of us and, in effect, is the wellspring of our being. It is a wind waiting for us to fire it into a positive direction. When it reaches out, it releases the process of growth. Our growth potential is always there, right from our birth, and it never leaves us even as we grow into adulthood.

Growing is an integrated event. We are material, physical bodies living in a concrete world. Our minds are connected to our bodies, and when we suffer psychologically, this connection is ruptured to some degree. Even when there is only some progress, but especially when there is some sort of regression, we feel disconnected in our parts. Our moods shift to inward ruminations. We are not present in the moment. We are not actively aware and alert to the fullest degree. Even meditation and spirituality, if expressed, are only isolated phenomena. Genuine learning, teaching, and creativity are jeopardized, and our social life becomes a routine. Growing in the true sense of the word stops or stutters. There is no central core to which growth is channelled so that all areas of our being can be affected by the growth.

When we suffer psychologically, fortunately, more than psychological difficulties occur, for the system seeks solutions from within. Beginnings of self-healing fill our psychological lifescape. A will to change develops, perhaps sparked by an encounter with the outside or sparked by a hidden will within. The growth journey begins, or it begins once more after having stopped temporarily. A joining of different parts of the self begins to take place. Perspective is gained on the whole, and we see union developing where there once was separation. We begin to have more hope and begin to see healing. We rejoice in it and feel rejuvenated.

Then our growing meets a barrier. Growing always meets barriers. Without barriers, there would be no growing. Growing even invites barriers or creates them. If we are unaware of this factor, we will be confused because we thought we had been making progress. Growth should be understood as something that never fully arrives, or never stops at a certain end-point, outcome, or state. The process is what counts. If we keep on the path of growth, then growth is assured sooner or later. **We should realize that we should trust growth, and also realize that we should not trust when we feel that no more growth is needed.**

This book series cannot keep perspective on the whole picture at all times. It reads one word at a time, or one idea at a time. It gets into very specific techniques and concepts and, in describing them, sometimes, the whole is lost. As you read on, keep in mind the whole. You may be reading one word or idea at a time, but your mind can comprehend more than the particular words and ideas that you are reading at any one particular moment. As you apply the techniques of the book series, or follow through on some of the suggestions, or absorb some of the philosophy underlying it, keep in mind the whole.

For the most part, no one simple change of a part can reach the whole by itself. There is no simple remedy to reintegrate the whole. Moreover, without genuinely wanting such integration, focussing on any part may be futile. Yet, at the same time, the whole and its parts live in a delicate balance. We need to keep them in balance, not putting aside the whole, which often is so easily done. **When we let a sense of the whole impregnate our lives, our lives become impregnated with sense.** An enriched life is whole one.

---

*Sometimes the best  
medicines are the ones  
left in the cabinet.*

---

---

*Put stress to pasture—  
by breaking it in.*

---

---

*To treat stress,  
treat the problem.*

---

Put stress on sale—by  
not buying into it.

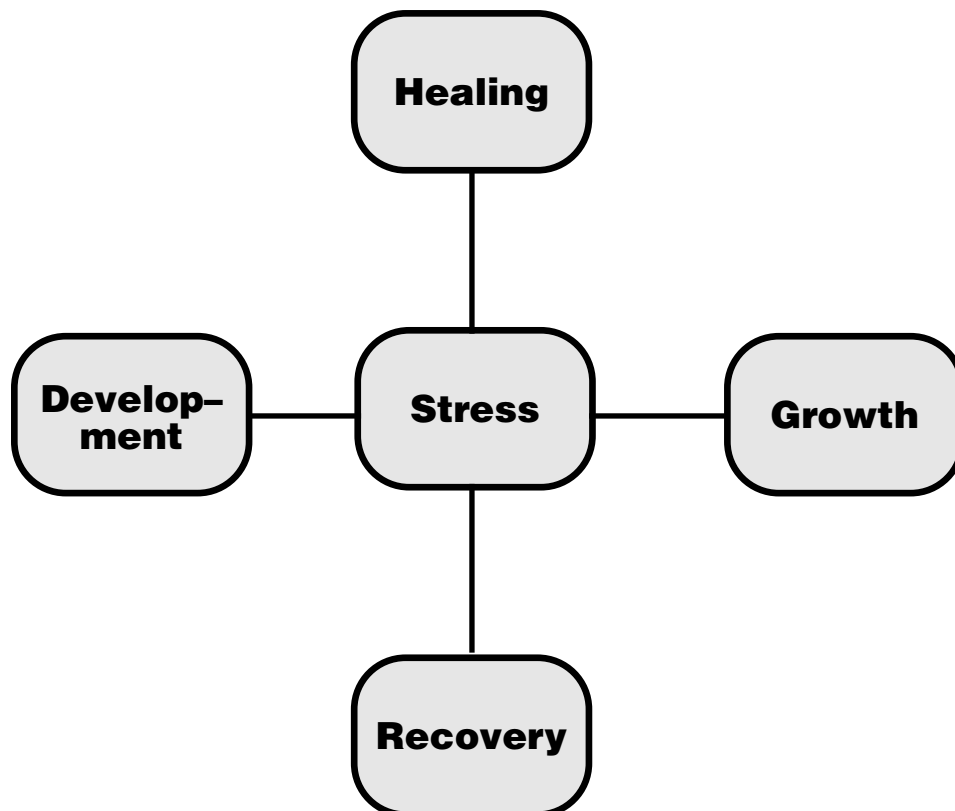
When stress arrives,  
leave it to its devices.

**Figure 1-4** emphasizes that dealing with stress is an ongoing process that, inevitably, is part of every step of life's journey. Stress is continually present, but only exists in context. That context may be a source of strength and help. The more relational links with other people (family, friends, co-workers, professionals) that we foster and share, the less stress can create links from itself to us. Moreover, the more we try to deal with stress, the more our efforts influence others to do the same. We do recover and heal from stress, and incorporate directly into our development and growth what we have gained in our encounters with stress. We do this not only by ourselves for ourselves but also through others and for others. The sweetest victory in dealing with stress is not when we deal with it well, but when we have shown others

**Figure 1-4**

Psychological maturity is as much about the other as the self. By participating fully in life, by helping and sharing, caring for and healing, and so on, we open growth zones in our psychology and we facilitate growth zones in the psychology of others. Stresses and personal hurts recede in helping others, who then can help others in their turn.

## Healing is a Socially Transmittable Deed



how to do this well. We are but one person, but inspiration can reach many.

Figure 1-5 expands on the idea of the whole, and seeking wholeness by exploring hidden connections. It reminds us that in our daily pursuits and in trying to deal with the stresses that life brings, often, we forget the deeper meanings and

.....  
*Each new level that  
 develops in ourselves  
 leads to even newer levels.*  
 .....

**Figure 1-5**

Too often we see only one side of the story, seek too simple truths, and so on. However, we need to keep a balance, a dialogue among the options, see complements instead of opposites, fuse differences in our personal characteristics, and so on. For example, as we mature, we adopt less frequently extreme masculine or feminine persona, and blend in us the masculine and the feminine, growing more integrated. In consequence, we become more attractive to the opposite or preferred sex, at least among those also maturing.

## Living Lost Levels

Surface Level	Deep Level
Thinking or Feeling	Thinking and Feeling
Objective	Subjective
Logical Thinking	Intuition
Intelligence	Creativity
Nonsense	Conscience
Self-Control	Letting Go
Analysis	Synthesis
Reductionistic	Holistic
Goal Setting	Goal Questioning
Story Telling	Story Creating
Success	Being
Achieving	Believing
Driven	Dreaming
Acquiring	Inspiring
Living	Loving
Material	Spiritual
Exclusive	Inclusive
Racism	Wrong
Sole	Soul
Compete	Collaborate
Peace Seeking	Peace Promoting
Glass	Crystal
Telescope	Kaleidoscope
Mirror	Prism

.....  
*Steel yourself with  
hard bargaining and  
a tempered response.*  
.....

.....  
*Life is too complex to  
control it, except for that  
part of life that is ourselves.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress will needs a good  
lawyer—when you bring  
it to your trial.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress comes when it is least  
expected. We can still expect  
that we can handle it.*  
.....

qualities of life. We need to keep in touch with the hidden dimensions of ourselves and others, for example, the personal and individual compared to the outward and what others expect. Too often, we create facades and barriers that isolate us from our more deepest thoughts and emotions and, ultimately, from ourselves. Or, we may gravitate too strongly to them, living without balance. Balance is the key ingredient in being able to deal with stress and to rejoin joy. **Seeking growth, by both dealing with the surface and diving into the depths, helps us better discover ourselves and live better lives.**

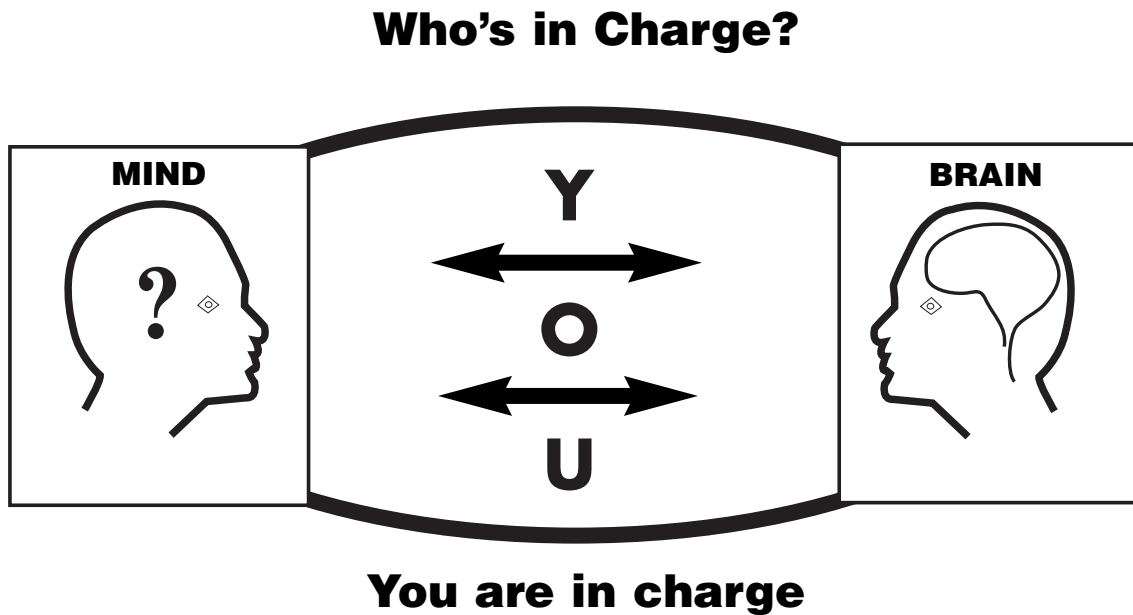
I believe that the most important message in the book series is about the deeper meaning of our lives. For me, deeper meaning in life revolves around responsibility. At a simpler level, there is one responsibility. In our complex universe, there is multiple, never-ending responsibility, which I call “re-responsibility.” I return to this theme at several points in the book series.

In **Figure 1-6**, I underline a most important point in this book series. That is, when it comes down to brass tacks, we are in charge of ourselves, of our psychological condition, and of our stress. **We are more than our minds, and we are more than our brains, for we are ourselves.** We can direct our minds how to think. We can direct our brains how to react to the stresses and pain in our lives. Without a doubt, the mind and brain influence each other. However, ultimately, each of us has management over both. If we become too focused on the past, we become controlled by it and our capacity to be in charge is compromised. If we see only the stresses and strains in the present, and not the challenges and possible solutions that they may allow, again, our capacity to be in charge is compromised. If we live only in an abstract future, with unrealistic dreams or with dreams from which no deviation is accepted, once more, our capacity to be in charge is compromised.

An appropriate way not to become overly focussed on the past, present, or future is to see time as a whole. The past may be filled with regrets, but we can learn from them. The present may not be ideal, but we can try to improve it. The future may seem closed, but we can see it as an opening to possibilities, as a pathway to options, or as a stepping stone to taking charge of our self and our surroundings. We are all capable of increasing the probability of developing such an

**Figure 1-6**

So much of doing well psychologically concerns keeping control. This does not mean simply to always try to control the other, but it means to keep a sense of dignity, keep anger at bay, keep focused on the goal, keep family and friends in mind and together, and so on. When we take control in these positive senses, no one takes a leave.



- The mind and the brain influence each other
- The past offers lessons, not limits
- The present offers learning, not liabilities
- The future offers itself

attitude, of being in charge and having a vision that includes past, present, and future in one whole. We can act to try to improve what we learn from the past, how we cope with the present, and how we dream about the future.

Figure 1-7 asks us to find the middle ground. We seek inner sanctuaries as the troubles of the external world swirls around us. We seek stress release zones, or ways of joining the inner and outer worlds. We seek to make connections with other people and within ourselves. **The harmony we seek should not be something found when we avoid and retreat but when we get involved and advance.** Stress cuts our connections, but they can be rebuilt and expanded.

We need to find our zones of inner calm and cultivate them, telling them to be a part of us as we explore the outer world. We need to release our stress in release zones, whether physical or mental. This will help us to solve the problems

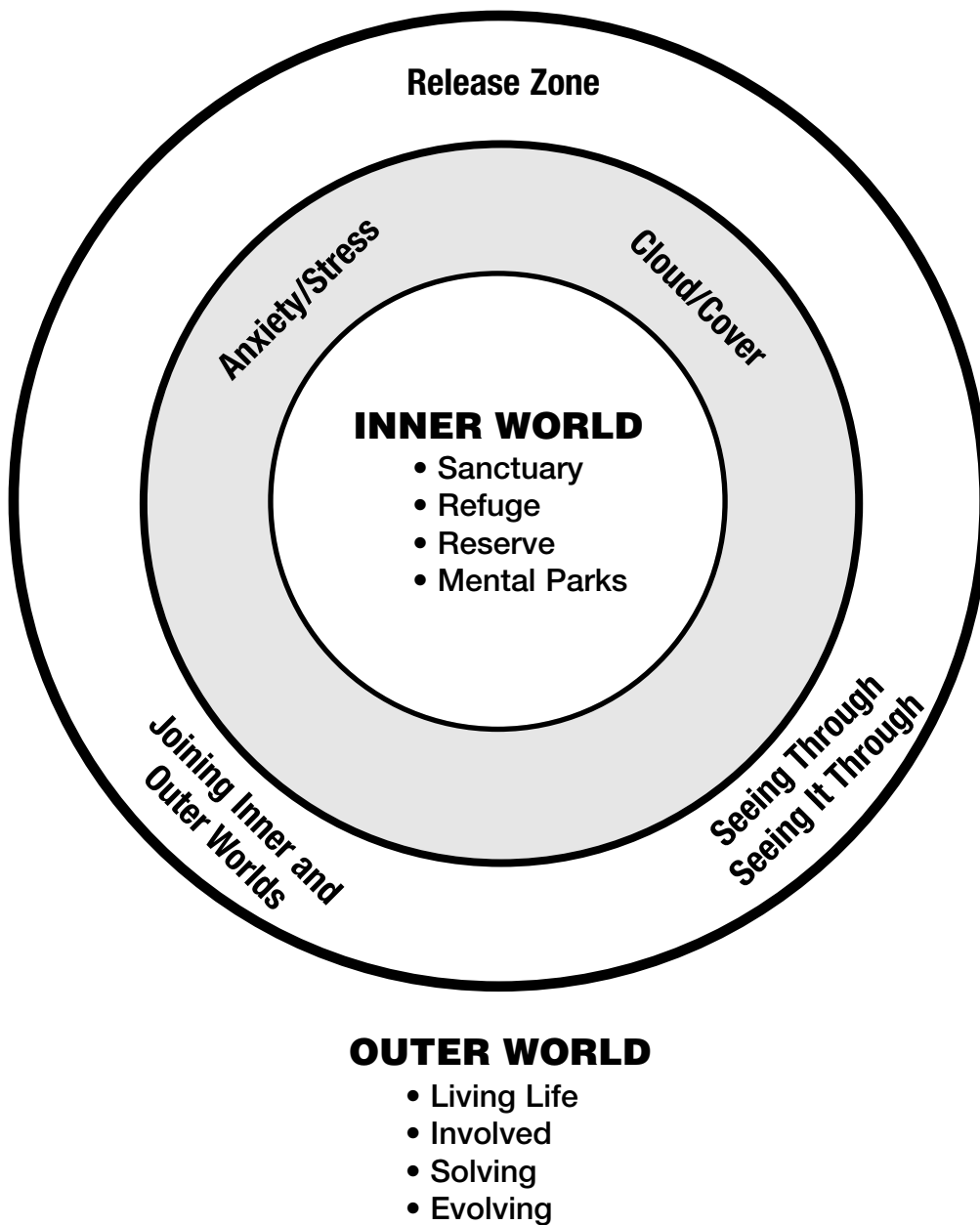
.....  
*Stress can be immobilized  
between staying ourselves  
and staying involved.*  
.....

.....  
*Bank on yourself when  
stress opens an account.*  
.....

**Figure 1-7**

Stress has the habit of cropping up when it is least wanted. It can be like a rain shower; however, often is like a thunderstorm. But stress is also a matter of perception; when we feel that we can deal with it no matter what, and know what to call upon both within ourselves and on the outside, stress does not get within ourselves nor stay long on the outside. When stress clouds the horizon, rain on its party.

## **Releasing Stress Renews the Lease on Life**



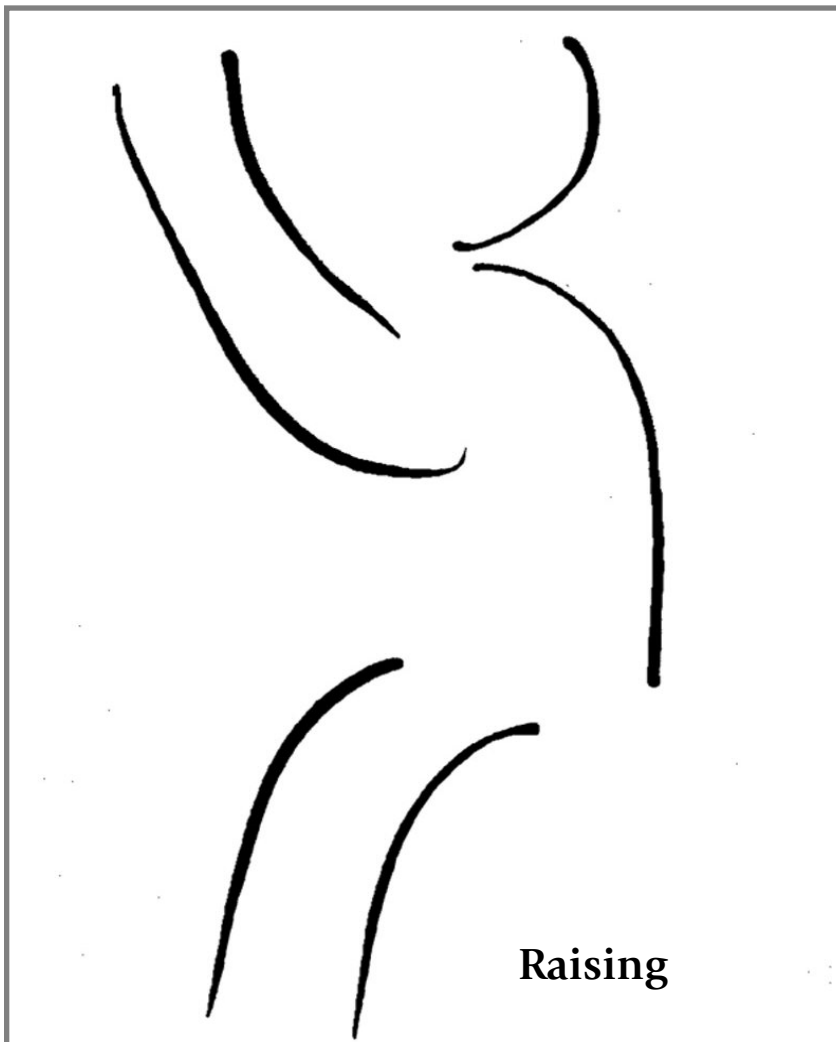


underlying our stress, so that our efforts in the outer world succeed better, and so that, in turn, they help us build a sense of inner calm. The two can grow together, inner tranquility and outer agility. In doing so, they can help us to see **stress not as a block in life, but as a block of life.**

Figure 1-8 illustrates that there are common sense guideposts to destressing and rejoining joy that we all know and that we all should follow. They are simple guidelines that tell us to think, be conscious, let go of bad habits, build better ones, and be constantly open to growth. We need to detour around the negative; watch for rough slides; walk out on cross feelings; avoid anger red; find a soft shoulder; and signal our intentions. One way is to find a better way. On a two-way street, take the positive way; pass up the fast lane; do not park on the wrong side; end divided ways; bridge narrows; and void hazards.

.....  
*Stopping to think leads  
to options to act.*  
.....

.....  
*Make stress just a  
temporary stage by  
starting to deal with it.*  
.....



.....  
*We may not be the  
master of stress, but  
stress need not master us.*  
.....

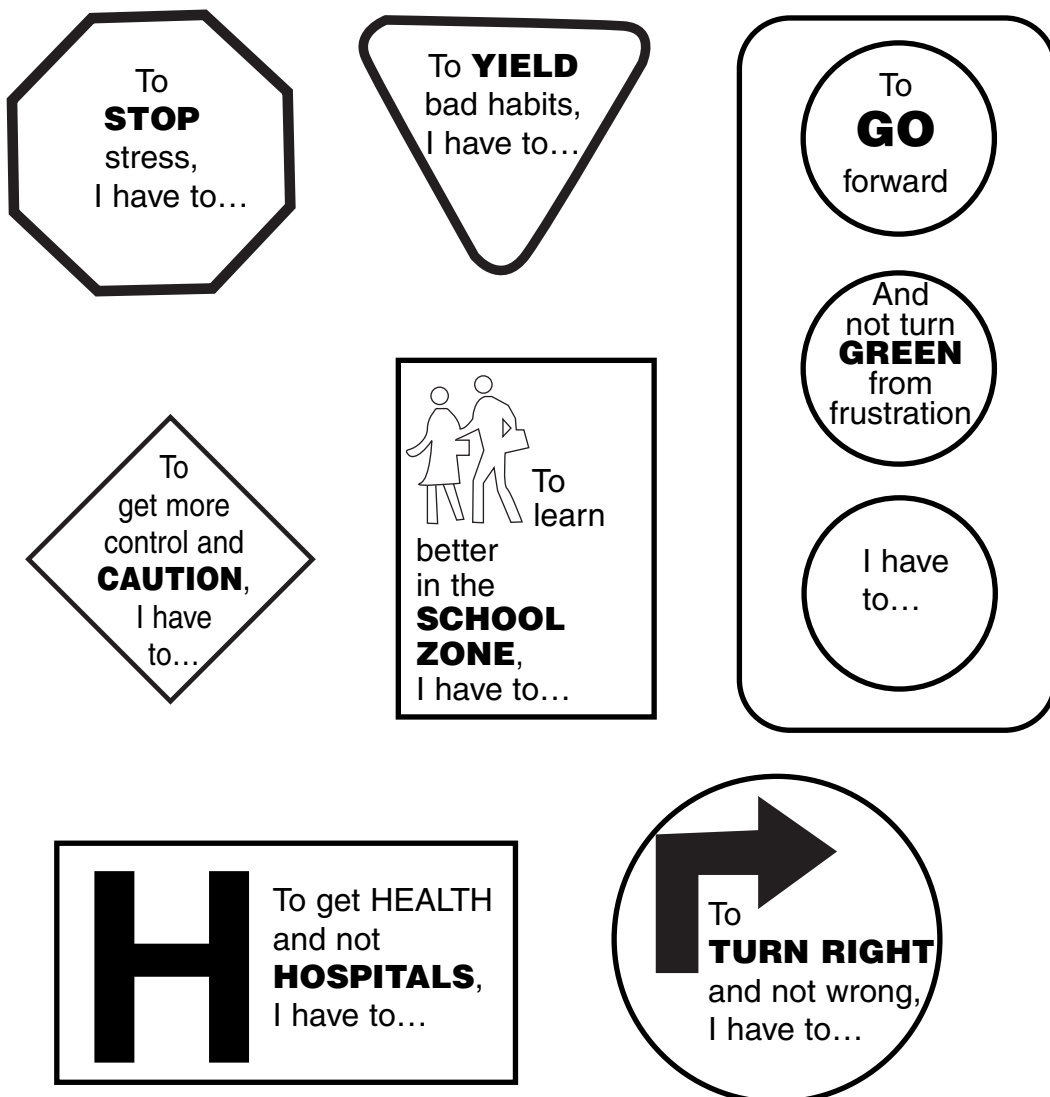
.....  
*Adopting a healthy lifestyle  
includes nourishing  
a healthy mind.*  
.....

**Figure 1-9** asks us to play a game of filling in the blanks. Too often, our mind is blank when it comes to making the important choices in life that will keep us on the right track. Instead of asking the right questions, we question if we should even ask. **We sit passively, waiting for magical solutions for our problems instead of seeking practical solutions for them.** The game in the figure is not the only game that we can play in times of trouble. For example, if we are stressed, we can play Chess so that we checkmate whatever gets in the way of destressing and rejoining joy.

**Figure 1-9**

Traffic signals tell us when to stop, slow, and go. Our own signals tell us when to get motivated, try, and keep going.

## Fill in the Blanks



**Figures 1-10** deal with the topic of sleep, or our lack of it. Sleep is a wondrous destressing agent when it is deep and long enough, for it acts to restore our physical energy and neutralize our mental stress. As it gets deeper, it passes through stages, with each one beneficial. It also includes a dream phase, where our eyes dart back and forth watching the scenes that our mind creates. Dreaming is as essential to our well-being as is sleep itself. By following simple procedures, we can increase the chances of regaining good sleep. Sleep can go awry because of stress in the day, but we can turn poor sleep around by using the right techniques.

First, it is important to wake up about the same time every day. Second, understand, above all, that the bed is for relaxing and for sleeping, and not for worrying. When we are worried in the bed, it is best to get up, or write down on a pad beside the bed what is on our mind. Next, it is important to cut out by about mid-afternoon our various stimulants, such as coffee, tea, coke, and cigarettes. Fourth, we should practice visualizing ourselves dozing off. We get an alarm response when we wake up in the middle of the night with stress. When this happens, we should avoid saying something like, "Oh, Oh, I'm up again. I won't go to sleep again." Instead, we should practice in the day seeing ourselves eliminating such a response. For example, as soon as we wake up too early, we can visualize our heads slowly becoming very rested on the pillow, and our eyes closing, while we say to ourselves, "It's okay. I'm going to rest. It's okay. I'll be fine." and so on. Finally, in order to help us sleep at night, we need to do both physical exercises and mental exercises in the day. To conclude, **if we follow the ABC's of good sleep hygiene, we can avoid the XYZ's of sleepless nights.**

The best sleep techniques remain the common ones, such as using deep breathing exercises in combination with visualization. When used in a prolonged fashion, this technique is called meditation, in that a single object focus is used to help control any interfering stress. The best way to permit good sleep is to know how to live and destress effectively in the day. **Good sleep for the night to come begins with good stress management once we get up in the morning.** In the end, sleep is about what happens in the course of the day more than what will happen later at night.

---

*Sleeping at night is easier  
when we live the day wiser.*

---

---

*Stress is a matter  
of perception. We can  
change how it looks and  
how it makes us look.*

---

---

*Good sleep  
underwrites great days.*

---

**Figure 1-10**

This figure elaborates many ideas to help us sleep, a function essential to our health. By following some of the advice given, sleep may come easier, be more peaceful, and last longer.

## **ABC's of Sleep**

**Do all appropriate psychological exercises.  
For example, do those specified below**

- Awake**
- Sleep same time every day
  - Sleep same time as before sleep disturbed
  - This will set up regular cycles
  - You will sleep same amount of time as before
  - No need for nap
- Bed**
- Above all, bed is for sleeping
  - Use chair beside bed if stressed
  - Get in bed when tired
  - Don't watch clock
  - Write down worries
  - Even get out of bed (e.g., for milk)
  - If can't sleep, do light activities
  - If can't sleep, don't say that you must
  - Just relax, rest
- Cut**
- Coffee, caffeine, coke, cigarettes, etc.
- Doze**
- See self dozing off on comfortable pillow
  - Eyes close slowly
  - O.K. to see self resting
  - See self getting "alert" response, to a stressful thought, and then saying to self, "That's O.K., I can do it, etc."
  - See self getting rested again
- Exercise**
- Daily routines help
  - Muscle stretching exercise in the morning
  - Physical relaxation exercises periodically throughout day
- Feel**
- Feel good in day; do things as best you can, be fit, be fun
  - Fatigue is temporary; rest, recover, and start again
- Good**
- Good self care. Be kind to yourself, seek positives. Before sleep, watch spices, etc.
- Health**
- Live a healthy lifestyle. Eat well, exercise well, avoid drugs, etc.
- Increase**
- Increase effort. If injured, learn to control pain, impairments, etc.

**Figure 1-10 (continued)**

- Jazz** • Jazz up your life. Listen to good music; find small joys
- Key** • Keep the positive in mind, be optimistic  
• When negative, tag on a positive as soon as you can
- Listen** • Listen to your body and its needs; don't fight sleep
- Mind** • Meditate, be mindful; control stress, go around it
- Needs** • Reduce the noise; if sensitive to noise, go with the flow  
• No nervousness allowed; if it comes, do psychological exercises
- Optimism** • Optimism is key. When you see yourself improving, you will  
• But be realistic, too; take small steps
- Positive** • When you are positive, there is no space for the negative  
• Keep people around; keep criticism out
- Quiet** • Take time for the quiet moments in life; quit the hubbub
- Rest** • Rest, relax, revive; don't be resentful, be resourceful
- Serene** • Take control of stress, destress
- Thanks** • Be thankful for the positives; don't fixate on the negatives  
• When you see the glass as half empty, pour it on your negative thoughts
- U R** • U R OK U R U  
• Be the best you can be; accept yourself  
• Unite your heart and mind, yourself and the people close to you, and your goals and what you can achieve
- Very** • Very peaceful thinking, mind, and soul
- Wise** • Wake to a better day by practicing good sleep habits  
• If you are not doing this, ask yourself, "Why am I not?"
- Xtra** • Xamine your life when sleep is not going well, then correct  
• Xtract the negatives and excess the positives
- Yes** • Say, yes, you can do it.  
• Yoga, or anything that relaxes and teaches meditation
- ZZZZ** • ZZZZ at night, Zest in the day

.....  
*When stress wants to rule,  
do not give it an inch.*  
.....


.....  
*Stress gives less tension—  
when we deal with  
it with intention.*  
.....

The chapter emphasizes that each person is an individual, and capable of learning how to rejoin joy and to destress. Each of us is exposed to all sorts of stresses at many different levels. Some of us know how to cope better with them and have learned techniques that are effective. Other people have more difficulty in this regard. However, each of us can learn to deal better with stress, no matter what are our current abilities to manage stress. Once we realize that we can be in charge of stress, we approach better the task of dealing with ongoing stresses and new stresses. As we develop our resolve and develop an attitude steeped in more calm, we can become better at solving the problems that we face. The more that we can maintain a positive attitude during stress, or at least return to a positive attitude as soon as possible after stress, the more the negative aftereffects of stress are reduced or contained. There is no magic bullet that can give any person instantaneous stress control; but hard work, will, and good guidance can move each of us toward this skill. It is a lifelong process—encountering stress, dealing with it, learning more about it, and becoming better at dealing with it for the next time. **We have a choice of either conspiring with stress to live under its rule or to make stress live under our rules.** We can act on our desire to help ourselves and others. The greatest voyages are the ones that we take daily into our psyche. When the time comes to expand one’s internal horizons, the voyage may be as complex as those into interstellar space.



Amanda felt anxious and depressed. She just had a major argument with her long-time partner. They've had a rocky relationship for several months after having a few good years. She knows she is justified in some of her complaints, but also realizes she is irritable for little or no reason. Her work performance begins to decline. Her partner is trying to understand, but sees the same pattern repeating that he has experienced with other partners and witnessed between his mother and her series of partners. He begins to withdraw from Amanda, telling her that he is busy at work. He spends time at the local bar, trying to drink away his sorrows. She speaks to her family doctor, who recommends that she share her problems with a close family member and try to get out with friends so she can better deal with things. Amanda confides that she does not get along with her family and has never been able to speak about problems with her mother, who has always been overwhelmed by her own problems. Her mother is a worry wart, she reveals, as are many members of her extended family. The family doctor recommends medication, which she would rather not take, and the doctor refers her to a mental health professional.

A book such as this one, *Rejoining Joy*, can help someone who is experiencing problems like Amanda's so that she can better deal with them and improve her relationship with her partner. This book covers a broad range of material, from stress and destressing, to joy and communication, to anger and love, and to hope and inspiration.



# Understand

**When we try to understand the other, we learn about ourselves.**

## Have your Say with Stress.

*Stress can turn us inward.  
Destressing can turn us outward.*

*Everything has two sides—except  
when we walk the line that we want.*

*Sometimes stress comes uninvited—  
it always leaves at our invitation.*

*Wherever we find ourselves,  
we can find ourselves.*

*Stress remains a problem only  
when knowing how to  
solve it is a problem.*

*To turn stress upside down,  
stand up to the problem.*

*Each crawl of the caterpillar is a  
step toward the butterfly's flight.*

*Stress raises blood pressure—when  
we do not raise our patience.*

*Stress stops electrifying  
us—when we take charge.*

*When we engage in  
relaxation exercises, the world  
floats above our bodies.*

*Stress has a habit of finding us  
when we have bad habits.*

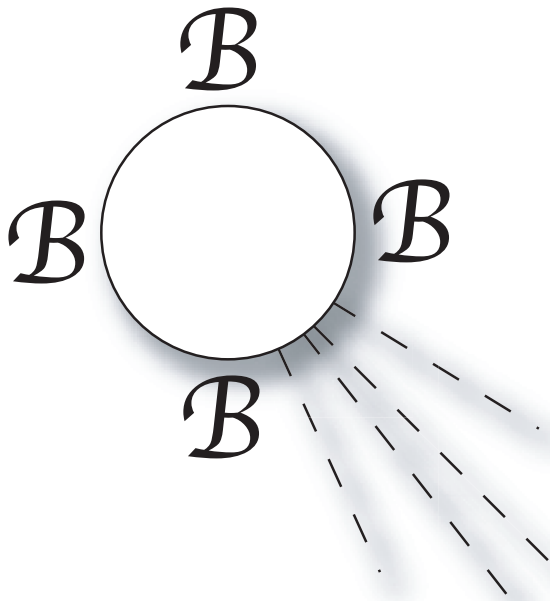
*To beat stress at its game,  
find an inner stroke.*



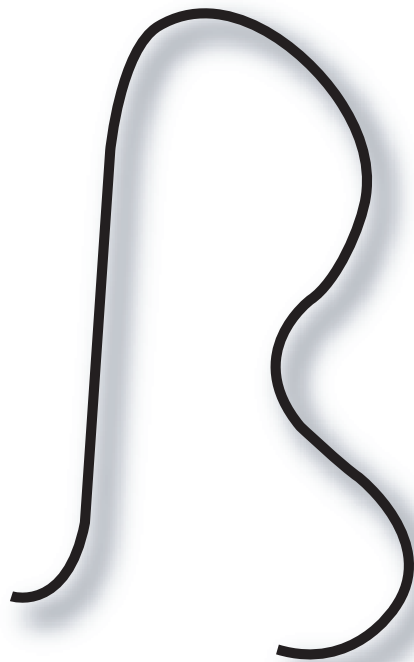


# Chapter 2

## *Stress Control*



*"B" is for believing  
in ourselves and  
our capacity to grow.*





.....  
*Worry and its friends—  
 should be our mere  
 acquaintances, at best.*  
 .....

In the second chapter of the book, I examine various types of stress, how we can speak to stress and invite it to leave, and how we can begin to deal with it. In addition, I explore the developmental origins of stress. The chapter includes discussion of positive focusing, a technique that can help us get through some difficult moments.

Figure 2-1 examines different ways that we react to stressful situations. I have coined a word that reflects these different stress reactions. The word is W.A.I.S.S.T. It is an acronym that stands for: Worry, Anxiety, Insecurity, Strain, Stress, Tension (or Woe, Anguish, Indecisiveness, Stuck, Stormy, Troubled). Some of these words refer to short-term, immediate internal responses to a particular difficult situation. Other words involved in this acronym refer to more long-term effects.

Of course, the task we have is to transform W.A.I.S.S.T. to W.A.T.C.H.H. stands for Wonder, Awe, Treasure, Cherish, Hope, and Help. With a positive outlook, we can look out better for ourselves.

**Figure 2-1**

Stress goes by many names, destressing by one.

## Waste

**W**orry  
**A**nxiety  
**I**nsecurity  
**S**train  
**S**tress  
**T**ension

## Watch

**W**onder  
**A**we  
**T**reasure  
**C**herish  
**H**ope  
**H**elp

The diagram shows that we have options when confronted by stress, worry, and the like. We may be assertive, attempt to cope with it, and get on with our lives. However, at the other extreme, we may succumb to the stress, be unable to cope with it, and feel overwhelmed. The point is that we have a choice when confronted with such stress. **Nothing is ever ideal, but effort itself approaches the ideal.** We can try to do our best to cope, to hope, and to move forward. Or, we can feel defeated by the stress, become resigned to its power, and suffer the consequences of that decision in terms of headaches, lack of sleep, pain, and so on. It depends on which map of possibilities we would like to see ourselves follow as we pass through the stress that confronts us in our daily lives.

In **Figure 2-2**, I have written a letter, indicating that we have a choice when dealing with stress. I am not saying that all that we have to do is to make a simple decision to do the right thing and, therefore, automatically and easily things will change. I know that it also takes hard work. However, sometimes the simplest decisions lead to the most profound results. In the same vein, sometimes taking the easy way out gets us into the most difficult problems.

In the letter, I am trying to personalize stress, that is, to make it an entity or thing external to us, or on the outside. Too often, we define ourselves in terms of our problems. For example, we say to ourselves, "I am worried, I am stressed, I am overwhelmed." What we really mean to say is, "At the core of me, I am still myself, with all my positive attributes and feelings. However, there are stresses around me that are presenting me with difficulties. Nevertheless, I am not fully overwhelmed, even if there are parts of me that may feel that way. As a whole person, I am not overwhelmed; I am still myself. I still have a lot of positive qualities, good coping mechanisms, other resources, and social supports, such as family or friends. I still know ways of solving problems, ways of seeing options, and ways of adapting, overcoming, and moving forward into the future." **We can choose to become navigators in the stress around us, or we can choose to let stress navigate us.**

.....  
*When stress gets you  
down—give it the  
one-upmanship.*  
.....

.....  
*Telling stress when it is  
overdoing it—gives it  
the once over.*  
.....

.....  
*Optimism is an acquired  
habit that is non-addictive,  
requires small doses to be  
effective, and costs very  
little per day.*  
.....

**Figure 2-2**

Write stress letters it does not know how to read.

## Writing Stress

### Dear Worry,

I would like to thank you for trying to be of help to me. I don't think that you wasted my time in trying to help me even though many times you led me to the incorrect behavior, thoughts, and solutions to a problem. I didn't know any better, and your answers were the best ones available. But now I know better. Now I am learning new ways. I'm learning to relax. I'm learning to express my emotions in appropriate ways. I'm learning to solve problems, for example, by analyzing them, seeing options, and deciding logically on which to follow. I'm learning to ask other people for help instead of asking you for help. You were there for me when I needed you. I listened to you. But, now you listen to me. Your goal was to have me get through difficult times. Well, I'm doing this. So kindly leave me to my new ways. I'll need your old way sometimes and for a little while, to get me going. But make your visits quick, because now I know how to get going myself. So get going yourself. I'm not being sarcastic with you. I just like to see the humorous side of things now, if I can. Well, that's the new me. I try to see things differently now. I guess I'm growing. Sometimes the old way creeps back into my life. But now I understand. I don't get nervous. I know the old way will just waste away.

*Stress is unfair—so undo it.*

*Stress stays below the radar—  
when we fly above the “louds.”*

*Although stress is universal—  
you are still an individual.*

Figure 2-3 is entitled, “We are all butterflies.” It offers a metaphorical way of indicating that each and every one of us is capable of change. Like the butterfly, we pass through stages in life, even though it may not be apparent to us. It may seem that we have reached a point in our life where we cannot change. Or, it could be that in our present circumstances, especially if we are experiencing difficult stress, we may feel that change is impossible. Or, it could be that we feel that we do not want to change, that there is no need for change. However, change is always happening.

Change is a constant process. We are always evolving, even if we feel stuck at a particular level of psychological development or cannot see how we can get out of a particularly stressful circumstance. If we take a lifespan perspective

.....  
*Stress can grow on us,  
or we can grow from it.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress wants to boss  
you around, tell it there is  
no room for two bosses in  
your company.*  
.....

### Figure 2-3

When we grow, stress does not. Our growth is like that of a caterpillar in metamorphosis; it changes us toward maturity.

## We Are All Butterflies

Butterflies begin life as crawling creatures. Some are already beautiful. Others are bland, or prickly or poisonous. None fly. Then a biological program kicks in during their development. They metamorphose. It is part of their make-up. All butterflies metamorphose. Change is part of what they are. First, they stop. They rest. They let change happen. They build a cocoon where change can take place, a protected place, a peaceful place, a relaxed place. When they stop and relax, they change. Then they struggle to let their changes show. They emerge, discarding their old covering. Their old way no longer works. Crawling is finished. They can no longer go back. Everything about their change supports a new way of being. Tentatively, they try out their new way. They stretch their wings. They flutter them. They hold them open to the sun. Their beauty is striking. Their new way dazzles in the sunlight. They feel urges to communicate with other butterflies. They grab their energy and release. Both hesitant and confident in their new way, they fly. The sky greets them.

.....  
*Prepare stress for  
the worst—by being up  
to its challenge.*  
.....

and realize that even adults change, as they move from one decade to the next, it is clear that we are all constantly growing organisms and learning beings. An important part of how we grow is by dealing with the difficult situations that we encounter in our daily lives, by using all of our skills to do so, and by getting all the help that we need. If we trust this growth process and this change process, it makes life easier, both for us and for the people around us. **Stress becomes easier when we see it as a means to grow rather than as an obstacle to growth. Stress gives fodder not only for problem solving, but also for personal evolving.**

.....  
*Put stress in therapy—  
by having it regress.*  
.....

But that does not mean that we should seek out stress and then sit passively, hoping that it will make us change and grow. This approach will not work. There is a better way. When stress comes into our lives, and it will always come, initially, we should look at it as manageable, no matter how overwhelming that it may seem. Then, as we deal with the stress, we should adopt the attitude that it is providing challenges to us. Through attempting to deal with stress, we can test our coping skills and problem solving skills, refine them, improve them, learn others, and so on. Finally, as we get a better handle of the stress, we should look forward to a well-deserved reward.

.....  
*Let stress be the audience—  
of your growth from  
its encounter.*  
.....

If we adopt such a positive attitude to stress, we will see that it will stop giving us headaches and heartaches. Rather, it will give us opportunities for changing for the better and for growing. Stress can provide the medium not only for its management, but also for our personal growth. The more we manage stress, and are not managed by it, the more likely our metamorphosing psychological butterfly will come closer to flying.

In **Figure 2-4** I have indicated the different levels in how to deal with stress. In one way or another, stress starts at the physical level. For example, our heart races, we sweat, our breathing gets heavier, and we may get a spurt of adrenaline to prepare for an emergency release of energy and muscular activity. Then, stress proceeds to the emotional level. We become tense and anxious, or perhaps wary and fearful. Sadness or a deeper despair may manifest. Another possibility is that we become irritable and snappy. In parallel, at the thinking or cognitive level, we are trying to make sense of and analyze the stressful situation. We look around, gather the facts, and

**Figure 2-4**

Stress does not grow through stages when we do instead. The figure describes five stages in growth, with each one increasing our ability to handle stress.

## Stages in Life Composing

Stages in Waisst Composting	Stages in Life Composing
<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We feel Waisst in our body</li></ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Our bodies are free</li></ul>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We express it</li></ul>	<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We express freedom</li></ul>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We analyze it</li></ul>	<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We don't think about burden</li></ul>
<p><b>Consciousness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We become aware of options</li></ul>	<p><b>Consciousness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We are aware that burden is gone</li></ul>
<p><b>Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We see our lives improve</li></ul>	<p><b>Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We feel free</li></ul>

try to put them together. This leads us to become aware of, or conscious of, possible solutions or alternatives to the stress. We compare them for their advantages and disadvantages, and anticipate their overall effects on the stress, on the context, and on the different people around us. We try out the solution that seems best. Finally, after putting into effect the option chosen, monitoring it, and getting feedback, we realize that we have handled the stress, leading to a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. This adds to the personal growth processes that are ongoing in our development.

.....  
*When stress wants in,  
will it out.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress has many allies, like  
tension. You have many  
allies, like yourself.*  
.....

.....  
*What is around, but not too  
visible with little to say?  
Stress, when it hides from  
your new attitude.*  
.....

.....  
*Tricking stress  
takes no magic.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress likes to play  
hide and seek.  
But this does not mean  
that you should  
play tag with it.*  
.....

.....  
*Thinking is stress's opposite—  
have them meet.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress begs to differ,  
have it go to its knees.*  
.....

.....  
*Emotions can help us when we  
are under stress as long as  
they stay under control.*  
.....

Steps in dealing with stress have similarities to the stages of life. In the first developmental stage, the newborn lives at a very physical level. Then, for the infant, emotions become very prominent. In the third stage, the child moves into the thinking phase. As for the adolescent, consciousness begins. Finally, the adult enters into the advanced thinking and spiritual phase. As we pass through and deal with stress in the equivalent of the five steps that have been described, in one sense, we are passing through and dealing with a sample of the five major stages of life. Mini-changes and maxi-changes in life's developmental journey are very similar. There is an economy to change in life. It is as if one basic pattern subsumes the change process regardless at what level it occurs (as if there is a change fractal, to use a mathematical term). Thus, how we grow in stress is a sample of how we grow in life. **The more we learn to deal with daily stress and its mini-changes, the more we facilitate the maxi-changes in long-term growth.** In both cases, we move toward feeling less burdened.

In **Figure 2-5**, we see that there is no magic solution in dealing with stress and rejoining joy but, nevertheless, simple techniques and the right attitude can work some magic. We all wish that things could change instantaneously when we encounter stress and that everything would return to normal. But nothing is ever that easy. **Usually, the wish for a simple solution leads to confusion.** Keep in mind that magicians work very hard to make their tricks work and to have them appear smooth to the viewer. Handling stress requires the same care, effort, and focus on details yet, paradoxically, this approach works best when there is a simultaneous calm, inner peace, and attempt to see the larger picture. Seeing the details requires carefully moving into the complexities of the problem, but seeing the whole requires carefully moving back to get the big picture. That's the real trick. When stress reactions are controlled and we remain calm and true to ourselves, that's the best trick.



**Figure 2-5**

Magicians pull rabbits out of hats; people pull bad habits out of stress.

## **Abacadabra**

- A** = Anguish, Accident
- B** = Beach imagination, Breathing exercises
- R** = Rejoining, Restarting
- A** = Accepting, Accelerating
- C** = Calm, Control
- A** = Asking, Answering
- D** = Dealing with, Discovering
- A** = Allowing, Alleviating
- B** = Building, Better
- R** = Regrowth, Recovery
- A** = Adept, Adapting



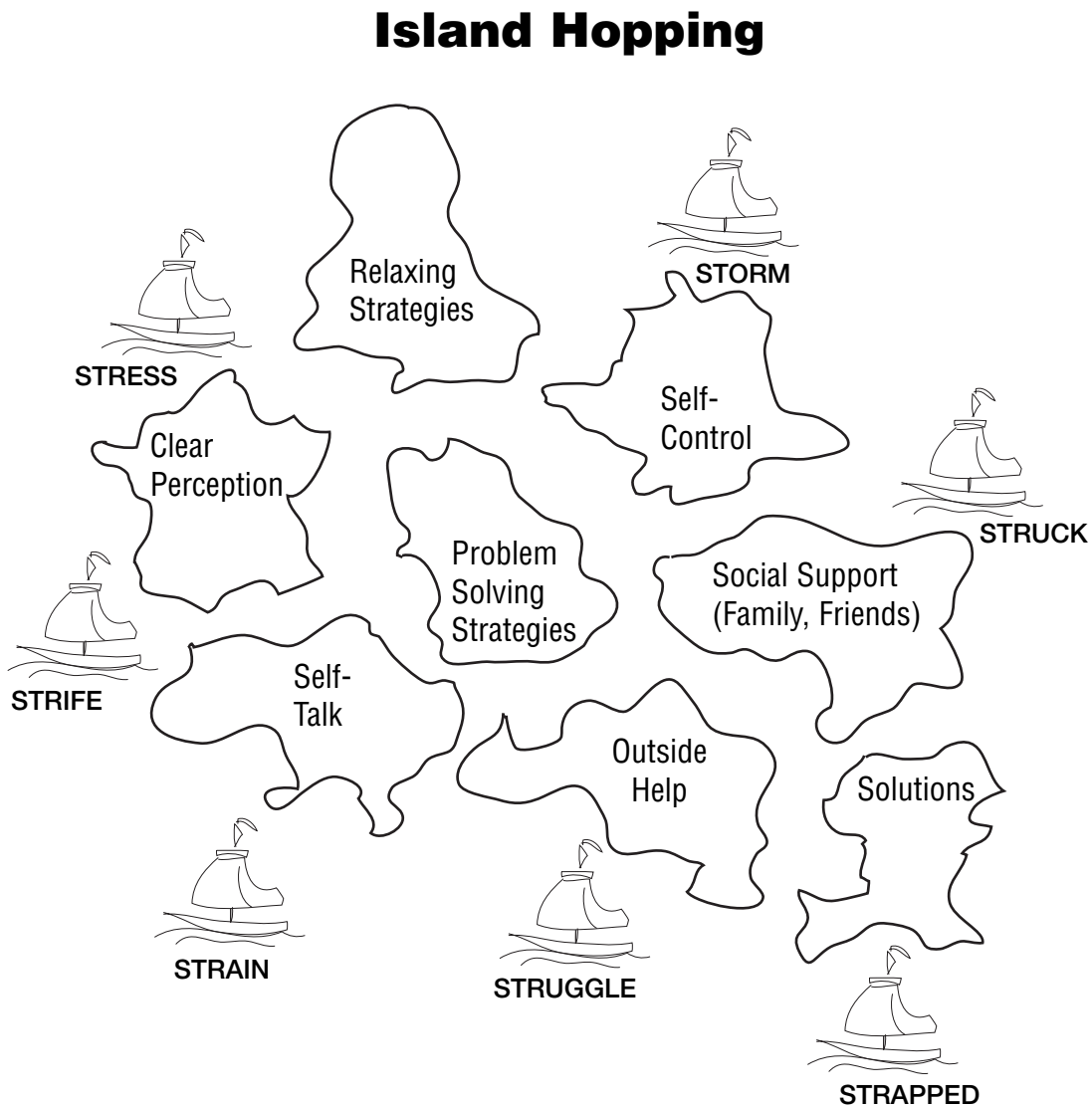
.....  
*Running around for  
answers often leads home.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is a sign that  
we need a "break it open."*  
.....

Figure 2-6 indicates the broad range of destressing strategies and resources that we can use to rejoin joy. They refer to both inward-focused strategies, such as relaxing and self-control, and outward-focused strategies, such as tackling the problem and getting social support. These strategies may be characterized as islands on a sea of stress. Like all islands, due to shifting sands, battering seas, and storms of erosion, they can change form and even reduce in size. But also like all islands, they can grow in size. Dikes can be laid down.

**Figure 2-6**

To deal better with stress, we need to bridge our islands of strength.

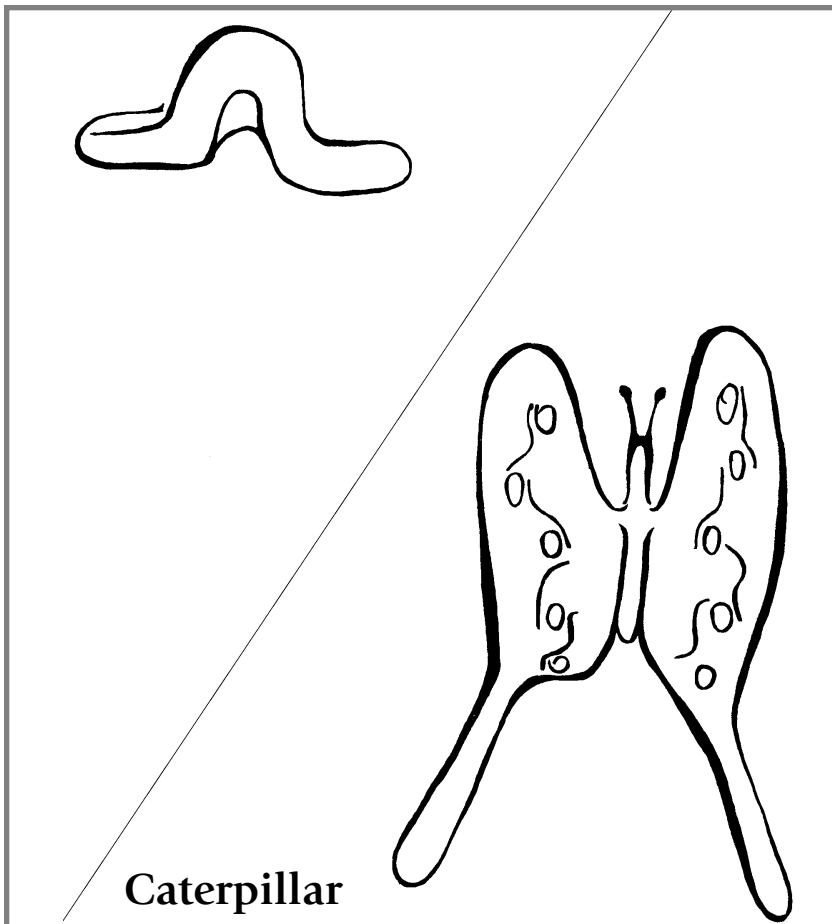


Sea walls can be built. Protective harbours can be dug. Land can be reclaimed. Trees can be planted to act as barriers. Buildings can be fortified. Similarly, in the strife of life, human activity can act to expand and preserve mental islands that are safe and peaceful havens. The havens can be strengthened as we use them, modify them, and learn from them. Islands can be linked by ferries, and even by causeways, creating a chain of interconnected land mass. Similarly, as we learn to deal with and moderate our stress, we can create powerful links in the psychological islands on which we fall back in order to destress and rejoin joy.

The next three figures are about having a positive attitude and thinking positively. It is easy to lapse into the negative, to think pessimistically, to have a “baditude”, or to see the worst. However, it is harder to get out of the negative once we are in it than to try to keep out of it in the first place. The negative persists, and vicious circles widen their influence. The best strategy for feeling the pull of the negative is to push it away.

*When we control stress, we allow freedom for ourselves.*

**B**eatrice felt beaten. By reading Chapter 2, she stopped feeling blue. Too good to be true.



*Because stress is part of life's curriculum, we should aim for good marks in dealing with it.*

Remembering fond  
memories makes  
them present.

For **Figure 2-7**, I created a positive memory game to help focus on the positives of the past. The goal was to get the couple involved to share more and to feel more positive. I cannot say whether this one technique was successful in permanently improving their relationship. However, the message is clear. **By building positives, life at least becomes easier and the seeds are sown for more positives.**

### Figure 2-7

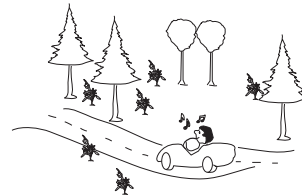
When imagination is given free reign, it frees us from stress.

## Driving Down Memory's Lane

**A** For each letter of the alphabet, think of a happy person, place, or thing that you have known, and see who can think of more positive things to say about the person, place, or thing.

If you come up with two examples for any one letter, talk about both. See who comes up with more good memories at the end of one hour. The winner gets to smile more.

**B** For each number (1–10), think of happy person, place, or thing that you are going to get back to after things get better, e.g., working five days a week, going out three days a week, laughing ten times a week. See who comes up with more good things to return to at the end of the hour. Again, the winner gets to smile more.



#### Note:

Talking of things like chores in negative ways is not allowed.

See these as positive too.

After all, you will be thankful doing them with all that you have been through.

Figure 2-8 presents a simple chart emphasizing that when we have a positive focus or attitude, it is easier to deal with stress. Moreover, by performing the exercises outlined on the chart during moments of non-stress, we are acting preventatively to help us deal better with any stress that may come later. The chart is organized around three areas of positive focus—concerning the body or physical level, the emotional level, and the mental or relaxation level. In asking clients to find a positive focus at each of these three levels, I ask them to do it with respect to each of the past, the present, and the

*Oneness is wellness.*

*Seeing the past as something to learn from, not live in, can alter the present.*

*When stress grabs us, we should hold on—to our values.*

*Stress likes a good drink. Give it some chamomile tea.*

*Put stress in training—send it to your boot camp.*

**Figure 2-8**

When imagination rules, it rules out stress.

## Positive Focussing: I

	Past	Present	Future
Body	Remember pleasant experiences.	Savour your healthy snacks.	Imagine pleasant meals, etc.
Emotions	Remember happy times.	When happy, let go to maximum.	Imagine happy times.
Mind	Remember peaceful times.	Do relaxation exercises to reach more peaceful states.	Imagine feeling peaceful.

future. That is, by focusing positively at all three levels of body, emotion, and mind, and for all three time periods of past, present, and future, we facilitate having positive reactions to real events in our lives.

Thus, for example, when it comes to a past positive focus about their physical body, I ask clients to recall an event such as eating a favourite ice cream, with its succulent tastes, diverse colours, refreshing sensations, aromatic smells, and friendly exchanges with others sitting around. For a present positive physical/body focus, I ask clients to enjoy any positive moment that might come up during the week. For a similar experience in the future, I ask them to imagine having pleasurable experiences, such as eating a favourite ice cream.

The procedure is not very different for the emotional component of the chart. For happiness in the past, I ask clients to recall a joyous moment, such as when they received or gave a birthday gift. For happy present experiences, they are to reflect upon such experiences as they are happening. That is, they are to say to themselves statements such as, “I am happy”; “This is pleasant”; and “I can do it again”. For happy future emotions, clients are asked to imagine happy moments that they would like to experience.

With respect to the mind and state of relaxation, I ask clients to recall past moments of peace or deep relaxation that they had experienced. With respect to present peaceful states, I ask clients to take note of any peaceful experiences as they happen, or just after they are experienced. Finally, for imagining future relaxed mental states, I ask clients to visualize being totally relaxed through their favourite pathways to this end.

Through positive focusing, one can experience relaxation, which leads to interference of the stress cycle. **The easiest way to counterbalance a negative is to experience a positive.**

The chart in Figure 2-9 expands upon the previous one. Where the previous chart discussed the physical, emotional, and mental levels of positive focusing, this current chart refers to five different levels—physical, emotional, cognitive, conscious, and spiritual. Similarly, I ask the client to focus positively on all these five levels in terms of each of the past, present, and future. For the particular client for whom this chart was created, the physical and emotional levels were more or less the same as in the prior chart. Also, the entry for

.....  
*Stress leads to  
wasted energy and effort.  
Better to recycle it.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is a constant in  
our lives, and so  
destressing should be  
what we live constantly.*  
.....

.....  
*Bad memories are reminders  
of better times to come.*  
.....

**Figure 2-9**

Positive imagination positively helps control stress.

## Positive Focussing: II

	<b>Past</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Future</b>
<b>Physical</b>	Think of a pleasant physical experience that you had.	Concentrate fully on a pleasant physical experience.	Imagine a pleasant vacation.
<b>Emotional</b>	Re-experience a time when you were happy and motivated.	Do something that made you happy in the past (e.g., listen to favourite song).	Picture yourself smiling, laughing and happy, in a wished-for activity.
<b>Cognitive</b>	Recall a problem that you solved.	Break down a current problem into parts. To solve the whole problem, work on each part.	Visualize yourself confronting a problem and tackling it effectively (e.g., using these strategies).
<b>Consciousness</b>	Remember when you realized that there were options for solving a problem, or when you had accepted that there were none and worked through it.	See options for solving a current problem, or try to work through the problem if none are possible or evident.	See yourself confronting a problem by realizing that there are options, or that you can work through the problem if no options are possible or evident.
<b>Spiritual</b>	Relive a time in your life when you were at peace. Let that feeling come to rest in your body, mood, thought, etc.	Even for a moment, let the peaceful side of you emerge. It's always there in each of us, no matter how big are our problems.	Project into the future the peaceful feeling that you want. Try to be guided by it, knowing that this is your potential.



---

*Rhythm is to music  
as music is to life.*

---

---

*Put stress beneath it all—  
by walking proudly on  
its territory.*

---

the spiritual level was similar to the mind level in the prior chart. The major difference between the charts lies in the cognitive and conscious levels. The examples given in the new chart show that, for this client, for these levels we referred to problem solving, in particular. However, perhaps for another client the cognitive and conscious level would not emphasize problem solving. Each client is different, requiring individually tailored therapeutic suggestions.

For this client, cognitive positive focusing dealt with any procedure that led to better concentration and sharper thinking. In this regard, consciousness referred to taking a step back, and becoming aware of the procedures and process followed in problem solving. In practicing mental exercises, we gain mental muscles. Spiritual positive focusing refers to a sense of well-being that goes beyond mental relaxation. As long as spiritual experiences occur, even if mysteries remain, they are highly beneficial. **In spirituality, the voyage may be more important than the port of call.** To conclude, positive focusing is such an obvious solution in helping to alleviate the effects of stress that many people overlook it.

**Figure 2-10** reinforces the message that basic fundamentals produce all the tools that we need in order to deal with stress in our lives. We do not need to learn complex principles, read philosophical treatises, or study under gurus or in cults in order to learn relaxation and stress management techniques. They are already part of us, but when stress overwhelms us, we do not know where to turn and we forget to use them. The ability to deal with stress is part of our evolutionary heritage. Just as our bodies' biochemicals are put together to keep us healthy, so are our minds' essentials. Just as the letters of the alphabet can be combined into innumerable words, so can the basic ways that we intuitively know how to deal with stress be combined into innumerable ways in order to deal with it. Similarly, our minds can choose to put words together to say either positives or negatives. Needless to say: the positives are more helpful; boosting self-confidence is constructive; remaining optimistic is better; and so on. For example, is it not better to hear, "Happy hope helps healing" than "Hurting harm hampers happenings?" **Because our mind can gravitate to positives instead of to negatives, we need to set its compass in the right direction.**



**Figure 2-10**

This word game shows what serious imagination can do to stress.

## **Happy Hope Helps Healing**

**A**ttentive agreeing accentuates action  
**B**uilding balance betters bonds  
**C**alm consideration creates coping  
**D**efying disability directs discovery  
**E**xploring essentials energizes emergence  
**F**amily fun facilitates fitness  
**G**iving goodness galvanizes gain  
**H**appy hope helps healing  
**I**nvoking investigation invites invention  
**J**ogging joking jerks jocularity  
**K**issing koalas kindles kindness  
**L**engthy listening lifts loving  
**M**ellowing moods maximizes mending  
**N**oble notions nix negativity  
**O**wning optimism opens oceans  
**P**raising positives promotes peace  
**Q**uiet quests quicken quiescence  
**R**inging rejoicing raises recovery  
**S**oft soulfulness stimulates serenity  
**T**ender treatment touches tranquility  
**U**ndoing injustice uplifts universals  
**V**ast vitality ventures victory  
**W**anting wonder wins wellness  
**X**tra xclamation xtends xcitement  
**Y**onder yearning yields youthfulness  
**Z**estful zeal zooms zeverything



*To stop stress from having a voice—give it the silent treatment.*

Figure 2-11 reminds us that stress and its effects are on our outside. The best of us on the inside may be masked by stress coming from the outside, but stress cannot take away our core positives. We have strengths, resources, ways of dealing with stress, social support, learning skills, and problem-solving capacities. Our truth lies in the center, not in the turbulence at the surface. **Hidden in the bulb is the flower waiting to bloom.**

*To put stress out with the garbage—flips its lid.*

*Make stress second hand—by wearing it out.*

*To lighten stress when it comes knocking—send it punch lines.*

**Figure 2-11**

Stress can mask the best of us, but cannot take it away. We can always unmask stress.

## Under the Layers Are Truth Sayers

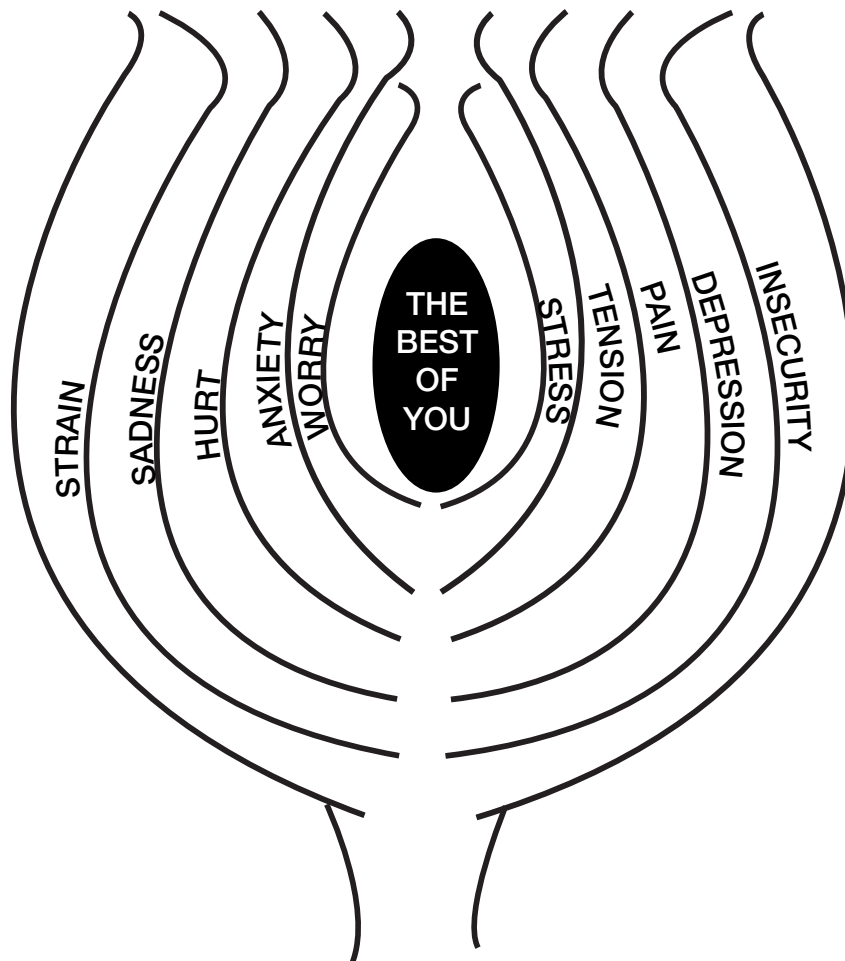


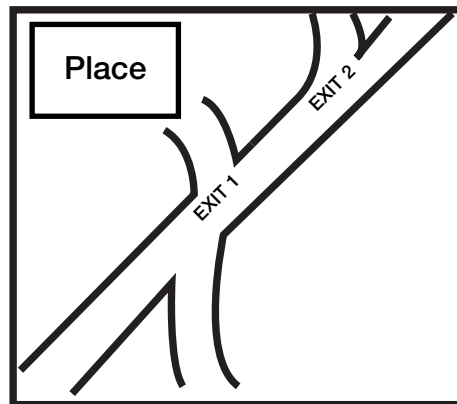
Figure 2-12 illustrates that destressing is a straightforward process of going round about. Plans always go awry, askew, and all wrong. To deal with such occurrences, we have to adjust, adapt, and find new ways, while keeping our goals in mind. Detours are opportunities for key tours.

*By responding to stress  
with heightened calm,  
we lower its levels.*

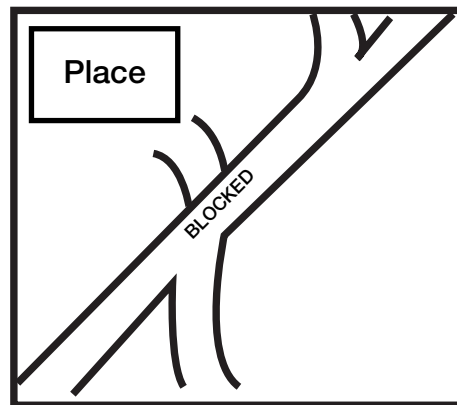
**Figure 2-12**

There are always options. Stress is a terrible navigator, so let it get lost.

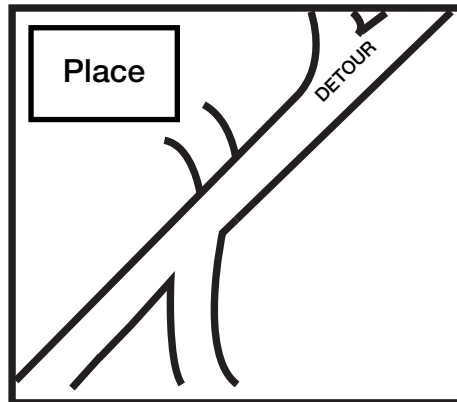
## Always Go Straight Around



PERFECT  
MAP  
(BLUEPRINT)



IMPERFECT  
WORLD



PERFECT  
SOLUTION

**There Are Always Options**

**Figure 2-13**

Stress is a terrible courier service, when we won't accept its message.

## **Stress is Not All or None**

### **Good Times**

- There's always some negatives
- We deal with it
- We distract ourselves
- We know it will work out
- We keep going, we keep busy
- We find liesure time, personal time

### **Average Times**

- The negatives increase
- Maybe it is 40–60 or even 60–40
- But even then, we try our best
- We call on others for support
- We find coping resources we didn't know we had
- We try harder, we keep optimistic

### **Bad Times**

- Something difficult or overwhelming happens
- The stress seems like 8 out of 10 or worse
- We feel that it is 100% negative
- But there is always some positive in us
- We need to uncover it, this will help
- If we keep seeing only the negative, the positive will be that much harder to find

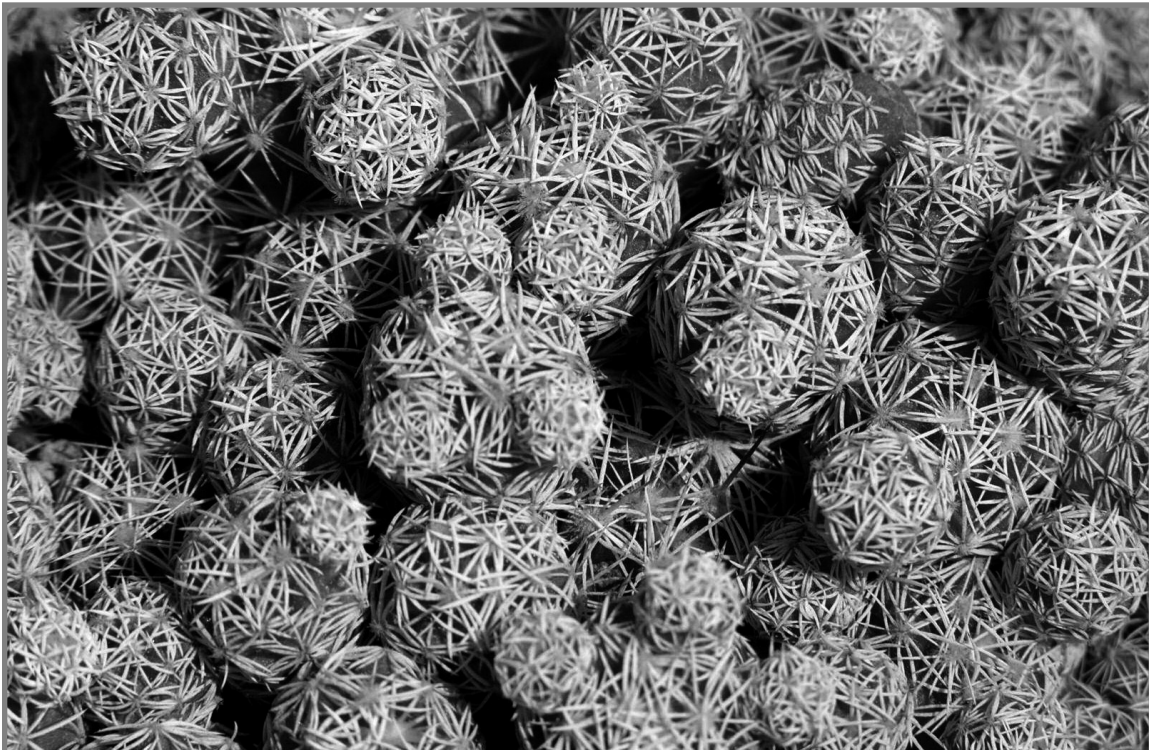
**Especially When We Won't Have None of It**

Figure 2-13 tells us to give stress the time-honoured response of not honouring it. For the most part, when it is mild, we can deal well with stress and, when it is moderate, we can cope adequately with it. But good times or average times do not always happen, for stress can be extreme. When stress is very negative like this, and we feel overwhelmed, we should remember that, in some ways, we know how to deal with stress at other levels. **Stress may try to hide our positives, but we do not have to run and hide when it does.**

.....  
*Stress needs a good plan  
that includes its good  
riddance.*  
.....

A review of Chapter 2 can only leave one impression—that stress is something that we can deal with and get better at dealing with, and that we can grow because of it. Even when stress seems insurmountable, there are avenues that we can take to help. We can adopt a positive attitude about our ability to handle stress. We can develop a calm persistence, clear thinking about options and solutions, a network of help, and an attitude of hope. The simplest techniques for dealing with stress work as effectively as basic mathematical calculations, giving the right answer every time. **The techniques of destressing and rejoining joy add up, should not be subtracted, cannot be divided, and, in applying them, the benefits multiply.**

.....  
*When stress bares its  
fangs—send it to its dentist.*  
.....



Brandon felt anxious and depressed. He always had done well at school and in his social life. He had done well in his first job and now he had been promoted into a new department. His supervisor seemed pleasant at first, but soon became picky with Brandon, finding fault with everything he did. Brandon became discouraged and spoke to co-workers, trying to find out how their supervisors had been treating them. Some reported negative experiences, but not to the same extent. However, they reported that his supervisor did this with all new people transferred to his department, because in the past he had been overlooked for promotions. Brandon had never experienced major stress in his life, having come from a home that fostered a sense of security and assertiveness of one's rights. However, his supervisor was a relative of the owner and Brandon knew complaints would not work; others who had complained had been fired.

Brandon decides to buy a self-help book on how to deal with stress. He comes across a book much like this one in the bookstore and feels it could help.

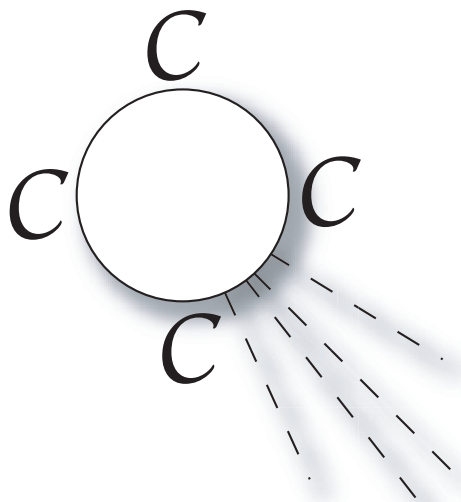


# Upbringing

**Providing a good upbringing  
prevents children from  
having downturns.**

# Chapter 3

## *Relaxation Techniques*



*"C" is for calm  
and learning how  
to reach it.*





.....  
*There are David  
destressing strategies for  
the Goliath of stress.*  
.....

.....  
*Have a party—instead of  
being a party to stress.*  
.....

**I**n Chapter 3, I examine most basic stress management and relaxation strategies. Many derive from the behavioral tradition in psychology. As the chapter proceeds, I introduce some basic principles in behavioral therapy. Essentially, in this approach, the focus is more on changing the problematic behavior in the present or on offering ways of destressing, although I do present ways of altering negative thoughts that may have helped cause the problems. **When the right behavior is brought to the forefront, stress takes a back seat.**

**Figure 3-1** illustrates that the expression, “Action and Distraction,” is a catch phrase that I ask clients to remember when they find themselves under stress. It refers to the longer expression, **“Action, Distraction, and Positive Attraction.”**

“Action” refers to the simple, positive things that we like to do or experience, such as walking in the park, talking to a friend, relaxing in front of the TV, or engaging in a favourite leisure activity. Of course, it also refers to our everyday activities with family and at work. Whether referring to the simpler activities or to our daily responsibilities, a positive approach to such actions can help induce destressing and a return to joy. Because our basic life tasks especially involve work (or school) and family, the more that we can learn to destress well in these spheres, the better we can deal with stress of any kind.

“Distraction” refers to getting our mind off the source of our stress and to relaxing at the same time. When we have too much stress, we express it through our mind and body in three basic ways, all of which speed up the pace of our normal rhythms. First, our breathing speeds up. It may become very irregular and forced. We may even begin to hyperventilate. Second, our muscles get more active. We move or fidget excessively or we become frozen as the muscles tense up. Third, our mind goes ever so fast. We worry about the stress. Our mind goes in many directions at once as we try to deal with the stress, or as we try to get away from it because it is too overwhelming.

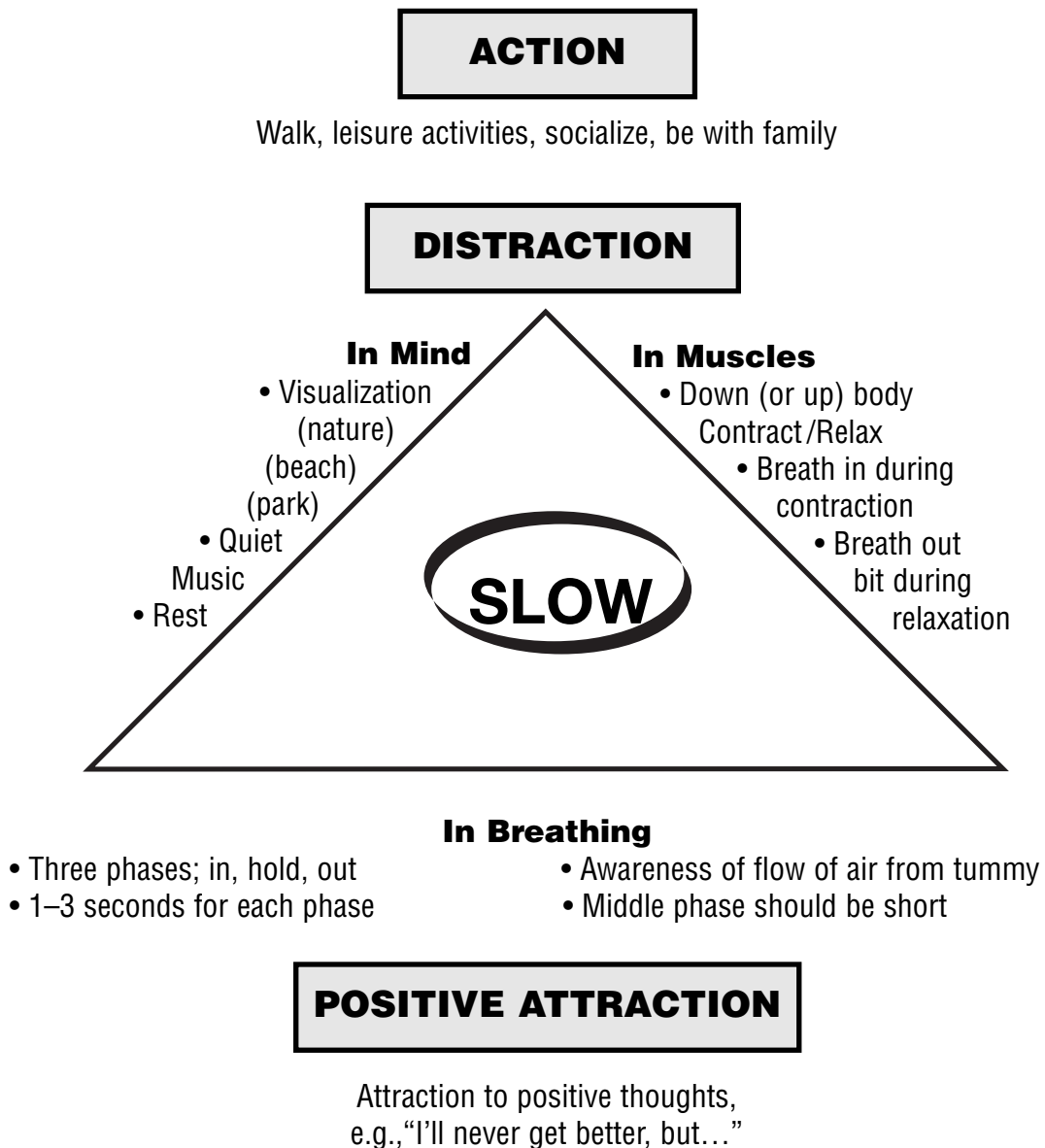
Thus, when under stress, we should use techniques that slow down all three of these speeded rhythms. There are breathing techniques that we can use to slow down the accelerated breathing that occurs when we are under stress.



**Figure 3-1**

The basic techniques for dealing with stress are simple to use, and they are enjoyable, too.

## **Action, Distraction, and Positive Attraction: Simple Techniques**



*Simplicity is synchronicity.*

*Parks are relaxation’s playground.*

*Bicycles get the mental wheels turning.*

**C**harley felt like  
a horse, but  
Chapter 3 had him  
trotting. Chapter 3  
showed him.

.....  
*When each day starts anew,  
stresses cannot accumulate.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress comes to  
memory—empty the store.*  
.....

There are muscle relaxation techniques that slow down the fidgeting, ease the muscle tension that accompanies stress, and encourage relaxation. Finally, there are mental techniques that slow down our mind and ease excessive worrying.

In using destressing techniques, there is no simple one-size-fits-all formula, because **psychological techniques are not meant for use by everyone in exactly the same way.** Stress is an individual experience and, therefore, destressing techniques should be individualized, as well. We need to apply the techniques in individual ways, using ways that work for us. Some people find that the breathing techniques work best, and there are many different methods of breathing techniques that one can use. One particular technique may work best for one person in one situation but not in another. Another individual may not be able to use this breathing technique at all, and needs a very different one. Finally, some people may find that breathing techniques are not beneficial at all to them, but that slowing down muscular activity is the most important way for them to cope with stress. Again, there are many different muscle relaxation techniques. Yet other people may find that using mental techniques, such as visualization, are the most important way of handling stress. Of course, there are people who can combine two or even all three types of techniques. The point is that, as we deal with stress, by using the techniques in these three areas (breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, and mental or visualization techniques), in one way or another, each of us can find the best way of distracting ourselves. At the same time, the techniques provide the added benefit of helping us relax and rejoin joy.

Mental exercises include visualizing a favourite nature scene, such as the beach, park, or garden. Listening to quiet music always is helpful. As for breathing exercises, by breathing in with a regular rhythm for up to several seconds in each of the in and out phases, one can help get control of stressed, irregular, or fast breathing. In pushing out the tummy rather than breathing from the chest, the air goes deeper. By concentrating on the airflow, distraction takes place, helping matters. For muscle relaxation, one contracts and then relaxes the muscles at each zone or joint of the body, moving from head to toes. The contraction-relax cycle may be coordinated with our out and in breathes. There are many ways of breathing to relax, destressing muscles, and

calming the mind. These should be facilitated by use of positive thoughts and positive self-talk. **The more one practices such positive psychological techniques, the less there is room for stress and for negative habits and thoughts.**

To help to destress and rejoin joy, we need more than action and distraction. We need to remember that the mind can influence the body just as much as the body can influence the mind. The things that we tell ourselves when we are under stress play a critical role in how we deal with it, our hopes about it, and how to proceed to resolve it. **Positive attraction to a positive attitude is a positive step in destressing.**

Thus, **Figure 3-2** emphasizes that when we are under stress, we need to have positive thoughts. Notice that I did not say that, when we are under stress, we must think positively. I

.....  
*When we think clearly—  
stress becomes irrational.*  
.....

.....  
*With the habit of positive  
thoughts, there are less  
“maybe’s,” “no’s,” and “not’s.”*  
.....

**Figure 3-2**

Positive thoughts are a good balance to negative thoughts, especially when used consistently and quickly after a negative one.

## **“Positive Thoughts,” Not “Thinking Positive”**

### **Examples**

- I’ll never get better, but as long as I keep trying you never know.
- I’ll fail that exam, but if I start studying slowly but surely I’ll do O.K.
- I never do my work to my supervisor’s satisfaction, but I just have to keep doing it to mine.
- He never appreciates what I do, but he can learn as long as we keep the lines of communication open.
- It’s so hard to discipline him, but if I learn to do it right, he’ll listen.

### **Principles**

- Negative thoughts are a natural part of life.
- We do not have to avoid them, fear them, persecute ourselves for them, etc.
- They have important messages for us, so that we can learn about ourselves and about others.
- They only hurt us when they continue too long because we do not know how to deal with them.
- We need to learn how to tackle well the problems that underlie them, and control our reactions to them.
- They always come back, that is their job.
- We can always come back from them. That is our job.

**It is too easy to say we just have to be positive.**

**The negative should not be hidden or ignored.**

**It is the balance that counts in the positive and negative.**

.....  
*We cannot change  
what stress brings.  
We can change what  
we bring to stress.*  
.....

.....  
*The more stress feels  
empowered—the more we  
should empower ourselves.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress heats up,  
freeze it out.*  
.....

realize that it is impossible to force ourselves to keep thinking positively when we are under stress. As much as one tries, the negative keeps coming back. Although we cannot stop this process when we are under stress, we can cut it short. Negative thought fuels worry, leads us to fear the worst, and stops us from trying to solve the problems underlying the worry.

We can try to reset the stress thermostat and reduce the worry. We need to learn to monitor ourselves as we worry, so that when it is constant and excessive, we can act to control it. That is, as much as it is possible, we need to turn the worry and stress switch from the “On” to the “Off” position.

I suggest that a practical way of encouraging positive thoughts to emerge when we are under stress is not to try to stop outright the negative thoughts, but to tag on a positive thought after each negative thought appears. For example, we can catch ourselves saying a negative thought to ourselves, such as, “I’ll never do it” or “I’ll never get over it” (a soured relationship, a painful injury, etc.), and then add on a more positive statement to counterbalance it. Instead of continuing with statements made silently, such as, “It will never go away” or “I will never get better,” we can learn to say to ourselves, “It will never go away, but I am trying my best,” or “I will never get better, but I am working at it.” The more that we use these kinds of positive statements after negative ones, or the more that we cut short negative thoughts or interrupt them, the less constant becomes worry, the less things appear overwhelming, and the more we give our body and our mind their needed rest so that we can recover from stress.



Figure 3-3 shows one breathing technique that I teach to clients when they are under severe stress or in severe pain. It involves three basic steps. There are three phases in any breathing—breathing in, holding the breath, and breathing out. In the technique that I use, each in and out phase lasts about 2–3 seconds, or counts, depending on what is needed and what works. A silent counting procedure adds to the effectiveness of the breathing technique, because it further helps to distract from stress. Therefore, in this breathing tech-

.....  
*I never met a hot stress  
that liked cool breathing.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is all bluster—when  
we do not fluster.*  
.....

**Figure 3-3**

Breathing techniques calm the mind, body, heart, and head. Call them all-in-wonders.

## Breathing Brakes

### Technique 1

- Mouth closed; eyes, too
- Breathe in for 2–3 seconds
- Counting 1, 2, (3)
- Perhaps stop briefly at each count—this creates a slight stutter in the breathing
- Hold for 1–2 seconds, counting
- Breathe out for 2–3 seconds, counting perhaps in a stutter
- Repeat over and over

### OR

### Technique 2

- Mouth closed; eyes, too
- Breathe in and out for 2–3 seconds each phase
- Deeply from tummy
- Concentrate on air flow or anything to distract
- Let stress come and go
- Repeat over and over

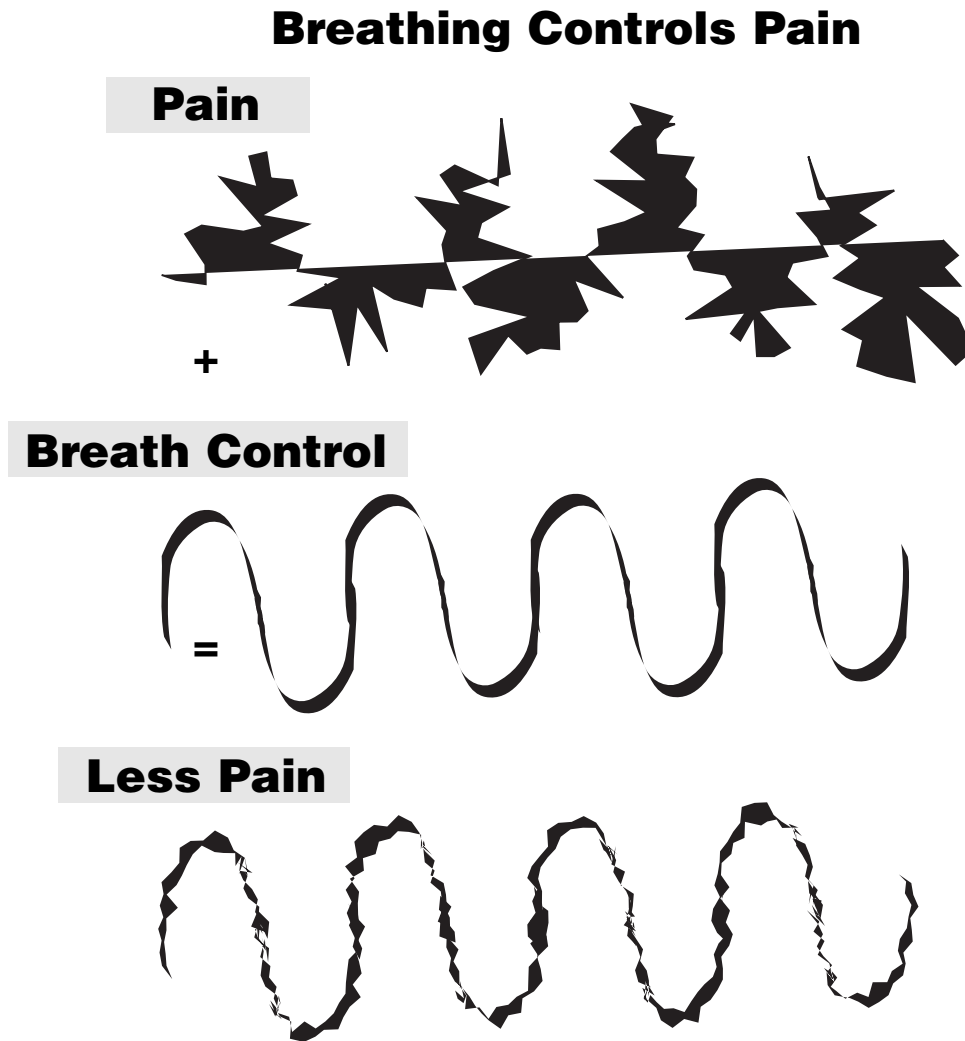
### OR

### Technique 3

- Mouth closed; eyes, too
- Keep regular rate of breathing
- Observe relaxation and stress sensations in body
- Work on stress sensations
- Repeat over and over

**Figure 3-4**

Breathing techniques should be used right away when there is pain. They distract and calm; call them pain chillers.



.....  
*Playing sports is  
already winning.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress must be a loner.  
It does not like family ties.*  
.....

nique, first we breathe in for the counts, slowly and evenly, then we hold our breath for a second or so, and then we breathe out for the counts, using the rate needed at that point. The whole cycle of the three phases may take about 4–6 seconds to complete (this duration varies with each person). After one cycle is completed, we repeat the breathing cycle for as long as it is needed. **With repetition of good breathing techniques, they take over and help control any stressful breathing rhythm that had occurred before their use.** Gradually, the stressed rhythm of breathing slows down, becomes more rested, and is more peaceful. If the heart had been beating rapidly, it slows down, as well, adding to the relaxing experience and setting up a rhythm of rest.

Variations of this breathing technique involve concentrating on anything that distracts, instead of counting. This may include concentrating on tense body parts or even the actual stress or pain that is of focus. However, we try to let it come and go, or observe it as much as possible, instead of being overwhelmed by it. To conclude, this breathing technique helps when we are in distress or when we are in pain. Our breathing becomes regularized, or occurs at the right pace, and we end up breathing more easily through the distress or pain. Once we reach this stage, we can move on to performing more regularized breathing exercises.

In **Figure 3-4**, we see that when pain gets out of control, so does the rhythm of breathing. It becomes laboured, staccato, and even punctuated by sighs and groans. However, by using a controlled breathing technique, the painful breathing rhythm can become capped or dampened, so that it becomes more regular. By controlling the painful breathing rhythm, we end up controlling and even reducing our pain. Once a good breathing technique is mastered, only a few repetitions may be needed, where similar situations before would have required many more. **When breathing and other stress and pain control techniques become automatic in their use, stress and pain may become automatically controlled or reduced.**

---

*Stress cannot hold  
our partner's hand—  
when we do.*

---

---

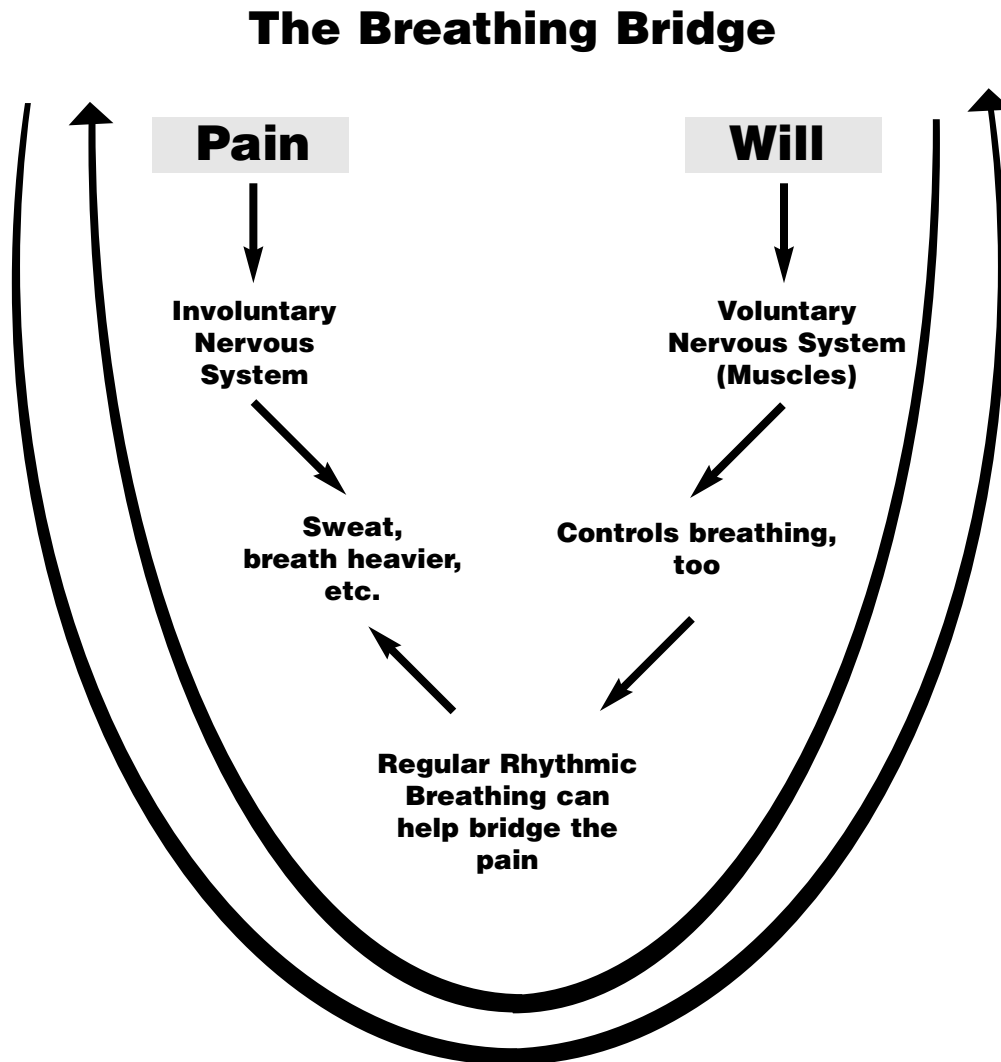
*When pain mounts,  
breathing surmounts.*

---



**Figure 3-5**

Breathing techniques are under voluntary control, so be a volunteer.



*Breathing right  
makes pain wrong.*

*Stretching sands  
shrink stress.*

The same message comes clear in **Figure 3-5**, where breathing is shown as the bridge connecting the voluntary and involuntary nervous systems. When we are in pain or under stress, we may sweat more and breathe heavier, producing interference in our voluntary actions and our regular breathing rhythms. However, through breathing exercises, we can gain control over the involuntary nervous system, including the sweating and heavy breathing. **There is a bridge leading away from stress, and it is up to us to cross it.** This is the beauty of breathing. It is our best friend when we are under stress. It calms the body and distracts the mind. When



it is coupled with techniques such as giving ourselves the right verbal message and remaining hopeful, we can get through difficult times.

Figure 3-6 indicates that we can distract ourselves from our distress and pain not only by the use of breathing techniques, but also by mental techniques, such as mental visualization. I introduce the technique by asking clients, “If you closed your eyes, what scene in nature would you like to imagine? If you were relaxed, what would you see?” Typically, clients answer by saying that they would imagine a beach. Other favourites are other water venues, such as waterfalls, rivers, and lakes, whereas gardens, parks, fields, and mountains are some other common examples. Once a favourite

.....  
*Why imagine pain  
 getting worse, when we  
 can imagine the beach?*  
 .....

.....  
*When the evening is  
 shared—stress stays alone.*  
 .....

**Figure 3-6**

When stressed, go to the beach, to see if it is as good as what you imagined.

## **Life’s a Beach**

### **Ingredients of Pleasant Imagined Beach Scene**

Sun .....	<b>Warm</b>
Sea .....	<b>Waves</b>
Shore .....	<b>Sounds</b>
Sands .....	<b>White</b>
Touch .....	<b>Trickling Sand</b>
Salt .....	<b>Smells</b>
Sky .....	<b>Bright</b>
Serene .....	<b>Stretched Out</b>
Breeze .....	<b>Cool</b>
Dunes .....	<b>Horizon</b>
Flowers .....	<b>Colours</b>
Sea gulls .....	<b>Songs</b>
Shells .....	<b>Beauty</b>
You .....	<b>Rested</b>

.....  
*Finding solutions makes  
stress lose its problem.*  
.....

.....  
*When two people deal with  
stress, it is half as much.*  
.....

.....  
*Work hard, then love hard.  
Sure makes it  
hard for stress.*  
.....

natural scene has been chosen, the client and I imagine the scene together. Either I describe it or they tell me what they see.

Typically, in the beach scenes that I describe, the sun shines brightly. It sends rays of light that feel warm, and the clients are asked to visualize themselves lying on the sand absorbing the relaxing energy. There may be a cool breeze caressing their faces with its light touch, balancing the warmth of the sun. The breeze rustles the leaves, creating a whispering sound that soothes. The clients are asked to feel deeply relaxed in the velvet, ivory-white sand, with its pleasant softness and warm sensations. Looking out toward the horizon, the clients are asked to sense the marked blueness of the sky. Perhaps it is dotted with wisps of clouds. The bright blue of the sky contrasts with the vibrant yellow of the sun. The clients are asked to focus on the colours of the ocean; perhaps it is aqua or a deep blue. It stretches out peacefully across the horizon like a blanket on the shore. Waves dance in from the ocean. The waves roll in one after the other, lapping at the shore, in a peaceful rhythm of relaxation. Their white caps break near the shore, gurgling. The constant beat of the waves as they strike the shore creates a melodic chorus that meshes with the ebb and flow of the body's internal rhythms, harmoniously restful and deeply tranquil.

The clients are asked take deep breaths and smell the refreshing saltiness of the ocean. They turn their heads to scan the vivid colours of the wildflowers on the dunes. Another breath is filled with rich, wafting odours of the flowers. Blossoms drip with beads of dew that sparkle in the sunlight. The clients are asked to slowly look skyward, focussing to hear the songs of birds serenading them as they lie on the sand resting. Gulls glide on wings spread out. The messages exchanged are ones of rest and peace. Each species is supremely happy in its natural medium. The beach brings a quiet tranquility, a warm inner glow. The clients are asked to imagine getting up from lying on the sand. They walk along the wet sands of the shore, lulled by the drumbeat of the waves, remembering happy beach scenes of childhood. The sun still warms them both inside and out. They pass by a cluster of seashells that appear striking in their form, their colours, and their magic. The entwined circular hollows of a conch swirl toward an opening in which they can hear the sounds of the ocean. They pick it up and listen, recalling

how, as children, they had loved to gather shells, in wonder at their mystery. Or, perhaps they recall how they had seen beautiful shells in pictures.

This is the kind of language that my clients and I exchange as we visualize and imagine peaceful scenes of nature. However, some clients are too distressed or in too much pain to start, but all eventually join in the meeting places of nature that we find together. Not surprisingly, clients readily continue to perform these exercises at home. Note that these visualizations are not exercises in the true sense of the word. Rather, such **visualizations of nature are lost parts of ourselves that we can reclaim**. They are natural ingredients of our peaceful memories of childhood and of the parts of our mind that are calm and destressed. They may be dormant, but they are still there, waiting for us to activate them and to give them their rightful place in our daily thoughts. The return of joy will not be far behind.

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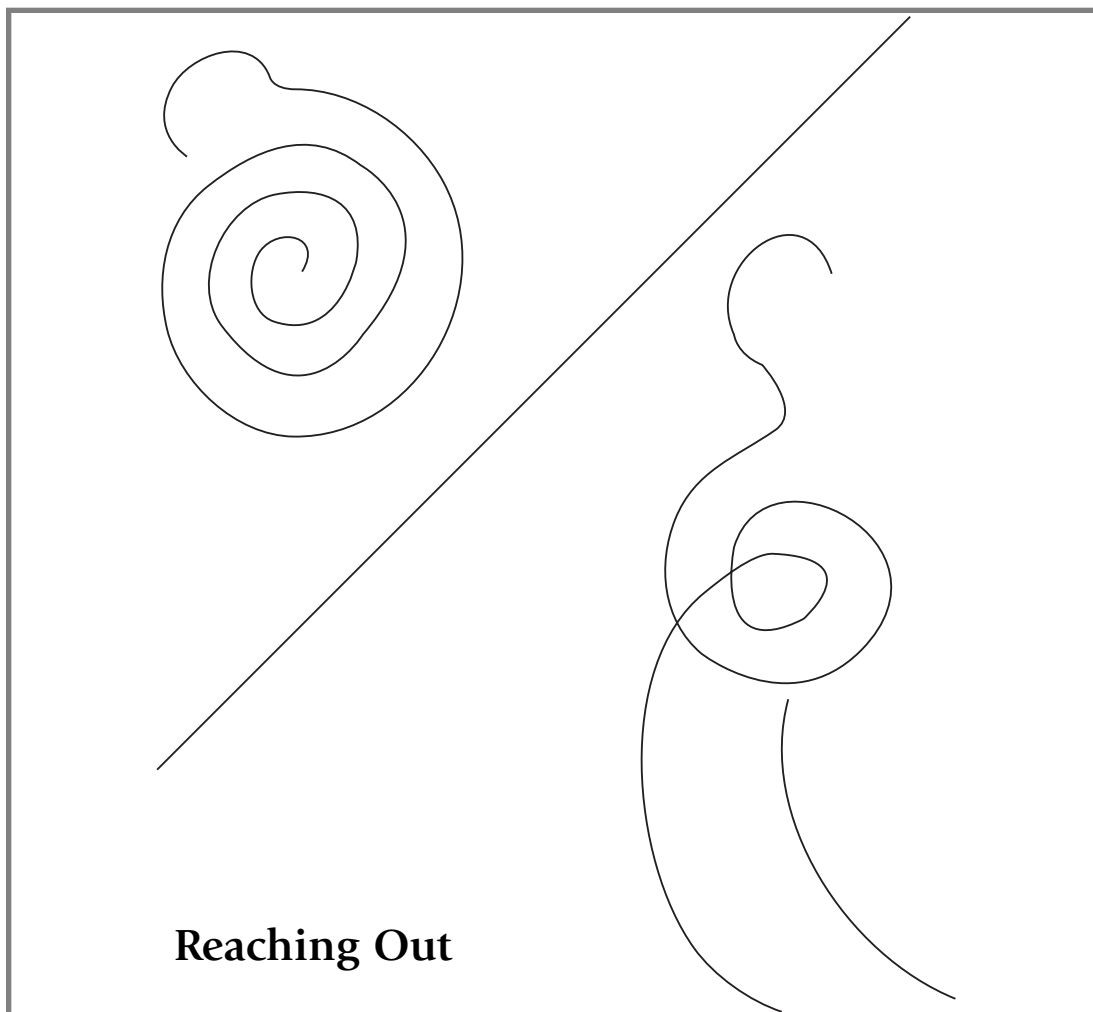
*When we create choices,  
stress gets too  
confused to think.*

---

---

*Stress and relaxing are  
opposites. So let stress go its  
separate way, by relaxing.*

---



**Figure 3-7**

Muscles get tense, but there are ways of reducing the tension. Muscle stretches are mental stretches, too.

## Melting Muscles Quickly

- Get in relaxed, seated position
- In about 10 breaths, we clear the body
- With each breath, one muscle group will be contracted, then stretched or wiggled
- Start with the toes and work up to head
- As you breathe in, contract muscle group
- Hold contraction for a second and at the same time hold breath. Breathe out, and stretch, wiggle, etc.
- Feel toe muscles relaxed and light yet heavy and rested
- With next breath, lift ankles upward, then hold breathe, and then wiggle
- Go on to each of your legs (calf-thigh squeeze), stomach (tummy tighten), and chest (awareness of lungs), holding breath then wiggling for each
- Then go on to fingers (massaging finger tips together after contraction), to arms (forearm-upper arm squeeze) and to shoulders (lift)
- Then go on to face (squeezing eyes, tightening mouth), finishing by rubbing eyes, massaging face
- For Grand Finale, stretch like getting up in morning
- That is, contract the whole body first, then stretch out
- Feel whole body relaxed, rested, stretched out, and both light and heavy

.....  
*Muscles tend to tense up—  
until we attend to  
tendering them down.*  
.....

.....  
*When we improve old ways,  
we shine a new.*  
.....

Figure 3-7 shows that, aside from performing breathing and visualization exercises, the third major way that we can destress and relax is by engaging in a muscle-related exercise. This technique may involve either stretching or mild muscle use, and, as with other types of relaxation exercises, there are many ways of performing them. The morning stretch, which we often perform as we get up, illustrates well the principle behind the muscular contraction-relaxation exercise that I teach. When we get up in the morning, we do not just stretch.

Rather, we contract first before stretching. This indicates that, when doing a formal relaxation exercise involving muscles, we should also first contract our muscles before relaxing them. In fact, the standard muscle relaxation techniques reflect this principle.

.....  
*Breathing in deeply leads  
stress away softly.*  
.....

To introduce this exercise, I adopt the typical contracted position of the so-called morning stretch. Invariably, clients state that I am stretching, and this leads to a discussion that I am doing the opposite—I have contracted my muscles before I actually engage in their stretching. With this introduction, the explanation of the exercise proceeds easily. In this demonstration, I begin with the lower portions of the body and move upward. The toes are easy to wiggle, for example. However, if we begin at the head and work down, first, we work the face, neck, and shoulders. Either way, because only about 10 contractions are involved, we get through the body quickly. The clients quickly learn the exercise. However, without working through all the body zones, or joints, it may be hard to liberate muscular tension in these key areas where such tension often collects. Note that the contraction-wiggle cycle can be broken down into more steps, depending on what works (e.g., left and right side separately, or any one contraction-relaxation step repeated).

.....  
*Imagining a pleasant scene  
is unpleasant to stress.*  
.....

The basic steps of muscular relaxation that I teach are structured around a relaxed breathing rhythm, where we take deep breaths to clear the body of its tension. With each breath, we contract one part of our body as we inhale. For example, we squeeze the toes for a second or two as we breathe in; then, for a fraction of a second, we simultaneously hold our breath and the muscular contraction. Next, as we breathe out, we wiggle the toes. No matter how many steps are involved, in performing the exercise, **we create a peaceful rhythm of muscular contraction and relaxation that follows our natural breathing cycle**, because, with each breath, we involve another body part, letting the exercise flow naturally.

.....  
*Muscles get less tense  
when stress is put in  
the past tense.*  
.....

Some clients need adjustments to typical muscle relaxation exercises, either because of excessive muscular tension in a particular muscle group, such as in the posterior portion of the neck, or because of physical injuries and pain. In these cases, the clients and I establish an appropriate series of muscular contractions and relaxations based on individual needs.

.....  
*A controlled response to  
stress allows control of stress.*  
.....

.....  
*By combining stress  
reduction techniques,  
stress splits.*  
.....

.....  
*The clearer our vision, the  
more invisible the stress.*  
.....

Usually, I demonstrate the exercise by moving up from the toes. We squeeze the toes on the inbreath, hold, and then wiggle on the outbreath. In the second step, as a new breath comes, we lift our feet at the ankles, then we hold in place at the same time both the foot movement and our breath, and finally we let both go, breathing out and wiggling the feet. Third, we move up to the legs, and here we begin by contracting the calves and thighs as we breathe in, for example, by contracting them around the front edge of the seat in which we are sitting. We hold and then let go, as with the other steps. With the fourth breath, we hold our tummy tight and wiggle our torso as we let go. Or, we may lean forward in this step. With the fifth breath, we focus on our chest muscles and, in breathing, we become very aware of the sensations involved. As with the prior step, as we let go, we wiggle, in this case, our torso. With the sixth breath, we squeeze the fingers of our hands, and after the holding phase, we wiggle them, letting out our breath. With the next breath, we work the wrists, lifting them or bending them and, then, wiggling them in parallel with the breathing cycle. Next, at the elbows, we squeeze our forearms against our upper arms, hold, and then wiggle slightly our arms. With the ninth breath, we lift our shoulders, hold, and then wiggle. With the tenth breath, the neck is involved, so that there is no contraction, per se. We rotate our head in a slight circular motion, by lowering our chin to the right, bringing it up on the right just over the shoulder, and so on. Then, we shift the rotation in the opposite direction, as a counterbalance. Finally, with the next breath, we squeeze our face muscles tightly; and for the letting go phase, we do what we typically do when we are under stress; that is, we put our hands up to our eyes and massage our face, until we feel relief. This portion of the exercise can be split across the lower, middle, and upper portions of the face (mouth, nose, forehead).

Now, with the end of the multi-step cycle, where we have contracted and relaxed our muscle groups sequentially from the toes to the head, we are ready for the grand finale. Just like when we get up in the morning, we contract our whole body—feet, legs, tummy, torso, arms, hands, shoulders, and face. We hold our breath, and then we let go, stretching everything that we had just contracted. I would hope that

therapists who demonstrate the technique get as much pleasure from it as I do; it sure helps destressing the body in the course of sitting during a series of therapy sessions. Similarly, office workers may find the technique useful to use every hour or every few hours, when they must sit for prolonged periods.

With the demonstration well-mastered, clients can move easily to more complex scenarios of muscle relaxation. This would involve lying down, getting in the right mental state, proceeding from the head downward, undertaking the contractions and relaxations of each flex-extend action for more than one breath, ridding tension in all muscle groups, repeating each action as needed, and performing the exercise for minutes on end to complete the full cycle.

This concludes the presentation of the basic techniques of destressing that I teach my clients after listening to their stories of stress. These techniques are the simplest forms of the various destressing techniques. Moreover, they are based on the typical relaxation strategies that we employ spontaneously in our daily experience, or are found in the common folklore in our culture of how best to deal with stress. We all know about the destressing advantages of establishing regular breathing, imagining pleasant scenes, and performing muscle stretching but, normally, we do not systematically use these techniques when we are placed under stress. Unless we are educated about the advantages of using them systematically in dealing with stress and are reminded that we should use them when under stress, we will not know of their full benefits and we will not employ them each time that they are needed.

Figure 3-8 displays more advanced techniques of action, distraction, and positive attraction. For distraction, I teach more specialized techniques in the three areas of breathing, mental relaxation, and muscle work. For breathing, I explain how to engage in continuous deep breathing for minutes on end, like in meditation. In doing so, we breathe from the stomach. For example, deep breathing is encouraged when we breathe with the diaphragm, or by pushing out. However, even the normal way of breathing can be used, as long as the breathing is deep and slow. The point is that, through experimentation, each person can find a comfortable deep breathing rhythm.

---

*Stress beats a hasty retreat—  
when we advance with  
determination.*

---

---

*When we think upright—  
stress downgrades.*

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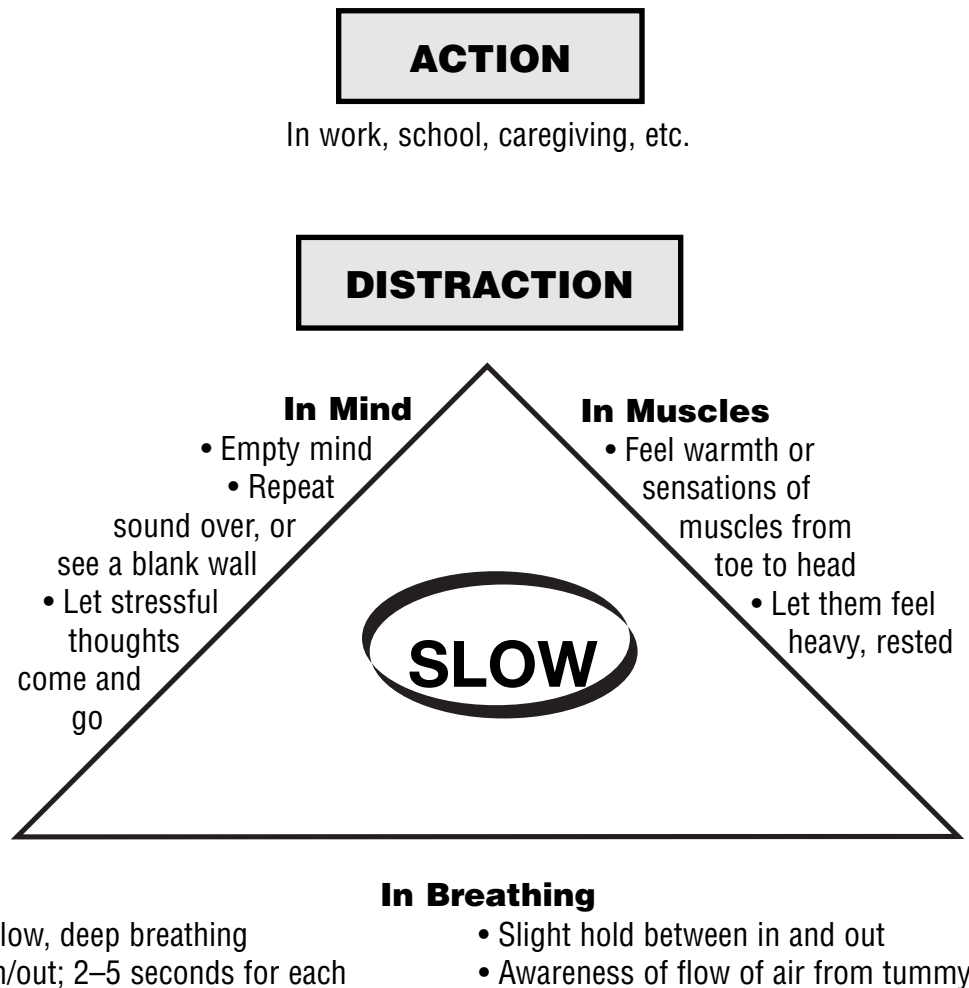
*Even complex destressing  
strategies are simply easy.*

---

**Figure 3-8**

There are so many action, distraction, muscle relaxing, and positive thinking techniques to control stress, that it is a wonder how there is any room left for stress.

## **Action, Distraction, and Positive Attraction: Advanced Techniques**



*Music tunes the soul.*

*Rock climbing descends stress.*

*Handicrafts are mental rafts.*



It may help to concentrate on the breathing process right from the beginning when the air begins to move down the nasal passages. The inhaled air feels cold, at first, as it begins to enter the nostrils. We sense an expansion of the nostrils as they open better to let the air flow in. Then, we notice the lungs, as they fill gradually. It seems to us that our breath is getting deeper, as the lungs begin to expand. We become very aware of the expansion of the chest, as the lungs fill. After the full inhalation period, we are completely focused on the chest area, its stretched muscles, and the sensations emanating from the lungs. Then, we begin the second phase of breathing out slowly but surely. We feel the exhaled air coming out of the breathing passage. This time it feels warm. We stop breathing out, and rest for a fraction of a second. Then, we take another slow, deep breath. We breathe this way repetitively. Over and over, we concentrate on the cool air moving down and the warm air flowing out, while sensing simultaneously the lungs expanding and diminishing in size. The added procedure of concentrating on the changing air and lungs serves as a good distraction technique.

We now turn to the other advanced relaxation techniques that I teach. In the advanced muscle relaxation technique, rather than an active approach where we first contract the muscles and then relax or stretch them, here, we simply experience the muscles without movement. For example, we may focus on a muscle's sensations, concentrate on its flow of energy, feel its warmth, or feel that it has a warm liquid moving over it. We repeat this procedure with the other muscle groups, moving up the body from toe to head, or moving downward, as with the contraction-relaxation technique. Muscle tension diminishes as we proceed, and psychological relaxation increases.

In the advanced visualization technique, rather than filling the mind with positive scenes of the beach, or the like, we try to empty the mind. The best way to accomplish this is to engage in a repetitive experience. The experience could be visual, as in visualizing a blank wall, but also it could be auditory, as in repeating a sound over and over. Typically, I ask my clients to stare at an empty portion of the wall or even into the lights and, then, to close their eyes immediately. This creates a negative, anti-, or absent image, if you will, distracting them from their stress. Another way of emptying the mind of stress is to visualize

---

*Breathing exercises  
are a bridge that  
stress does not cross.*

---

---

*Imagining the warm  
sun melts stress.*

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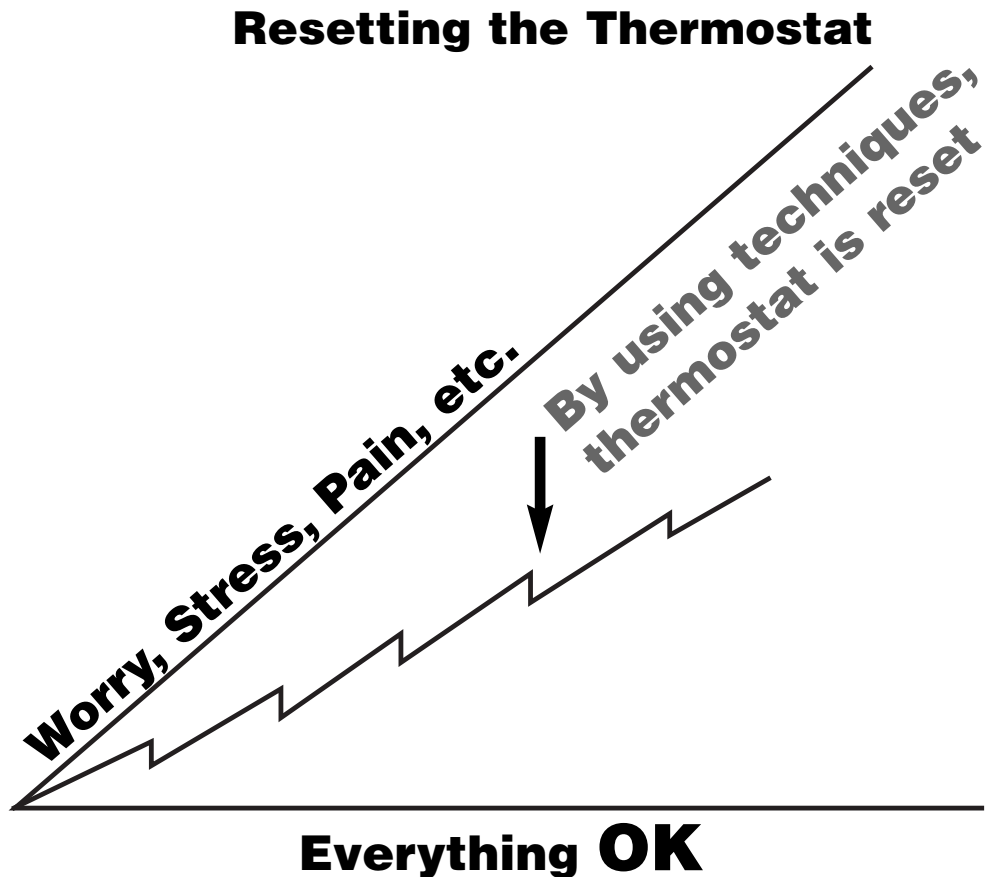
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*Shoring up the  
mind beaches stress.*

---

**Figure 3-9**

Stress can be reduced by using control techniques guided by our knowledge and will. Cooling off stress raises our degrees of freedom.



.....  
*Reading opens us to others  
minds and to our own.*  
.....

.....  
*By learning to calm down,  
stress ups and leaves.*  
.....

the source of stress as an object that has neutral properties. For example, we can visualize pain as a red ball that gradually turns smaller and black. In the auditory modality, to empty the mind of stress, we can repeat over and over a nonsense sound, such as “ohm.” The sound is already devoid of meaning and, by its repetition, the mind clears even more.

Inevitably, stress or worry comes back as we engage in mental exercises that try to clear the mind. However, as we get better and better at repeating the visual image or sound that we have chosen, there is less room for stress. By persisting in the use of mental relaxation exercises, each of us can distract ourselves from our stress and, at the same time, increase our relaxation, thereby rejoining joy. In this regard, the positive effects of performing actions such as listening to music or talking to friends should not be forgotten. **Stress is controlled when we put it on hold.**

Figure 3-9 shows the advantages of using all the techniques that I have explained so far. The breathing, muscle, and visualization distraction techniques can be used interchangeably with the positive thought technique to cut off or cut short worry (anxiety, stress, tension, etc.). Each time that any of these techniques is used, the stress thermostat is reset at a more equilibrated level. Collectively, relaxation techniques allow us to take mental mini-vacations from stress. The more that we use them in our daily life, the better we can cope with stress. Destressing is something that we can begin to do right from the start of the day. These techniques might take time to begin working but, with persistence, we can get better at using them. **It is not surprising that mixed in the first six letters of the word “destressing” is the word “rested” and that the last four letters spell the word “sing.”**

---

*By lowering the bar for  
destressing, we raise the  
barrier for stress.*

---

---

*If we look at a picture  
of the beach, the waves  
will wash away stress.*

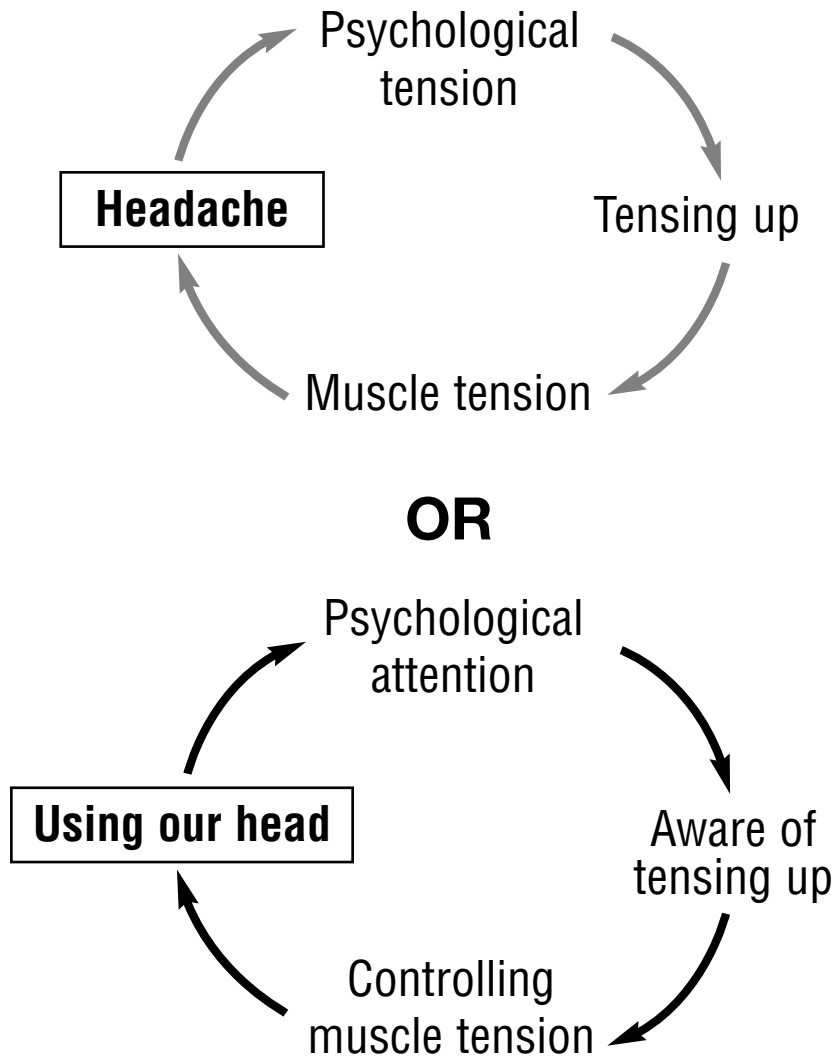
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**Figure 3-10**

Give headaches a pain, by reducing them through psychological exercises.

## Prevention of Tension Needs Attention



.....  
*Managing headaches  
means managing stress.*  
.....

Figure 3-10 illustrates that, by being more aware of how we tense up due to psychological tension or stress, we can begin to control muscular tension, headaches, and pain. When stress begins to take over, we experience actual physical signs. A tightening mind leads to a tightening body. At the same time, when we become aware of the process as it builds, we can begin to control it. We can interrupt our negative thinking

**Figure 3-11**

Stresses combine only when we don't split it.

## The New Math

- A** • Use relaxation strategies, positive thinking, etc.
- It will give a critical edge
- Even if it reduces worry/stress/pain by only 1%, it might make a 100% difference!

## **B** small victories add up to **BIG WINS**

$$V + V = W$$

$$\begin{array}{c} v \\ i \\ c \\ t \\ o \\ r \\ y \end{array} + \begin{array}{c} v \\ i \\ c \\ t \\ o \\ r \\ y \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} W \\ I \\ N \\ N \end{array}$$

in a variety of ways; we can calm our bodies using simple techniques; and we can act for ourselves instead of letting stress act on us. I never met a stress that liked someone who knew how to handle it.

Figure 3-11 presents in a simple way some basic principles in systems theory. One of the principles is called the "butterfly effect." Systems form wholes that are more than the sum of the parts. In the butterfly effect, a small change in a part of the system can lead to a large change in the whole pattern. Figure 3-11 indicates that even a bit of relaxation exercise, positive thinking, and so on, may be sufficient

.....  
*Small steps can  
trip up stress.*  
.....

.....  
*Taking pictures  
captures images and  
frees us from stress.*  
.....

**Figure 3-12**

If we study a destressing program, stress will drop out.

## Destressing: Stress Relief Methods

- Get in relaxed setting with relaxed posture. Try to relax, e.g., by listening to music, doing breathing exercises, visualizing pleasant scenes
- See what thoughts emerge as stress comes. See how you get back to relaxed state
- As stressful thoughts come back, etc., separate pleasant and unpleasant thoughts
- Then work on solutions to unpleasant thoughts. This may mean simply to decide to get rest from them for a moment
- Also, work on amplifying pleasant thoughts. Follow through in your mind, seeing them realizing
- When unpleasant thoughts or stress return, go back to pleasant ones
- In doing all this, we help to create islands of stress-free positive thoughts in emotional currents in mind. These islands grow, as the ability to confront problems and to destress grows

to induce a major change in how we feel. Of course, we should not count on the butterfly effect, but we should increase the chances of positive change by doing more positives. **Persistence in effort adds up.** This can happen to the point that systems can make great changes. Behavioral systems are responsive to inputs, and they can change greatly in response to great effort.

**Figure 3-12** asks us, if possible, to work directly on the flow of negative thoughts that invade our positive thoughts, so that we can reduce the negative ones and increase the positive ones. By developing the capacity to turn off negative thoughts and to replace them with a relaxed state and more pleasant thoughts, the negative thoughts develop less readily into vicious circles. We need to learn to make positive thoughts last longer, to feel them more deeply by experiencing them simultaneously during relaxed moments, and

.....  
*When stress takes the lead,  
let it run to the finish.*  
.....

.....  
*A good poem is  
imagination's home.*  
.....

**Figure 3-13**

Stress is tone deaf, hates music, and has no rhythm. Play on.

## Singing Without Pressure



*I know as I listen to the birds in the trees  
My blood pressure will go down to my knees  
I know as I listen to the wind and the waves  
My blood pressure will begin to behave  
I'm listening to my body as I listen to the songs  
And my body listens to me, it sings along  
It finds the peace to slow the flow  
Relaxed and at rest, this is the way that I go  
As I breathe in the oxygen flows  
And as I breathe out the stress goes*



to follow through on them, for example, by visualizing a pleasant thought developing into a realistic, positive outcome. The more this ability grows, the easier it is to control negative thoughts, negative images, and associated non-relaxed states. In addition, the more this ability grows, thoughts are freer of stress and any associated emotions are more relaxed. Thus, the more this ability grows, when new stresses are encountered, it becomes easier to deal with them with calmer and clearer thinking, and with more capacity to grow from them. **By practicing positives in our mind, we facilitate positives becoming our practice in life.**

.....  
*Stress has no  
rhythm—Dance.*  
.....

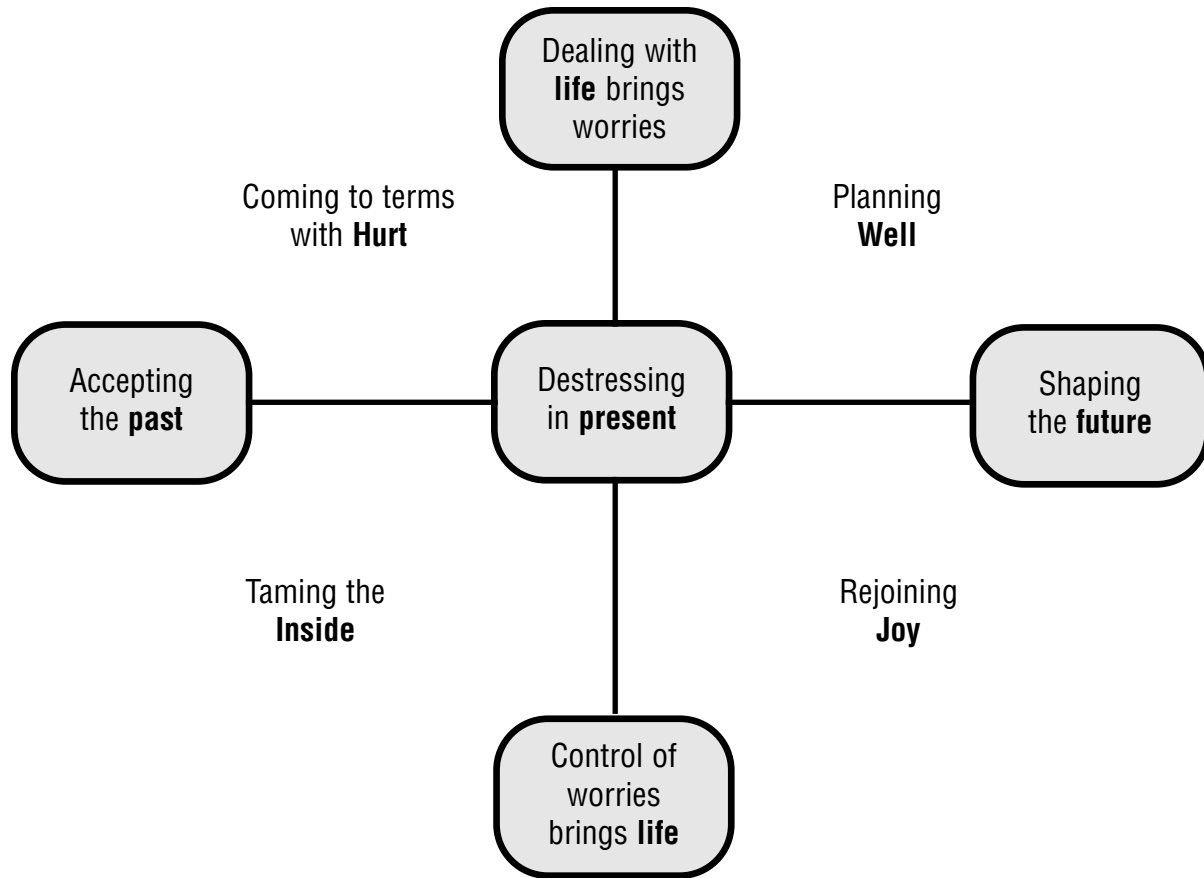
.....  
*Stress hates music.  
Turn on the radio.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress hates art.  
Paint a pretty  
picture about it.*  
.....

**Figure 3-14**

The worst thing we can do under stress is to catastrophize. We all do it. We all can undo it by facing the past, present, and future. Catastrophe becomes the past when we refuse to give it a present or future.

## Coping, Not Catastrophizing



.....  
*Creativity crowds out stress.*  
.....

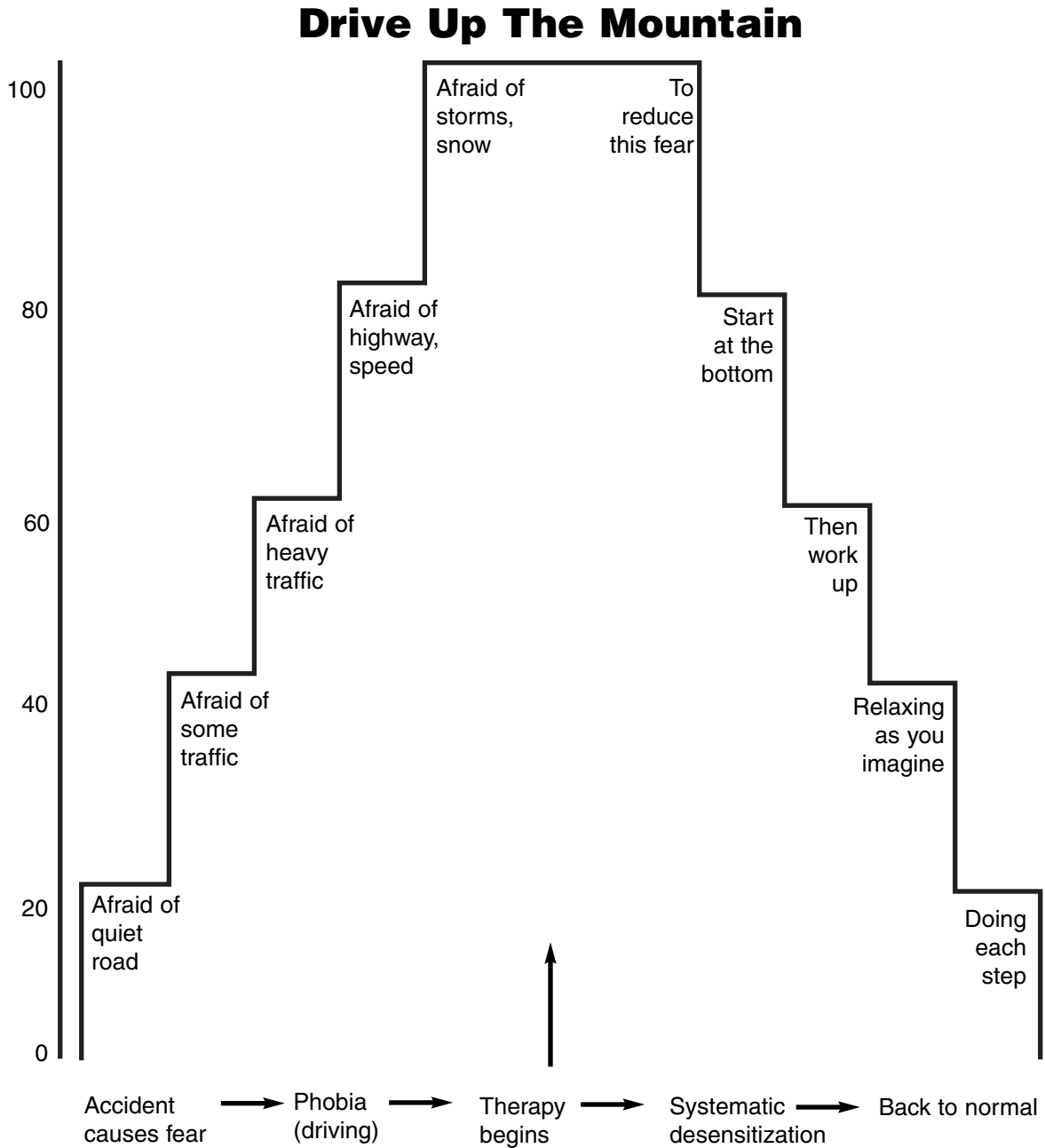
.....  
*When catastrophizing seems close, do not give it comfort.*  
.....

Figure 3-13 is a poem written to a client about how the techniques in this chapter could help him deal with his high blood pressure. When stress continues unabated, it leads to continuous production of bodily states of arousal that can lead to exhaustion and illness. Appropriate psychological techniques may lead to containment of the stress, psychological balance, and even positive integration of the stress experience. High blood pressure can dissipate when we pressure it with high quality psychological techniques. In general, **the body is less stressed when the mind is better at destressing.**



**Figure 3-15**

Systematic desensitization is an effective technique for dealing with fear of any kind. We need to know a relaxation technique. We need to create an individualized fear hierarchy from least fearful to most fearful (e.g., easy to do for fear of driving). Start relaxing at the bottom of the hierarchy of imagined fearful stimuli created to neutralize it (e.g., quiet, neighbourhood drive, the first of 10 steps, all the way to a feared highway drive). Then work up the hierarchy one step at a time at a self-paced speed.



### One Step at a Time

.....  
*Rage and courage  
are opposites.*  
.....

**Figure 3-14** emphasizes that trying to cope while thinking the worst does not make a good mix. The first step in coping is controlling our perception of catastrophe, or of thinking the worst. When we feel stressed, whether due to past hurts and feelings, present circumstances and worries, or fears of future uncertainties and problems, it is better to be positive. When we let past issues dominate, we perceive them as unresolvable and they get in the way. When we get overstressed about what is going on in the present and do not destress, things feel overwhelming and we cannot stay on our way (on track). When we feel that there is no future, we give up planning and lose our way. By eliminating thinking the worst, we improve the best types of thinking. This opens avenues, such as seeing the past differently, using destressing techniques in the present, trying to solve the problem, and planning for the future. **When we stop always expecting the worst, we have better chances of getting the best.**

.....  
*The worst fear is not  
knowing the simple  
techniques of  
coping with fear.*  
.....

**Figure 3-15** illustrates how various destressing techniques can be put together to solve a particular problem related to fear. When someone develops a clinical level fear, or a phobia, the more the particular situation in which they find themselves resembles the initial fear-provoking situation, the more they experience fearful reactions to it. For example, after a motor vehicle accident, the most difficult driving situations on the road are feared worst — the driver's heart pumps rapidly in a snow storm; he sweats on the highway, especially if there is a close call; heavy traffic leads to tensing the hands on the steering wheel; cars coming head on from the opposite lane or cars waiting to turn in front of the vehicle; all these induce panic, and so on.

.....  
*When fear is low on the  
totem pole—it cannot  
rise to the occasion.*  
.....

To deal with clinical-level fears such as these, psychologists and other mental health professionals often use a behavioral technique called "systematic desensitization." In using it, we begin by determining what are the exact fears and their inducing situations and, then, we arrange them from the least to the most fearful. That is, these situations are arranged in a hierarchy of fear intensity.

Then, we teach clients to relax appropriately, for example, through deep breathing exercises. Then, we have the clients apply the relaxing techniques to the fear hierarchy created about the fears. In the first step, the clients imagine the least intense fear while neutralizing it by engaging in a relaxing exercise, such as deep breathing. Gradually, as the clients

**Figure 3-16**

After an injury, physical exercises and physiotherapy are essential. They may hurt, but they do not harm. For example, the physical exercise may make us stiff, but will lead to less pain in the end. When we stop these exercises, whether physical or psychological, that is when we harm ourselves.

## Hurt vs. Harm

Hurt	Harm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Doing exercises Hurts temporarily</li><li>• Muscles build, Resistance strengthens</li><li>• Pain recovers, It stops or stabilizes</li><li>• Giving up stopping, Going forward begins</li><li>• May feel sore, But recovery begins</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stopping exercises Harms</li><li>• Doing exercises Does not harm</li><li>• Stopping exercises Lets pain worsen</li><li>• Doing exercises Stops the vicious circle</li><li>• Stopping exercises Stops you</li></ul>

work up the fear hierarchy, they neutralize each successive level. This technique is, therefore, both systematic and desensitizing, as its name implies, and it is described in detail elsewhere in the book series. However, note that, as with any psychotherapeutic technique, systematic desensitization works only when we want it to. Psychology may teach us techniques, but only we can decide whether or not we want to learn and apply them. **Systematic desensitization of fears works only when we want to work on the fears.**

**Figure 3-16** can't harm us. It describes the difference between hurt vs. harm. When we are physically injured, part of our treatment includes physical or physiotherapy exercises. The physical exercises recommended to us after injury are meant to strengthen the injured muscles, stretch us where needed, build around the injured areas, increase our aerobic capacity, and so on. **The physical exercises after physical injury may make us sore in the short term, but they do not harm us in the long term. To the contrary, they**

.....  
*Interior decorating—give your mind the peace that the great painters bring.*  
.....

.....  
*To strengthen resistance to pain, strengthen your mind.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is like a Frisbee—it  
will twist and turn when  
we send it on its way.*  
.....

.....  
*The better we explore, the  
more questions we have.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress is an equal  
opportunity employer—  
fire it!*  
.....

**aim to improve how we feel physically.** We do not complain when we need preventative vaccines; we take them knowing that they are meant to fight off deadly or debilitating diseases. We should look at the need to do physical exercises after physical injury the same way. When we are injured, the soft tissues involved need physical exercises to recover. Moreover, when injured, we get physically deconditioned, or out of shape, and need exercises to stop this effect. Physically injured individuals should learn all physical exercises shown to them. They should perform, too, the exercises in a persistent manner, whether in therapy sessions or while stretching at home, and continue at home when the therapy is completed. Doing physical exercises at home after a rehabilitation program is completed may continue to lead to a temporary increase in pain experience, but this pain is a good sign of effort and continued improvement. To repeat, being sore after rehabilitative physical exercises does not necessarily mean getting worse, so we need to repeat them daily.

To summarize, in Chapter 3 we have learned some basic destressing and relaxation techniques. They concern slowing down the rapid breathing rhythms, muscle agitations, and mental worries of stress, through the techniques of action, distraction, and positive attraction. These techniques may be learned, but they do not operate automatically. We have to have the will to use them.

The basic relaxation strategies reviewed in this chapter can be used for both the daily hassles of life and the huge impacts that stress can sometimes bring. **The simplest recipes often taste best and, similarly, the simplest remedies often cure best.**



Chantal had felt lost and alone for years. She functioned adequately at work, for she was very organized and punctual. Her work required someone with these characteristics. However, she got very little satisfaction at work and at the end of the day she was too fatigued to do much about the situation. It seemed that all she wanted to do was to crash when she got home to her neat little condominium and just watch television or get on the computer. Sometimes she would go out with friends, but they would see a movie and not talk much. She had little motivation when friends suggested that they go away for the weekend.

Finally, one friend suggests to Chantal that she might be depressed and she gives Chantal a copy of some of her self-help books. With a mixture of doubt and optimism, Chantal picks up a book much like the present one. She begins to scan the pages.

*Walking round the block gives  
direction to the mind.*

*Laughter is the best mental sun.*

*Give the best of yourself—  
share what you feel,  
what you think,  
and what you are.*

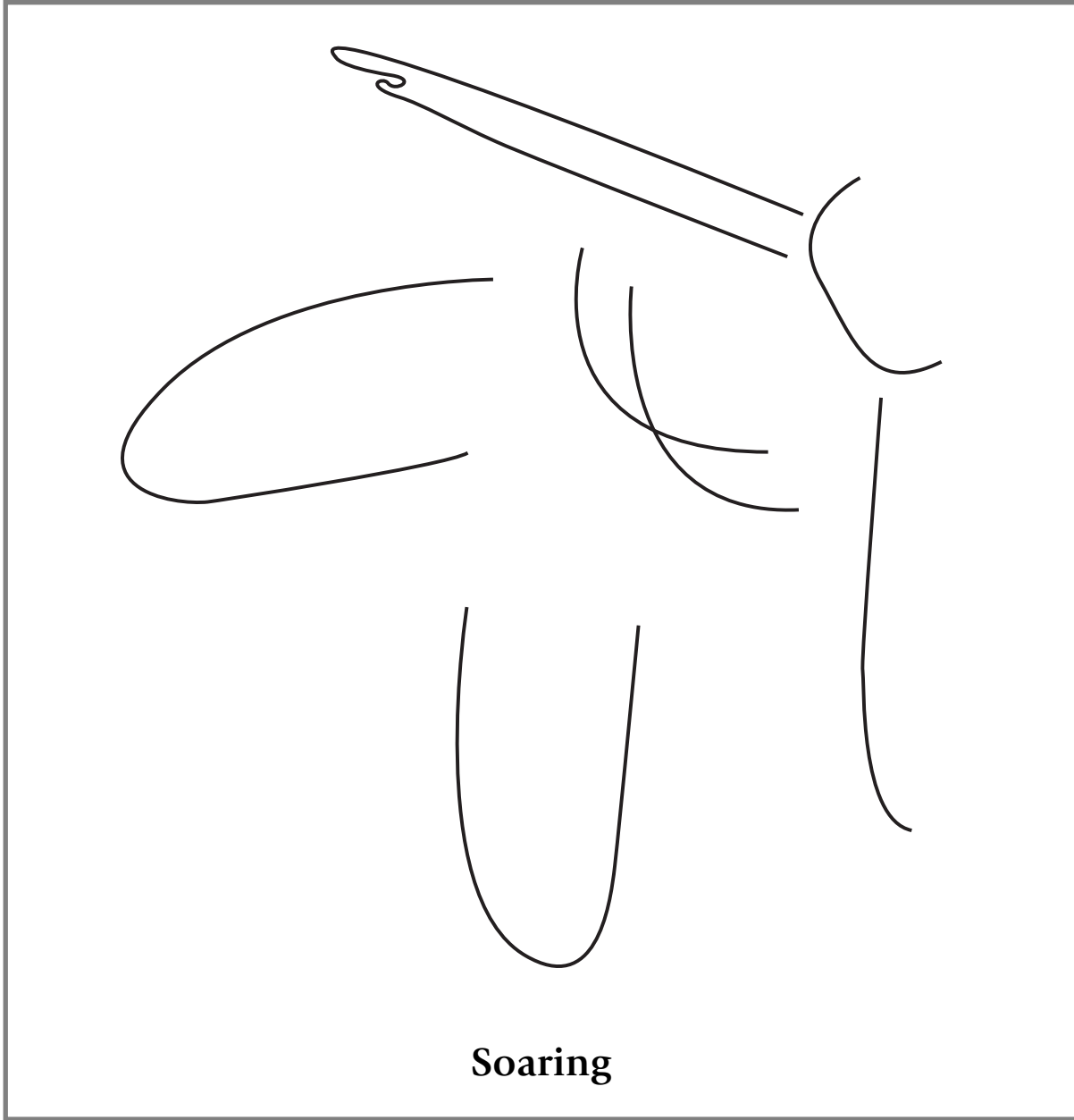
*Humour avoids stupour.*

*Writing it down lifts us up.*



**Undergo**

**When we decide to undergo  
change, we reach over the top.**

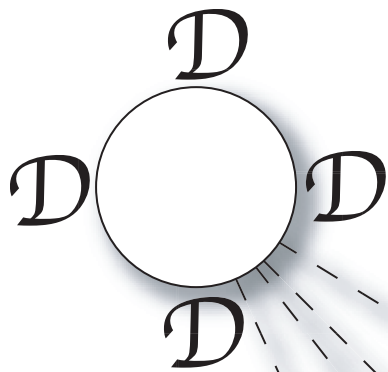


**Soaring**

<i>The exuberance of dance leaves stress no chance.</i>	<i>Ballet is painting space with the body.</i>	<i>Find a passion—find yourself.</i>
<i>Classical music gives classical relaxation.</i>	<i>Going to the theater sets the stage for playing a more relaxed role.</i>	<i>Stress is like a hula hoop—it runs rings around us, but it lacks substance</i>

# Chapter 4

## *How Stress Works*



*"D" is for being  
determined to destress.*



.....  
*Stress is a poor loser—when  
we enrich our resilience.*  
.....

.....  
*When it comes to stress,  
I'd rather it goes.*  
.....

In Chapter 4, I examine some basic effects of stress and how it works. At the same time, I examine how the experience of stress can strengthen the individual and lead to appropriate knowledge about it and how to handle it. When we encounter stress, instead of it dominating us, new habits can surface and can become part of us, so that we emerge as better individuals through having lived and coped with it.

In **Figure 4-1**, the nature of stress itself is examined. Stress induces body changes, preparing us for either “fight” or “flight,” depending on the nature of the circumstances confronting us. Either the stress is faced head on and we “fight,” or, if it is too overwhelming or dangerous (as happened with our ancestors millions of years ago when this biological system evolved), the stress induces a flight (or withdrawal) response. When the stress continues on a short-term basis, that is, when the fight or flight reaction successfully removes the stress one way or another, then recovery takes place. However, if the stress continues long term, it produces exhaustion. As a consequence, the possibility that we experience further stress, weakness, and illness is increased. So when stress persists chronically, it relentlessly works its negative, deleterious effects. Thus, we need to learn how to moderate stress, how to monitor it, how to resolve the situations that produce it, and how to adapt to it. We can even ask ourselves how stress can become a motivational force more than a destructive one. **Stress mastered well produces wellness.**

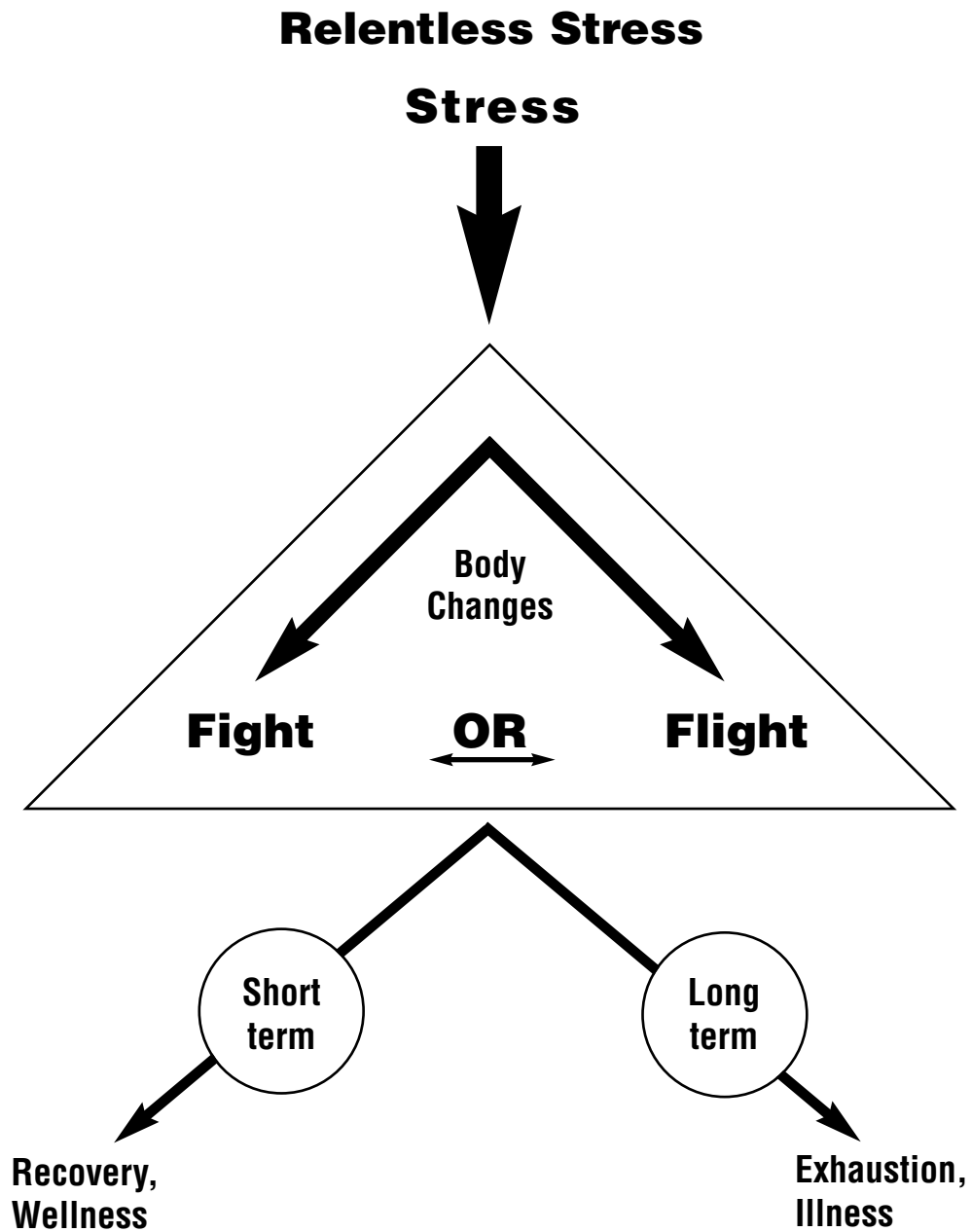
The model of stress just described views stress in terms of the body’s reaction to a stressor, and leaves little room for individual variation. The model has important ramifications for understanding the connection between stress and disease. However, psychologists have developed other models of stress. In one important model, psychologists examine the stressors, or stimuli, that produce the stress response. They have produced stress scales, where different types of stressors are rated for their level of stress. For example, the death of a loved one is rated extremely high on the scale, whereas a minor traffic accident would be rated much lower.

However, in this approach, some large-scale events are given about equal weight whether they are positive or negative. Thus, for example, wedding preparations are considered quite stressful. Moreover, the collection of daily hassles is given less weight on the scale compared to large-scale



**Figure 4-1**

When stress is chronic, the risk is exhaustion and illness. By monitoring our stress, we help ourselves.



<i>Write stress a syllabus—starting with a course on its control.</i>	<i>Studying brings stress—Not learning brings more stress.</i>	<i>Stress is half-hearted—when we are wholly in control.</i>
<i>Teach stress your alphabet—I X U.</i>	<i>Stress fears laughter. Make it afraid.</i>	<i>When stress frowns—smirk.</i>

.....  
*There is more stress in  
worrying about stress than  
in what stress brings.*  
.....

.....  
*Conquer the great  
divide—join minds.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress has many needlessly  
bad effects—and many ways  
that we can make it needy.*  
.....

events. One could imagine that the daily wear and tear for some people is unrelenting and, consequently, quite stressful. As well, there is little room for individual variation in approaches to stress that use scales. The stress scales are applied equally to all individuals. Although this approach of using scales to measure stress gives part of the answer in understanding stress, not everyone reacts to the same situation in the same way.

Instead of conceptualizing stress as a universal bodily response, as in fight or flight, or as a one-fits-all scale of stressors, psychologists have developed a third model of stress, one that considers individual differences. They argue that different people perceive stressful situations in individual ways and that we have different degrees of coping ability to handle stress. Moreover, we differ in our evaluations of how well we can handle stress. Different individuals may have similar coping skills, but also they may have different degrees of confidence about their abilities to use them effectively in dealing with stress. Moreover, people can change their perception of stress. For example, an individual may come to realize that a particular stressor is not as bad as it seemed at first, thereby reducing its impact, facilitating better handling of it, and speeding its resolution. Thus, there are individual differences in the stress experience for different people, even if the stressful situation in which they find themselves appears on the surface to be equal for them. In dealing with stress, perception matters. **We can learn to be better masters of stress by learning to perceive better what matters in stress.**

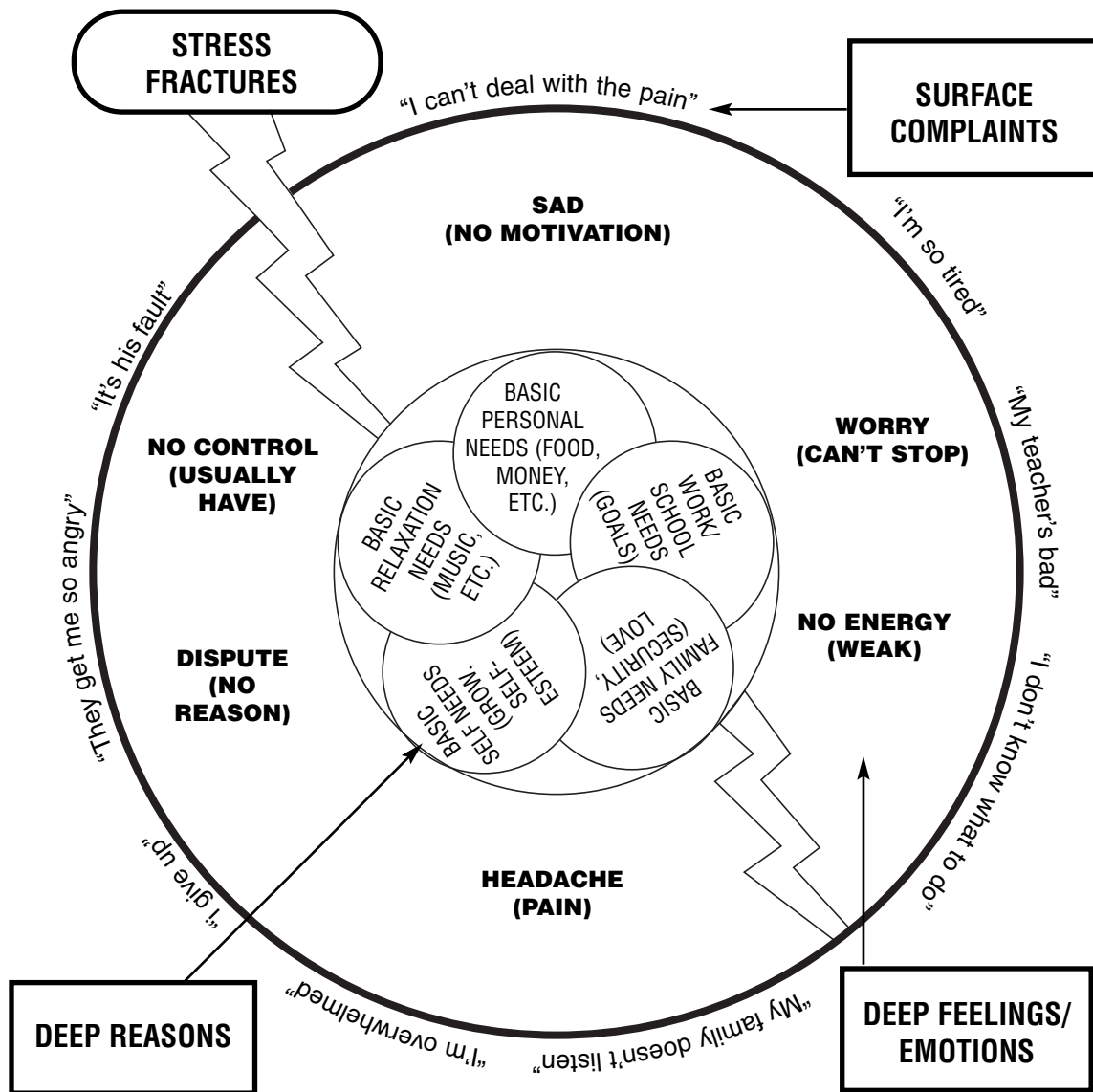
Figure 4-2 shows that there are different levels in understanding the effects of stress. The diagram indicates that we all express surface complaints but, often, underlying them are deeper feelings or emotions, such as worry, sadness, and anger. Moreover, beyond these deeper feelings or emotions are even deeper reasons for the complaints. Usually, these deeper reasons relate to unsatisfied basic needs, such as basic relaxation needs, basic personal needs, basic work or school needs, and basic family needs. Many or all of these basic needs can be compromised or fractured by stress.

However, we are not simply a mirror of the stresses that we experience and of the fractures in us that they create. We are made up of many psychological parts, and stress frac-

**Figure 4-2**

Stress brings complaints, but doesn't alter our fundamental core. By reconnecting to our core, we break the vicious circles of stress.

## Stress Fractures



*The first day that stress arrives should be the first day that its control begins.*

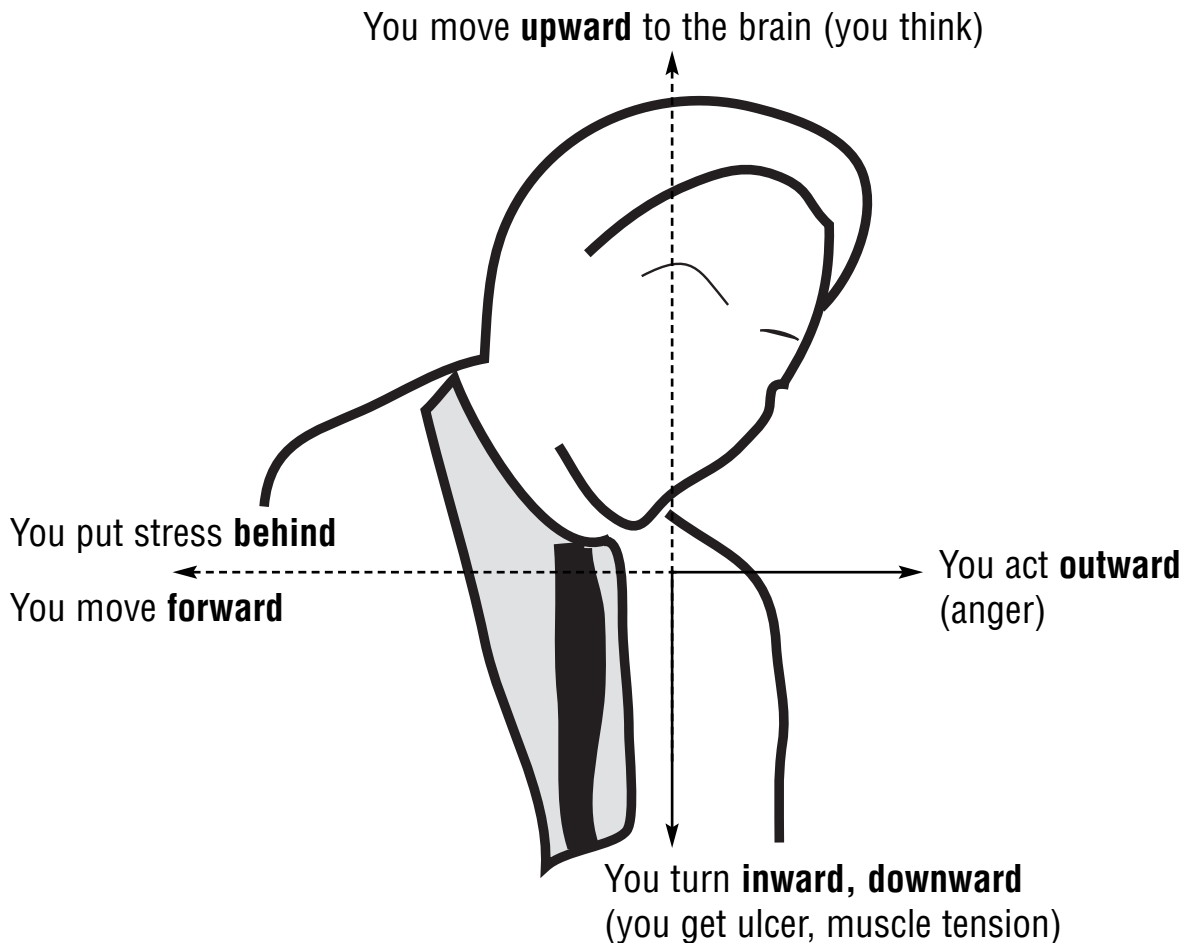
*Everything has a beginning and an end—especially stress—when we take steps to control it.*

*Stress is great theater—it wants to upstage us all the time.*

**Figure 4-3**

Stress pushes us backwards, unless we use our forehead.

## Stress Directions



*Stress warms up to heated discussions.*

*Stress beats a retreat—when we stay upbeat.*

tures do not reach them all. Stress does not reach into all the corners of our core and its coping mechanisms. Strong parts of us remain intact; we have ways of dealing with stress; and we have people around us who can help. However, when stress arrives, we may lose sight of our resources. **The secret in dealing with stress is to know that we have secret strengths to help us deal with it.** Moreover, in dealing with stress, it is ourselves that constitute our most important resource.

In **Figure 4-3**, we see the different directions that stress can take. These are not actual spatial directions, but possible pathways on the psychological map that we experience when

we are stressed. Two of the four directions are less appropriate than the others in dealing with stress. That is, one less optimal way of dealing with stress is to turn in the outward direction, which is a metaphor for expressing anger when we are under stress. Another less optimal way of dealing with stress is to turn inward, or downward into the body, but this situation sets up conditions for increased stomach upset, muscle tension, and the like.

However, there are different, more adaptive pathways that we can follow in our encounters with stress. Stress could move in an upward direction, that is, in a metaphorical sense, stress can lead to positive activity in our brain. When stressed, we can think about it, preparing optimal plans to solve the underlying problem. Also, to assure that we are thinking straight, we can engage in silent self-talk, trying to calm down. In this way, we could act to put stress behind us, helping us to move forward, which is the ultimate direction that we want to take when confronted by stress. **Stress can come from any direction, but if we stay directed, the only direction that it will go is backward.**

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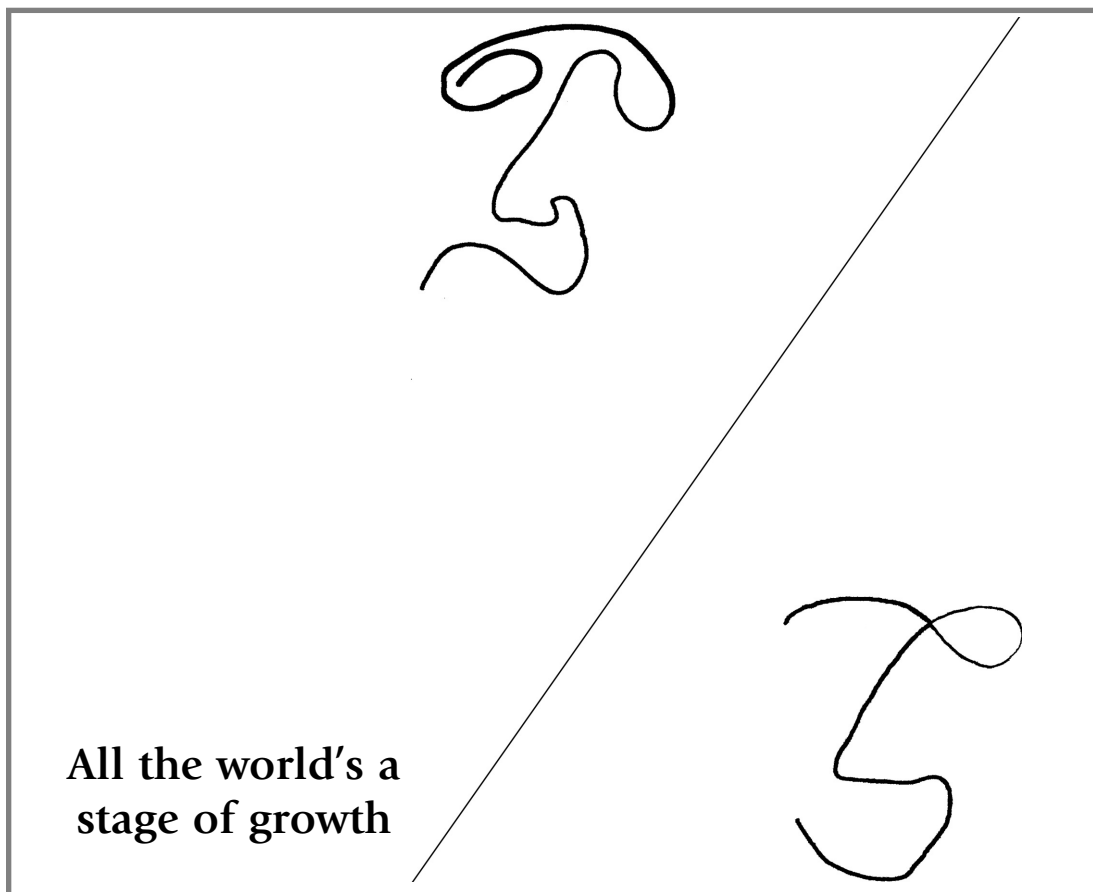
*When we decide to  
change bad habits,  
the good times begin.*

---

---

*The only downside of your  
new upside is that it  
becomes your inside.*

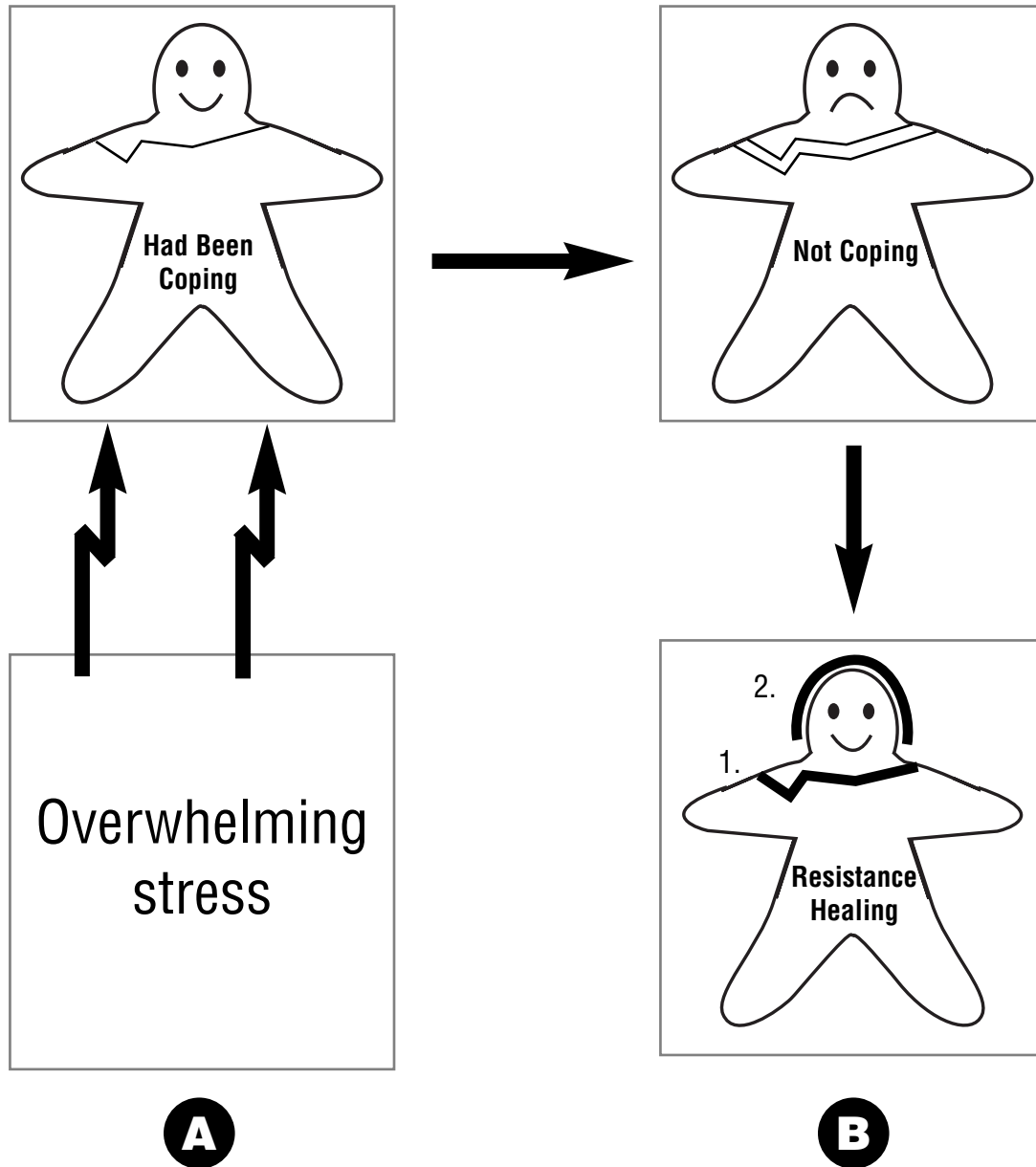
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**Figure 4-4**

Stress may give us temporary setbacks, but it may also give us permanent strengthening.

## Stress Strengthens



*Stress gets a lesson when we go to school.*

Figure 4-4 emphasizes that stress may strengthen us. It induces fractures but, at the same time, healing takes place. Stress comes in different intensities, and is perceived differ-

ently. Often, it is considered minor. We all have vulnerabilities or minor stress fractures from the minor stresses that we encounter on a daily basis. Normally, these are positive stresses and fractures. For example, muscles grow stronger after having minor tears created during physical exercise. It is the same with most daily stressors; minor stress fractures enrich, motivate, and invigorate. We try to cope with these normal stresses and, usually, we can manage.

However, with overwhelming stress, our coping skills fragment. But with time, we might come to better deal with overwhelming stress. We might develop new coping skills or strengthen prior ones. Therefore, a major stress might have constructive or positive aspects. **By accepting as a real possibility the potential growth factor of stress, it makes that potential much easier to materialize when we are exposed to stress.**

---

*Stress does not have a brain—unless we collaborate with it.*

---

---

*Stress fills empty spaces. Start thinking.*

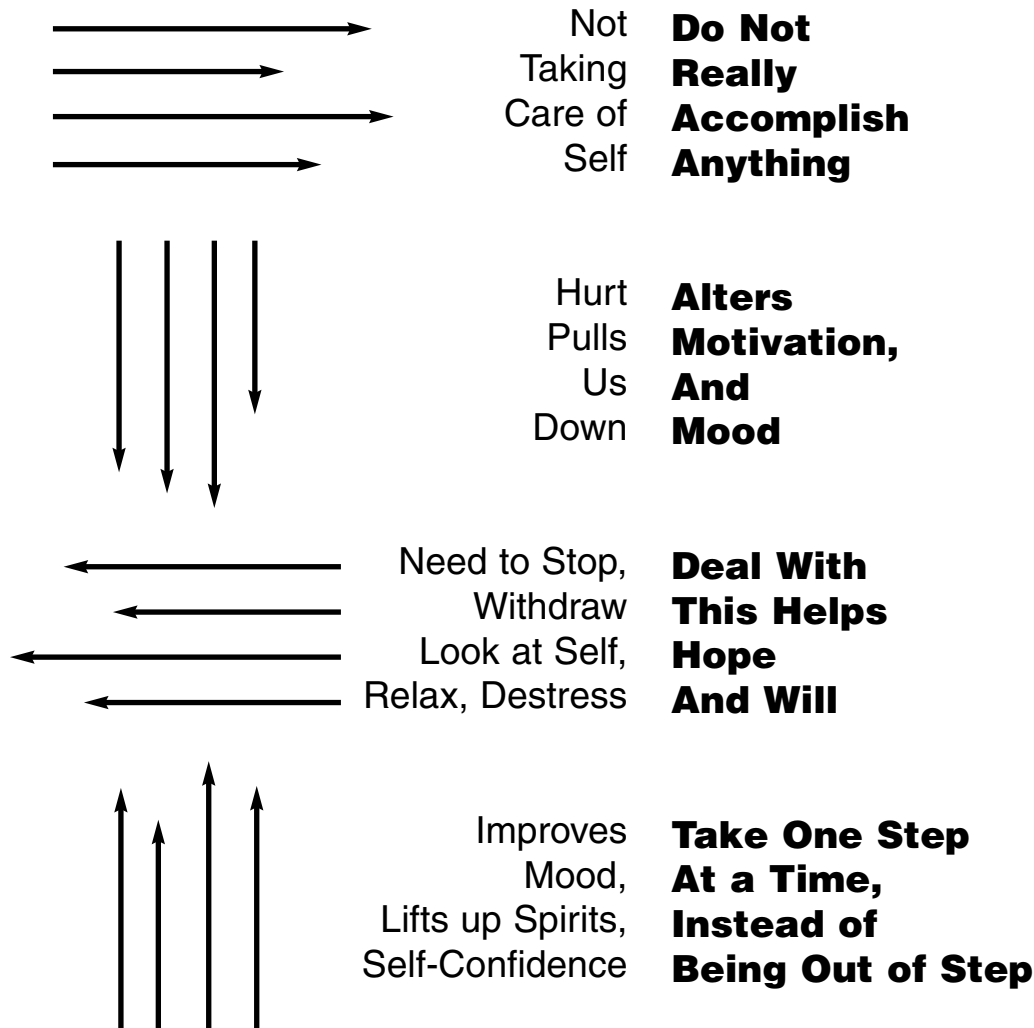
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**Figure 4-5**

When we confront the hurting inside, we move it outside.

## Hidden Hurt Needs to be Heard



.....  
*Stress stops communicating  
with us when we  
communicate  
amongst ourselves.*  
.....

.....  
*Kindness is hostile to stress.*  
.....

Figure 4-5 better specifies how we can grow or recover from stress. Each stress that we experience induces hurt. Our first reaction is to protect ourselves, to put up layers of protection, to use defense mechanisms. However, a second reaction should follow. We should not deny the hurt but, at the same time, we should not just live with it. Rather, we should reassess it, plan, and deal with the stress. In doing this, we can heal. By not receding into the hurt that stress causes, we can act to help ourselves. **When we let out our hidden hurt, we stop hiding from ourselves.**



**Figure 4-6**

We can build layers of healing over stress, when we deal with each layer of the hurt.

## The Best Defense is a Strong Offense

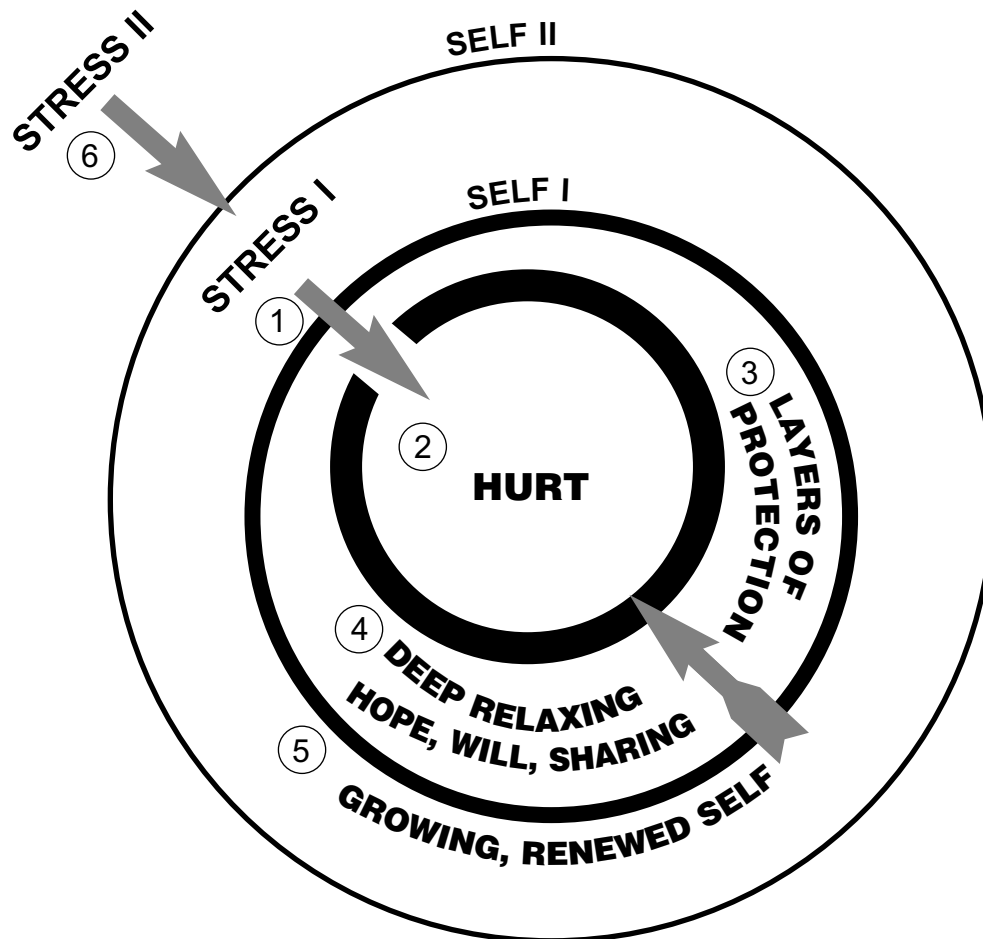


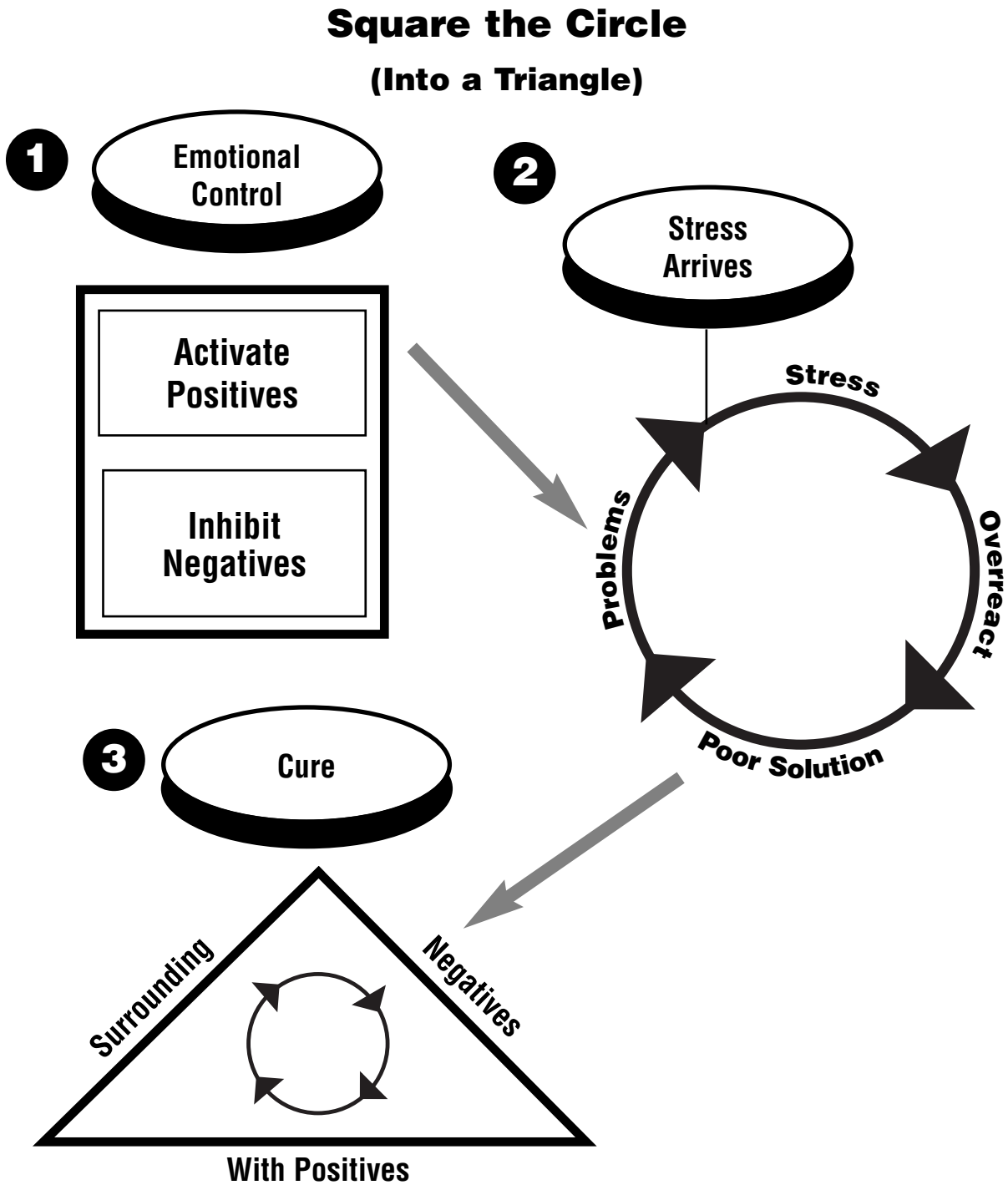
Figure 4-6 looks further at the strengthening power of stress. Stress may aggravate in the short term, but also it may inoculate in the long term. Moreover, it will not hurt in the short term when we are up to the task. We can deal better with stress when we are calm, when the vulnerabilities it creates are balanced by resilience, and so on. By speaking to ourselves or to others about stress, or by letting it out in other ways, we renew ourselves with each stress, develop protective layers, and grow. We can end up doing things right, slowly but surely, instead of going too fast, and surely in the wrong direction. **When we get into an attack mode against stress, which means just dealing with it, we become less defensive and stress becomes less offensive.**

*Stress causes fight  
and flight—we fight it  
and it flees.*

*When stress seems like a  
storm, clap with thunder.*

**Figure 4-7**

By balancing negatives with positives, the negatives shape up.



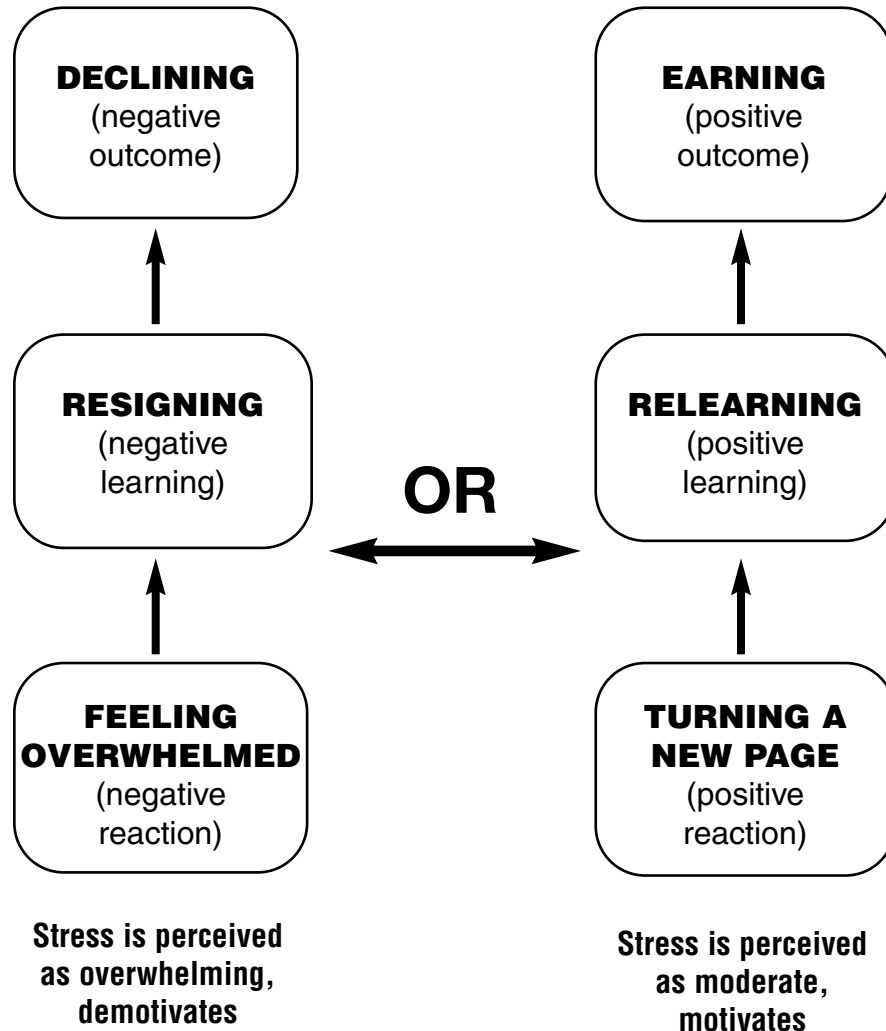
*Stress cannot grow  
where we plant positives.*

Figure 4-7 presents a fundamental principle involved in dealing successfully with stress. Typically, we have emotional control in the normal situations that we experience. We are

**Figure 4-8**

Stress often depends on how we perceive it and interpret it. Know what I mean?

## The Challenge of Stress



more positive than negative, always trying our best. However, when a problematic stress comes into our life, we may find it too difficult to deal with it. We overreact, our body becomes affected, we use no control strategy or the wrong control strategy, and so on. Bad habits may develop and emotional difficulties may arise.

In dealing with situations such as these, we could use many psychological techniques. The basic principle that underlies all psychological destressing strategies is that they

*Stress is in the eye  
of the beholder.  
So look it in the eye.*

*Stress out—or Stress! Out!*

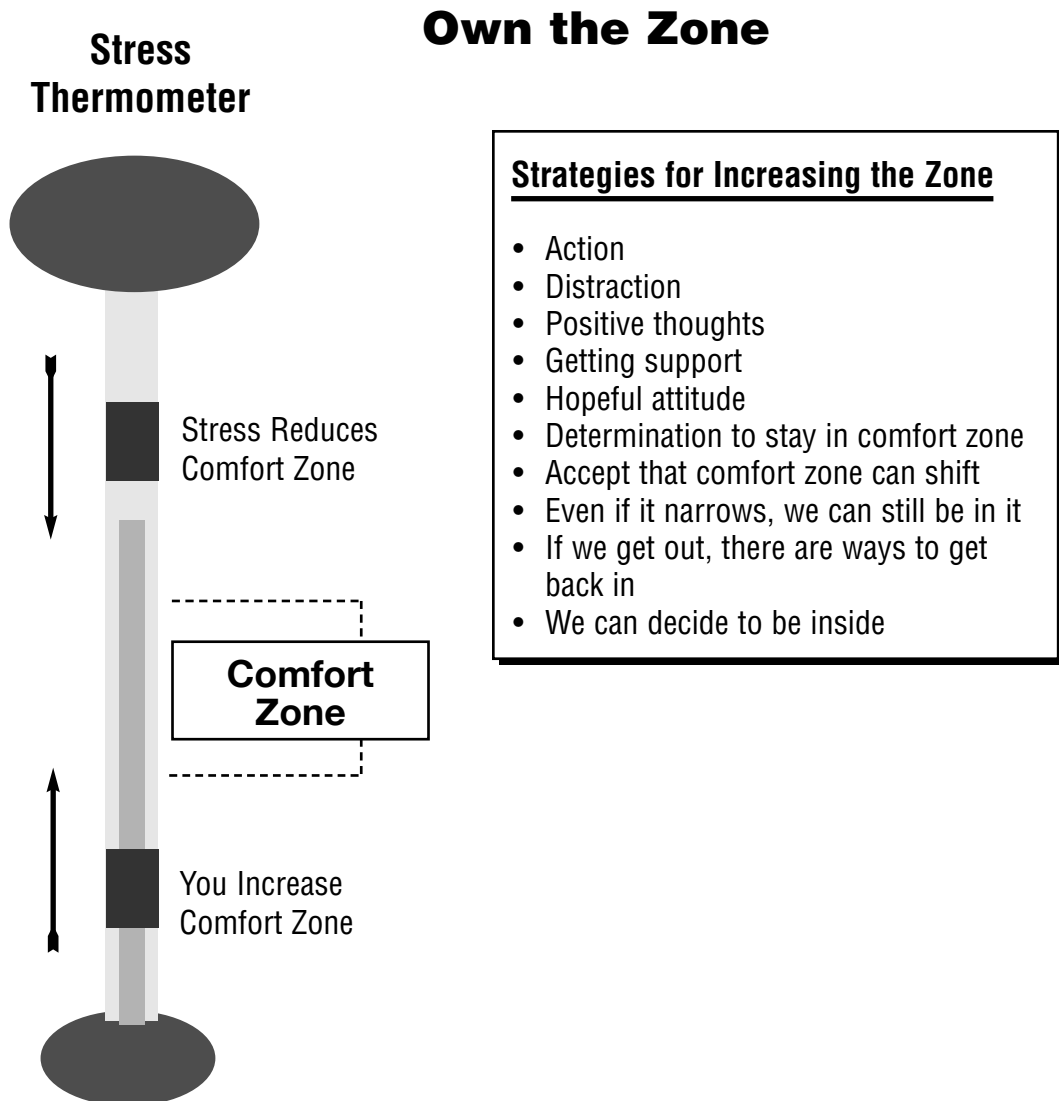
*Our strengths weaken  
stress's staying power.*

lead us to balance the positives and negatives, or to activate the positives and inhibit the negatives, or to surround negatives with positives. By keeping our positives in focus when we are stressed out, our mind better zeroes in on the stress. In dealing with stress, follow the “all and nothing” rule: **when we use all of our brain, stress becomes nothing.**

**Figure 4-8** shows the basic options that confront us as we confront the challenge of stress. When facing stress, we can adopt a more adaptive mode or a less adaptive one. In more colloquial terms, we can complain or we can learn. When dealing with stress, perception and motivation are key ingre-

**Figure 4-9**

We like to be comfortable. Stress reduces our comfort zone. Create a zoning law against stress.



dients. If we perceive ourselves as able to cope, stress is already lessened. If we are motivated to deal with the stress, it becomes even less negative. If we accept the stress, we can analyze it better and determine better what course of action to follow. Then, we are faced not with something overwhelming, but with a stress that is manageable. The battle is won before it begins. The plan that we have developed can be put into action. Stress starts beating a retreat at this point. Either the underlying problem is resolved or we come to adapt better to its ongoing nature. Stress is a natural, normal part of our lives, but so is destressing. **The challenge of stress is not to recede before it, but to lead in front of it.**

Figure 4-9 illustrates that, although we are constantly buffeted by stress, we can find an interior comfort zone. We should remain constantly alert to the presence of stress, but also to our inner relaxation needs. When such a balance is struck, we can both handle stress better and find our inner peace. On the one hand, if we end up retreating due to stress from all responsibility toward empty pleasure-seeking, we might avoid stress for the moment, but the ever-present feeling of emptiness that we create can be quite stressful in and of itself. On the other hand, when we work continuously even when it is not called for, avoiding pleasures at all costs, our responsibilities are never discharged with full effectiveness.

Each of us has a stress thermometer that tests for the balance between stress and comfort. The gauge is set differently for each of us in terms of what is considered stressful and the degree of stress that we can handle. Moreover, the thermometer shifts its measurement. Sometimes, the comfort zone is larger than usual, sometimes smaller. Sometimes, external stress is responsible for these changes, and sometimes it is our own internal dynamics. When the comfort zone is larger, we feel that there are safe havens, calm refuges, and areas of peace of mind that can help us deal more effectively with stress. We need to learn how to preserve these reserves, how to stay within them, and how to find them when we happen to be out of them. What are the barriers to finding stress exclusion zones and the frontiers of their discovery? We need to become expert in mapping zones of comfort in our stress landscapes. **By knowing where are our comfort zones and how to use them to manage stress, we can stop giving comfort to stress.**

---

*When we see stress for what it is, it stops eyeing us.*

---

---

*Destressing is a step on the wrong direction.*

---

---

*By washing away our misconceptions, stress is hung out to dry.*

---

**Figure 4-10**

Motivation and effort bring positive rewards, especially with respect to stress.

### The Stress Test

**Answer:**

	Before Stress	During Stress	After Stress
Motivation	Positive	To change stress, improve	More deeply felt
Effort	Self, family, friends, work	Problem solve, try	With more wisdom
Rewards	Feel good, see future	Begin to feel better	Better person

**Question:**

**With this answer, who needs a question?**

*Trying may not always lead to winning, but not trying always leads to losing.*

School time! **Figure 4-10** is a stress test. Instead of asking the question first, I will give the answer, as in the popular television quiz show. The answer to the stress test is that in dealing with stress, by using positive motivation and effort, we get rewards. **We need to remind ourselves constantly that stress is doable and that we can do it.** By applying

**Figure 4-11**

Not everyone experiences stress the same way. There are individual differences in personality, supports available, and personal resources and control. Accepting our differences is a start in working through stress.

## Individual Differences in Stress Experience

<b>Stressors</b>	<b>Personality</b>	<b>Buffer</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Personally generated (mild)	Easy going	Coping resources	Positive experience
External (mild)	Slow to warm up	Social supports	In control
Personal (moderate)	Withdrawn	Work/school support	Some control
External (moderate)	Difficult	Professional/institutional support	No control
Overwhelming	Feel overwhelmed	Perception of stressor (as bearable)	Overwhelmed

ourselves this way, our life tasks are better performed and we feel better about them. Our motivation is reinforced, our efforts are more successful, and we become better individuals. We become our own reward.

Oh, yes, what is the question to the test? Perhaps it is best that I do not reveal the question, if there ever was one, because the present answer is what is important in this exercise. Why jeopardize the show that you could put on in front of stress?

.....  
*Make stress a surprise party.  
Change.*  
.....

**Figure 4-11** explains that there are many individual differences in how we experience stress. The way we experience stress is not simply a one-to-one relationship to the degree of the objective characteristics of stress in any particular situation. Both the personal characteristics that we possess, being the individuals experiencing the stress, and the characteristics of others, being important parties who may be able to help, enter into the equation. Thus, our stress experience can be greater than what should be expected by the objective stressful situation, depending on our personal and other resources. However, to the contrary, our stress experience can be minimized relative to what is suggested by the objective stressful situation. **Make stress your puppet rather than being a puppet to it.**

Stress can derive from external factors or from personal ones. External stresses refer to things like work pressures and family discord. Personal stresses refer to things like studying very hard to get an "A" on an exam at school or examining the effects of one's past. Objectively, often these stresses are mild to medium in intensity and, normally, we should be able to deal with them. Sometimes, these stresses are overwhelming to us.

.....  
*Stress blows things out  
of proportion when  
we huff and puff.*  
.....

However, a moderating factor in how we experience any stress is the nature of our personality, or our enduring behavioral traits and characteristics. These are not constant in every situation in which we find ourselves, but personality has some consistencies. For example, we may be outgoing or shy most of the time, or moody or stable in emotions most of the time. The figure provides one way of looking at individual differences in personality. It indicates that right from the first few months of life individuals may be (1) easygoing in temperament, (2) less easygoing, at first, but then easygoing, (3) difficult and sullen, (4) withdrawn and

.....  
*When you are you,  
stress cannot be itself.*  
.....



shy, or (5) chaotic, confused, and confusing, and experiencing most everything as overwhelming. Of course, pure personality types do not exist, and most individuals show at least some degree of combination of types, with perhaps one predominating. Our pattern of personality types serves as a filter in our experience of stress. It colours it; shapes our response to it; influences our internal reactions and behaviors in response to it; and affects the people around us as we try to manage it. Individuals with easygoing and slow-to-warm-up personalities usually should have an easier time with stress, but in some situations the other types may be more adaptive.

The stress experience is not only influenced by our personality, but also by various mediating buffers or factors that lie between a stressful situation and the responses that we give to it. Some of these buffers are external to us, such as the extent of support that we receive from family, friends, professionals, and at work. Such support can be critical in making a difficult stress more manageable. Other buffers are the ones that we provide ourselves. There are many ways of coping with stress, and some individuals are better at it than others, or some techniques are better than others for one particular situation.

Most important, the stressful situations that impact us are not interpreted or perceived the same way by each of us. One person may deplore overtime at work, a deadline to meet, or a difference of opinion with a friend, whereas another person may relish these opportunities to show what they can do or that they can manage emotional moments. Often, different people interpret a stressful situation in different ways, or they give different meanings to the same event. In the end, stress is only what we perceive, evaluate, appraise, or see. We may experience an overwhelming trauma, but have enough personal and external resources to handle it well right from the beginning. Or, to the contrary, we may subjectively perceive that a major stress is present where, objectively, there is little or none.

Part of what we have to do as students of the stresses of life is to learn to perceive stress optimally. Objectively, perhaps the situation is not as bad as we think. Perhaps, we do have the skills necessary to deal with it. Perhaps, we can learn new skills. Perhaps, we know where to get help and how.

---

*Stress slips in when  
we clue out.*

---

---

*Stress has no room when  
we build our mind.*

---

**D***ougie felt like a dog, down and out. Chapter 4 jangled his bones, so he could take a bite out of life. This chapter walks on all fours.*

.....  
*Stress can be cured—when  
we give it the treatment.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress has no redeeming  
qualities—except how it  
brings out our best.*  
.....

Perhaps, we can stay more calm and more in control compared to what we think, so that we can use all the resources available to us to handle the stress.

Thus, whether stress is experienced as positive, as overwhelming, or as somewhere in between depends not only on the reality of the particular stressor, but also on the reality of how we typically handle stress. Also, that reality can vary with our mood, the support around us, and our determination. Nothing is predetermined; we are not simple weight scales sinking with heavier and heavier stress. We have psychological muscles that we can choose to flex or not, making the weight of stress more bearable or not. In a certain sense, we cannot change stress, but we can always choose the degree to which we can handle it and destress.

Individual differences are essential to our personal survival and the survival of our species. Life would be boring with no

**Figure 4-12**

Stress doesn't like humour. Send it jokebooks.

## Bring Stress to Its Knees



individual differences. And if everyone reacted in the same way to stress, there would be little room for personal innovation and growth in dealing with it. **When we cherish our uniqueness, all stresses become the same—managed well.**

Figure 4-11 indicates that the outcome of any confrontation with stress may range from having a positive experience to having an overwhelming one. When under stress, different degrees of control are possible. As we have seen, the degree of control does not only depend on the severity of the stress, but also on a host of other factors, such as personality, perception, and support. But when the stress is experienced as overwhelming, is it enough to know that we are unique individuals, even in how we deal with stress? The answer to this question is both “yes” and “no.” By knowing that we are unique, it is more likely that we can find the motivation to deal with the stress. It becomes more likely that we can find the personal resources and buffers needed to be successful in doing so. However, knowledge is never enough; planning, application, and persistence are needed to see us through difficult times. Skills are required, and we need to know that they can be developed. **The worst enemy of overwhelming stress is overwhelming preparation.** Here is one law that does not differ for one individual to the next.

Figure 4-12 shows that stress may not be as terrifying an experience as we may make it out to be. It brings with it a sense of being overwhelmed, to be sure, for it can seem to be of monstrous proportions but, in reality, it may be weak and meek. **Stress will lower when we raise ourselves up to meet it.**

---

*Stress is taxing—when we do not collect our thoughts.*

---

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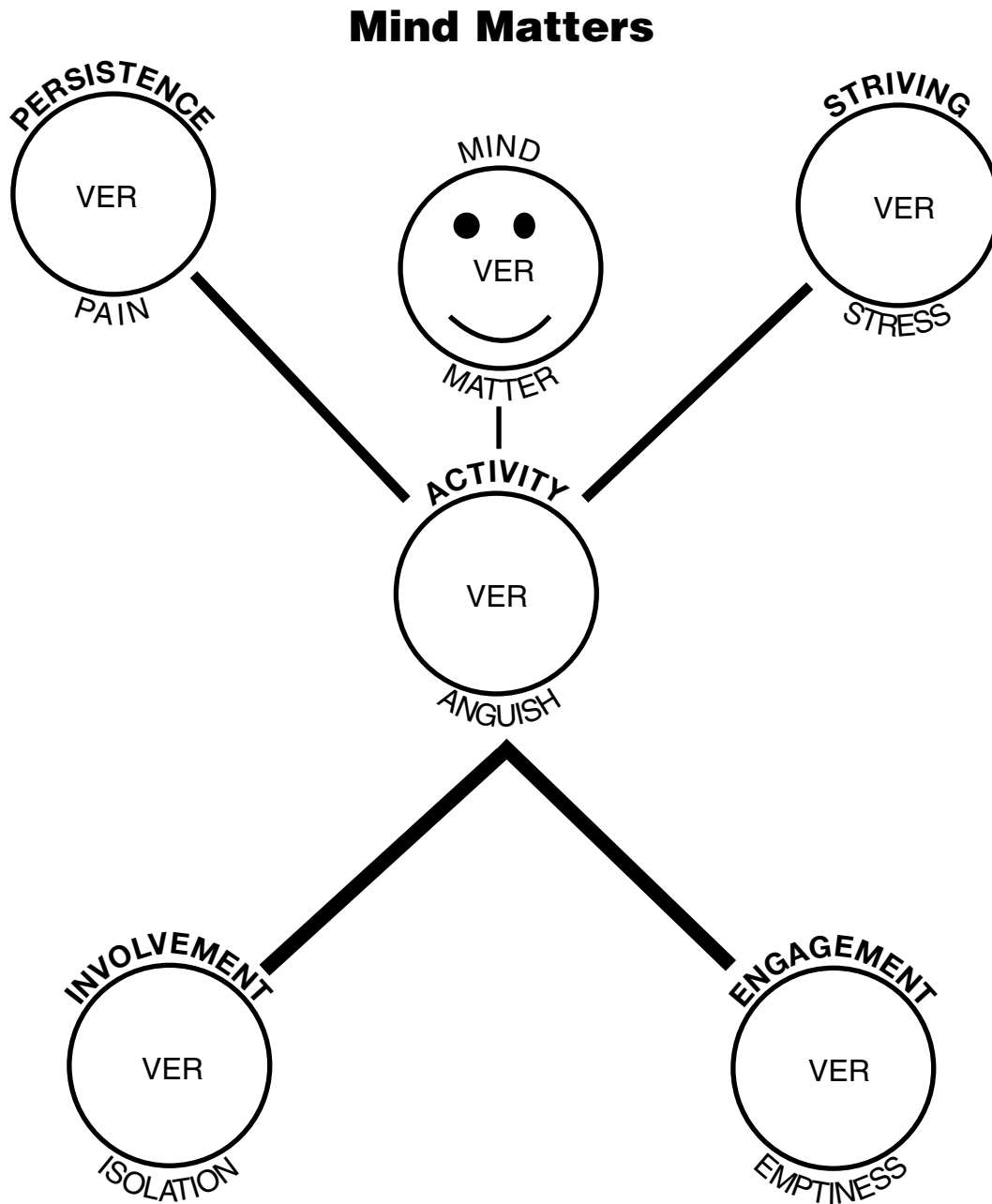
*Because stress is a matter of perception, see it to the door.*

---



**Figure 4-13**

Mind over matter happens only when our mind matters.



.....  
*Mind over matter  
means you matter.*  
.....

Figure 4-13 indicates that there is more to therapy than technique. Techniques work only when we want to apply them. It is not only a question of mind over matter—it is also a matter of deciding that the mind should matter. When we decide to use our minds, other things fall into place. We become more social, more active, and more involved. **Stress does mind—when we use our mind.**

This brings us to the end of Chapter 4 on the nature of stress and how it can be a vital force from which we can grow, rather than being only a destructive one. More recent views on the nature of stress indicate that the stress experience is individual and influenced by the personal perception that we have of stressful situations. Stress is a challenge that we can adjust to adaptively. Adaptive stress responses allow vulnerabilities to heal and stress resistance to develop. A key principal in stress control is to surround the negative with positives, for example, to take breaks from stress and to perform relaxing exercises. We can stay in a comfort zone despite the presence of stress and pass whatever tests that stress uses to surprise us. Getting control of stress confirms our individual differences and even magnifies them, making us better people. **When we fill our lives with what really matters, stress does not seem to matter.**

---

*By loosening our minds,  
stress loses its grip.*

---

---

*When we can take what  
stress gives, we give  
stress a take.*

---



Dave has a stressful job in finance and manages a successful team of workers. However, he knows that the day his team stops producing he is out of a job. Therefore, he is constantly nervous with the people he supervises at work, and when he comes home he is not willing to listen to any stressful stories from his wife and children. They learn to leave him alone and he continues to fret about his stresses when he is at home. He finds little relief on the week-end, which consists of preparing work for the week ahead and going out with other business managers like him and their partners where they consistently talk of constant stress from work, the children, and their partners. Dave develops an ulcer in his oesophagus and is referred to a medical specialist.

The doctor recommends that he speak to the human resources department at work and get a referral to a counsellor. The counsellor and Dave meet. She uses a book like this one to guide their sessions and gives Dave selected chapters and figures each week as reading material.

*We can count stress out—  
or count on it.*

*When stress rolls around—  
roll your eyes.*

*The best antidote to stress  
is not to dote on it.*

*When stress inflates faster  
than a balloon—blow it up.*

*Stress lacks a heart—  
when we don't.*

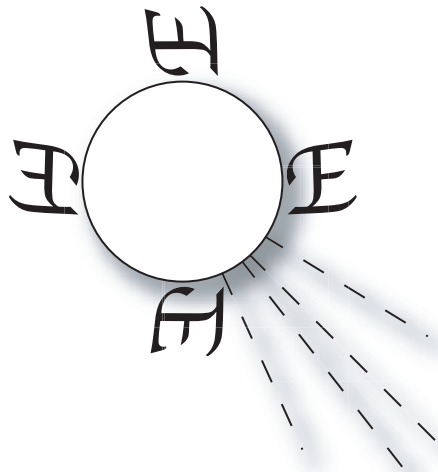
*Take stress out on a date—  
send it backwards in time.*



**To undo an injustice,  
just do the right thing.**

# Chapter 5

## *The Basic Choice*



*"E" is for always ending  
up on the right path.*

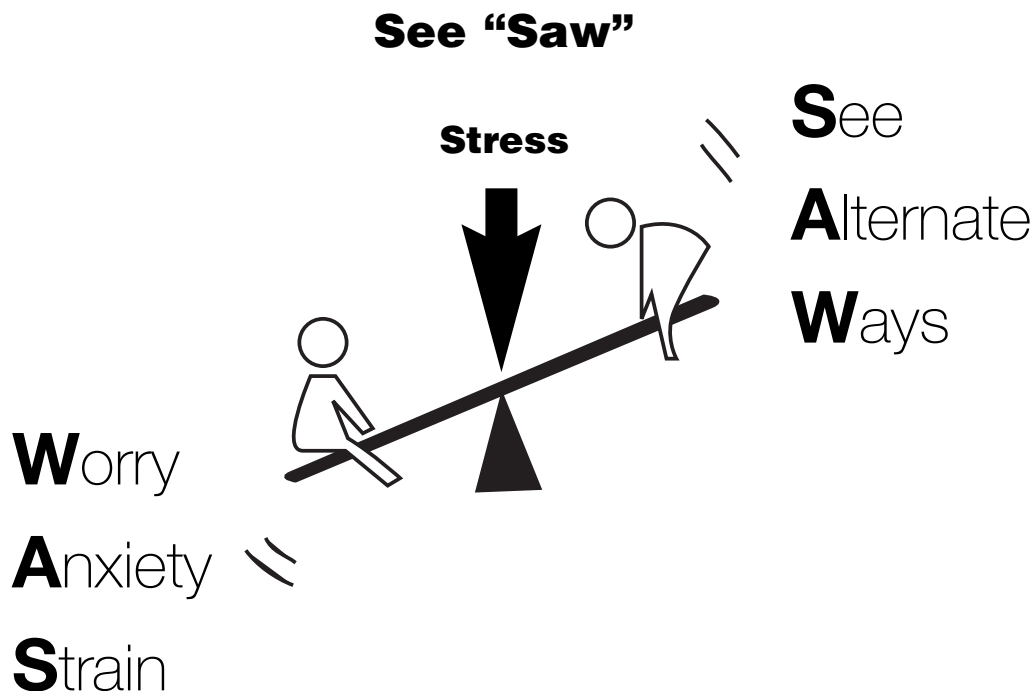


.....  
*Give stress the business—  
 instead of your business.*  
 .....

**C**hapter 5 examines the basic choices that we make as we confront stress. Are we going to adjust, adapt, be positive, and cope, or are we going to be overwhelmed, worry, freeze, and lash out? Part of the way that we deal with stress depends on how we were raised and the kind of buffers against stress that we had when we were young. We may have developed more negative ways of handling stress in the past but, in the end, each of us is our own person and we can learn new ways in the present. Even if we think that there is no choice in how we can act, in dealing with stress, there is always choice. Having only one way to deal with a problem puts us in a straitjacket with no flexibility. The best choices may be difficult to put in action; however, if they are present as potentials, they provide opportunities that otherwise would not be there. Past ways of dealing with stress and with problems, often, offer little opportunity for solutions. The first step in finding new ways of dealing with stress is to admit choice into our reactions to stress, in order to have alternatives. Therefore, **in dealing with stress, there is really no alternative but to have alternatives.**

**Figure 5-1**

Stress never gives us a choice about its time of arrival, but we can give ourselves a choice in how to deal with it.

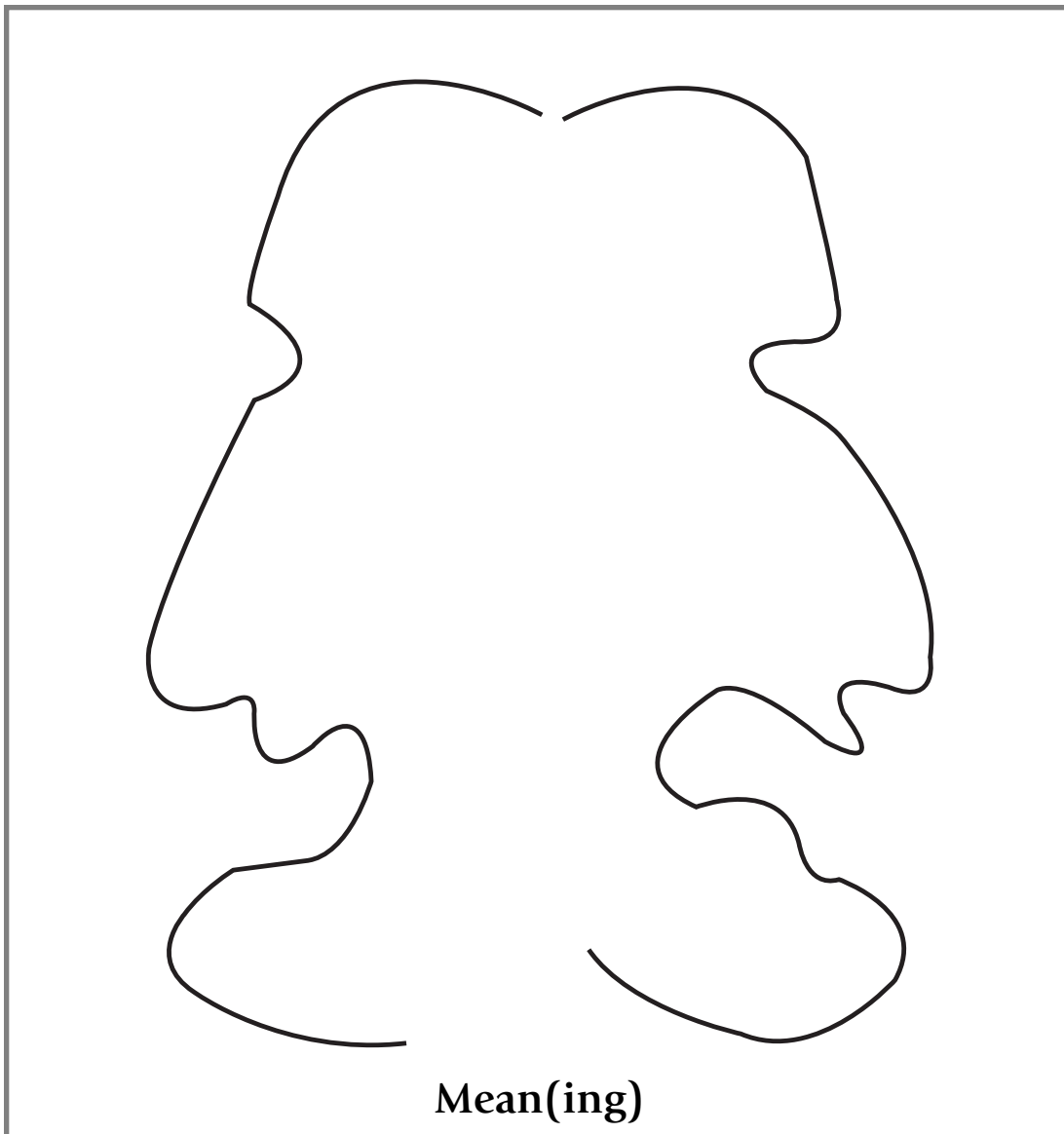




**Figure 5-1** illustrates that there is choice in how we react when we are stressed. Life is a balancing act with ups and downs. We ride the see-saw. Everyday of our life, we juggle the responsibilities that life provides us. There are safety nets to protect us and help us bounce back, should we trip up, fall off, or drop things, but they do not cover the whole terrain. Worry is a natural response to the stresses of life, but wanting to seek solutions to these stresses and the worry that they engender is part of the natural response to life stress, as well. We can organize to control stress, push ourselves up from the low ground, and push into a more comfortable level. We need to see stress from new vantage points, being above it rather than in it.

*Stress is a bad habit that should lord over its own rings.*

*Make mistakes—to learn from them.*



*Old ways became hard rules. New ways legislate their retirement.*

*Take a liking to stress—like in letting it leave.*

Figure 5-2 presents the basic choice between behaving in an old way and behaving in a new way when confronted with stress. Stress can make us confused, upset, and so on. However, by destressing appropriately, by thinking and acting positively, our initial feelings of being overwhelmed by stress can dissipate, or smooth out, and a more calm self can organize to act. In this new way, the energy and determination of the initial reaction to stress is not lost, for it is channelled to provide a calm determination and directed energy. When it first hits, stress hits hard. But we can learn to deflect it and redirect it. **When we are overly stressed, we can learn to be overly in charge.**

**Figure 5-2**

We make so much fuss over stress that we build it up into much more than it is. New ways of dealing with stress should involve seeing positive, doing positive, and being positive.

## **New Way is the Way to Go**

**Stress**



**OR**

<b>OLD WAY</b>	<b>NEW WAY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wasted energy</li><li>• A lot of edge</li><li>• Always frantic</li><li>• In every action, feeling or thought</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eliminate the excess</li><li>• Recycle the usable</li><li>• Take the best</li><li>• Forget the worst</li></ul>

*Half of stress comes from what we do. The other half comes from what we don't do.*

*Put stress through your safety drills—squeeze it so that you can breathe.*

*The movie of how we deal with stress can be rated five stars.*

Figure 5-3 makes the point that it is natural that, in difficult circumstances, stress takes its toll. However, we have a psychological weighting mechanism that counterbalances the negative effects of stress. Perhaps the stress is too heavy, at first, and the scales tip to the negative. However, by the force of our will, desire, motivation, effort, and hope, we can return to the positive. Pessimism is a natural product of stresses, but optimism is a natural product of ourselves.

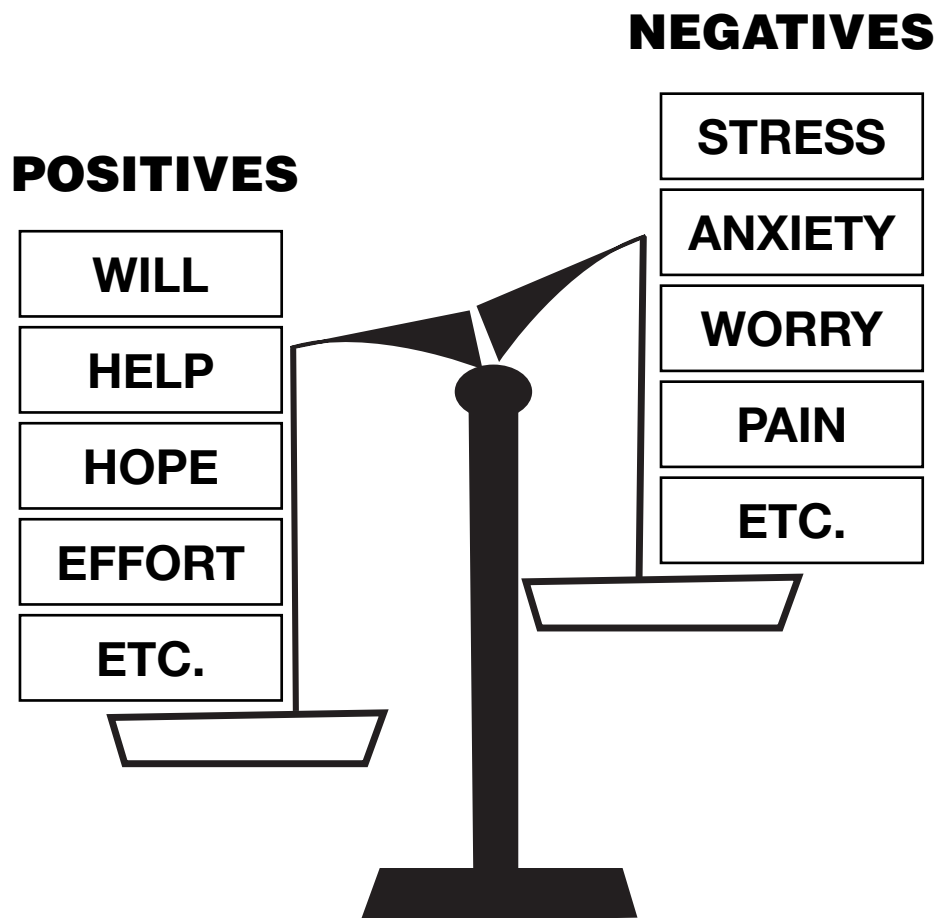
Our moods go up and down.  
Weigh in on the positives.

Pop pills—or  
give yourself a pep talk.

**Figure 5-3**

Stress can weigh us down, unless we lighten up.

## Tipping the Mood Scale



Lifting weights on to the upside of the mood scale will lift your spirits

*When we hold the hurt, or do not hold our tongue—either way, people do not listen.*

Figure 5-4 shows that we can gravitate to different areas of our mental landscape as we deal with stress. We may dwell too much on the negative, complaining and even doing things that, ultimately, hurt the self. The more appropriate action to follow would be keeping busy, acting for ourselves, and sharing with others or acting together. There is a simple rule involved in dealing with stress. **The more we do stress's bidding, the less we can bid it to leave.**

**Figure 5-4**

The best stress remedies are social. Talking it out stresses out stress.

## Bitter or Better

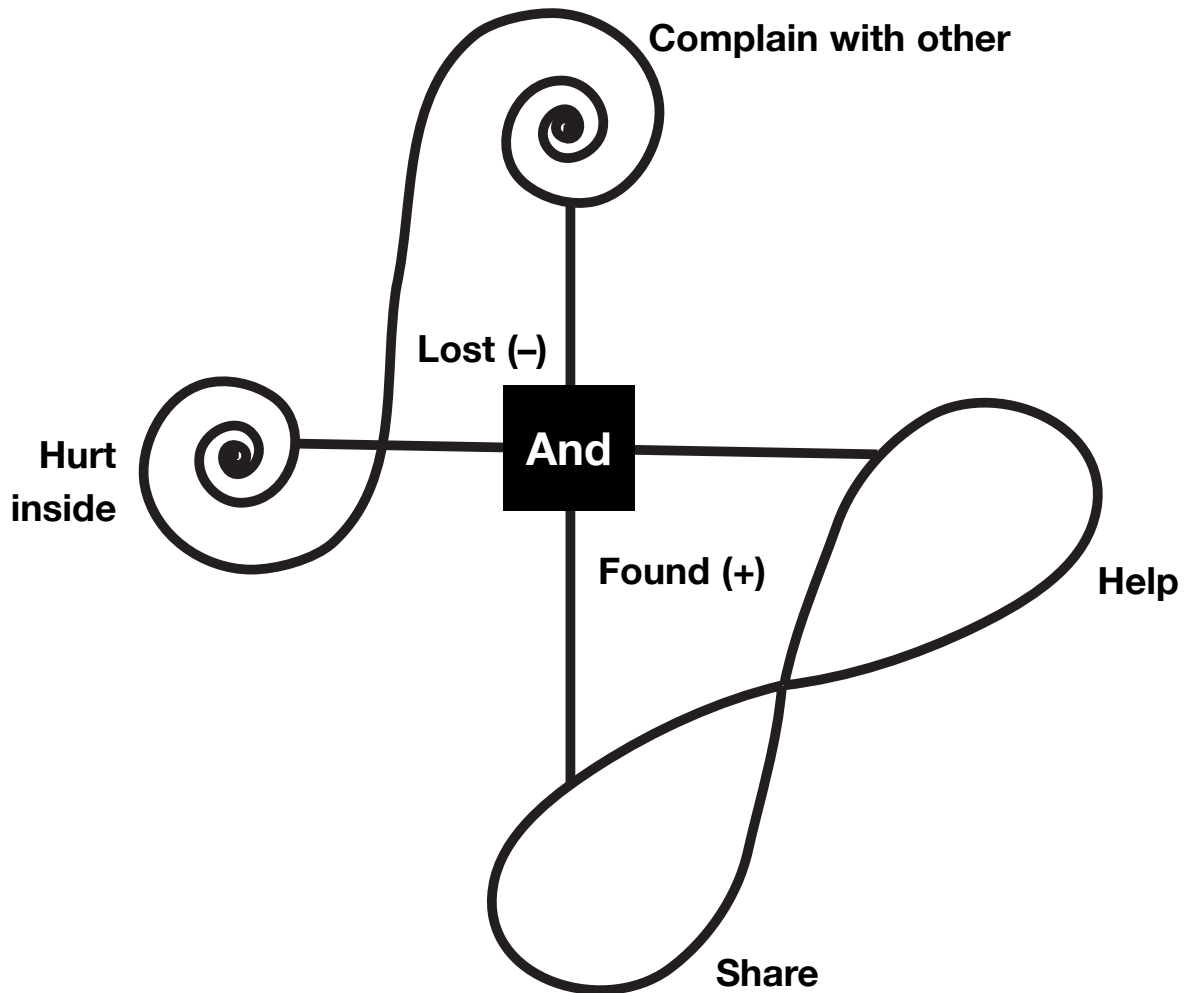


Figure 5-5 is about how far we can let pain, or any stress, pull us down. When we keep up our psychological exercise and keep our hopes high, we can cushion our lows. Rather than succumbing to pain or to any stress, and failing to keep up our efforts, we can reverse the course set out by our lost energies and improve our lot. **When we put fuel in our engine, stress gets the run around.**

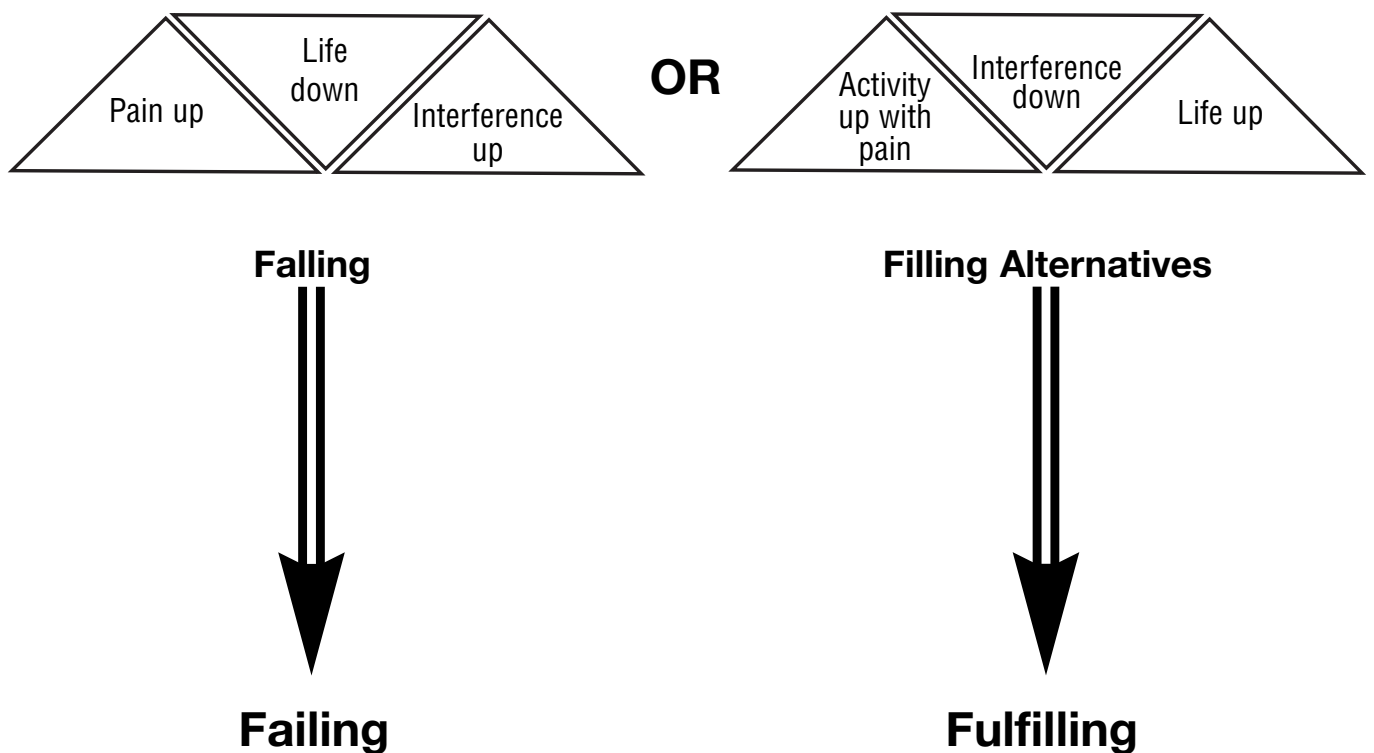
*When pain is put aside,  
we rise to the occasion.*

*Put stress up in a hotel—  
then get it “no room” service.*

**Figure 5-5**

When we preserve the best of our lives despite pain, we pass its test.

## Falling, Failing or Filling, Fulfilling



*Tell stress that it better solve  
its problems, which happen  
to be that we can control it.*

*Tell stress it can lead the way—  
to shark-infested waters.*

*When we shirk responsibility,  
we sharpen stress.*

Sometimes things go faster  
when we slow down.

**E**rnied felt uneasy. He  
read Chapter 5 and  
felt alive. Chapter 5  
earned its keep.

In **Figure 5-6**, we realize that stress is like physics, it is all relative. When faced by stress that seems overpowering, sometimes, we need to make a quantum leap out of our current perspective on time and begin to construct a future where we have a better place. The expression “everything in time” tells us to slow down but, sometimes, it is not enough; sometimes, we have to abandon time altogether. To make the jump away from stress into a different universe where time is more relaxed, slowed, or even absent, requires a mental leap of faith. We have to stop running even faster, or else we will slow down even more. Perhaps, we need to perform relaxation exercises or find the right relaxing hobby. Also, the solution could be the opposite. Perhaps, we have too much worry time on our minds and we need to find ways of keeping functionally active, spending time on relevant tasks. **Time may be the fourth dimension, but the wisdom in its use is the fifth dimension.**

**Figure 5-6**

Stress can be darkened over time, and we can brighten over time. Let the good times begin.

## Time Will Tell

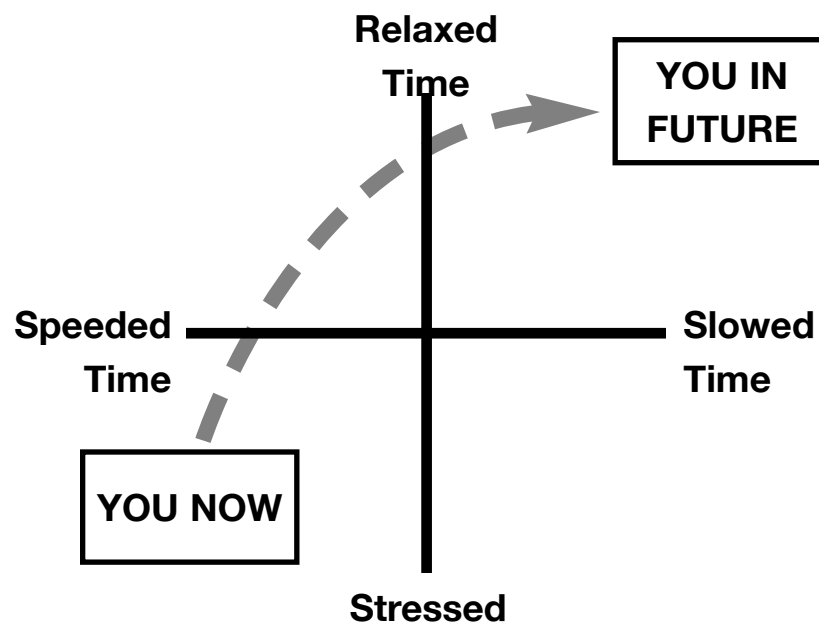


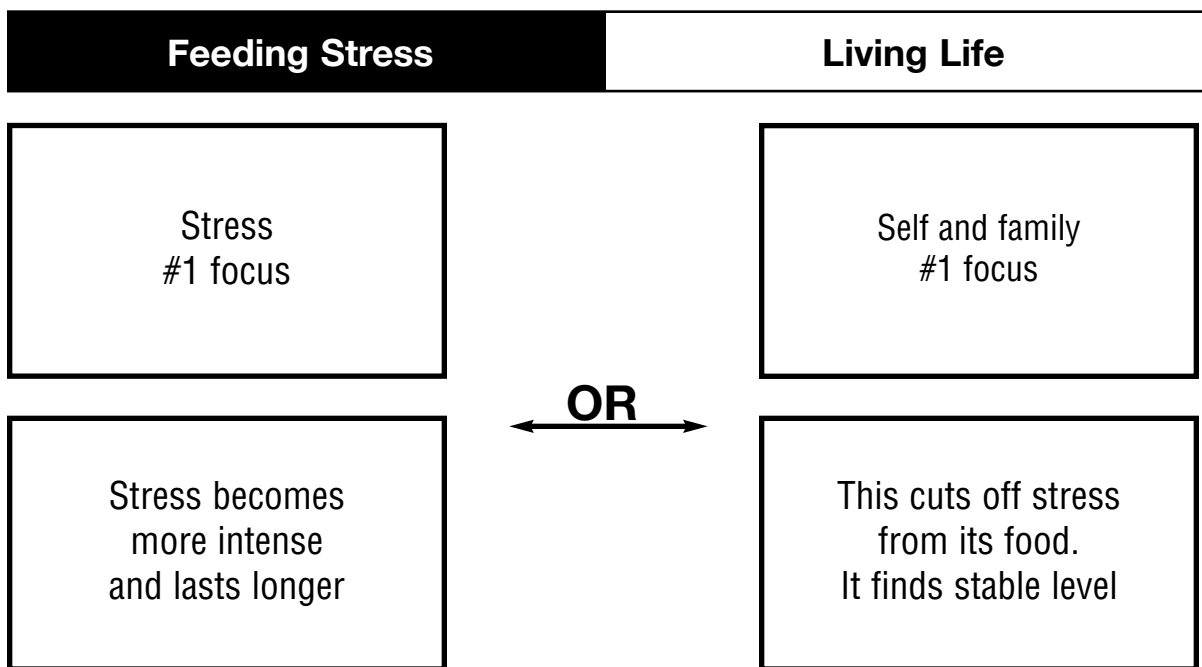
Figure 5-7 points out that stress offers options. If we feed stress, it grows to be large and heavy in our lives, leaving us no room for self, family, and friends. However, when we decide to live life and keep a positive focus, stress keeps its rightful place—not in the background but behind, and not in the foreground but on the ground.

*We learn that time has infinite patience when we try to beat it.*

**Figure 5-7**

Stress cannot go into a feeding frenzy when all it can feed on is itself, and not you.

## Feeding Stress or Living Life



<i>To cut stress down to size, raise the issues.</i>	<i>Seeing a problem for what it is makes it an illusion.</i>	<i>Stress is a poor student—when we study how to deal with it.</i>
<i>To raise your stress I.Q., investigate the problem and question all solutions.</i>	<i>Don't buy into stress—buy it out.</i>	<i>Half the battle in dealing with stress is starting.</i>

.....  
*Stress has no future—when  
it is kept in the past.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress takes away our  
choices—but only  
when we choose it.*  
.....

**Figure 5-8** emphasizes the need to make appropriate choices when facing stress. In all stressful situations, we are pulled into the past toward automatic habits that we have learned. These may or may not be optimal for the circumstances. They may be bad habits that we use, because stress blocks our ability to adjust appropriately and to be flexible, or because they are what we have learned to use in stressful situations in the past. However, in all stressful situations, there may be a natural tendency to use good habits in dealing with stress.

**Figure 5-8**

The only present that stress likes is the gift of its gab. So do not give it the floor when it wants to present its case.

## Choose the Past or Future with Presence

**TRACE FUTURE**

FUTURE

(trace here)

**OR**

**PASTE PAST**

PAST

(paste in here)



Stress calls us to choose the positive or negative responses that are possible. Will we pin up the past as a poster to worship, like some star-struck teenager who cannot escape the glitter? Or, will we trace a different future than the habitual patterns to which the past normally leads, a future that is built on a clear understanding of our stresses and its needed solutions? Decisions that need to be made in life are not as clear-cut as presented, yet balance is needed. We all have good ways of dealing with stress. When we begin to use them, soon, they become habitual (and better). Eventually, as they become more natural to us, we use them automatically. **Past reactions to stress that are maladaptive can be replaced by adaptive reactions, should we choose to cultivate them.**

*I scream. You scream.  
We all scream. Until we  
learn to deal with stress.*

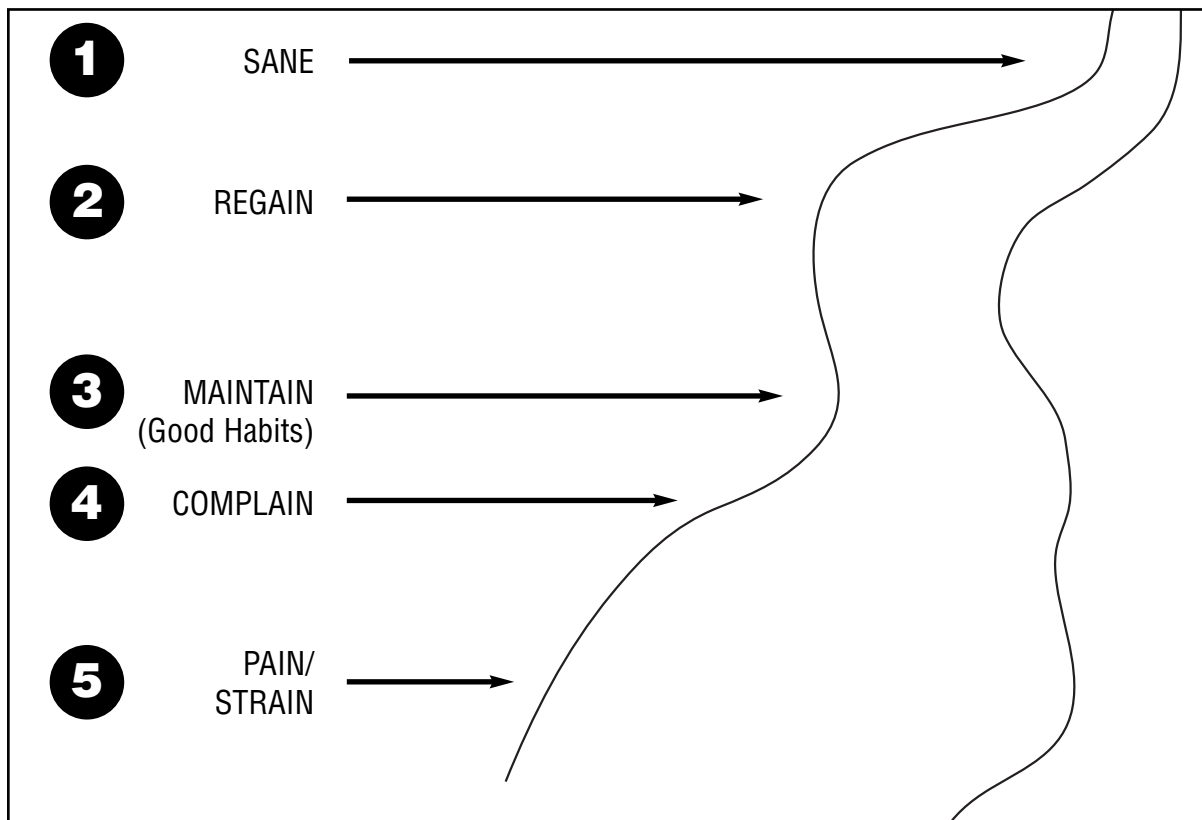
*Stress loses perspective—  
when we flatten it.*

Figure 5-9 tells us that, in facing stress, our goals can keep us in focus; we do not have to feel that the only valid goal is

**Figure 5-9**

By keeping on target when stress joins the race, it lags behind.

## Stay the Course, of Course



.....  
*We can be patient or  
pay incensed.*  
.....

.....  
*Patience is the middleman  
in becoming a better man.*  
.....

to overcome stress or that our central goals have to be sacrificed because of the stress. When our path winds, perhaps it is hard to see its end point, but if we learn to deal better with stress, we will trust better that the path is always there. Stress does bring its setbacks. We may complain and feel fatigued, for example, but by maintaining our equilibrium and staying on track, we can get back on our life course. **When we confront the stresses in our life path, the path never leads to stress.**

Figure 5-10 examines the theme of tolerating tension. Confronting stress requires work and patience. Destressing starts with tolerance of stress and, then, plans can be put in place. **Appropriate actions can transform stress before stress transforms us.**

**Figure 5-10**

Too often we lack patience with ourselves and others when under stress. Stress can change us or we can change stress.

## Tolerance Transforms

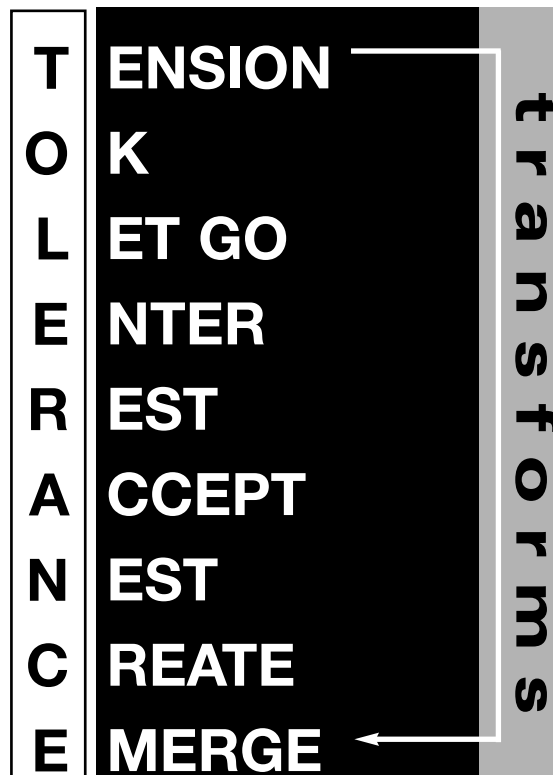


Figure 5-11 tells us that when life is heavy, it is normal to complain, but problems arise when complaints take over our lives. In general, we look at life through cognitive filters, or perceptual lenses. Cognitive filters are emotional filters, as well, for the two go together. When our cognitive filters turn to the negative, we become more negative in mood, in thinking, and in behavior. When we function in our daily lives with a positive outlook, perhaps negative feelings arise, but such feelings last less and are less intense. However, when the balance tips toward the negative due to factors such as stress, we may lean more toward the negative. In the math of stress, two negatives do not make a positive. **Although it may be hard to do, when stress doubles itself, we have to double our effort.**

.....  
*When stress wants us to  
 speed up—step on it.*  
 .....

**Figure 5-11**

I never met a healthy lifestyle that stress liked.

## With Stress and Pain, We Complain

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life before was fine</li> <li>• Healthy lifestyle</li> <li>• Fit food, fun</li> <li>• Future seemed bright</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accident or illness</li> <li>• Stress, pain</li> <li>• We give up</li> <li>• Future seems dark</li> </ul>

Chapter 5 is entitled, “The Basic Choice” but, in essence, stress gives us no choice. When decisions relating to stress are being made, in the long term, there is only one healthy option—to deal with it and to do so effectively. **If we skirt the issues that stress present, we will get a good dressing down.**

.....  
*The rule is—goals  
 should guide, not rule.*  
 .....

Elisa is a rebellious teenager who wants to grow. She feels constrained at home and wants to apply to university to get away. Her mother understands her daughter, for she had gone through the same phase as a teenager, but she does not know how to reach her daughter. Moreover, whenever she tries, her daughter rejects her and runs to her room, slams the door, and plays her music loudly. Or she goes out with friends who live on the wild side and experiment with drugs and drinking. Elisa has resisted and always ends up the designated driver, but she is angry at her mother who never tried to understand how different she is from her older sister. She also is angry with her father, because he has always supported her mother and not her. Elisa's marks at high school begin slipping and her chances of going to university are being jeopardized.

Elisa's mother realizes how risky missing university would be for her daughter and knows that she does not have the psychological knowledge herself to help her daughter. She goes to the self-help section of the bookstore and the clerk recommends a book similar to this one. She brings the book home and suggests to her daughter that they read it together. Her daughter agrees.



**As we grow, whatever goes  
up cannot come down.**

# Destressing

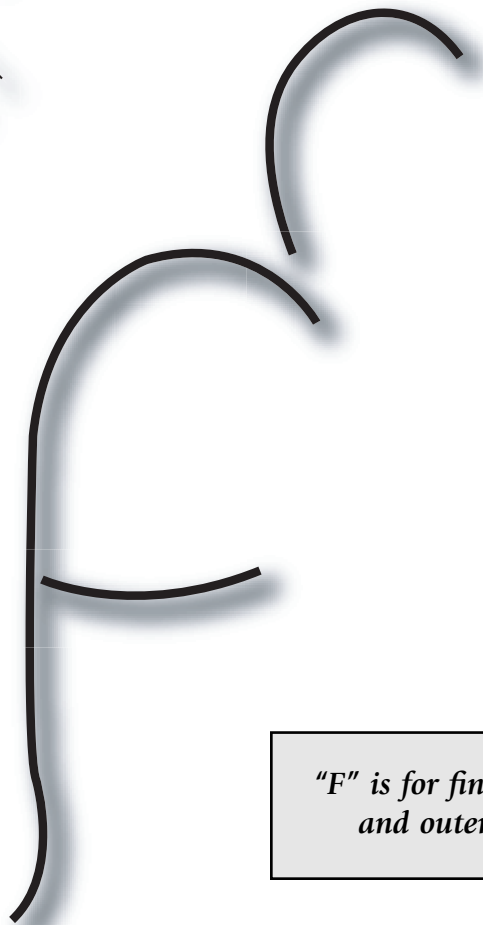
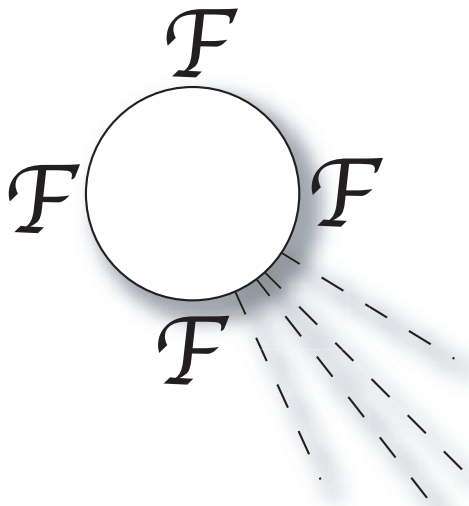
## Part 2

*In the next 5 chapters,  
stress and destressing is  
examined in more depth.*



# Chapter 6

## *The Ins and Outs of Choice*



*"F" is for finding inner  
and outer peace.*



.....  
*Stress is as big as  
you believe it;  
so believe in yourself.*  
.....

.....  
*Doing the right thing  
includes stopping  
the wrong thing.*  
.....

In Chapter 6, I examine in depth the question of making appropriate choices under stress. Too often, when we are stressed, we fall to the wayside; we watch the stress overtake us, and we even give up, feeling helpless. But there is another side to us waiting to act. We are aware of our capacity to face stress and handle it. This path is a real option for us and, often, it is at least partially activated as we try to deal with stress. **Most often, stress comes from the outside, but what we do next comes from the inside.** If we get assistance in order to help us get to the positive side of the choice, all the better, but, ultimately, the choice is ours to make.

In **Figure 6-1**, I emphasize the need to deal simultaneously with the outside situation that is stressful and the inside reactions to that stress. Often, we perceive stress as larger in scope than it is in fact. In actuality, stress may be a small problem in our daily lives, but we are experts at blowing things out of proportion. Stress may consist of a moderately difficult assignment handed to us at work or school, but we feel that it is a project that will take all of our time. It could be a mild disagreement at home, but we react with frustration far beyond the original mild nature of the dispute, and a serious argument ensues. When faced with mild to moderate stress that could quickly disappear if only we have the right attitude, by blowing it out of proportion, we make things worse. We need to learn that by calming our initial emotional reactions to stress through the right self-talk and other techniques, we can analyze the problem better, see our options better, and resolve the problem better. **If we hang tough, stress won't hang around.**

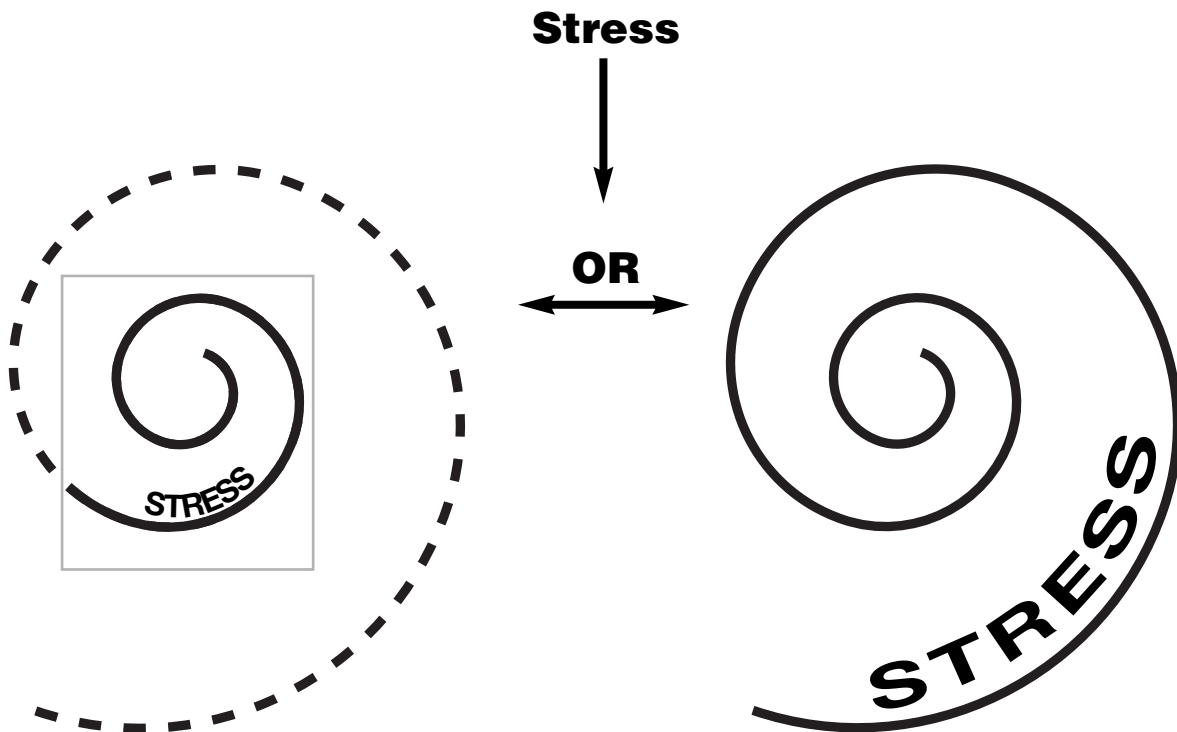




**Figure 6-1**

We can turn stress inside out by using on the inside the right self-talk and by seeking on the outside solutions for it.

## Controlling Stress: Inside Outside



### **Outside: (Try to) Solve**

“What’s the real problem?”

“What are my options?”

### **Inside: Self-Talk**

“I’m upset”

“It’s OK”

“I can calm down”

*Coping is built on skill and will.*

*Coping is to stress as studying is to school.*

*Coping is problem solving and problem finding.*

*Coping is part know how and part asking how.*

*Coping can head off losing it.*

*Passive coping needs active reworking.*

Stress can blind us—or we  
can see it for what it is.

Indecision allows  
stress to choose.

**F**elicia found  
herself falling.  
When she fiddled  
with Chapter 6,  
she fixed herself.  
Chapter 6  
doesn't fumble.

In **Figure 6-2**, we see that stress need not back us into a corner, because we have options in how we can react to it. Stress may take the form of a problem, an argument, a difficult situation, a hurtful memory about the past, or a pessimistic prediction about the future. But our past has pleasant memories as well as hurtful ones. Our present has other realities beyond the stress confronting us. Also, we have stress reduction mechanisms, coping skills, and relaxation techniques that we have used or know about. **Our future can be the vision that we want.** The future is naive, it is a blank page, and it will accept from us what we write on it. Hope is a positive outlook that we have in the present about the future. By having hope, we allow a better future to be written, as we wish it. Hope clears the path we walk on toward the future, often bringing us in directions that we could not have imagined. Hoping gives us a long term perspective. It allows us to see beyond immediate stress to our long term goals. Hope takes us out of the day even as it makes the day more bearable. It helps us to put stress in its place, a place where we are more than our stresses and can see beyond them.

If we see ourselves slipping in this regard, it is up to us to push ourselves back onto the right path. As we confront stress, we should ask ourselves the question, "Where do I want to be in five years? Do I want to be someone who made the choice to live a life of anxiety and pessimism, without the ability to confront the present and only living in the past without a future? Or do I want to say to myself, 'I did it. I kept up my hopes and ended up coping and adapting. I was optimistic and it enabled me to plan, move forward, cope, and succeed.'" So when we feel ourselves slipping into a poor coping style, we should remember that it could turn into a vicious circle and grow. We are equipped with checking mechanisms that can monitor ourselves, help our hoping and coping to grow, and reduce stress; these skills are inside of us. So keep on checking.

Resilience can increase—  
when stress is seen as  
an improving ground.

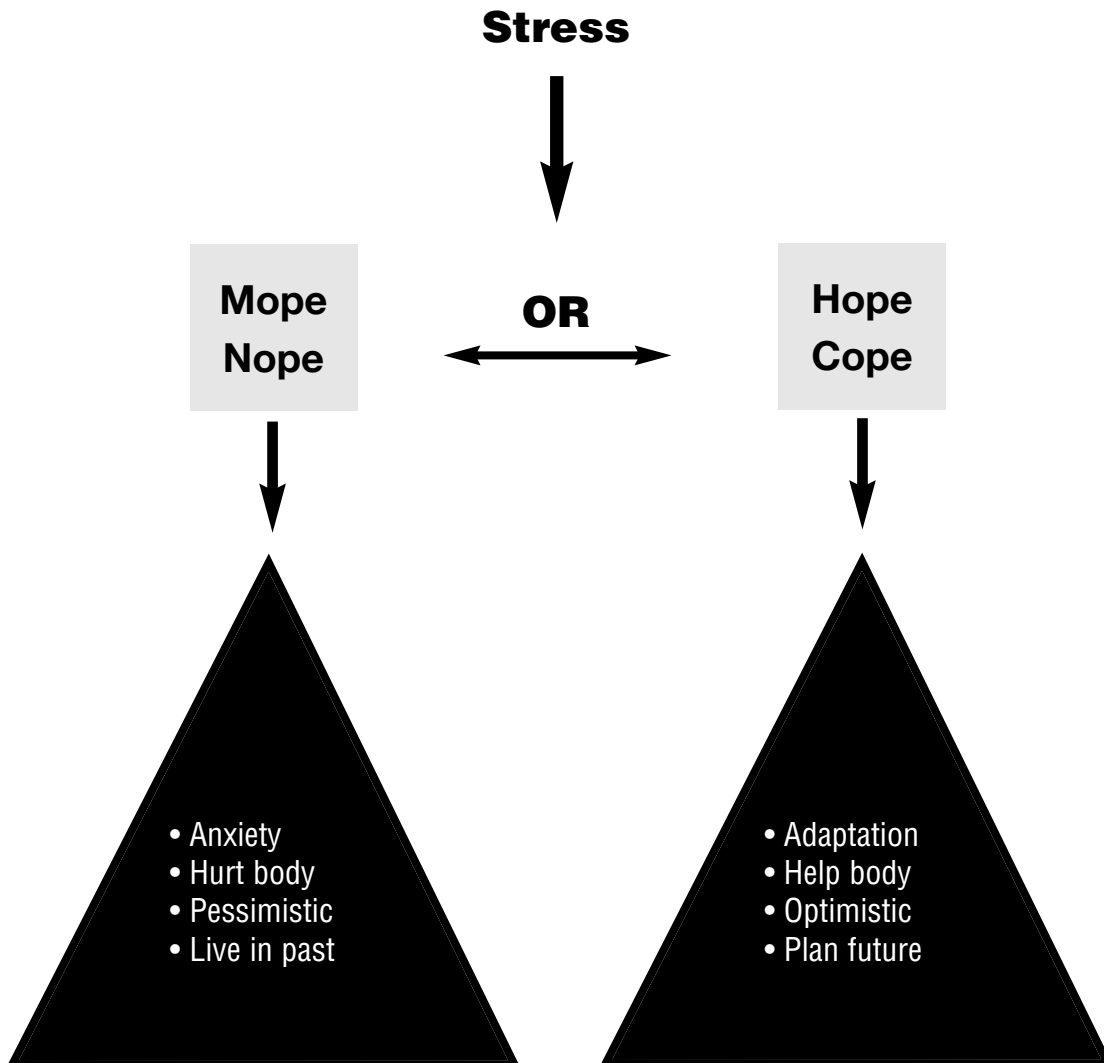
We can improve our immune  
response to stress by inoculating  
it with our needles.

Stress reduction increases  
mental production.

**Figure 6-2**

Stress can be the great demotivator. We can motivate ourselves and have stress lose interest in us.

## **If See Self Slipping: Slide Back**



**In 5 years from now,  
which option do you want  
to remember that you chose?**

*Coping is the best manner of  
manning the fort against stress.*

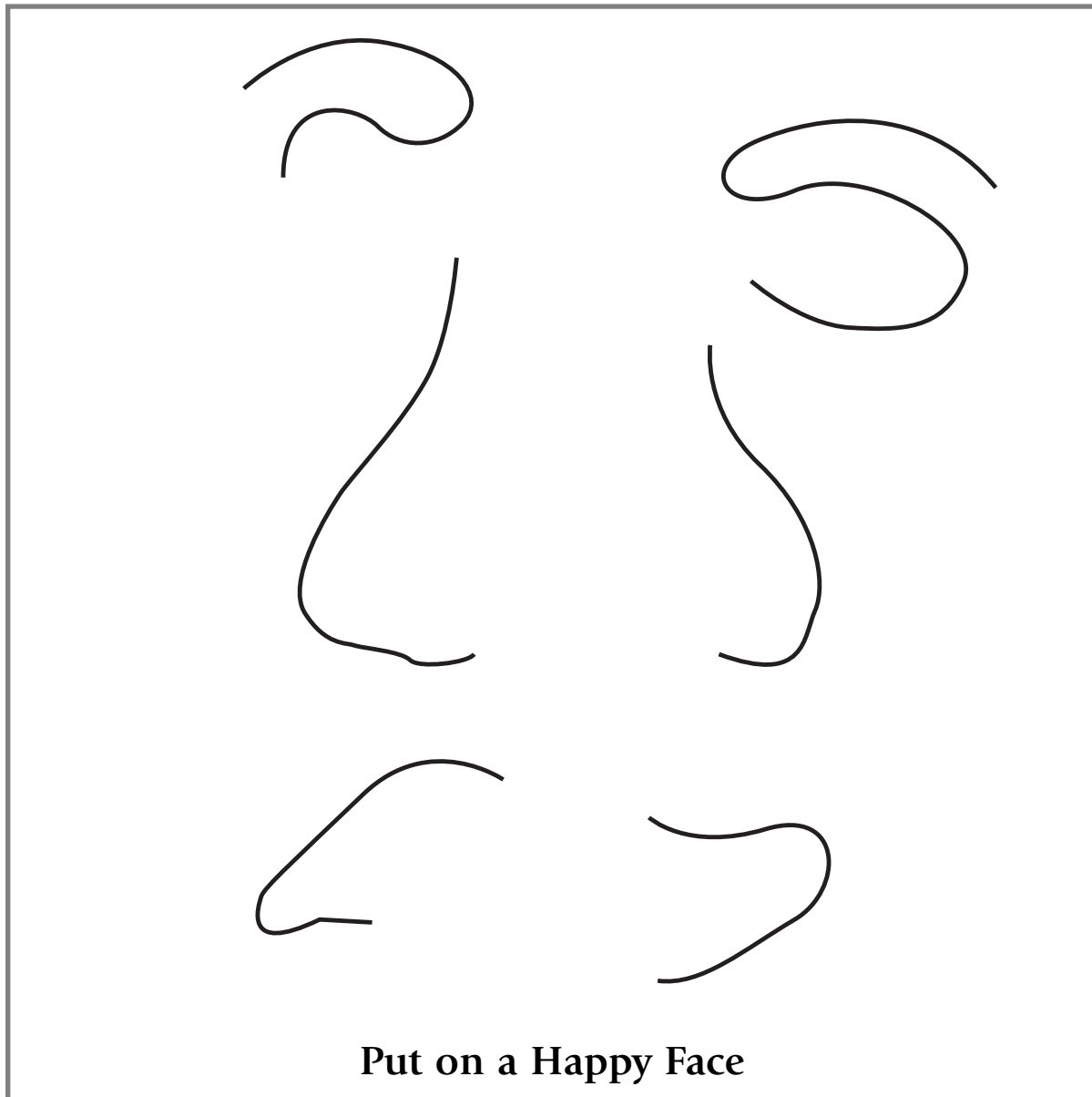
*Coping is one step above hoping—  
learning how to do it is two.*

*To step to the coping side—  
stop siding up to stress.*

.....  
*Stress can bring out the negatives or positives. Help it bring out the positives.*  
.....

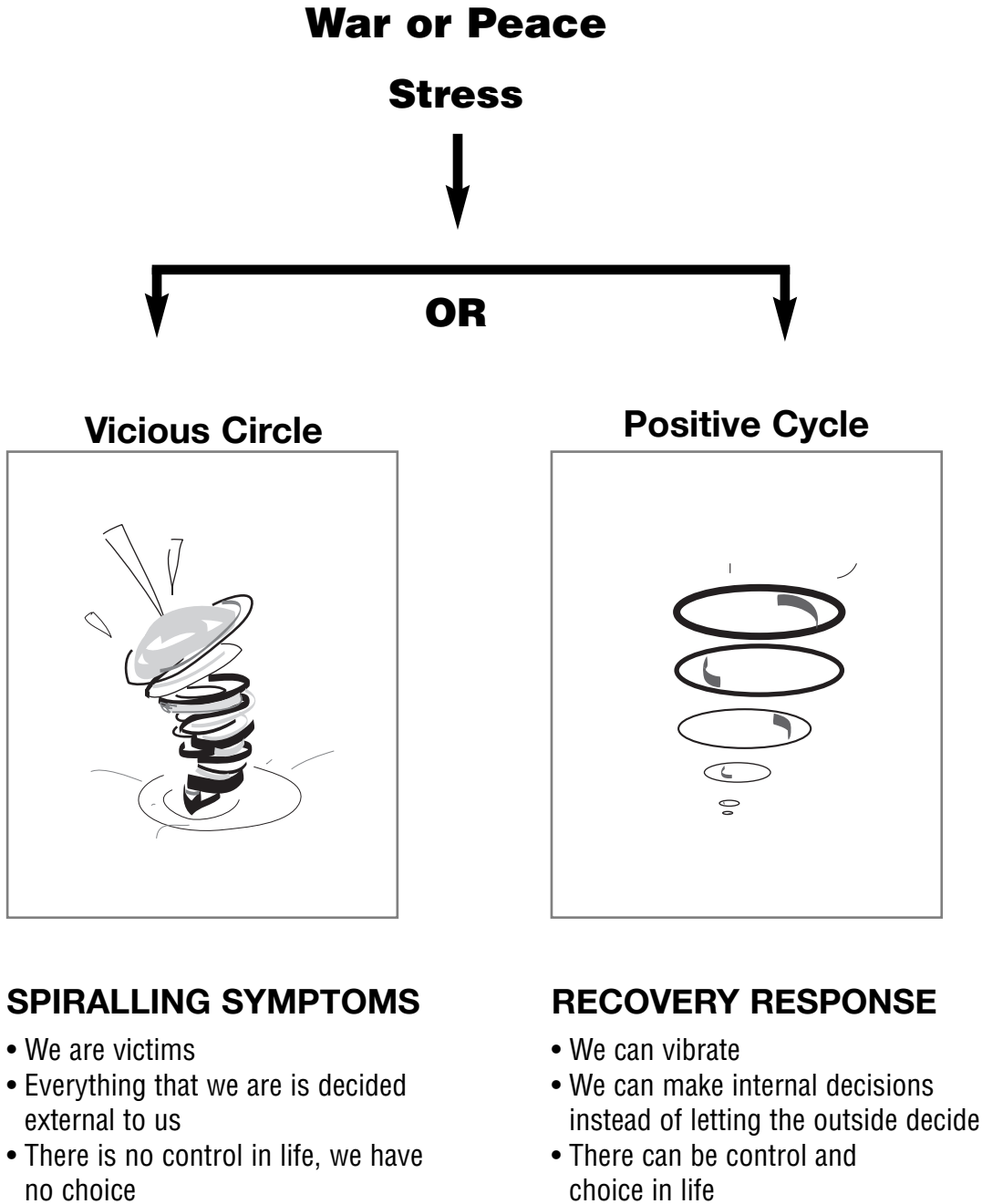
.....  
*There is no choice but to keep our options open.*  
.....

**Figure 6-3** shows that when we internally check ourselves, we avoid vicious circles and we create positive cycles. In vicious circles, a minor stress or pain becomes magnified and spirals out of control. But with positive cycles, stress and pain respond to our good attitude, and to our getting help. We end up in a recovery response, moving toward feeling better. Decisions are made inside of ourselves, by ourselves. **Stress does not decide when it should arrive, it just does, according to the circumstances of our lives. However, we can decide when stress should go, and it will, according to the circumstances of our choices.**



**Figure 6-3**

Vicious circles come from stress. Positive cycles come from us, in our decisions, our desire to keep in control, and our perseverance.



Take stress to the wild side—by removing it from the inside.

Stress is everywhere in the universe—so put it in the black holes.

The galaxy of coping skills can be greater than the dark energy of stress.

.....  
*Old ways that allow  
transformation are new  
ways in waiting.*  
.....

.....  
*Make creating new  
ways not old.*  
.....

Figure 6-4 shows us that we can always learn new ways of dealing with stress. When we try to avoid all stress, every stress that we experience feels more overwhelming. Paradoxically, by trying to avoid all stress, we end up having more stress, because even a small stress is blown out of proportion. When we have this simplistic attitude of trying to avoid all stress, unfortunately, stress becomes a constant part of our lives and can be of major proportions. To the contrary, when we adopt less egotistical goals and try to help other people with their stresses, our own stresses can be minimized. Potentially stressful situations are resolved or do not seem overwhelming to us anymore. We stay calmer when we are under stress and problems seem solvable. Thus, by making the right internal decisions, it is easier to turn outwards and solve external problems. Otherwise, we make it easier for ourselves to turn inward in our behavior, isolate ourselves, and so on.

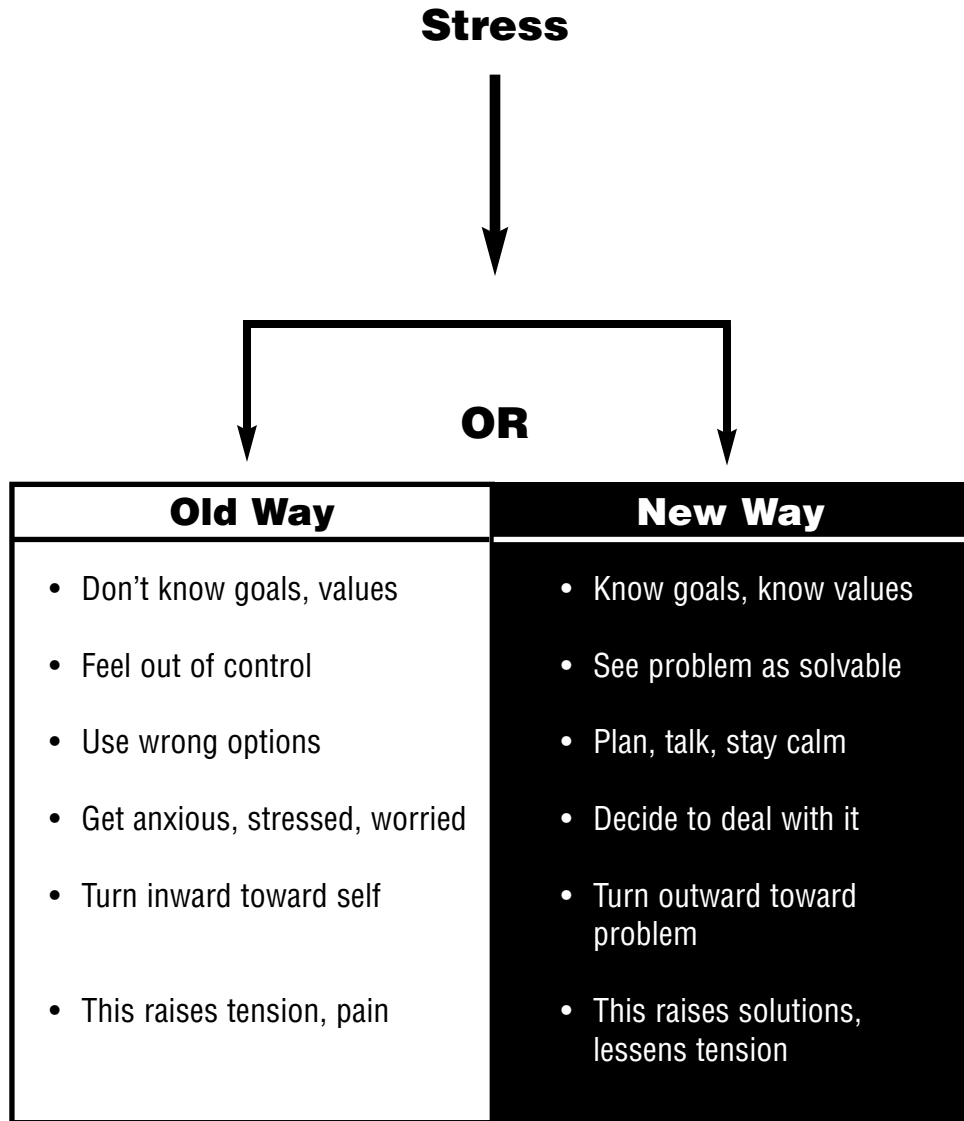
Similarly, as with trying to avoid all stress, when we try to avoid taking control, inevitably, we end up feeling out of control. In contrast, when we see the problem as controllable and solvable, usually it is. There are times when we do the right thing, follow the new way and not the old, feel in control, stay calm, keep our composure, and confront the problem. When stress comes, we respond appropriately. We organize, we talk with others, we act according to a plan, and we monitor the plan that is put into action. We should try to do this all of the time, knowing that **problems are solutions waiting to happen.**



**Figure 6-4**

Old ways pull us to themselves. New ways don't have the same power, until we give it to them.

## Old Way is Way Off



<i>When we get a taste of coping with stress, we want to have seconds.</i>	<i>Empty stress of its resources—learn stress control.</i>	<i>Be a cactus to stress—prickly on the outside and sweet on the inside.</i>
<i>Treat stress like fine wine—park it on a shelf.</i>	<i>Make stress like the Sahara—let it blow hot wind.</i>	<i>Show stress your best face—by putting your head down into the problem.</i>

*Falling deeper means  
climbing higher.*

*Showing our metal  
steels us against stress.*

*To find your harmony,  
don't look for money.*

*To reduce stress,  
stop trying to avoid it.*

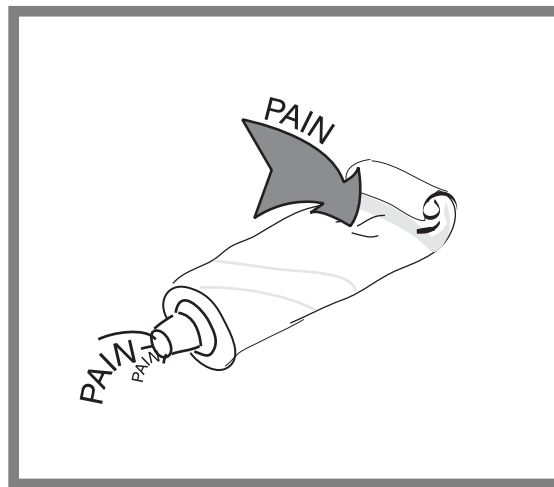
*Invite stress to its goodbye party.*

In **Figure 6-5**, we see that, sometimes, stress feels too overwhelming. We believe that a solution to the underlying problem does not seem possible. However, despite feeling like this, deep inside of us there are more optimistic feelings. A part of us also knows that even if there are major problems and stresses, their solution can bring major rewards. We realize that **the larger the wound, the larger the healing**. The greater the victories over a virus, the more antibodies are available to protect against the next attack. Stress is part of life, but so is living our lives, allowing healing to take place, and growing stronger because of it.

**Figure 6-5**

Stress can get bigger. We can get better.

## Two Views... You Choose



**Bigger the wound**

**OR**

**Bigger the vulnerability  
Bigger the danger**

**Bigger the healing  
Bigger the protection**



Figure 6-6 shows that perception is important in dealing with stress. Two different people can perceive the same stress in different ways. It may be perceived as immense and overwhelming; in this case, the stress bowls us over. However, someone else might perceive the same stress as manageable. The same stress perceived by two different people may result in two different perceptions, two different reactions, and two different outcomes. The central issue is not how to deal with an overwhelming stress, but to decide if it really is as overwhelming as we perceive it. Perhaps our initial perception of its size and severity is wrong. In addition, even if stress appears overwhelming and we react with much emotion, we can decide to channel and re-orient that emotion in order to deal step-by-step with the stress. **When we are stressed, we can play the game stress chooses or we can choose to play games on stress.**

.....  
*Dreams are stress's opposite.*  
 .....

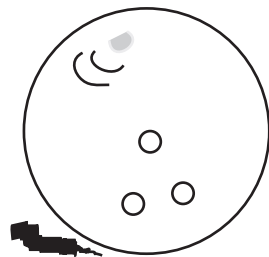
.....  
*Plan ahead.*  
*As soon as stress begins,*  
*plan its demise.*  
 .....

**Figure 6-6**

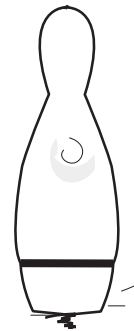
Stress likes to play games on us. It's time to let it play alone.

## Which Game to Play

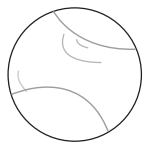
**Perceived frustration from stress is intense**



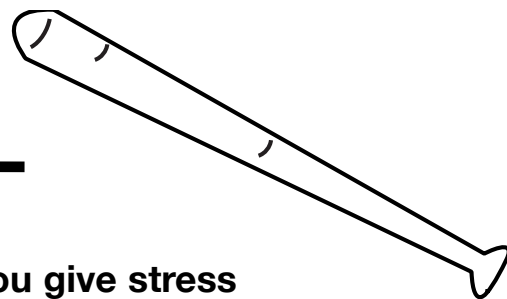
It bowls you over



OR



Real frustration is livable



**You give stress a good whack**

By finding balance  
in ourselves—stress  
falls over itself.

Take the easy way out  
when confronted by  
stress—deal with it.

Figure 6-7 underscores several relevant themes as we live through stress. When we are stressed, we feel that we are on a tightrope with no room to manoeuvre. All about us are powerful external stressors and within us are overwhelming internal pressures. We feel that the tightrope is our only refuge, and that pushing through is the only way that we can survive. At the same time, when we manage to walk the tightrope well, when we manage the crisis with aplomb, we realize that **stress is only as overwhelming as we perceive it** and that we can handle it. The more that we have faith that we can get through the tough times, the quicker our actions can help the stress to end, and the better we can cope during the stress. We all can get beyond stress to a more peaceful place. Calm waters seem so much calmer after the storm.

**Figure 6-7**

When everything seems so dark and hopeless, we can always find even the smallest opening to better times.

## Finding Bridges Beyond Turbulent Ridges

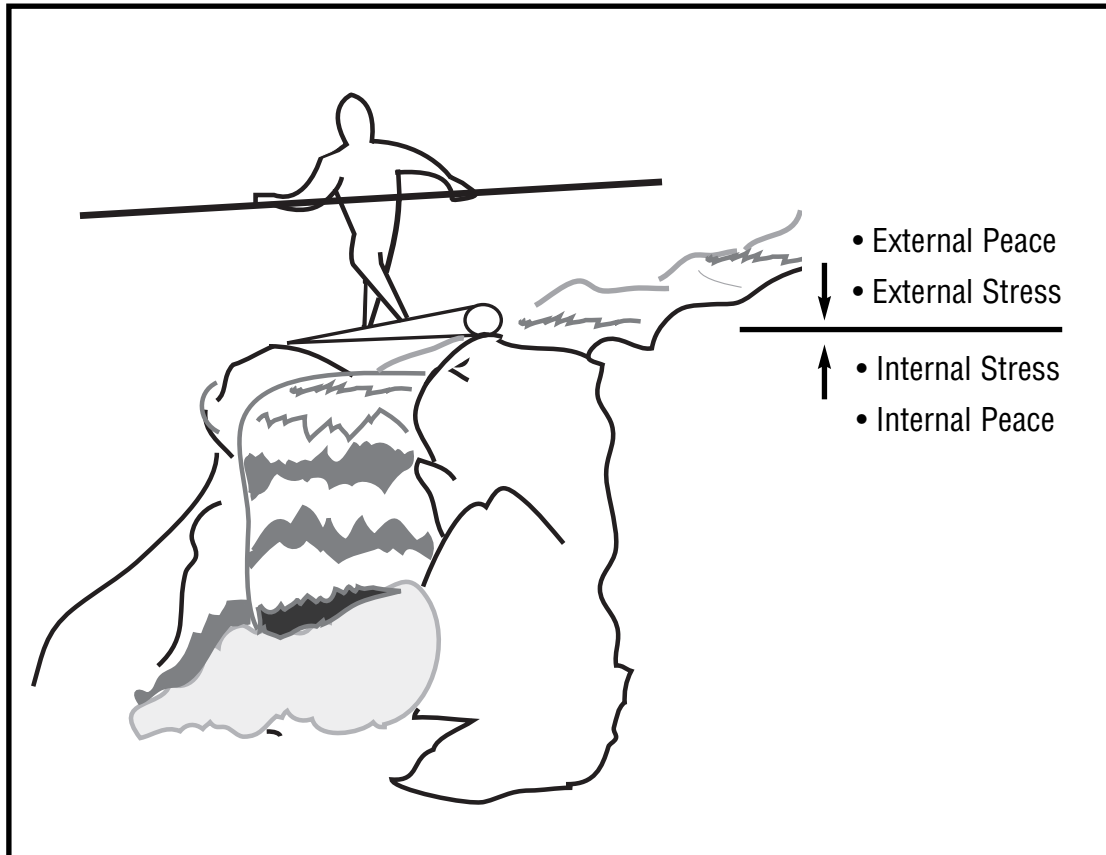


Figure 6-8 illustrates that after stress is initiated, it is normal to have a self-protection response. We can withdraw, be sad, and be irritable with others. We have a choice to make after our initial reaction to stress. We can either let our negative response continue and even degenerate, or we can start to recover and to regenerate. Once the latter option is chosen, we need to have patience with it. It is impossible to quickly turn things around, but it is possible to quickly want to become more positive. When we have a positive attitude, in the long term, positive actions will follow, because action follows will. If we keep going slowly but surely toward the positive, there is little space for the negative. **By doing all the small things right, there is little space for doing big things wrong.**

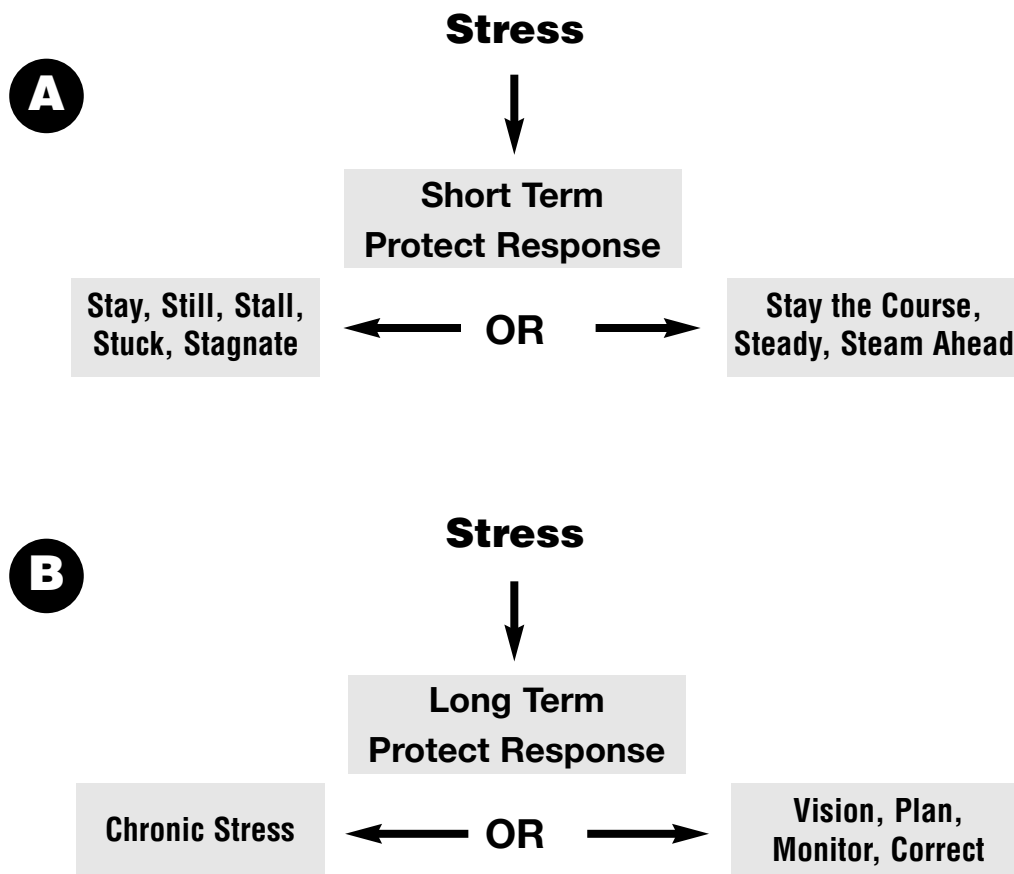
.....  
*Stress wants  
 immediate gratification—  
 kick it out swiftly.*  
 .....

.....  
*Stress can do no harm—  
 under your foot.*  
 .....

**Figure 6-8**

When we think and act toward the long term, stress becomes short term.

## Sign a Long Term Lease



*Solutions come in infinite varieties. Plant their seeds.*

*Stress comes unexpectedly only when we think that it never can.*

**Figure 6-9** illustrates that stress needs to be examined at multiple levels. Too often, we get fixated on one level or the other. Stress happens at three levels—moment-to-moment, over the day, and in larger units, such as our vision of the future. Once we understand this concept, it is easier to grasp that there are strategies that we can use to deal with stress at all three levels. We can manage our moment-to-moment stress by moment-to-moment techniques, such as breathing exercises. We can improve our daily function by trying to keep busy, being functional, and being social. We can keep the long term in mind more easily once we take care of the short term. Seeing the long term involves seeing the larger picture, taking the high road, planning well, and having hope. To conclude, good stress management requires moment-to-moment psychological presence, keeping on track in our daily responsibilities, and having a constructive, long term plan for the future. **Stress retreats when we advance.**

**Figure 6-9**

Solutions to problems often can be found in ourselves, especially when we seek them there.

## Problems Are Everywhere: So Are Solutions

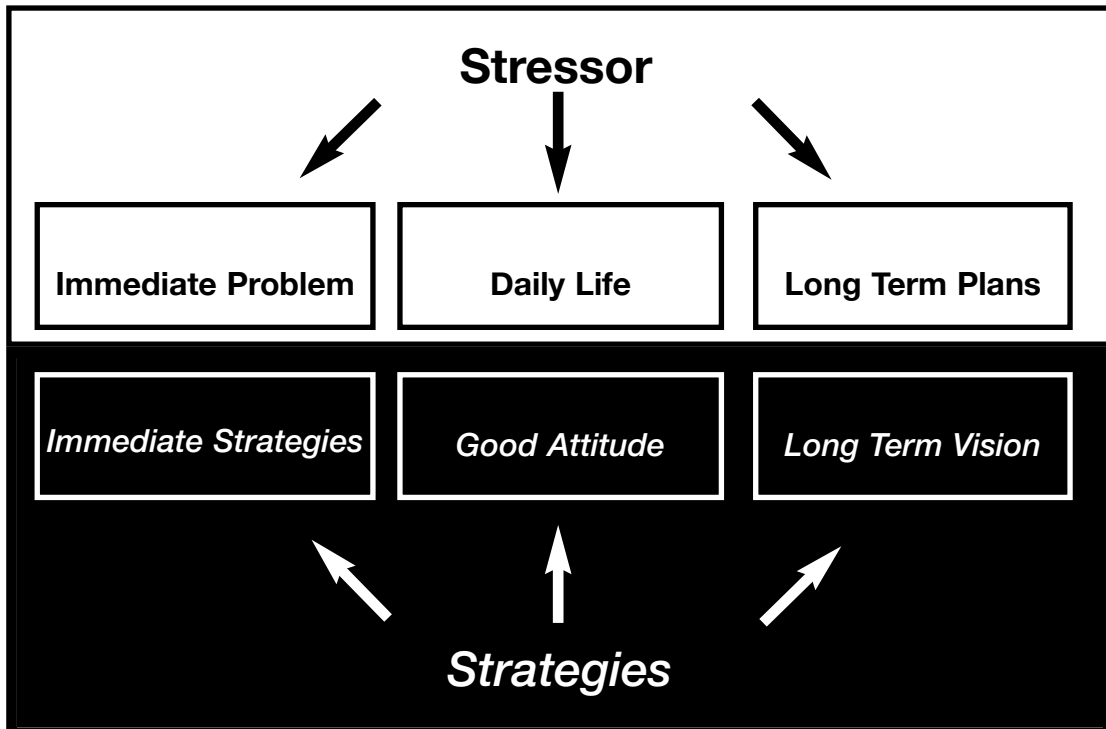


Figure 6-10 points out the difficulties in choosing. Good bad habit control starts with good good habit control. That is, by doing what is right for us, it is easier to stay on the right path. It may be boring, less exciting, or bland, but it sure beats making things worse. The other half of the equation is to know that **when we take the easy way out, we are usually off track**. By going on the right path, we usually find the right outcome.

.....  
*When we organize  
 things our way, we usually  
 have our way.*  
 .....

.....  
*When we speak with  
 our inner strength,  
 stress cannot speak out.*  
 .....

**Figure 6-10**

It's so hard to learn to know what to do, and what to stop doing. But a good attitude and effort can bring opportunities for such learning. Don't stop now.

## Get Up and Go Chart

Get Going	Stop Going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be active</li> <li>• Exercise your mind</li> <li>• Stretch your body</li> <li>• Boost your energy</li> <li>• Brighten your spirit</li> <li>• Lighten your stress</li> <li>• Measured responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bonkers</li> <li>• In the Bunker</li> <li>• Wearing blinkers</li> <li>• Overboard</li> <li>• Under the table</li> <li>• Around in circles</li> <li>• Into stress</li> </ul>
Go Stopping	Stop Stopping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bad habits</li> <li>• Giving in to them</li> <li>• The wrong side</li> <li>• Poor choices</li> <li>• Weak responses</li> <li>• Inappropriate behavior</li> <li>• Lack of consideration for others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give up giving up</li> <li>• Inhibit inappropriate inhibitions</li> <li>• Block blockages of right actions</li> <li>• Control overcontrol</li> <li>• Suppress undue suppressions</li> <li>• Freeze freezing reactions</li> <li>• Withdraw withdrawal</li> </ul>

When stress wants your time—punch its clock.

Asking for help makes stress helpless.

Figure 6-11 speaks to bad timing. Stress never comes at a good time, and its negative effects persist. We worry incessantly, stress out, and either act out or withdraw in. But time heals wounds and, moreover, we can, too. When we learn to destress, stress is sent for time out. So tell stress that it's time has come, and then make it go. Develop a time-honoured tradition: **Tell stress to always meet your deadlines about when it should leave.**

**Figure 6-11**

Stress takes time to deal with. A lifetime. So punch its clock.

## It's a Question of Time

STRESSES		
Past	Present	Future
Accident (Traumatic) & Pre-accident Stresses	Effects Cause More stress (work, family)	Worry ("Will I get better?" "Will my personal life suffer?" "Will my mood improve?" "Will I be able to work?")
WITH TIME		
Past	Present	Future
Past Stresses • reprocessed • worked through • come to terms with • accepted	Present Stresses • positive attitude • destressing used • apply self as best can • adjusted to	Future Stresses • add hope • stop seeing worst • less pessimistic • more optimistic

When we make wrong choices that give us stress, we can make the right choices to control it.

Unfortunately, sometimes, stress chooses us. Fortunately, always, we can choose the right way to deal with it.

Tell stress that you are not it's equal—you are better.

Stress holds grudges—give it cause.

To summarize, in this chapter we have learned that there is a choice to be made in dealing with stress and that the act of making a choice comes from the inside. **We can develop new ways of dealing with stress and deal with it in an effective manner.** When we decide to face stress, it becomes easier to deal with and it is easier to find the solutions to the problems that bring it. When that internal decision is made, then, usually stress can become something we can deal with rather than something that deals with us.

*Stress is caused by so many things, and it is alleviated by especially one—ourselves.*

*Stress is inevitable, but suffering from it is not.*

*Let stress hit a new low—by lowering the boom on it.*

*Thinking through makes stress through.*

*Handle stress with care—as you bury it.*

*To feel in control of stress—feel the stress less.*

*Give stress choices—to leave, run away, or flee.*

*To part with the problem, be part of the solution.*



Frank felt that life was overwhelming him and he did not know how to deal with the stress. He was arguing more at home and everyone in the family was feeling stressed. He wondered if it related to his past, the daily stresses of trying to work and pay the bills, or the insecurity about the future in these uncertain times. He could not stop worrying, and vicious circles developed involving excessive worry, poor sleep, headaches, and a general malaise.

When he goes to the doctor complaining of his symptoms, the doctor advises that his symptoms probably are psychological in origin. Frank asks to see a mental health professional who would give him readings as well provide counselling. On seeing the therapist, he recommends a book much like this one.

*If it can go wrong, it will. If you will to make it better, it can.*

*Problem solving starts with understanding and finishes with standing up.*

*When stress taps your nerves—hammer its nails.*

*Stress is only part of the picture—when we paint it in the corner.*

*Let stress be the audience for your play.*

*Pertinent thinking is scissors to stress's impertinence.*

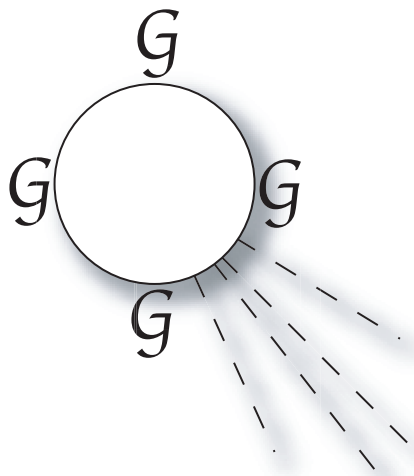


**When two I's become Us,  
We never becomes Me.**



# Chapter 7

## *Complexities in Choosing*



*"G" is for giving  
from the heart.*



.....  
*Stress is a sign that  
plans are needed.*  
.....

.....  
*One way to keep stress  
down is to avoid  
building it up.*  
.....

**T**his chapter examines complexities in the basic choices that we have to make in dealing with stress. Up to this point, I have painted a picture regarding what is needed to deal with stress that is sometimes too simplistic. For example, the situation may be quite complex and it may be quite difficult to get into a functional, adaptive mode. Or, the choices available to us when we are stressed may be difficult to figure out, or they may be not as clear as they seem at first. Whenever stress can confuse us, it does. **Bringing mental clarity to the task of perceiving the complexities that accompany stress simplifies the task of dealing with the stress with mental clarity.**

Figure 7-1 shows that, as we deal with stress, we develop negative emotions. When we react negatively to stress, we may feel that such emotions give us an energy boost or otherwise help us get through the stress. However, we need to learn that when these emotions continue, they are less adaptive than they appear. Are the negative emotions elicited by stress our only choice, or can we see them as messengers, or signs of how to deal with stress in a more constructive and positive manner? For example, if we get angry, is it simply a step toward becoming determined? If we are fearful, does it mean simply that we have to be cautious? If we think that we have lost something and become sad, is it simply the beginning in overcoming that feeling and adapting? If we are worried, is it a signal that we should relax? In all cases of negative emotions after stress, should we really just keep on expressing them in an endless vicious circle? When they persist, negative emotions are maladaptive, and become interfering messages with unclear meanings and less clear plans. When negative emotions cannot be turned around, we can still help ourselves. Our minds have to maintain a steady course in the emotional turmoil, and attempt to organize calmly a coherent plan of action despite the interference by the emotions. To do this better, we must channel these emotions, take their power, and orient them to work toward the best plan that we can devise, such as turning anger into determination.

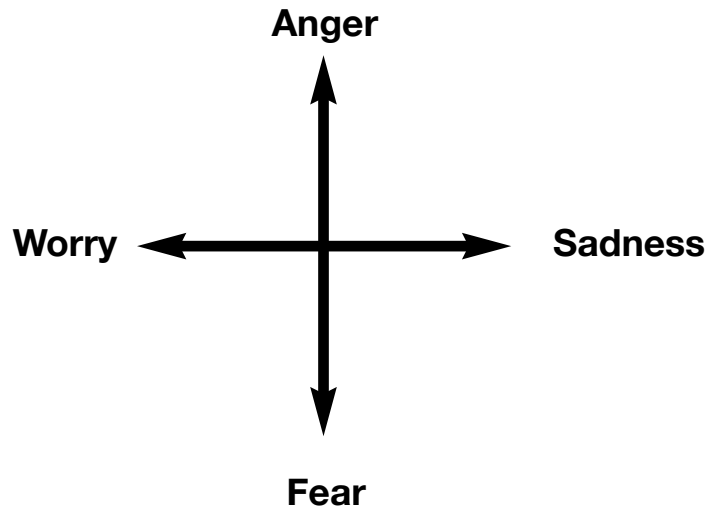
In dealing with stress, if our minds can struggle through the phase where the emotions cloud it, we increase the chances of getting a more positive outcome. In saying this, I am not denying the positive role that emotions play in our thoughts,

**Figure 7-1**

Stress elicits negative emotions. Make them illicit.

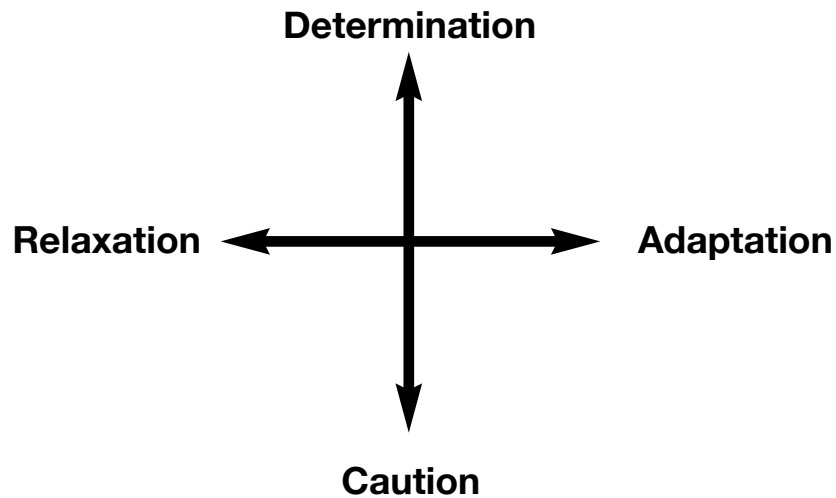
## Which Foursome to Choose

### THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE



**OR**

### THE FOUR MUSKETEERS



When stress tries to divide  
and conquer, multiply  
your efforts.

Anxiety can be a turning  
point turning on.

and I do recognize that thoughts and emotions are indivisible. However, it is hard to be only positive when we are under stress, so we need to learn how to deal with negative emotions. For example, we can switch to some optimism and hope in order to give us more energy and to help produce a plan that works in dealing with stress. We need to be able to monitor which emotions are brought out by stress, regain some calm, and try to think and turn things around. Emotions can be used to hinder thinking or promote it. **When we move our emotions to the positive side, clearer thinking gets in motion.**

Figure 7-2 looks further at the effect of worry or anxiety on our ability to handle all the information involved in a stressful situation. When we are too stressed, not all the needed information gets in or, if it all gets in, it is jumbled. Stress closes the window in our attention capacities. However, if we keep that window open, if we enlist all the ways that we know in order to maintain some measure of calm when we are under stress, the information relevant to it can get in better. **If we let good information about stress enter our attentional window, we can more easily react appropriately and have it leave.**

**Figure 7-2**

Anxiety is deleterious, and blocks information processing. There are techniques that we can use to give it a piece of our mind.

## **Anxiety Closes the Window; You Can Open It**

**Can we turn this into a window of opportunity?**

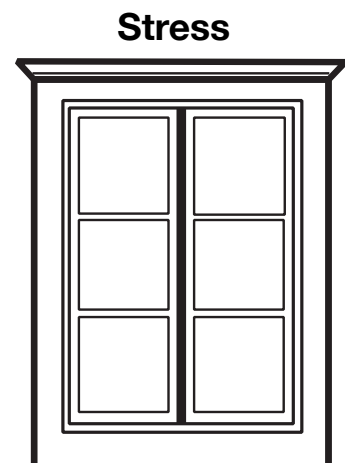
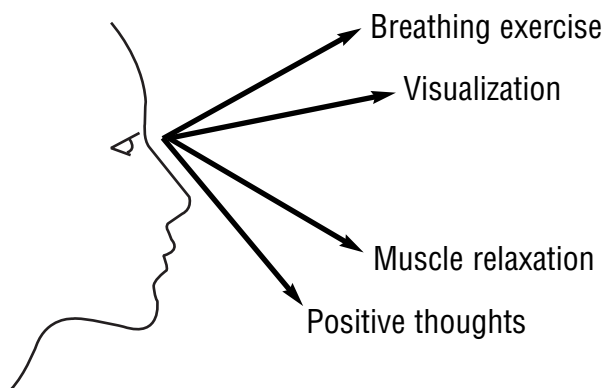


Figure 7-3 shows that sometimes it is hard to change paths when we are under stress. Also, sometimes we can change paths very quickly, but it may be the wrong choice that we make. The first part of this diagram shows that when we experience stress, we get imprisoned in wells or valleys of action from which it is hard to climb out. However, we must

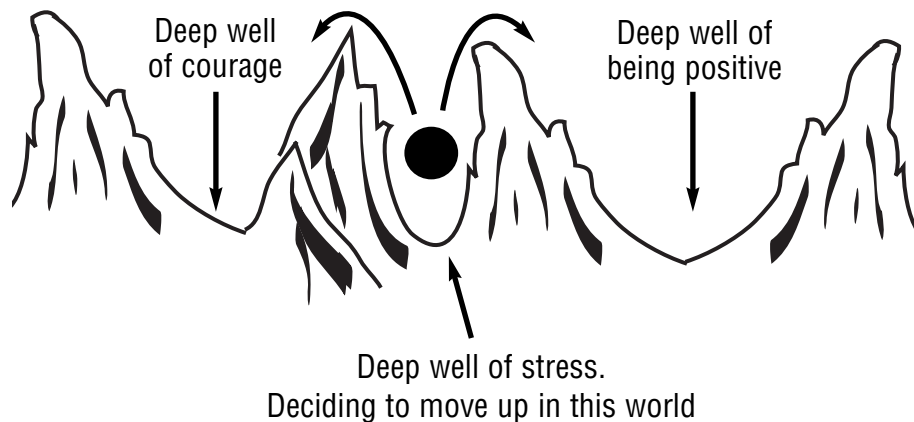
*Choice always happens—  
when we choose  
to have them.*

**Figure 7-3**

A positive attitude is the best remedy against stress. Positively so.

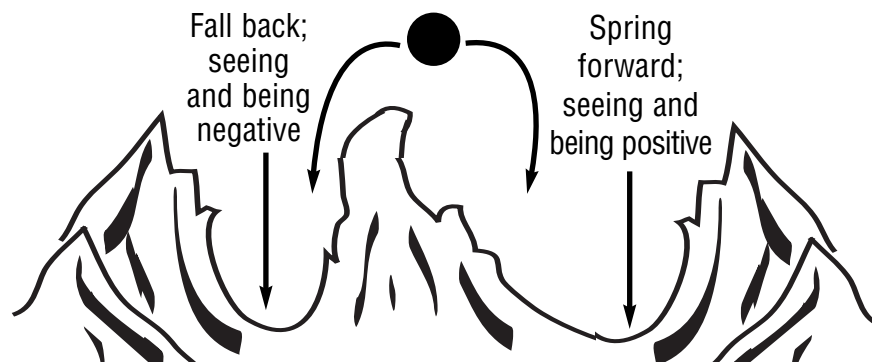
## Mountains of Choice

### **A** “WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN”



### **B** “SPRING FORWARD, FALL BACK”

Ambiguous situation  
Uncertain how to react  
Things could go either way

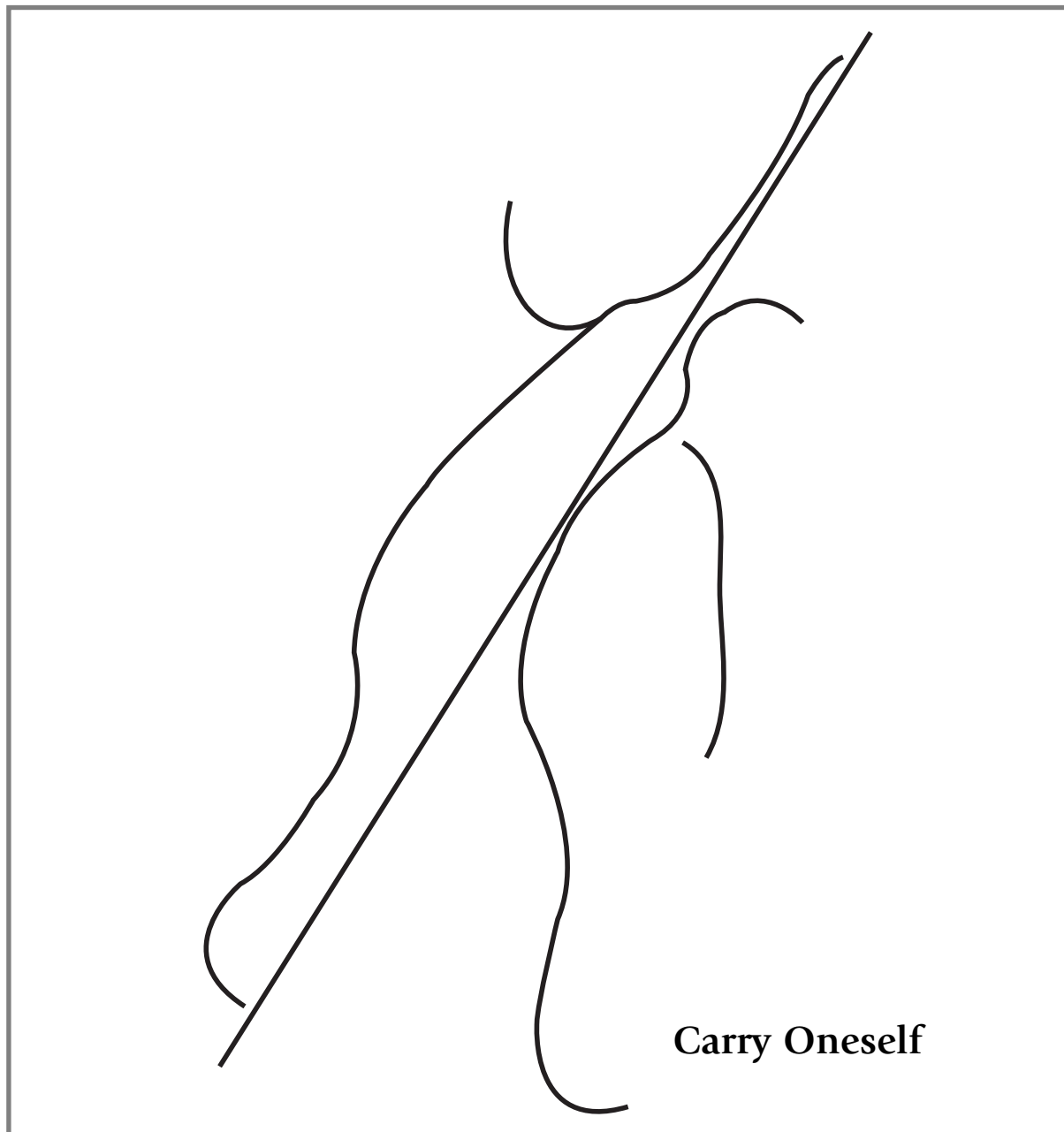


.....  
*Stress is a whole—until we  
dismantle its parts.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress seems  
overbearing—we  
should bear down.*  
.....

remember that mountains have valleys on the other side. With effort, one can always return to a staging point in any mountain, to better analyze what to do, find the right path, and organize plans to succeed better in crossing it.

The second part of the diagram shows that, in an ambiguous situation, where we have difficulty deciding which way to go, we must keep in mind the saying, “spring forward, fall back.” By having both choices available when we find ourselves in an ambiguous situation, by trying to



resolve it but, at the same time, knowing that it may not be worth it, we put ourselves in position, ultimately, to make the right choice and to take the right path. Even the largest mountains on the planet have been climbed to their heights. But mountain climbing is always planned carefully and the right equipment is used. **When we perceive the challenge of stress surmountable, we build a psychological base camp equipped with what we need—good attitude and good knowledge.**

---

*When we do not face stress,  
we do not face ourselves.*

---

---

*Seeing positives  
creates positives.*

---



Stress cannot reach the center—when we keep the wheels turning.

Stress likes to inspect the grounds—so send it to the back.

In **Figure 7-4**, we see how a major stress may affect one's sense of self. However, a major stress might only destabilize us temporarily, in the short term, affecting our equilibrium of self. Once the shock happens, we should work toward getting our sense of self back on track. Identity is built up from a matrix of social interactions and skill learning that keeps developing throughout the life span. It is a finely spun web made of intricate parts of ourselves, and we are constantly defining ourselves. A major stress may induce a disorientation of the web of our identity. However, we are capable of regrouping and having it recover, perhaps with the help of others, such as family and friends. At the core of each of us lies a positive strength that we can return to when it is put off balance. **We need to believe in our positive core and its resilience.** It can reappear intact after any major stress, just like the sun engages faithfully in its daily sweep across the horizon in the morning after each nightfall.

**Figure 7-4**

Stress may upset aspects of our lives, but it need not upset any aspect of ourselves.

## Identify Identity

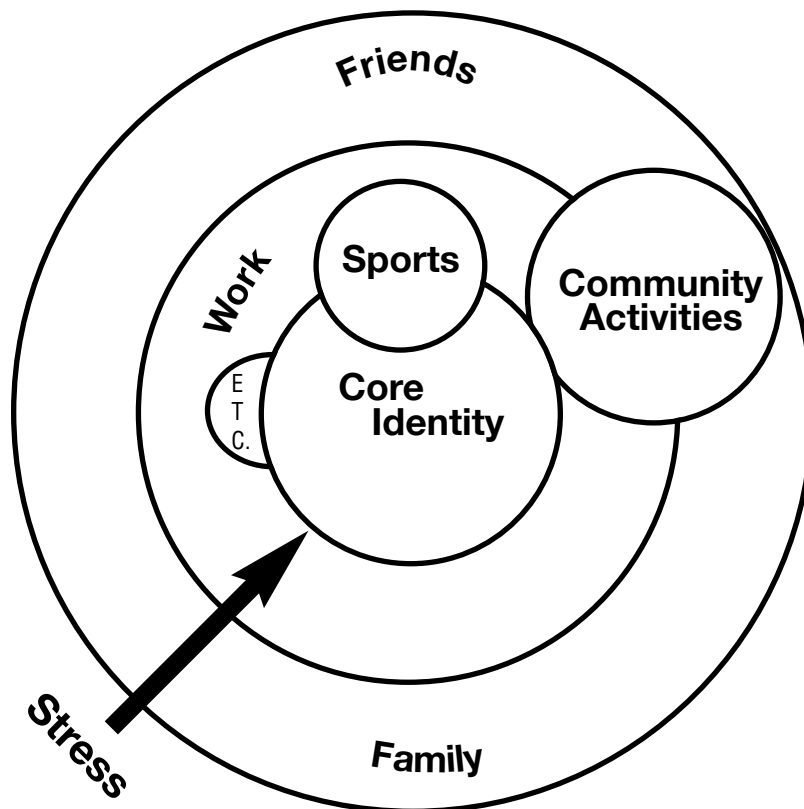




Figure 7-5 shows that bad habits arise from stress and are not really part of our central core. It indicates that bad habits are not innate, or born within us, but derive from factors external to us, such as stress. In contrast, positive qualities and good habits are the major components of what is central to us. Normally, bad habits are either minimal or are controlled and contained, because the stresses in our lives are not overwhelming. Also, we have coping mechanisms, resources, and ways of relaxing and dealing with stress to help us get through our daily lives. We have our social environment and social support network of family and friends to help us get through moments of stress.

Nevertheless, there are moments when all these stress resistance mechanisms are overwhelmed and bad habits are more likely to manifest. We may become aggressive or depressed, worry too much or withdraw, and so on. If this happens, it is unfair to ourselves to say that these behaviors are only negative and maladaptive for, in the short term, they may help us mobilize our personal and social resources in order to better deal with the stress. Thus, in a certain sense, in the short term, they may be positive and adaptive. However, they can develop into maladaptive bad habits when the stress is too intense or prolonged and we become incapable of dealing with it. The bad habits may become generalized and liable to emerge in any situation. When this happens, we tend to forget our positive qualities and forget to use our personal and social stress reduction mechanisms. We perceive the stress as immense, that we cannot cope or deal with it, and we believe that we have especially bad habits. We become pessimistic about our ability to deal with the stress and to change ourselves.

Part of what we have to learn in destressing is to have confidence in our positive qualities and that our positive core always stays with us. No matter what the stress that we are experiencing and no matter to what degree the stress disorients us and hides our positives, we can stay the positive course. Our central core is not like a chameleon. It does not take on the colours of what surrounds it. Our central core is not an amorphous balloon. It is a well-formed, resilient, powerful core that helps us to adjust, adapt, and move forward. The stresses that we face may appear to make our central core small or weak. However, in times such as

---

*There are many ways that  
stress can be countered.  
Start numbering them.*

---

---

*When stress builds, build  
the resources to deal with it.*

---

---

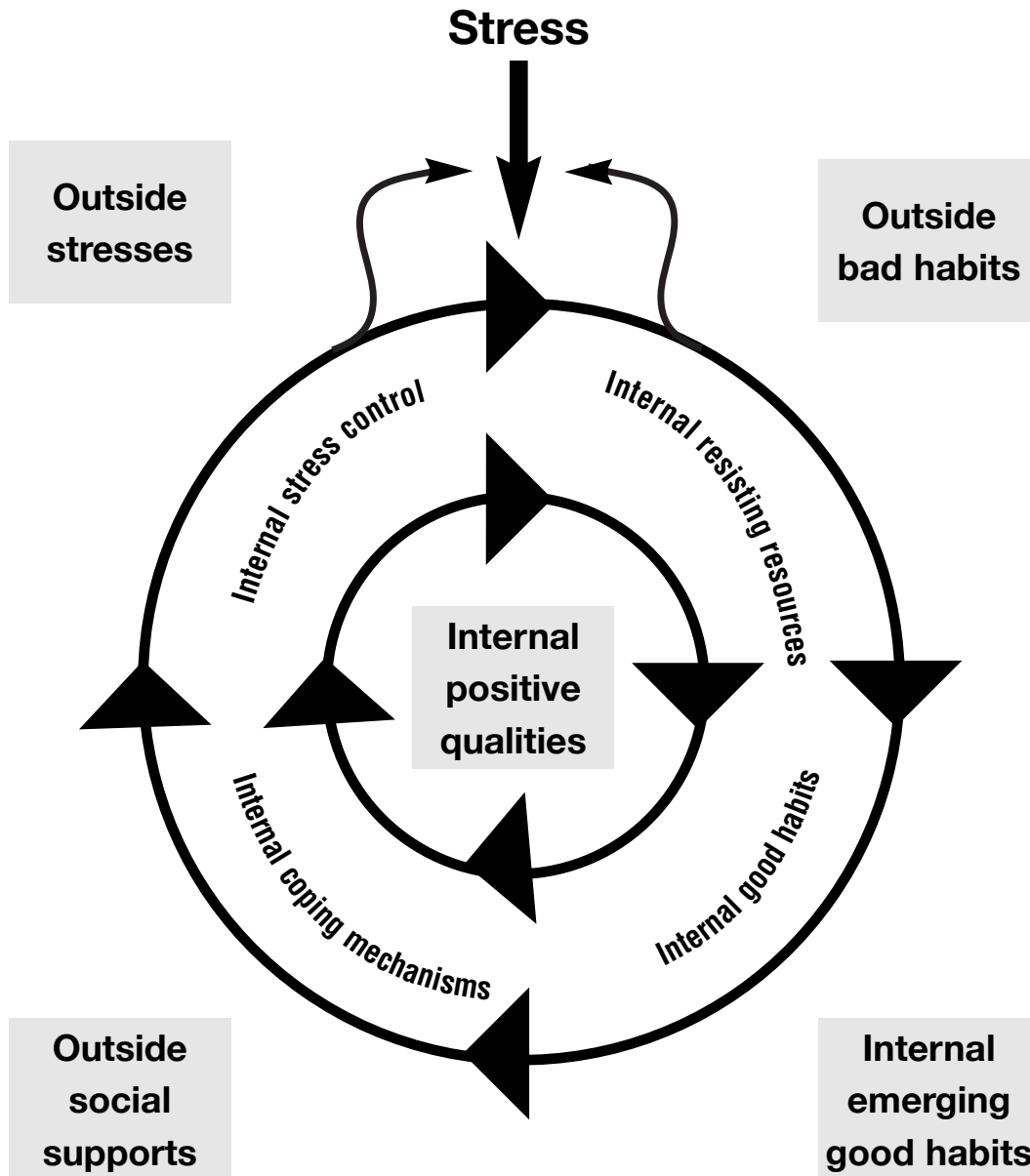
*Stress comes freely,  
but do not give it interest.*

---

**Figure 7-5**

Our positives, our coping skills, our good habits, and our social supports can help keep stress on the outside.

## The Ins and Outs of Stress



these, our central core is always there, a positive waiting for the call to mobilize so that it emerges as a force that can help us through troubled times. As long as some of it is there, even if it is hidden, our central positive core can become as strong and as big as we will it.

*Stress used to get to me,  
now it gets me moving.*

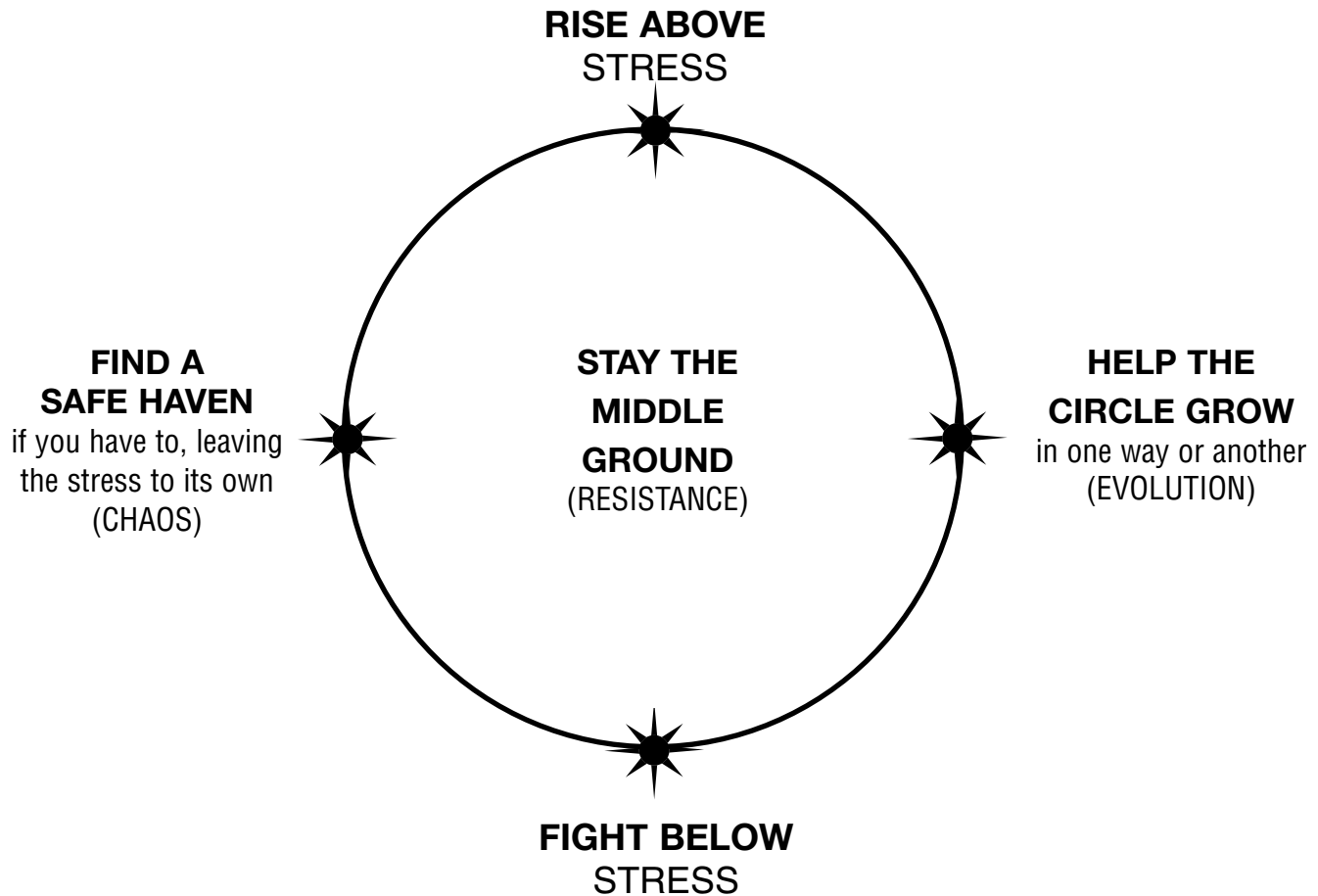
Figure 7-6 illustrates the five major ways that I perceive that we can react to stress when it is overwhelming. It also illustrates that when we are exposed to stress, we have options. The reactions that we may have in dealing with stress run the gamut from withdrawal to striking out.

*The world seems less foreboding—when we are for embolding.*

**Figure 7-6**

There are direct strategies that we can use in difficult situations, but also indirect ones, such as rising above, finding a safe place, resisting in our own way, and even engaging in an underground fight. But the best means of dealing with any stress is to grow through it, no matter what it is, using good strategies.

## The Four Corners of the Earth



*Stress needs no invitation—nor does it want one when we are celebrating its control.*

*Let stress eavesdrop the gossip about it—when we have it under our control.*

*Cure stress—get a nurse for it once your finish with it.*

.....  
*Stress is tone deaf, cannot  
keep a tune, and hates  
music. Play on.*  
.....

**1. CHAOS.** In this mode, when we are under major stress, we withdraw as the stress swirls about us, perhaps with some hope that it will resolve by itself. We focus on the negatives, having a chaotic attitude. We may express psychological reactions that mirror the perception of the chaos that we perceive in the stress. However, there may be nascent feelings of hope and of undertaking positive actions when the situation seems chaotic. That is, from a kernel of hope struggling to free itself, chaos can begin to take a more constructive shape and positive actions may follow. In chaos theory, the term "chaos" actually means "anti-chaos," or increasing order. For our purposes, this illustrates that being in a psychological state of less order can produce the conditions that permit more order to emerge. **Feeling as though we are experiencing chaos may be a step toward getting us out of the chaos, where direction can take shape.**

.....  
*Stress is in the  
mind of the beholder.  
So look at some travel pictures.*  
.....

**2. REVOLUTION.** Sometimes we have the personal resources to react in the opposite manner to a chaotic one, and not withdraw from a major stress. Both the context and our will allow more active effort on our part to change the situation. We become determined to change the factors eliciting the major stress, planning and acting in a forceful manner. At the same time, we monitor our reactions in order to assure that we do not go overboard. **Overreaction to stress can lead to underperformance in its resolution.**

**3. RESISTANCE.** In between the chaotic withdrawal reaction to major stress and the more radical revolutionary reaction lays more moderate positions, should conditions permit. We can stay the course, and try to change things less directly. Therefore, we resist in an indirect fashion, but in a way that is more active rather than passive.

**G**ary was feeling  
glum, so he  
read Chapter 7.  
It helped him glow  
and be garulous.  
Chapter 7 is a  
good one.

**4. EVOLUTION.** Sometimes we are capable of growing into a fuller person when exposed to major stress. It becomes a transformative experience, with the issue not about changing conditions on the outside but maturing on the inside. We deal with the stress as best we can, hoping that the situation improves but, should it not happen, we

know that at least we have grown at the psychological level partly through the effects of the stress.

.....  
*When stress gets us down  
and out, we need to dig  
down deep and in.*  
.....

**5. RISING ABOVE.** Sometimes in dealing with overwhelming stress, we try to stay above the fray in a way that allows us to both deal better with it and to facilitate self-growth and growth in others, either directly or indirectly. We facilitate our own development despite the circumstances, but in a way that permits some sort movement toward resolution of the stress. Therefore, each of *a)* the context in which we and others in our lives are situated, and *b)* our own growth process, and that of others in our lives, end up more positive.

This sketch of five ways to deal with overwhelming stress reveals that there is more than a basic choice between two options, but at least five ones, which can take various forms and combinations, depending on how the stress is unfolding. Life never reduces to a single choice. There are always nuances, complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties that make the straight line of life twist. A range of choices opens at each appearance of stress, but even the most depressive reaction to a major stress can contain a glimmer of hope that can cascade into a major attitude change and growth. **Stress invites a defeatist attitude—until we defeat its attitude.**

.....  
*Make a mountain  
out of a molehill.  
Keep discarding stress.*  
.....



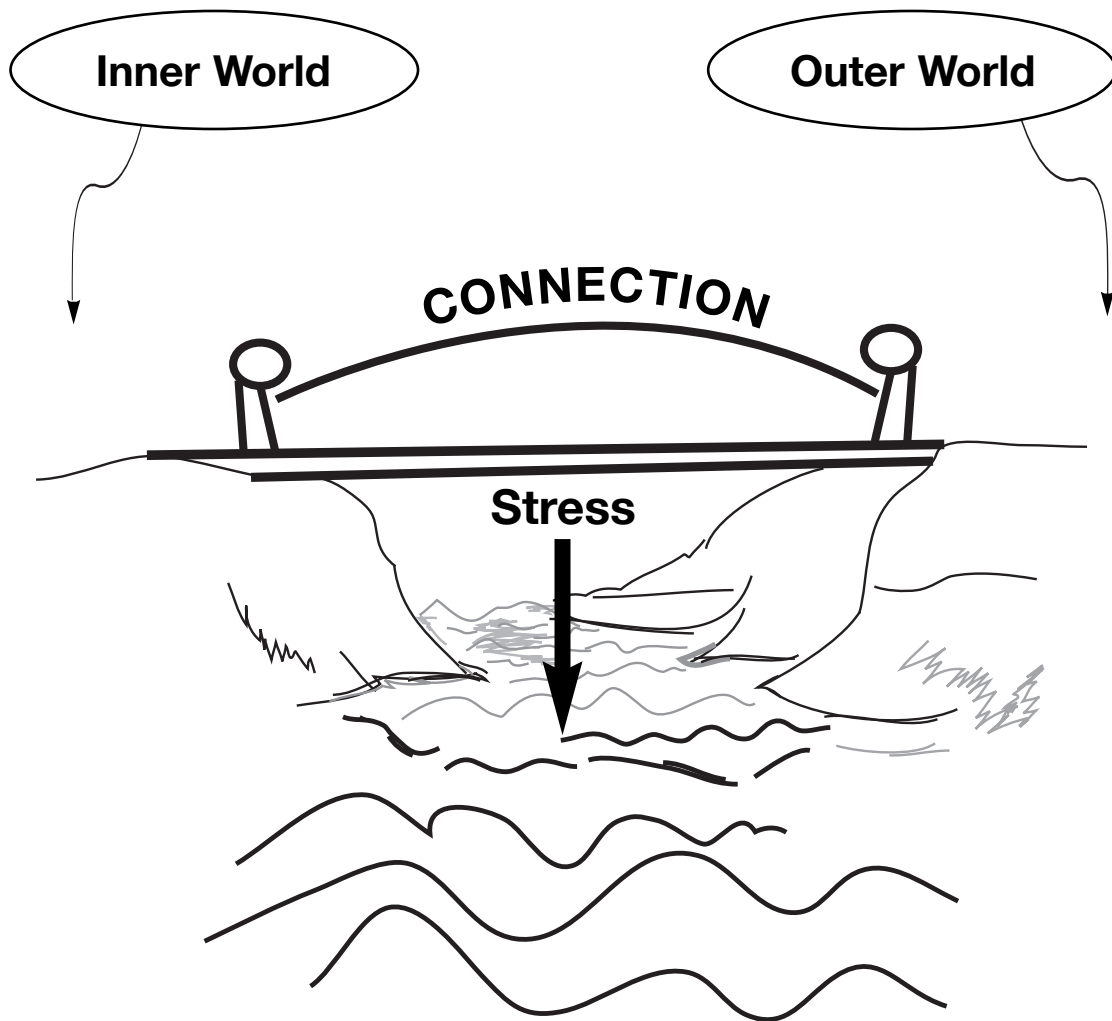
.....  
*Connections put stress  
behind bars.*  
.....

Figure 7-7 demonstrates a way to pass over stress. Stress gets through to us when our inner and outer worlds are not well-connected. To best deal with stress, our inner and outer worlds need to be in tune with each other. Good connection networks protection from stress. **Stress can be bridged when our inner and outer connections pass over it.**

**Figure 7-7**

When we stay connected to ourselves and to others around us, we can better survive troubled times.

## Like a Bridge Over Troubled Waters



.....  
*I used to think that stress  
was a cyclone—Now, it thinks  
I am a Cyclops.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress used to blow all around me  
—Now, I'm its hurricane*  
.....

.....  
*Stress has the bad habit of going  
on vacation—once we trip it up.*  
.....

Figure 7-8 suggests that a good way of dealing with stress is to find people who can help, even if indirectly. We can worry endlessly alone, or we can end our worry by sharing it with others. By speaking to family, going out with friends, doing something social, communicating, or otherwise socializing, we allow less place for stress in our lives. **When stress wants to befriend you, find it a rejecting partner instead.**

*Together, people can confront political regimes and psychological realms.*

**Figure 7-8**

Stress cannot be dealt with alone. We have internal resources, but we also need external support. Friends or other important people in our lives are stress's worst enemies.

## Socialize

Social Eyes	Social Ayes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress has you down, look up to your family and friends</li> <li>• Stress has you down, visualize being with a friend or family member</li> <li>• Stress has you down, keep on the look-out for family and friends</li> <li>• Stress has you down, look at the horizon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress has you down, force yourself to get out</li> <li>• Stress has you down, smile even if you don't feel like it</li> <li>• Stress has you down, arrange a party and don't invite stress</li> <li>• Stress has you down, pretend you're you and not stress</li> </ul>

## The Friend You Make May Be Yourself

*Arguably, stress does not know how to win a reasonable debate.*

*Put stress on the firing line—then try not to get run over as it runs away.*

*Stress beats a hasty retreat—when we speed up its losses.*

*I used to let stress tell  
me how to live—Now,  
I tell it to get a life.*

Figure 7-9 shows that we have the potential to control bad habits but, for reasons such as past learning and present context, bad habits can take control of us. The secret is to be a good coach. We must lead the way, create a good alliance among our good habits, and put our good habits into the game. We cannot totally eliminate bad habits, but we can stop them, sit them on the bench, and have them cooperate with us. When we become our own coach, bad habits cannot outcoach us.

**Figure 7-9**

Bad habits reflect underlying conflicts. When we start taking control of them, good habits follow.

## Be Your Own Coach

**SORE  
CARD**

We are coached				
B	A	D		
H	A	B	I	T
W	I	N	S	

**OR** 

**SCORE  
CARD**

We are own coach				
G	O	O	D	
H	A	B	I	T
W	I	N	S	



Figure 7-10 is concerned with how, when we are under stress, we can move both toward an internal motivation to help ourselves and toward getting support and help from the outside. When dealing with stress, to be sure, we need to relax, but also the more we tell the right stories about the situation and about ourselves to others, the more we get the support of others. **When we stay motivated, we can better act on a script where we have written that we are dealing with stress.** Moreover, this can influence others to help write with us a happy ending to the story. In contrast, when we tell stories of doom and gloom about ourselves and about our situation, we end up acting according to those stories

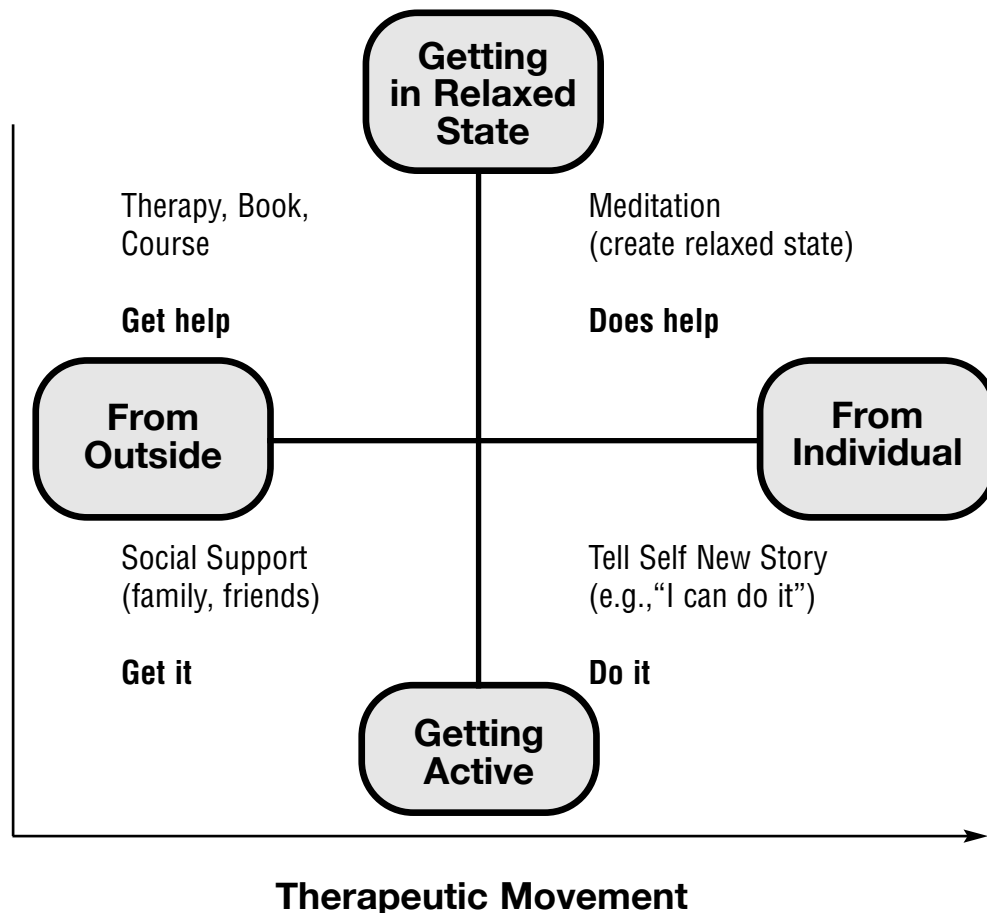
.....  
*Become a holistic healer—  
 give stress the medicine.*  
 .....

.....  
*Coping goes a long way—  
 when we shortchange stress.*  
 .....

**Figure 7-10**

Motivation helps when we are under stress. There are things that we can do and help that we can get. Stress backs down when we stand up.

## Motivational Strategies



.....  
*When stress gives no  
choice—give it choice words.*  
.....

and reduce the possibility of others helping us. If we change the negative endings of the stories that we tell about ourselves, we will sell more copies, especially to ourselves and to others who may be in a position to help. By asking for help from a position of being positive, we maximize the chances that the others asked to help us will respond with a positive answer. By adopting a positive stance in our attitude and action when under duress, we lead better to positives in others' reactions to our situation.

.....  
*When stress insists—  
outsource it.*  
.....

.....  
*Behold, stress!  
Or, put a hold on it.*  
.....

.....  
*Send stress on its way—  
a dead end.*  
.....

.....  
*Give stress a facial—a smile.*  
.....



In Chapter 7, I have explored some basic issues about stress management. For example, the way that we initially perceive stress is important to what happens in dealing with it. Also, in dealing with stress, the choices available to us are very complex, even relating to how we let information flow towards us. When we are captured in the vicious circle of stress, we still can gravitate with good attitude and effort toward more positive outcomes. Dealing with stress should be considered as one more homework or work project assignment. However, in taking life's stress course, there is a major difference compared to our daily homework or work project assignments. That is, **when stress gives us its difficult assignments, we have the choice of not only getting a passing grade, but also rewriting the questions on the assignments to make it easier for us.** Stress should not be our teacher or supervisor but, rather, should be the audience for our good attitude, good actions, and asking good questions.

.....  
*Showers stress storms  
with brain water.*  
.....

.....  
*Get a handle on stress.  
Then grab the handle  
and carry it out.*  
.....

.....  
*Bother stress—think.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress holds sway—  
until we stop shaking.*  
.....

.....  
*Stress relinquishes its hold—  
when we extinguish our fear.*  
.....



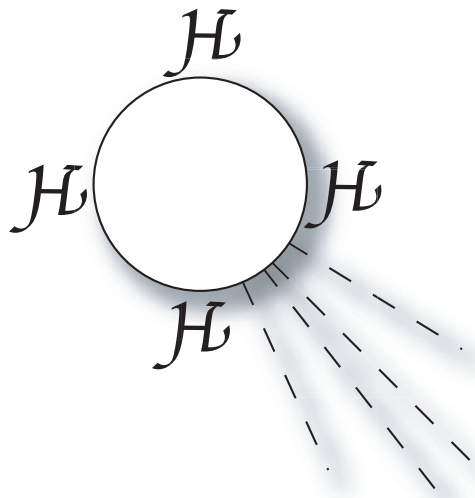
Ginny had been in a serious motor vehicle accident three months ago. She was getting nightmares and flashbacks and was very jumpy, in general. She avoided driving when she could. When she was a passenger in a car, she held on tightly, tensed up, and continually told the driver to watch out. She was always absorbed in her thoughts and recalled some past frightful incidents as well as the accident. She stopped being intimate with her husband, adding to her concerns. Physically, she was making little improvement in her whiplash-related lower back, neck, and shoulder pains. The treating physician had put her on pain-killers and a medication for her mood, but it did not help. She never wanted to speak about the accident with anyone and began keeping to herself more in order to avoid dealing with people's questions. She could not understand why her memory had gotten worse.

Ginny's physiotherapist and chiropractor decide to refer her to a psychologist. The doctor assures her that what she has been experiencing happens to many accident victims. In treating her, he refers to a book similar to this one.

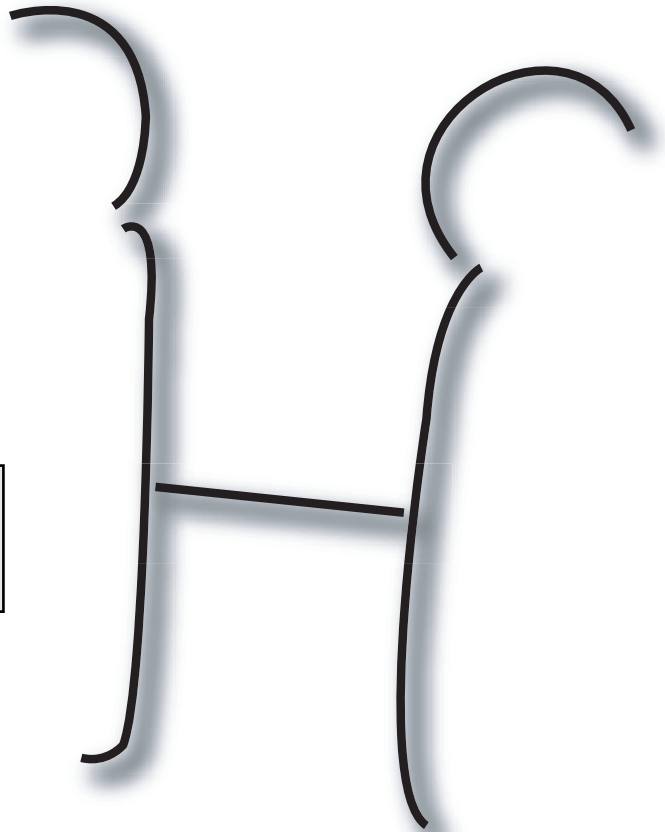


# Chapter 8

## *Think Choice*



*"H" is for being  
helpful and seeking help.*





**C**hapter 8 explores in detail some of the thought processes that help facilitate the making of appropriate choices when we are faced with stress. It emphasizes what I have labelled, “But statements,” which are ways of adding positive statements following negative statements. **Optimism is a learned habit, and negative and pessimistic statements should not be left dangling without learning to add after them more hopeful and optimistic ones.** Normally, we tag on negatives to our beliefs about stresses around us and about ourselves; that is, our “but” statements run from the positive to the negative, casting doubt on ourselves, our capacities, the feasibility of succeeding in the situations in which we find ourselves, and so on (“... but, I can’t do it.”) We should control such a pessimistic attitude, and learn the reverse way of qualifying our thoughts, that is, to tag on some positives, or optimism, following negatives, or pessimism. If we talk to ourselves in the right way, we can be interesting conversational partners. Toward the end of the chapter, I present charts developed in the cognitive-behavioral approach. They ask us to monitor our ways of thinking in stressful situations, or situations where problematic behaviors arise, leading the way to more effective thinking, feeling, and acting. Given the theme of the chapter, should you feel pessimistic about your capacity to counteract pessimism with optimism, I believe that you can succeed, nonetheless.

---

*When we find a solution,  
it's practice for  
finding a better one.*

---

---

*Our mind is not a  
computer—but millions  
of them, and more.*

---

**Figure 8-1** indicates that when we are pessimistic rather than optimistic, we make errors in thinking that lead to wrong actions or to inaction. For example, we may believe that everything negative in our life is our own fault and anything positive is not due to our own skills and effort. We may always think the worst, exaggerate, or “freak out”. We may believe that things will never get better. We may let our emotions rule our thoughts, keeping as our only response to stress the first emotional signs that develop in reaction to it and the accompanying negative thoughts as it continues.

The good thing about errors in thought is that we can test and correct them. If we examine them carefully, we may find that they do not reflect the reality of our situation. For example, upon careful reflection, we should realize that we do have positive core skills and that we can keep motivated

**Figure 8-1**

Optimism is the best buffer against stress. It reduces stress's impact on us and increases our impact on it.

## Opt In With Optimism

OPT IN	OPT OUT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Optimism</li><li>• Opportunity</li><li>• Openings</li><li>• Options</li><li>• Optimal</li><li>• Oppose Negatives</li><li>• Operate (Action)</li><li>• Opal (a jewel)</li><li>• O! positives</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pessimism</li><li>• Dead End</li><li>• Closings</li><li>• Oppositions</li><li>• Worst Case</li><li>• Invite Negatives</li><li>• Inaction</li><li>• Nothing Nice</li><li>• Positives Out</li></ul>

### Exercise:

When pessimism takes over, overtake it with optimism.

Do this each time.

It will get easier and last longer.

When optimism opts in, pessimism opts out.

and give good effort for the things that we like best. We may realize that we are thinking the worst about a small stress facing us, or that we are predicting the worst for no valid reason. We can do a mind check, helping us realize that, for any stressful situation in which we find ourselves, no matter how big or small, we can think stress down. We may react with emotions that are going in stressful situations, but then we learn to diminish their intensity, in order to allow us to have clear thinking and directed action. In all these ways, our thoughts can help us cope with stress. There is always at least a small part of our minds that remains level-headed when we are stressed. Once we let that part take increasing control, it can increasingly organize adaptive responses to stress. **If we let the best part of our minds watch over our stress, they can help to undermine it.**

.....  
**Common Sense:**

*It's all around us;  
but it's never seen.*

*We look so hard for it;  
when it's so easy to find.*

*The more we look, the  
farther away from us it gets.*  
.....

When we search for positives despite negatives, it becomes a positive habit.

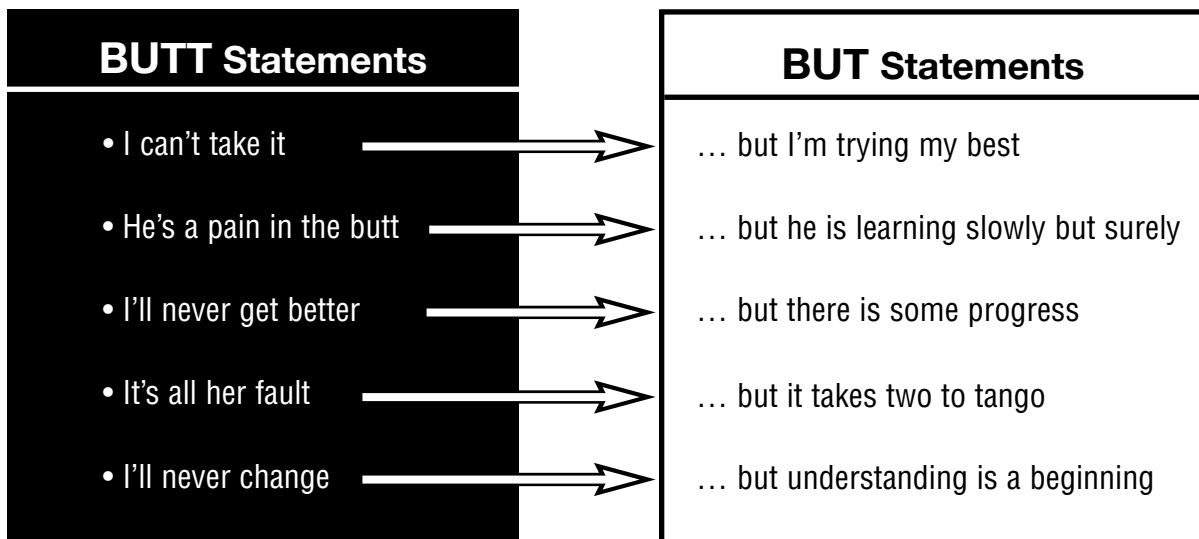
We should not pinch pennies with common sense.

Figure 8-2 highlights the concept of “But” statements. They are positive thoughts tagged on after negative thoughts. We cannot stop negative thoughts from developing, but we can cut them short by adding “but” statements after them. I provide some examples: “I can’t stand the stress, but I am trying my best.” “I’ll never get better, but I guess there is some progress.” “Sure there’s stress, but there is no reason why I cannot deal with it.” “This stress is tough, but I am tougher.” The sooner we add these “but” statements, that is, positives after negatives, or more optimistic statements after more pessimistic statements, the less we will be needlessly stressed. Each of us can do exercises in positive thinking. We can think of or find positive responses to our negative ideas. We need to let positives be our guides. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Figure 8-2

We cannot stop negative thoughts. But we can train ourselves to tag on a positive after them. When stress produces a negative, follow it with a positive.

## Butt Out



One does not need a reason to reason.

Being reasonable is being reason able.

Memory is more practice than photograph.



**Figure 8-3**

We need to learn how to talk more constructively about our coping skills. I'm sure you can do it.

## **The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly**

### **UGLY**

- It's lousy today
- I'll never get better
- There's no hope

### **BAD**

- Maybe it will get better a bit
- I'll feel better only if it goes away (stress, pain, etc.)
- It's out of my control; whatever happens happens

### **GOOD**

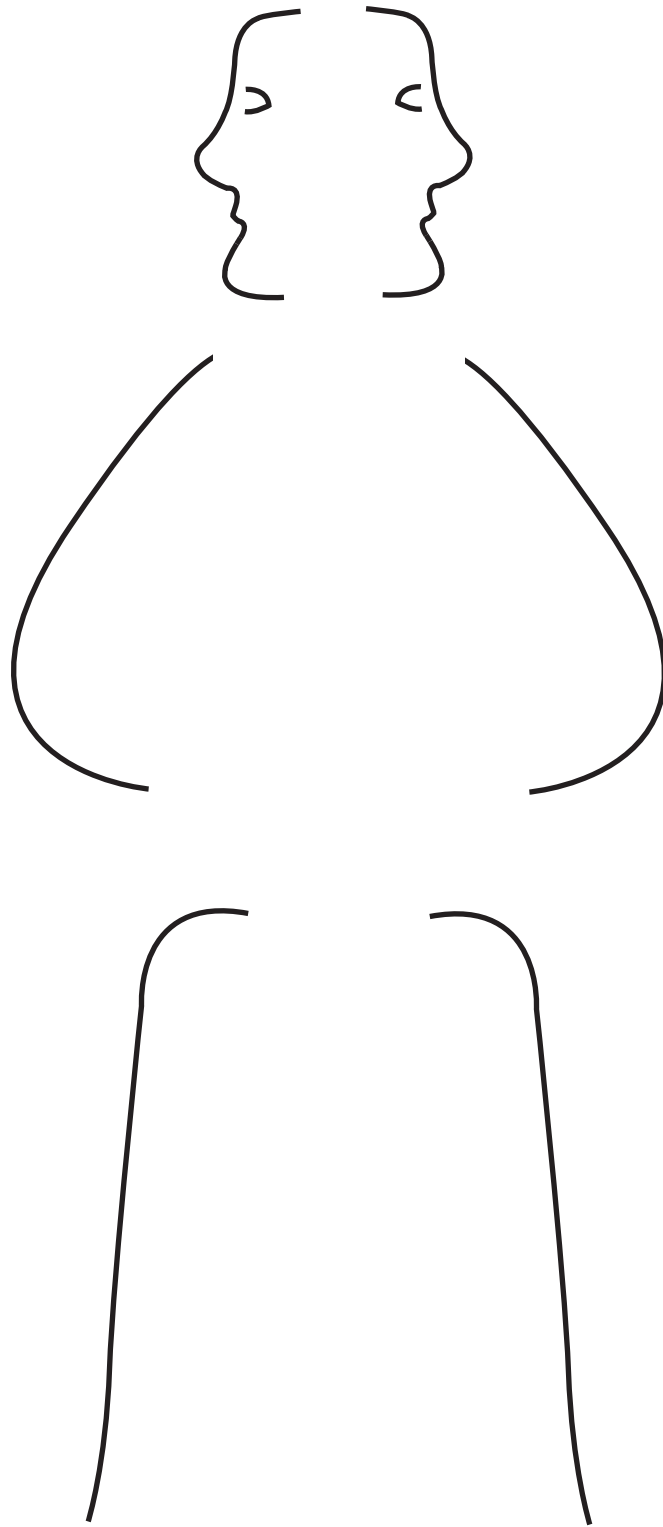
- I'm sure it will get better
- I feel in my heart it will go away
- I know that wanting it to get better helps it to get better faster

**Figure 8-3** gives examples of the power of positive thinking. When thinking is extremely pessimistic, not only do we believe that our situation is hopeless, but also we stop doing the beneficial things for ourselves that normally accompany a hopeful attitude. Pessimism even affects our health, through complex cascades that affect our immune system. **Pessimism is self-defeating, but it can be defeated by the self.** We can begin to use constructive statements. If we opt for optimism, our wounds and woes will begin their healing journey.

We tend to lapse easily into telling ourselves that everything is going wrong and that things will not change. However, when we let this negative thought continue, it becomes harder for us. It is easy to resist change or ignore the possibility of change, and to continue to feel down and out. But it is even harder to continue to believe these thoughts, or that things cannot change, and to continue feeling helpless and hopeless. Once we try to find new ways of thinking, of dealing with stress, of being more optimistic, of tagging on positives after negatives, and so on, pessimism loses its grip on us and we develop more positive ways of thinking to replace it.

.....  
*Feeling good starts  
with thinking good.*  
.....

.....  
*Common sense is  
uncommon knowledge.*  
.....



**Choose Thinking**

Figure 8-4 indicates that when optimism becomes a way of life, we develop a way with life. When we actively cope with stress, not only do we handle it better, but also we feel better as we handle it. Coping well with stress makes us feel handy instead of handicapped. Optimism is not all or none; even having a little bit is enough. It can empower us with its energy for lengthy periods of time even if we feel it for only a brief moment. **Optimism is atomic—a little goes a long way.**

Thinking good starts with wanting to think good.

There is more common nonsense than common sense.

#### Figure 8-4

Make every day that time of the year when we make a resolution to control stress.

## Optimism Fan Club

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

We've heard that you were in a difficult predicament, and got stressed out, but want to improve.

We are asking you to become a member of our fan club. To be a member, you have to be optimistic. We have found that **being optimistic does not take a mystic**; it's not mysterious when our attitude is positive. In our fan club, we all come out for people who want good outcomes. We heard that part of you is optimistic and wants to be more optimistic. **We applaud your efforts.**

Let us give you a few tips to help you along. First, pessimism is a natural part of stress. It's not something to deny. Let it be there. But let optimism be there, too. Optimism is a start. It leads to other things. When we're optimistic, we can face better the source of our stress. We become active in facing our stress. We cope better. We perceive the stress, plan a course of action, and see the priorities in the problem and also in the solution. We keep going, pacing ourselves as we proceed. We persist in going on as new problems and obstacles arise. We perform better the needed actions. We problem solve well so that the stresses diminish, and we perfect our ability to handle stress for the next time.

Optimism allows its confrere, Active Coping, to do its thing. Pessimism inhibits coping, leading us to cop out. So whenever we get stressed, we need to keep a level head, balance our choices, show balance, and allow optimism in while keeping pessimism out. **When we're optimistic, we don't opt out.**

This is what all our members in the optimism fan club have learned. No one said life was easy. But it became easier when we became optimistic. Optimism allows us to see the future. But the funny part about it is that when we are optimistic and perceive the future, we forget about it because we're trying so hard in the present. Optimism allows us to forget the past. But the funny part is that the past keeps coming back even though optimism allows us to forget it, but when it does it's changed. No longer is the past seen as only a collection of stresses that we have experienced. With optimism, instead, we come to see the past as a collection of challenges that we have lived. This is because when we are optimistic in the present, we come to see any **stress as a challenge**, and then come to re-interpret not only the past but also the future in this way.

Optimism keeps challenging us. Let it stay. Let us challenge stress back. Let us send it where it belongs, around us but not in us, over there and not in here; because in here is us, ourselves, all the people we care about, and all the best that we hope and dream for.



.....  
*Thinking positive can be learned. Start studying.*  
.....

.....  
*We need common sense, because most of the time we do not have it.*  
.....

**Figure 8-5** gives a positive thinking exercise that I gave to a client. Too often, she would think negatively. Consequently, for topics important to her, I asked her to write down the first positive thought that came to mind. With time, she became an expert in reading her own positive thoughts. She reported that the negative ones would appear, too, but she would focus on the positive ones, as requested. By the end of the sessions, she was more optimistic. **Pessimism gives us a beating, but optimism upbeats our minds.**

**Figure 8-5**

By practising to think positively, it becomes easier. Negative thinking is a bad habit that comes second when positive thinking is first.

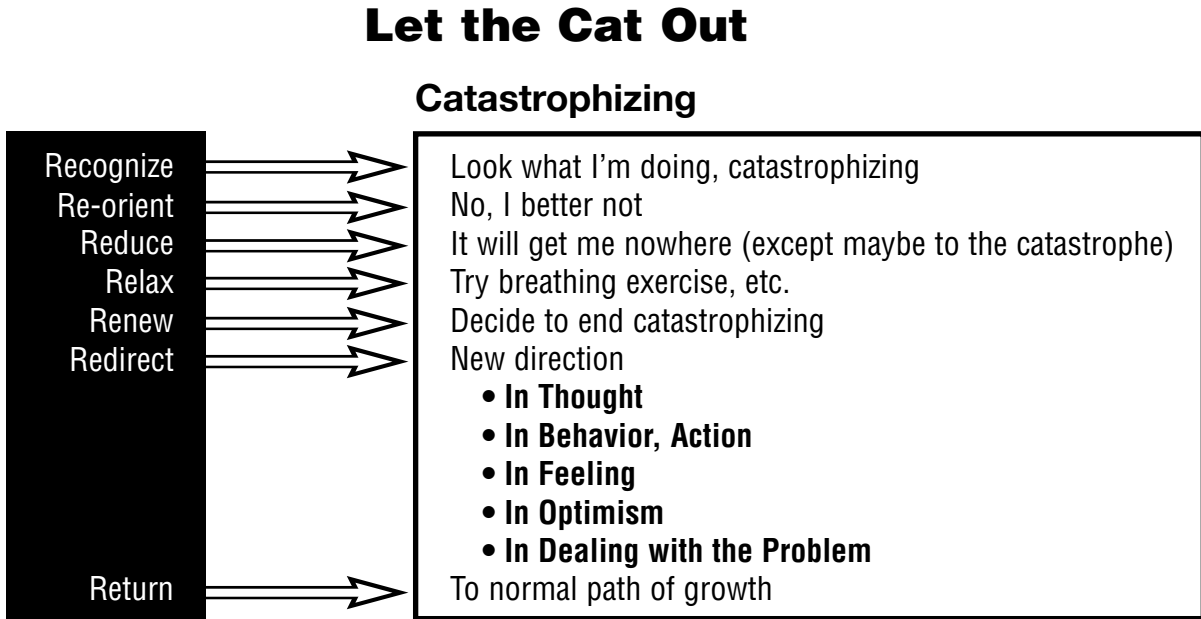
## Thinking Positive Exercise

### Practice Makes Perfect

Negative	Positive
Pain	“No pain”
No control of pain	“Let the pain be less”
Worry	“Worry doesn’t help, try to solve it”
Stress	“Stop the stress” “Think positive things”
Incident	“It could have been worse”
Fear of driving	“Be careful”
Poor sleep	“Peaceful”
I can’t	“Yes, I can”
Part of me can’t	“I try to help myself with the part that can”

**Figure 8-6**

Catastrophic thinking is a pervasive mode of thought that is pessimistic, emphatic, and harmful. It leaves little hope. We can succeed in altering such distortions in thinking, calling on our optimism. Optimism is a self-fulfilling prediction.



**Figure 8-6** deals with the particular thinking error of “catastrophizing”. The very act of thinking the worst is the worst thing that can happen. It sets up a negative mood, sending us into a vicious circle that makes catastrophes more likely, in a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, if they are only brief, catastrophic thoughts possibly could serve a relevant function in certain situations. That is, they may alert us to danger and mobilize us to engage in preventative action. However, once they get us going, we should strive to turn down their rhetoric in our mind. It is natural to go over in our thoughts all the negative possibilities that could happen, the worst-case scenarios. However, we need to recognize the catastrophic thought pattern; reorient and reduce it; and then renew, redirect, and return to better ways of thinking. **Thinking catastrophe should be momentary, at best, and replaced on the moment by thinking the best.**

We need to change how we speak to ourselves. We could engage in constructive self-talk, such as in the following: “Is there another way of thinking? Why am I thinking so negatively? What if it’s not as bad as I think? There must be some things that I can do to help. There must be things that other

.....  
*Thinking the worst  
should never come first.*  
.....

.....  
*Common sense comes  
naturally to the elderly and  
naturally leaves the young.*  
.....

.....  
*Attention is not so  
much how well we  
focus but to where.*  
.....

.....  
*Common sense comes from  
sensing the common.*  
.....

.....  
*For every negative thought,  
we can find a  
positive thought.  
Think of it as  
mental therapy.*  
.....

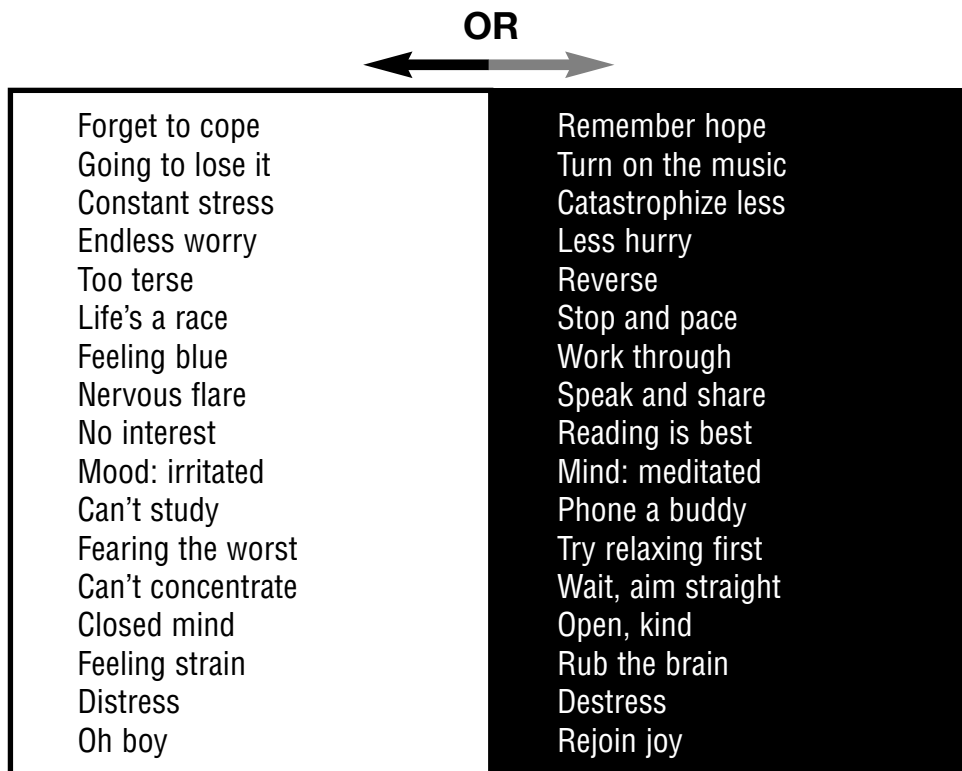
people can do to help. I can try to distract myself, find other things to do, tell myself the right things, and try to turn things around. What is important is not so much how I feel now, but my attitude about how things can change; how I think I can use what I've learned from dealing with stress in the past to help me now; and how I can imagine how things will be different in the future." By using self-talk such as this, we increase the chances of dealing well with stress. We always hear that we should think before we act. Blowing things out of proportion usually blows things up. Seeing things for what they are usually tones them down. Yes, think before you act, but think positively and well.

In **Figure 8-7**, I present word play in the form of thought opposites. When a negative thought enters our minds, as soon as possible, we should activate automatically positive thoughts. Words can inspire, so we need to create words

**Figure 8-7**

Life is full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and opposites, especially in people's thinking. By taking quantum leaps to the positive, the negative can be put aside.

## Thought Opposites



with positive messages that we can use in difficult times. The particular ones that I created for this figure are not only positive, but also they provide solutions to the negatives. **If we believe, stress can leave.** We find other examples in our cultural sayings, such as, “Behind every cloud is a silver lining”; “Tomorrow is another day”; or “When things get tough, the tough get going.”

.....  
*Common sense does not  
make sense to stress.*  
.....

.....  
*Educating intuition  
does not require tuition.*  
.....



---

*We get used to  
thinking negatively.  
Thinking positively could  
be something we could  
get used to, too.*

---

---

*Stress and common sense  
do not mix;  
so invite common sense in.*

---

I used **Figure 8-8** to give a response to a client who kept saying to me, “What if something goes wrong?” I told her that my impression was that she used a lot of negative “what if” statements, and I came back with the question of what would happen if she used positive “what if” statements. By learning to use positive “what if” statements, she switched from feeling downtrodden to feeling upbeat.

Unfortunately, we are masters of using negative “what ifs.” “What if” statements can be captured in the orbit of either our positive or our negative moods and attitudes. What would happen if our “what if” statements were captured mostly in the positive orbit? Already, you may doubt that this is possible. Such doubt is normal, but let it work both ways.

At its best, doubt is the great equalizer. It keeps us on guard, or vigilant to anything that can go wrong. It reminds us to be prudent, humble, and sensitive, even if we are also daring, assertive, and action-oriented. It makes us double check our analyses, our plans, and our abilities in dealing with problems and with stress. Doubt reminds us that no two situations are the same, and that we have to be open to continuous adaptation if we are to cope well and realize our goals.

However, doubt can become too dominant in our thinking. It can lead us to the negative orbit where negative “what ifs” predominate. We need to be wary of where we let our minds gravitate.

To conclude, I ask again, **“What if we used mostly positive ‘what ifs’?”** Possible negative endings, might not happen if we use positive beginnings in our thoughts?





**Figure 8-8**

If we ask “What if” in a way that promotes positives instead of negatives, we would end up more positive, in general. What if we did that?

## Positive “What If” Statements

*What if stress drags on, but instead of worrying too much and asking negative “what if” questions, we learn to ask positive “what if” questions, and feel more relaxed and directed in problem-solving?*

*What if we do this and feel happier instead of worrying? What if this happens?*

*What if we keep doing this, and it becomes part of us, so that a worry becomes a brief message to ourselves rather than a long mood in ourselves?*

*What if we had the same attitude for our other emotions, so that when we are frustrated we say to ourselves, “What if I see things differently or didn’t get angry? Would I be able to react better? Would I be able to end the stress earlier, or come to terms with it better?”*

*Similarly, what if we could see a sad situation as a beginning and not an end, a lack as something to fill, a loss as something to replace, a despair as something to change? What if we did the right thing when feeling negative, helping to turn things around, and did the right thing when positive, helping to keep it going? What if we became better at doing this?*

*“What if?”*

.....  
*When it is difficult to choose from among two options, one option is to find a better one.*  
.....

.....  
*In problem solving, the more options that we have, the harder it is to choose. The less options that we have, the harder it is.*  
.....

.....  
*First, she formed an idea to solve the problem. Then, she knew she could form many ones.*  
.....

*Doubt is transition toward certain improvement.*

*Often, common sense is a question of calming down.*

In **Figure 8-9**, I provide an exercise to help overcome doubt in thinking. The more that we practice overcoming doubt, the more that doubt will doubt that it is welcome. When we are learning a sport, the coach tells us to practice seeing ourselves executing perfectly the skilled activity of the sport, for example, seeing the ball hitting its target, going over the rim, getting into the net, and so on. The more we visualize success in an activity, the more we activate the possibility of success, allowing it to happen. This phenomenon not only applies to sports, but also to other things in our lives. So in this exercise, we should practice having doubt about an activity and, then, imagine ourselves overcoming that doubt by saying, “No, I can do it; it’s okay”. Then, we should see ourselves tackling the activity with confidence, saying something like, “Hey, I’m doing it”. When we have the right attitude, we increase our chances of success. **Look in the mind. There are treasures to find.**

### **Figure 8-9**

Negatives always creep in. But we can practice having them crawl out.

## **Out Doubt Week**

### **Principle**

- See self starting something
- See self expressing doubt about it (e.g., “No, I can’t do it”)
- See self overcoming doubt
- See self saying, “No, it’s OK”, “I can do it”, etc.
- See self beginning to do it, and with confidence (e.g., saying “It’s difficult, but I’m doing it”)
- See self being happy it’s done

### **Practice**

Apply to doubts of week, e.g., whether you are capable at:

- **Home**
- **Work**
- **Socially**
- **With self**

Figure 8-10 illustrates how we can analyze the thought processes that underlie our stresses. If we chart our stressful situations, and how we feel in them (e.g., are we in control, or not), we can analyze our underlying cognitions, beliefs, and anxieties. We can determine whether distortions in our thinking had played any role in magnifying stress and not dealing with it appropriately. We can decide whether there are lessons to be learned, for example, should we be avoiding thinking in terms of catastrophes. **Stress becomes our boss only when we let go our role as its boss.**

By monitoring our state,  
we improve our nation.

Common sense derives from  
sensitivity in common.

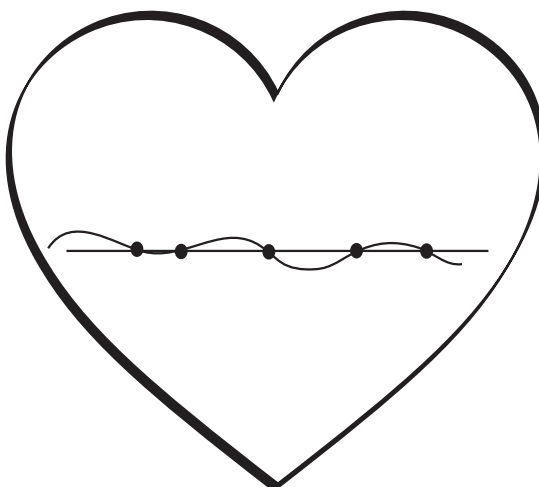
**Figure 8-10**

We need to track the situations where negative thoughts and feelings develop and see how to change them. We can learn to keep control and alter the negatives, and feel better about ourselves. On your chart, get set, go.

## Chart Your Heart

### Who's the Boss, You or Stress?

	Situation	Who's Boss	Outcome	Lesson
1	Co-worker snappy	I stayed calm	Things didn't blow up like the last time	Being your boss prevents loss
2				
3				
4				
5				
e t c .				



---

*Self-talk leads to  
nicer words.*

---

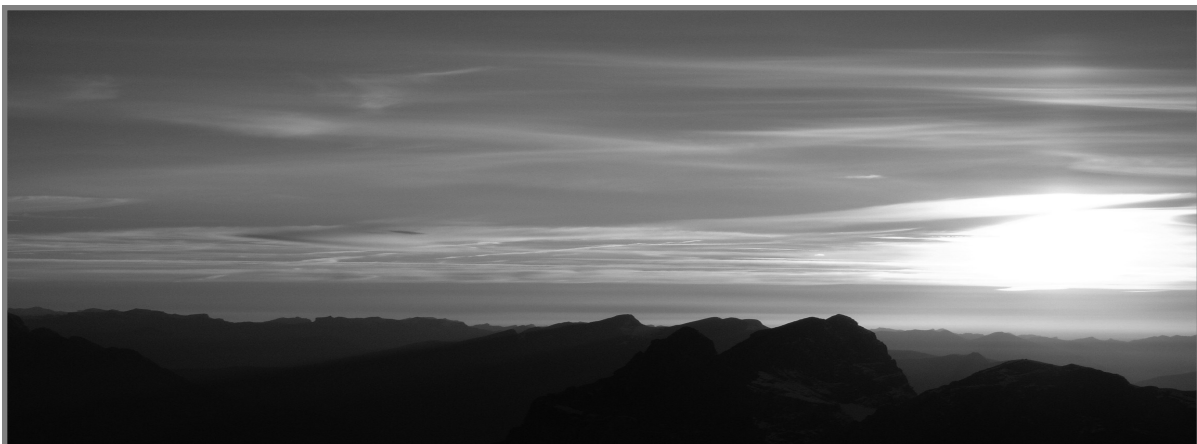
In **Figure 8-11**, we learn that, ultimately, self-talk involves one part of the self speaking to another. We have old ways of behaving that predominate as we face stress and as we try to develop new ways of adapting. Without an internal dialogue process where we are open to new possibilities, it is hard to escape old ways. It is hard to see options. Options are alternate ways open to us, with their pros and cons. We need to be asking ourselves constantly whether we are making the correct choice and doing so for the correct reasons. Are we deciding on an option because it reflects an old way that was chosen automatically without thinking, or are we deciding on an option because it is the best for us in the situation in which we find ourselves?

Old ways come from the past—they do not fully see the present, and they do not have the word “future” in their dictionary. We know that we are in a new way when we act, think, or feel differently compared to past ways, because we have examined the whole context rather than reacting automatically. When we keep speaking to ourselves in ways that deny behaving in an old way, the new way being formulated can grow and magnify so that the new way becomes habitual. Once we use our thinking process to understand better what are our goals and the best ways of achieving them, we can switch more readily to new ways, new ideas, new emotions, and new habits. There is never an easy way when we try to think through our stresses and problems but, in acknowledging this, we are already on the way to a new way and to an easier path toward the goals that we would like to achieve. **When our new way involves thinking more clearly from beginning to end, we increase our chances that good beginnings will lead to good ends.**

---

*Let each bad habit  
be a “for gone” conclusion.*

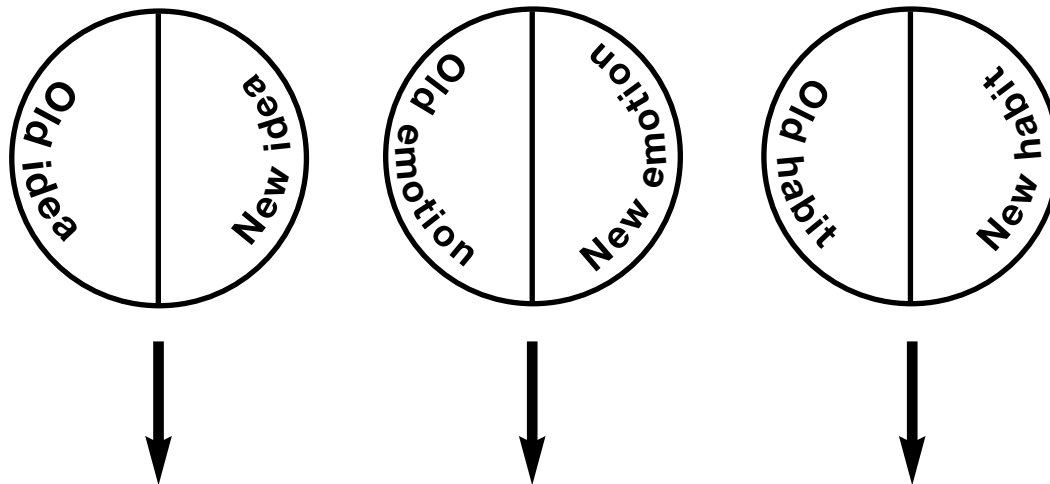
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**Figure 8-11**

Once we learn the right positive self-talk, we will not stop talking. New ways in thought, feeling, and action are promoted by positive self-talk. So become a good listener, to your positive self.

## Sell the Self on What to Tell the Self



### If no internal dialogue

- Hard to switch to new ways of thinking, feeling, acting
- Continue long time with old ways
- Don't see options; pros & cons
- Get stuck
- Lose sight of long term interest
- Lose sight of other people, and their internal dialogue

### If create internal dialogue

- Can get out of old ways easier
- See options; pros & cons of each
- More likely to choose best path
- Don't lose sight of long term goal
- Need other people, their internal dialogues
- See how to reach long term goal with them

*Concentration requires  
a concern to do it.*

*Incisive decisions avoid  
mental collisions.*

*Make your mind a proving  
ground—prove to yourself  
that you can do it.*

.....  
*Stress gets jealous when  
 we get zealous.*  
 .....

Figure 8-12 explores the value of effort in dealing with chronic stress. When confronting stress that does not stop, we can manifest resilience, resistance, and redoubling of effort. Then, we can rest to recover, and restart with effort once more. By using the strategy of persisting with pace, we can continue to deal well with the stress. Moreover, even if solutions are not

**Figure 8-12**

When we try doing something while having a positive feeling as we try, we can eventually accept any outcome of our effort even if it may be hard for us to accept it. A good attitude makes us feel any stress less because it makes us grow psychologically.

## **Chronic Stress is Livable When We are Live and Able**

### **Trying Harder to Find**

### **Find it Trying**

<b>Disadvantage</b>	<b>Disadvantage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not find solution</li> <li>• But trying itself is worth it</li> <li>• It always brings something</li> <li>• Not a real disadvantage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inner strengths get weaker</li> <li>• Energy lowers</li> <li>• Ideas shrink, don't grow</li> <li>• Feelings of shrinking grow</li> <li>• Find out we like not trying because we don't see overall picture</li> <li>• Get used to not trying</li> <li>• Forget what it's like to feel a winner</li> <li>• Lose self-confidence</li> </ul>
<b>Advantage</b>	<b>Advantage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find inner strengths</li> <li>• Find energy to apply</li> <li>• Find new ideas, new feelings</li> <li>• Find solutions</li> <li>• Find out we like it and will keep on trying with other problems</li> <li>• Keep trying all the time</li> <li>• Lose losing mentality</li> <li>• Gain self-confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem buries itself in the sand</li> <li>• Unfortunately, problem gets oxygen from the sand</li> <li>• It keeps going</li> <li>• Not a real advantage at all</li> </ul>

found, we learn something about ourselves—that we are persistent and have a good attitude and effort. **Stress has a nasty habit of returning but, by showing effort, we can develop a nasty habit of dealing with it.**

Figure 8-13 asks us to analyze when we had felt the worst. It suggests that we should look at the situation that caused it, the thinking behind it, and the result of the thinking in that situation. It asks us to change how we view things, should we encounter again the situation or another one similar to it, so that we do not repeat our worst feelings in such situations. Clients might tell me that this exercise asks them to think too much, or that they get a headache even trying to think so much. Then, I ask them what if they

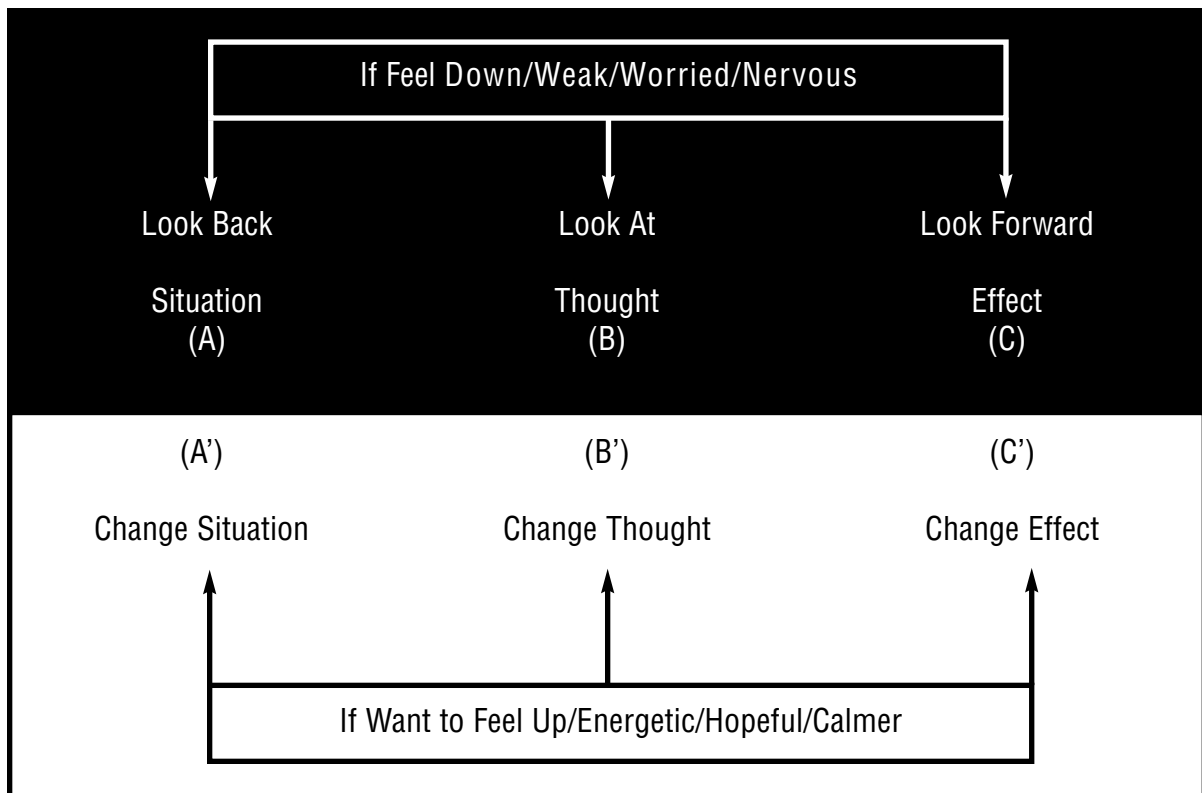
.....  
*When we work with our emotions, we think clearly.*  
 .....

.....  
*Handling stress is like grasping reality.*  
 .....

**Figure 8-13**

Cognitive behavioral therapy helps us examine antecedent conditions that produce distorted beliefs and consequent negatives. It helps us change the patterns in our feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Might as well start it yourself, by trying better ways of behaving and thinking. Better feelings will follow.

## ABC Chart: From ABC to A'B'C'



*Stress has a short shelf life—when we read books on dealing with it.*

**H**illary felt like a mountain was tumbling on her, so she read Chapter 8. She learned to be hilarious. Chapter 8 is a helpful one.

do the exercise and, despite having a temporary increase in stress and headaches, they learn about their emotional triggers and learn how to avoid feeling the worst.

Perhaps our fundamental beliefs about ourselves are quite negative (e.g., “I’ll never amount to anything”; “Things never work out”; “Everything is my fault”; “I deserve what I got”). Perhaps the manner in which we think about ourselves is too negative, inappropriate, or even dysfunctional. Are we too self-critical, having experienced too much past stress, abuse, and so on? Individuals who think this way need more patience with themselves, more support, and perhaps professional help. By improving our positive belief system about ourselves, we become more self-confident, more optimistic, and less self-critical. **Self-esteem grows as self-understanding grows.**

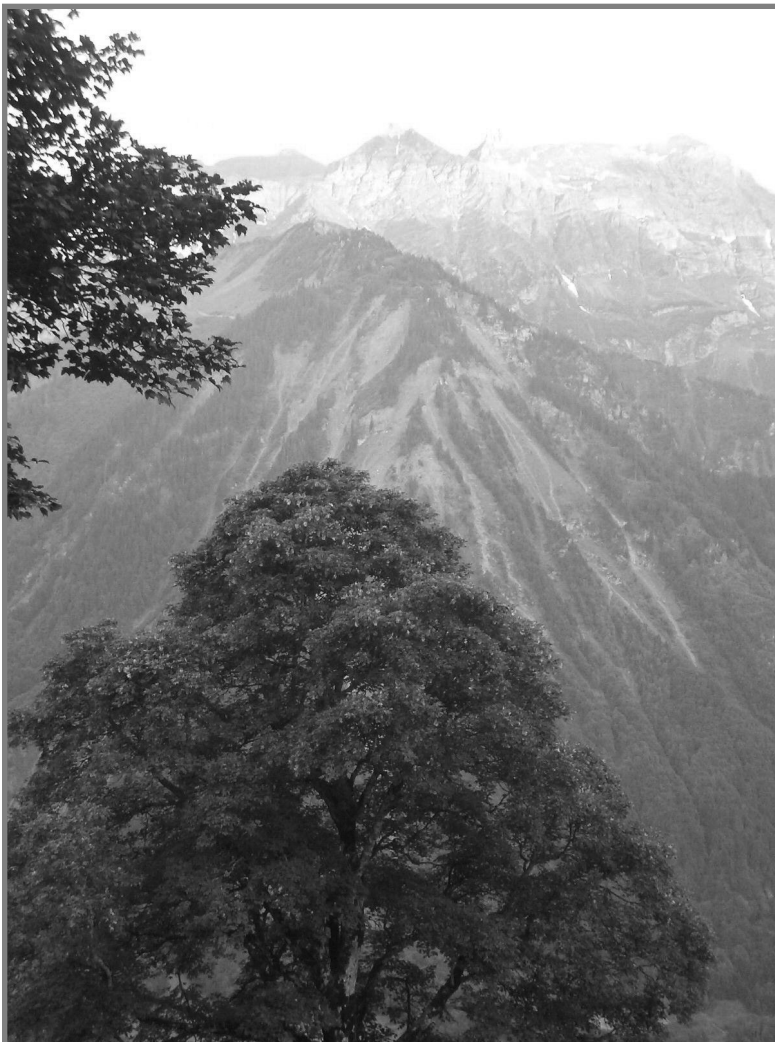




In this chapter, we have examined the ways that our thinking processes can help us get through stress. **In general, in dealing with stress, the secret is to think for ourselves rather than having stress think for us.** Thinking should not be confused with intelligence. A person may be smart in terms of I.Q., but may not know how to think. Knowing how to think well derives from intelligence, but also from much more. Thinking reflects motivation, experience, planning, effort, calm, persistence, and monitoring. Thinking can go astray and be negative when we have not learned to refine its potential through application. By working through the stress that daily life presents, using good thinking and more positive than negative thoughts, we learn good stress management skills.

.....  
*Subtracting one bad habit at a time has exponential benefits.*  
.....

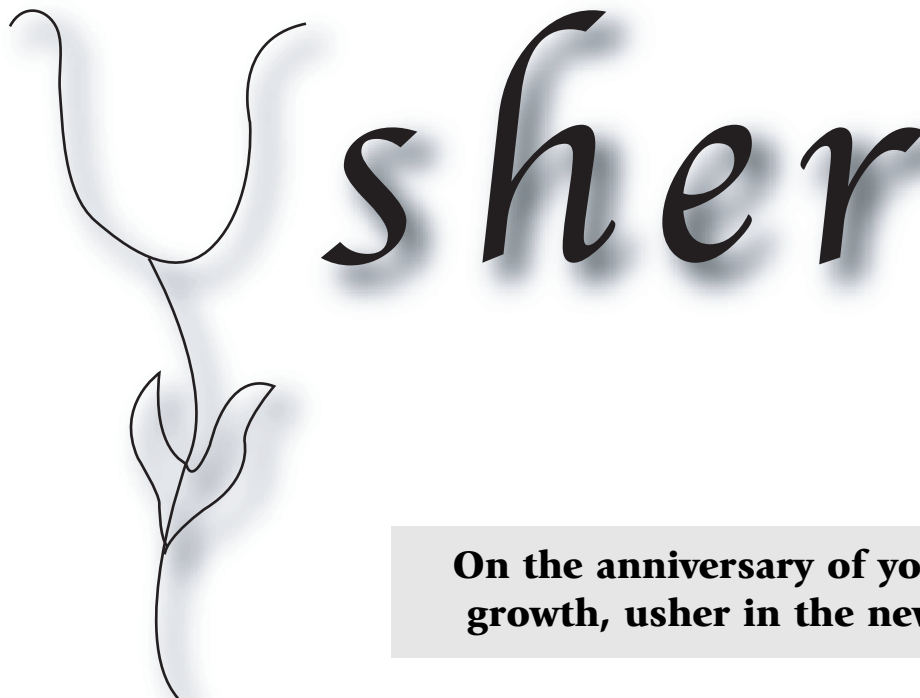
.....  
*Don't play ball with stress. Give it the run a round.*  
.....



**D**o  
**O**nly  
**G**iving  
**O**ffering  
**O**r  
**D**ecent acts

Harry could never stop worrying. When he had nothing to worry about, he worried for other people. He had always been this way and no matter how well things were going, he was anxious, nervous, and panicky. Harry's boss appreciated his effort and attention to detail. Girls would like him at first, but doubts would creep into his mind, he would get defensive at some comments, and end up driving them away. He became less confident about relationships and was about to give up hope about dating. His mother described to him how she took medication for the same symptoms, but Harry noticed that it helped her only so much. He wanted to get on with his life, but he always thought about everything that could go wrong. It got to the point that he could not deal with things to make them go right. He froze when there was too much stress and felt sick to his stomach. He thought he was having heart attacks.

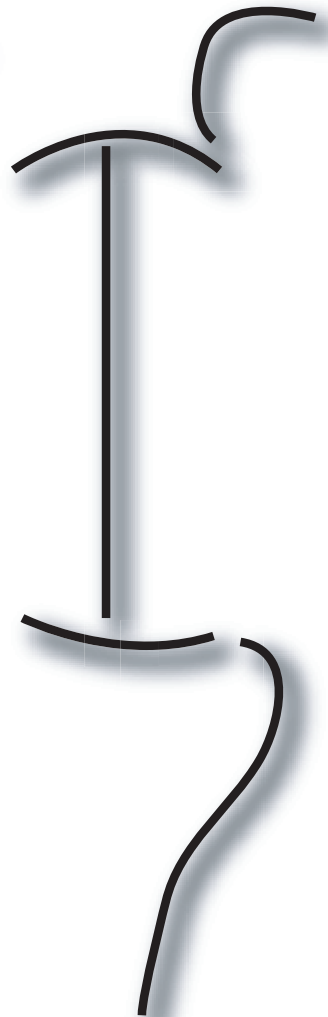
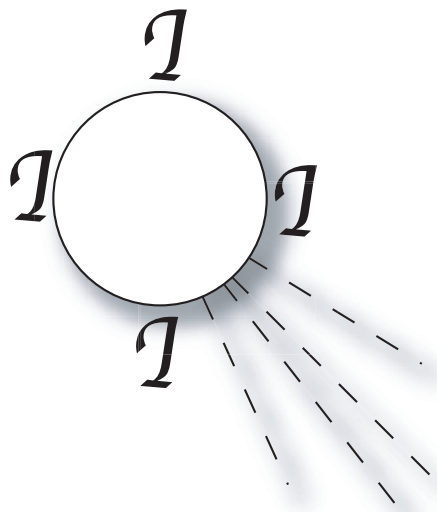
Then Harry meets the woman of his dreams and he decides to seek help. The family doctor refers him to a psychiatrist who prescribes the appropriate medication. The family doctor counsels him weekly, and recommends to him a book like this one.



**On the anniversary of your growth, usher in the new.**

# Chapter 9

## *Multiple Choice*



*"1" is for "I can do it".*



.....  
*By monitoring our  
composure,  
we maintain our posture.*  
.....

.....  
*Options are choices  
that stress hides.*  
.....

**I**n Chapter 9, I look at the multiple pathways that stress can take and emphasize that we can take good pathways as we deal with stress. Ultimately, I show that in keeping balance among all the various options that we have in dealing with stress and in keeping balance in our lives, no matter how hard it is, it is easier to deal with stress and it won't dominate us. **Stress can be balanced when it is kept off balance.**

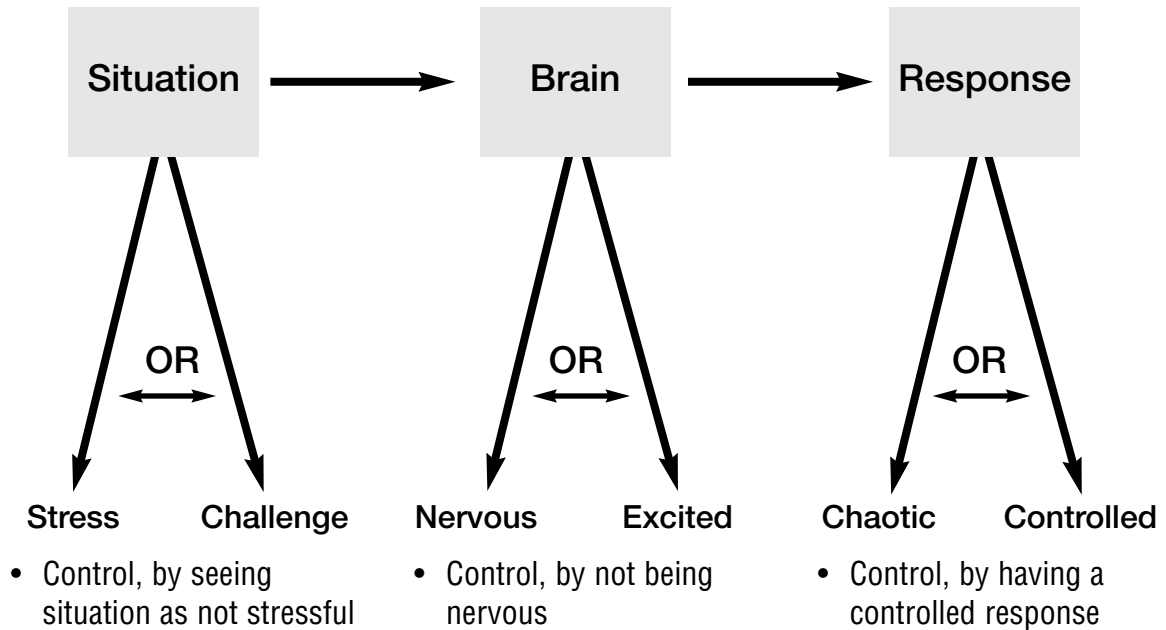
**Figure 9-1** shows the multiple points at which we can intervene in dealing with stress. In dealing with stress, first, there is a stressful situation in which we find ourselves. Second, this situation is analyzed. Third, there is a response to the stress. I will give a brief introduction to these three components of the stress reaction and, then, elaborate them in more detail.

- A. We can start dealing with stress as soon as it appears by examining carefully the situation that is presenting us problems. For example, our initial perception of a situation's gravity may be exaggerated. We need to keep an even keel. Perhaps the problematic situation is not as stressful as we first perceive it. Or, perhaps it is as stressful as it seems, but instead of letting it affect us negatively, we can see it as a challenge or a problem to solve.
- B. As for the second step of analyzing the situation, even though we may try to remain calm, we interpret our predicament as stressful and our body reacts with anxiety. We panic, we breathe heavily, or our heart beats faster. We feel that we are losing control. Then, the issue becomes how to get back mental and physiological control so that we can deal better with the problem. For example, we can use basic relaxation techniques for calming the stressed body and mind.
- C. Third, when confronted by a problem, an inappropriate behavioral response may follow, such as anger. It is never too late to gain the upper hand on stress. We need to learn to direct our impulses when we are under stress toward behavior that is adaptive and solution-focussed.

**Figure 9-1**

The brain sits between stress and behavior. Without our brain, we'd be stressed out all the time. With our brain, stress can be squeezed out each time.

## **Crisis of Control or Crisis Control**



A. Let's look in more detail at the situation causing the stress. I have already mentioned that the perception of stress is all-important. Is the situation really as serious as it seems at first? There are also our expectations. Do we believe that we are not able to handle it? Do we believe that it will get worse and spiral out of control? Negative expectations that we cannot handle the stress, or that the situation will worsen, may not be appropriate, depending on the type of stress involved. Unfortunately, negative expectations can produce self-fulfilling prophecies; that is, we may anticipate the worst and, therefore, inadvertently, unconsciously, and inevitably allow the worst to happen.

.....  
*If we can call on our calm,  
we can meet the call.*  
.....

.....  
*Thinking clearly and having  
stress are incompatible—  
think clearly about that.*  
.....

B. However, once we see the situation more realistically, we can formulate a better plan. What is the best option to follow? Do we proceed in a forward direction? Do we try

.....  
*Stress is alien to our plan it.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress drives us  
around, we should tell  
it to take the exit.*  
.....

**I**zzie— is he the  
one I meant?  
Sure, he's always  
sensing the worst,  
isn't he? Chapter 9  
gave him nine  
positive lives. Now,  
he's a cool cat.

to circumvent the stress? Do we avoid it for a while, delaying our actions or even not acting? All these are options, and we should know that they are all available, depending on the circumstance. Only by being calm or, at least by being as calm as possible, can we decide on which option to follow.

When we are under stress, our bodies become agitated, our physiological responses are activated. We can interpret these reactions in two ways. Is it an uncontrollable nervous response that takes away our ability to act, or is it an excited controllable response that prepares us for action? By acknowledging our increased adrenaline response without seeing it as deleterious, we can channel our energy so that it flows appropriately into constructive response. For example, if our stress response is not too excited, or we moderate it through relaxation strategies and the like, we can move toward considering the options that we formulate.

- C. Finally, after we have analyzed a stressful situation and tried to control our energy level, we respond with action. Hopefully, our action responses are controlled and oriented to the stress and the problem at hand, with various options evaluated prudently, and the best one is chosen as a plan.

However, our action response to stress may not be so organized. When stressed, we need to learn to consider what should be the goal of our actions, how we can break down the goal into manageable parts, and what are the particular solution-focussed actions for each of those parts. In addition, we need to learn to inhibit, or keep at bay, inappropriate responses or behaviors that do not fit as adaptive responses to the stress and the problem in which we find ourselves. Control is not only about performing the right actions, it is also about inhibiting or stopping the wrong ones. But even if a wrong one is used, it is never too late to correct ourselves, by monitoring the effects of our actions. Or, if the problem in which we are involved is a social one, we can use appropriate social strategies to rectify any social difficulty that may have arisen. For example, sincere apologies may be in order. We can learn to increase the effectiveness of our actions by stopping to evaluate whether they are helping resolve the stresses that had been their target.

It is important to understand this stress pathway. Without seeing the multiple points of intervention where stress can be controlled, stress escalates into an increasing crisis. With knowledge of how stress unfolds and how to deal with it no matter how intense, it can be better controlled. **Stress is submissive when we give it our missives.**

.....  
*When we navigate ourselves well, we navigate stress well.*  
 .....

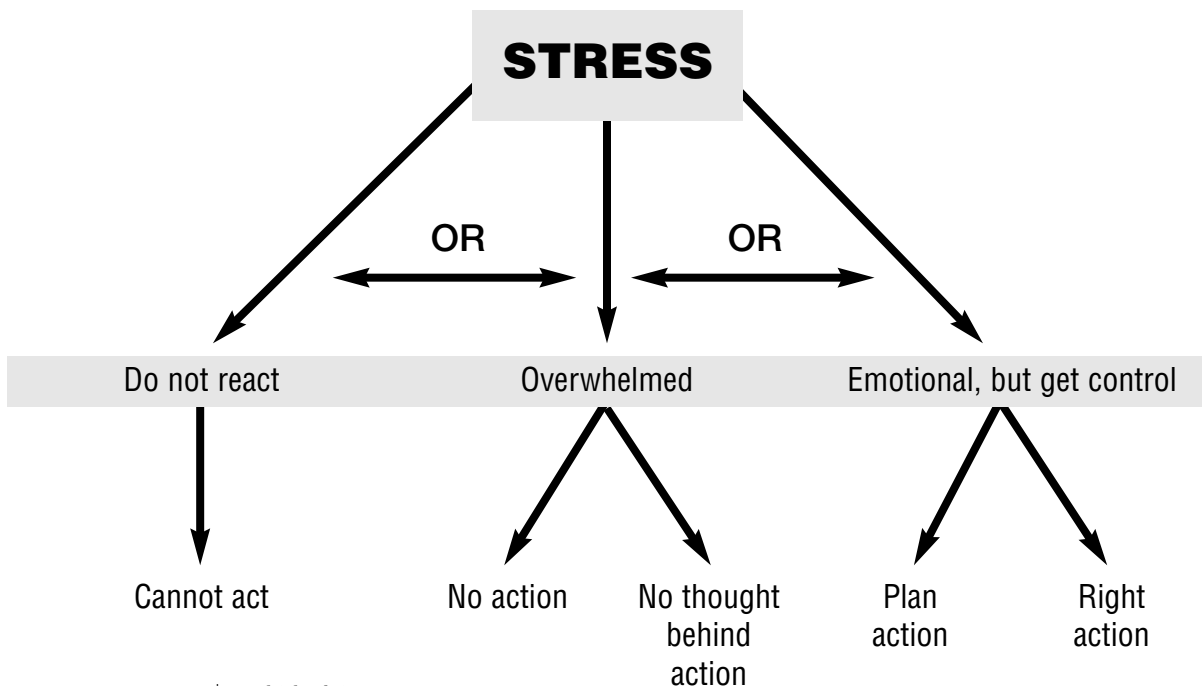
**Figure 9-2** illustrates that when stress is especially difficult to handle, there are a range of possible reactions. In the first one, we cannot react; we are frozen tight. The next ones concern flight or fight reactions, where we are not frozen but are ready to react; we are either more passive and flee, or we are more aggressive and confront the stress. In the latter mode, we get angry and there is action, but there is little organized thought behind the action. In the last two more adaptive responses, we get emotional, but struggle to get control and develop a good plan. We can see the different options and possible solutions, and we choose the best one. Finally, we can act in control and perform the correct actions at every phase in dealing with stress, adapting to any level of difficulty that it may present.

.....  
*Stress should be like a driveway—good for parking.*  
 .....

**Figure 9-2**

When stress arises, there are right things that we can do, like staying in control, problem solving, and checking if the plan is working. The more we deviate from a constructive strategy, the more we construct stress.

## The Path of Least Resistance



Stress should not be seen as all negative—and it should not bring out only the negative.

When we see the full picture—stress goes to the margin.

In dealing with stress, we need to learn how to move toward the better options available and not toward the worst ones. **By keeping cool when we are under stress, it is the stress that feels the heat.**

Figure 9-3 shows that our reactions to stress range from negative to positive. On the negative side, there is direct negative action, such as anger, or there is inaction, such as worrying. In the moderate option, we find counteractions to stress, such as struggling directly against it, but without good management of bodily reactions. On the more positive side, we can undertake relaxation and other exercises to help us get through stress without it being much of a struggle. Finally, in the most adaptive approach, we use positive actions and facilitate positive thoughts and feelings, even when we are put under extreme stress. **In manoeuvring around stress, let the negative fall by the wayside.**

**Figure 9-3**

When we turn the positive switch, we see stress in the light.

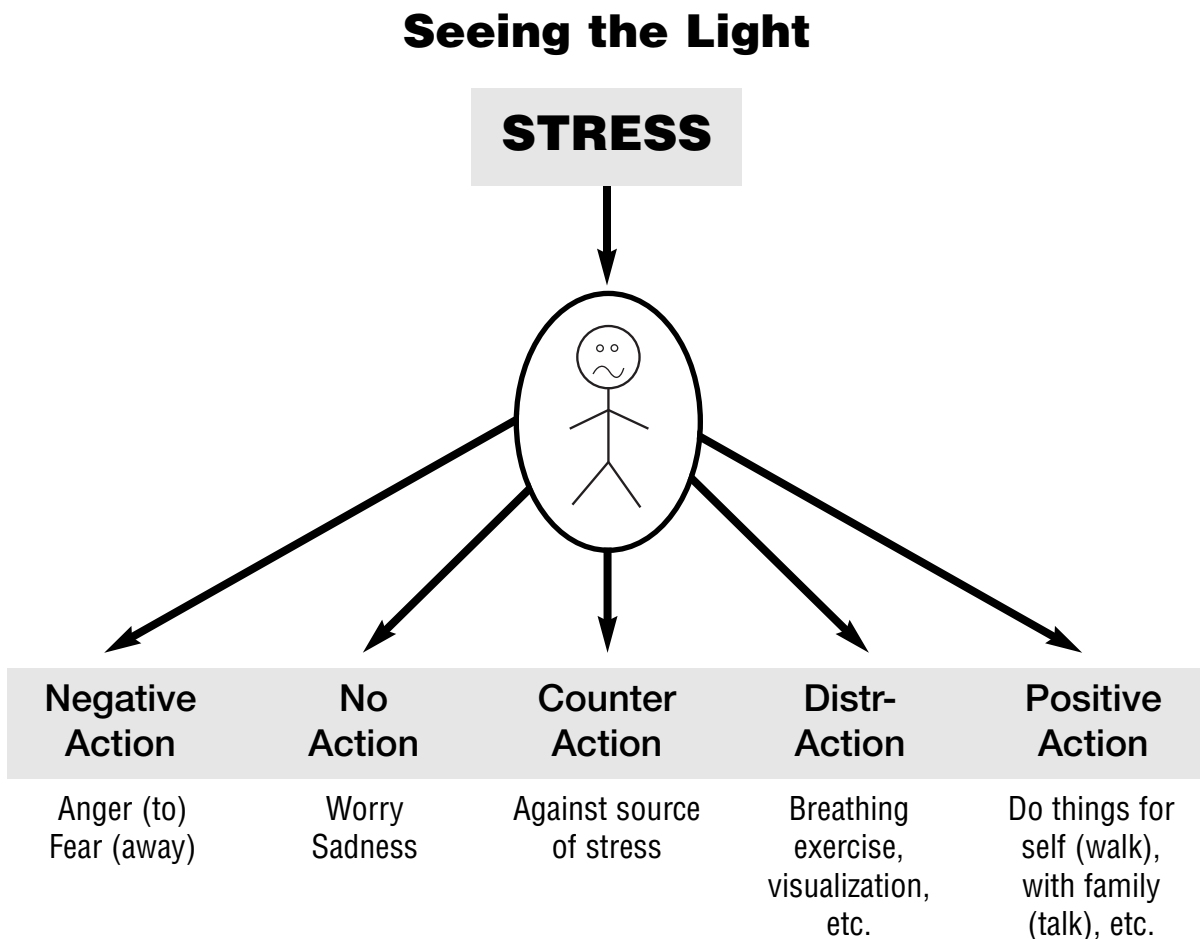




Figure 9-4 presents a scale that illustrates that, increasingly, bad habits can infiltrate into our lives, multiply their negative effects into more bad habits, and affect others around us. At the same time, bad habits are controllable. They can be blocked fully or partially. However, blocking them is not enough, for they will still find a way to pull pranks and bother us. We need to change them, in part or in full, and even replace them with good habits. **Instead of letting bad habits hamper us, we should realize that they need to be put in the laundry hamper for washing away.**

.....  
*Bad habits are base camps  
 for scaling positive heights.*  
 .....

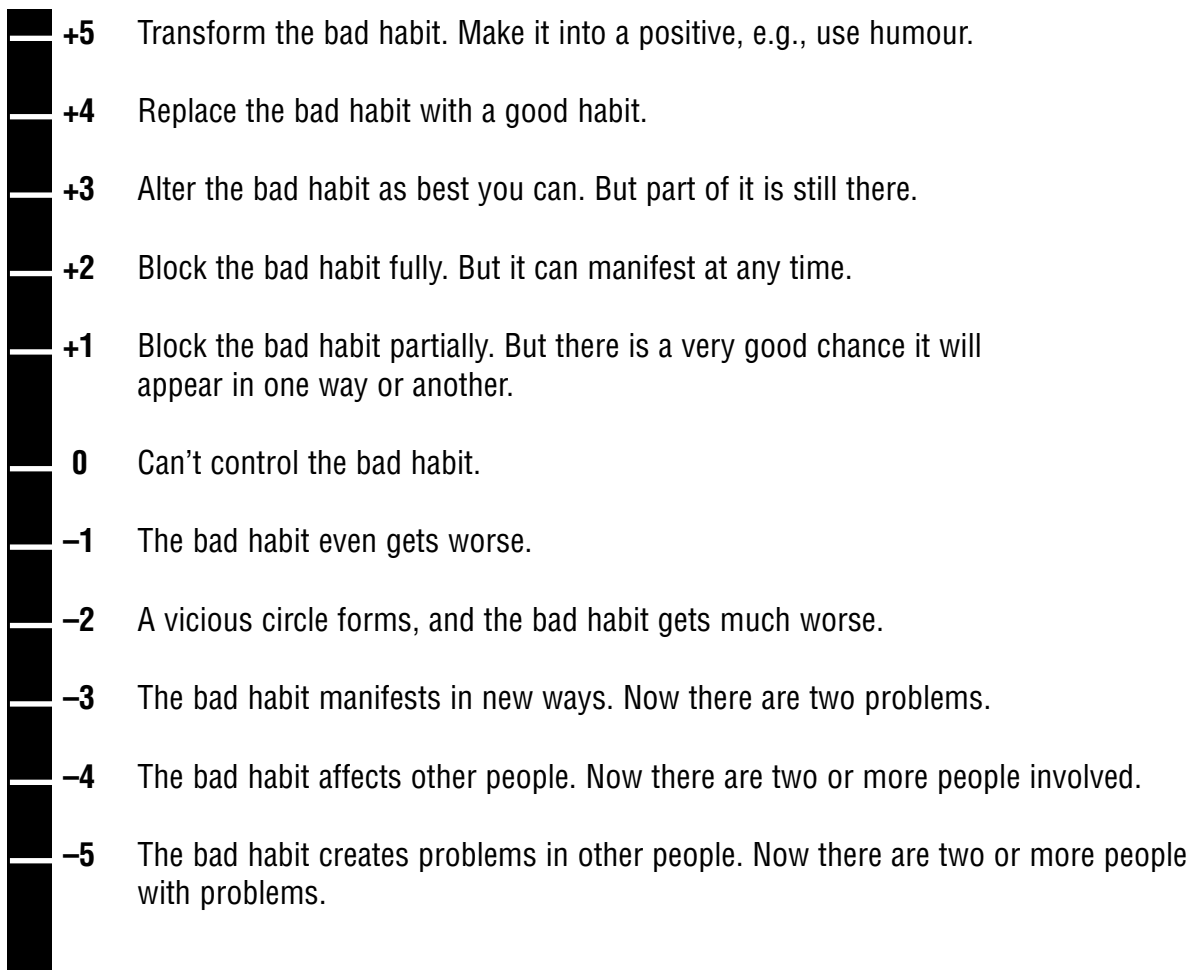
.....  
*Worst-case scenarios should  
 be best-kept secrets.*  
 .....

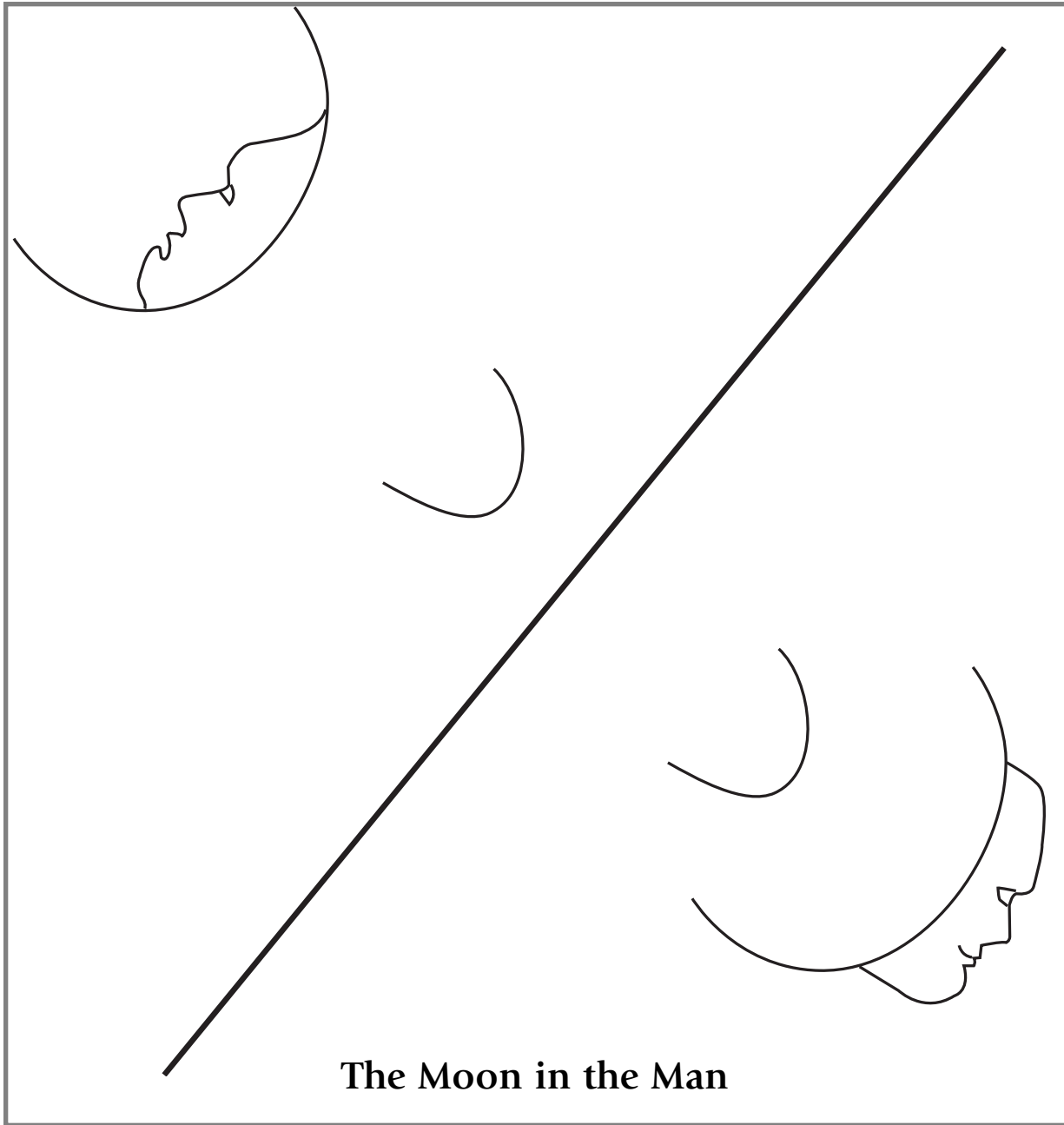
**Figure 9-4**

Bad habits have the bad habit of staying around. But we can replace them, transform them, and so on.

## **Controlling Bad Habits**

### **Scaling Them Down or Going Upscale**





<i>Problem solving begins with problem learning.</i>	<i>When we always seek simple solutions, we risk always creating complex problems.</i>	<i>If stressing out during problem solving was what it is was cracked up to be, Humpty Dumpty would not have fallen.</i>
<i>Coping is part thinking, part feeling, and part ourselves.</i>	<i>When we help someone else solve a problem, two people learn.</i>	<i>Changing kilometers to miles does not make the distance shorter.</i>

Figure 9-5 emphasizes that stress can affect our mood, but our core self is always present within us to help us choose the right attitude after the initial shock. Among the different trajectories in life that we can follow, normally, we choose the positive orbit. It would be easy to be drawn to negative orbits, given the pull of stress on our moods, in our daily responsibilities, and in our social world. When stress is overwhelming, this is bound to happen. Although stress can influence our mood and attitude, it is not at the center of our moods. **Stress is always outside the center of ourselves, turning on the outside of our center, which is always ourselves and the best of what we are.**

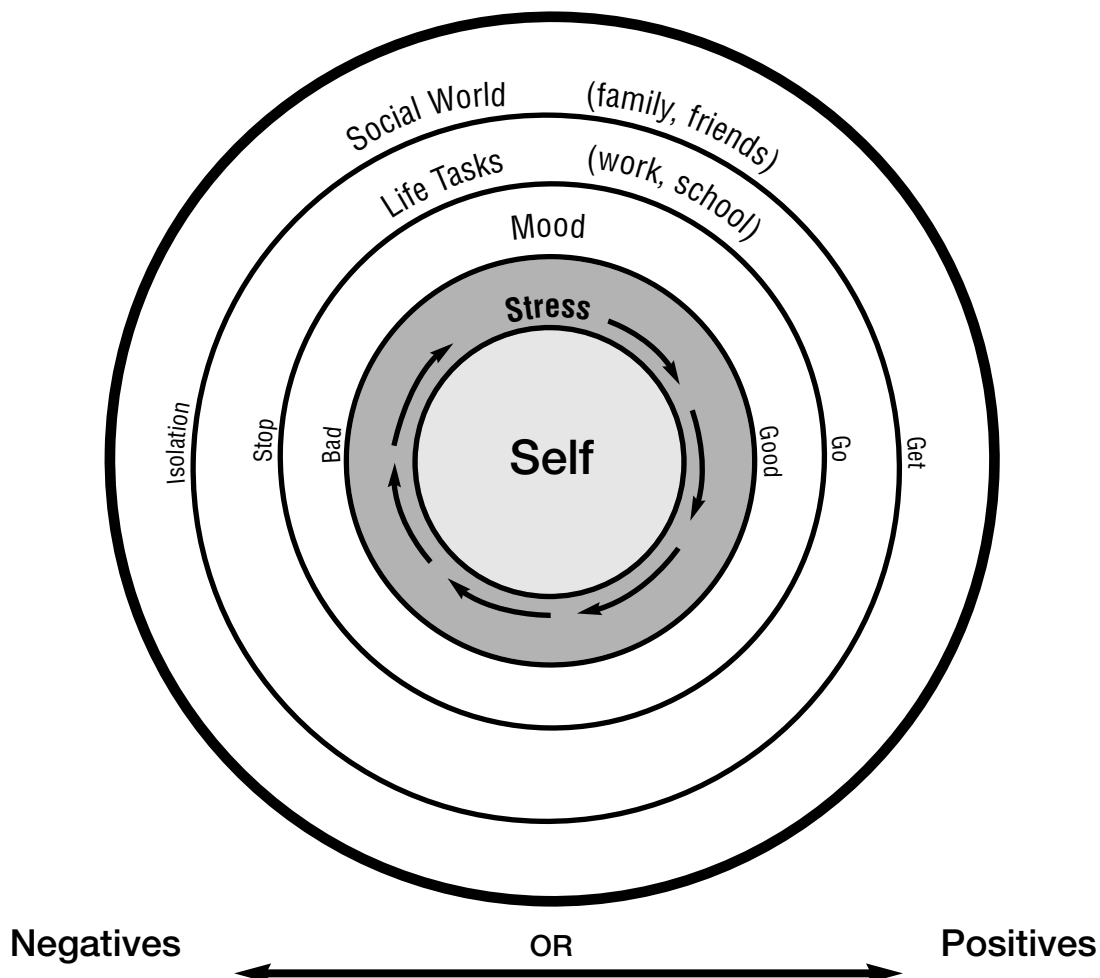
*The universe of stress  
excludes the universe of  
our daily contacts.*

*Stress is not our answer—  
especially when it is not  
our question.*

**Figure 9-5**

Make stress a soap opera. Then wash it away.

## As the World Turns



The moon has a dark side—  
so that we can be happy  
with its bright side.

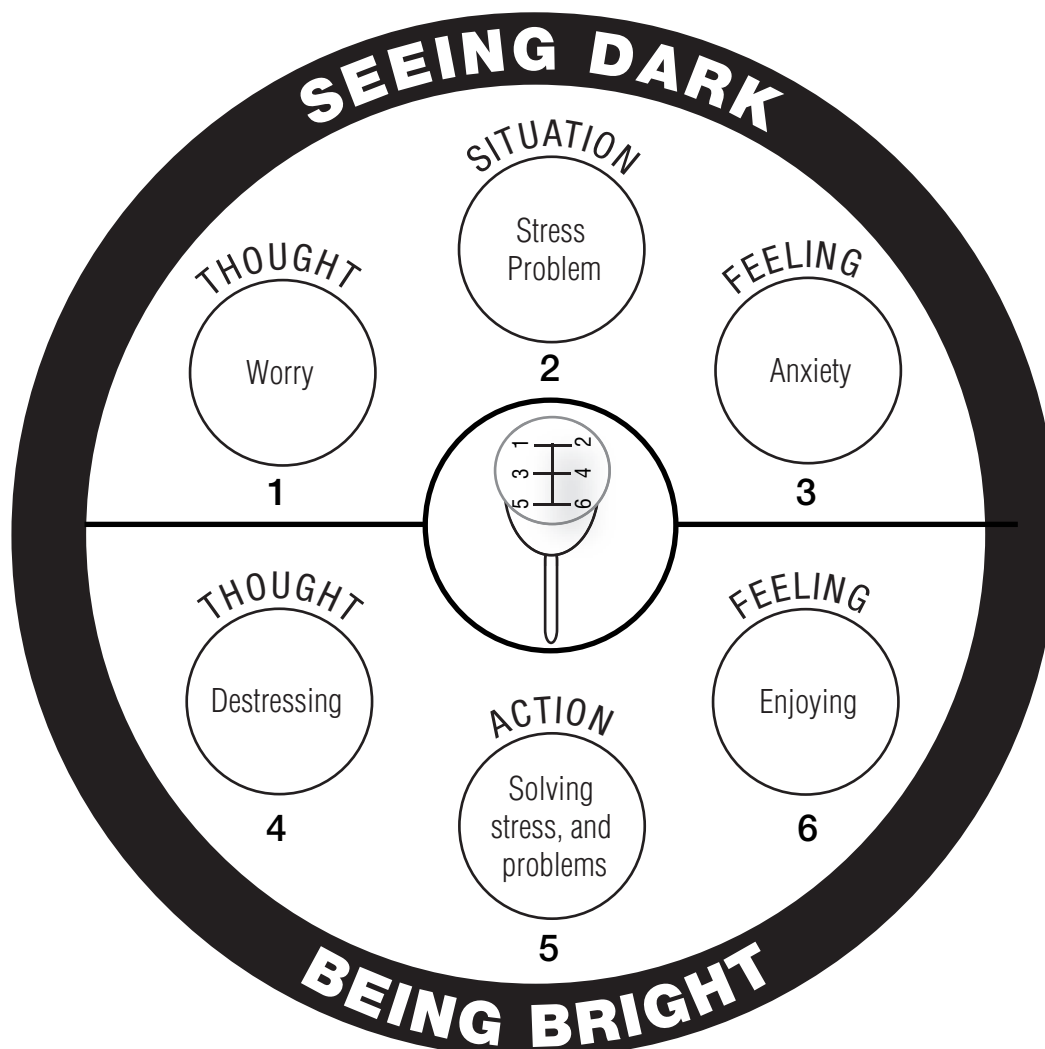
When stressing out stops,  
signing in starts.

**Figure 9-6** looks at the mechanics of motivation. It is not too hard to drive a motor vehicle; we can do it once we know how to do it. The same applies to driving ourselves. We can choose the direction of our lives, being in the driver seat or, rather, let life choose the direction that we take, removing us from the driver's wheel. **If we take charge of the wheel that life offers, in driving our lives ourselves, we won't be charged with stress.** This is never easy to do, to drive ourselves to where we want to go; but if we do not take up the challenge, we will end up in the backseat complaining about possible accidents that can happen in life.

**Figure 9-6**

Want to drive stress crazy? Follow your road in thought, action, and feeling.

## Shift Gears



In **Figure 9-7**, I explore the concept of balance, especially in terms of control. When a flower loses one petal or more, it no longer seems in harmony and balance. Normally, our life is like the image of an intact flower, because it has a harmonious balance of petals that we want to keep intact. In terms control in our lives, we hope to arrive at a just balance. We need some control over ourselves and some control over others, but also we should be able, when appropriate, to let go of control of ourselves or of others. In another example, by knowing when to give and by knowing when to take—by doing both well—others around us learn the same. By keeping in balance the different parts of our psychological growth, we promote its continuing growth.

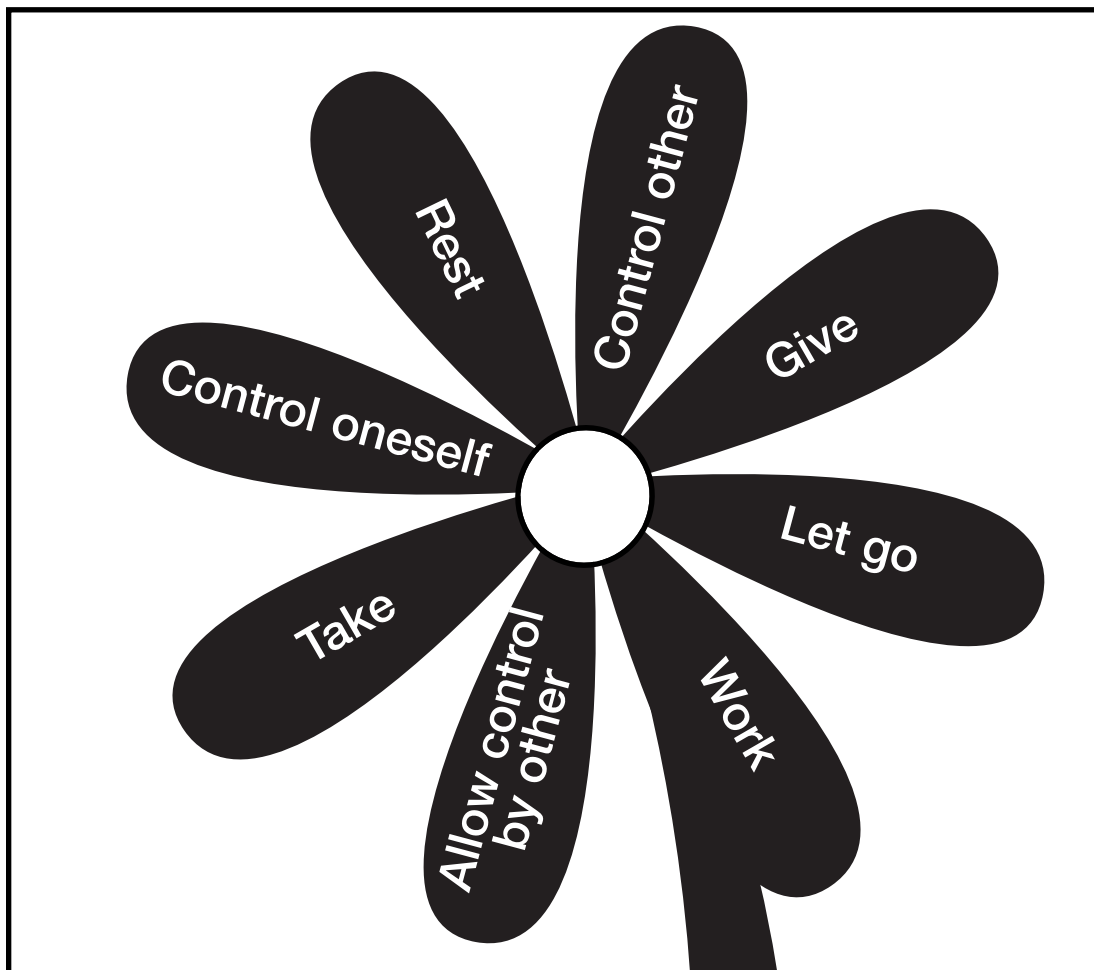
*Flowers turn to the sun  
each morning,  
showing us their way.*

*Stress is a natural part of  
life. So is destressing.*

**Figure 9-7**

Good balance can only develop once we have cultivated the best of the behaviors to balance.

## **Good Balance Stays Straight**



.....  
*When we are not thinking straight, we should throw our thoughts a curve.*  
.....

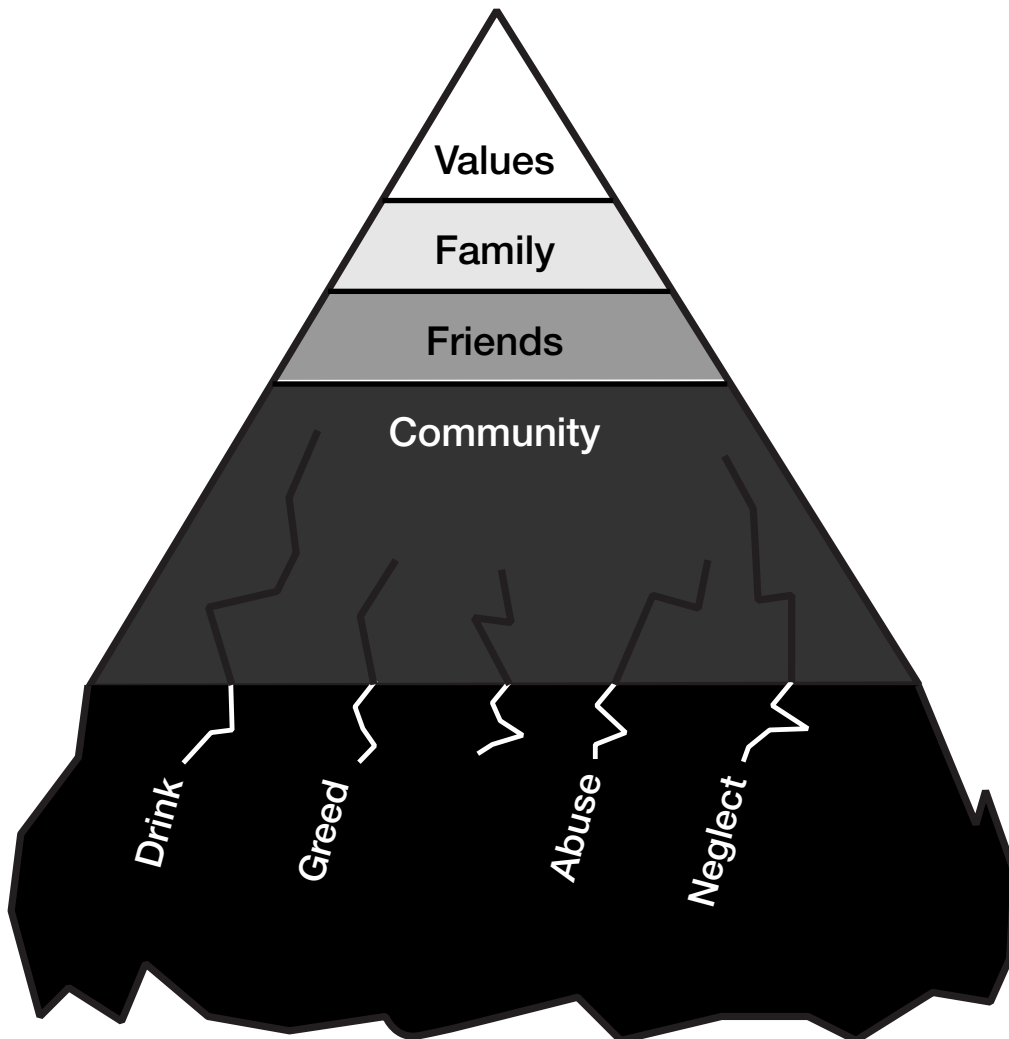
.....  
*We all feel forlorn at times. Feeling forlorn should be a signal for feeling for the other. When we feel forlorn, we should act both for ourselves and for others.*  
.....

Figure 9-8 explores the fragility of our values when they are not based on moral choices. The physical pyramids that we have built brick by brick in past eras eventually erode. The psychological pyramids that we build for ourselves are harder to erode, for they are transmitted to children, to family, to friends, and to community. Moreover, they may be distorted in shape if they are not constructed in psychologically sound ways. On the surface, our psychological presentation to others may appear solid. However, there might be fissures in our psychological foundation below the

**Figure 9-8**

When we keep our morals and family values despite the worst stress, we keep our family.

## That's the Way the Crookies Crumble



surface that can weaken our psychological self, social world, and future. We are surrounded by temptation and bad habits that can undermine our psychological structures. When this happens, often, we expose both ourselves and people around us (and the organizations and cultures in which we live) to instability. **The consequences of making the wrong choices impact not only ourselves, but also those around us.**

.....  
*Stress hates numbers, like—  
I am number one; it takes  
two to beat stress; strike  
three and you are out.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress goes haywire—  
should you farm it out or  
pull its cord?*  
.....



.....  
*Winters are preparations  
for spring.*  
.....

.....  
*When stress gums up the  
works—stick to family.*  
.....

**Figure 9-9** is for those people who always say they can't. Perhaps the main reason they can't is that they have rarely tried. It is hard to break this bad habit, but I never met a bad habit that had the habit of staying when we decided that we can change. It is hard to change when things never worked out for us, or we were told that they would not, or we were told that we can't. However, we can tell "can't" that we can and we will. **Even if positives develop slowly, they are worth the wait.**

### **Figure 9-9**

Words have many meanings, including positive ones.

## **Can't?... Recant**

<b>A</b>	is for Able	Like in you can do it when you want
<b>B</b>	is for Bold	Like in going for it
<b>C</b>	is for Can	Like in not can't
<b>D</b>	is for Doing	Like in getting things done
<b>E</b>	is for Effort	Like in energy
<b>F</b>	is for Find	Like in finding a solution
<b>G</b>	is for Go	Like in go, get, gain
<b>H</b>	is for Hard	Like in hardy
<b>I</b>	is for Insist	Like in going for keeps
<b>J</b>	is for Just	Like in just try harder
<b>K</b>	is for Keep	Like in keep it going
<b>L</b>	is for Lift	Like in lifting the bar
<b>M</b>	is for Much	Like in much motivation
<b>N</b>	is for Never	Like in never say never
<b>O</b>	is for Over	Like in it's never over
<b>P</b>	is for Positive	Like in being positive throughout
<b>Q</b>	is for Quest	Like in quest for positives
<b>R</b>	is for Rest	Like in a well deserved rest
<b>S</b>	is for Study	Like learning to help yourself
<b>T</b>	is for Try	Like in always
<b>U</b>	is for Upbeat	Like in feeling good
<b>V</b>	is for Victory	Like in doing well
<b>W</b>	is for Win	Like in good marks
<b>X</b>	is for Xtra	Like in excess effort
<b>Y</b>	is for You	Like in feeling good about yourself
<b>Z</b>	is for Zest	Like in being in the zone



Figure 9-10 suggests that we can dial a better number, return to the basics, and keep it simple. Those actions will get us going. We should speak to ourselves in positive ways and speak to others in positive ways. We each should remember our number. It is **U4U-UR#1**. When we think this way, others will treat you this way and you will do the same with them.

.....  
*Seeing a future  
allows a future.*  
.....

.....  
*Solutions fit when  
our mind is fit.*  
.....

**Figure 9-10**

The future is a phone call away, when we put stress on call waiting.

## Dial Yourself a Better Future



### Dial a Number

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>0</b> Start      | <b>5</b> Plan      |
| <b>1</b> Go         | <b>6</b> Act       |
| <b>2</b> Keep going | <b>7</b> Solve     |
| <b>3</b> Don't stop | <b>8</b> Enjoy     |
| <b>4</b> Destress   | <b>9</b> Never end |

**By telling yourself that the future is yours to decide**



In the present chapter, I have emphasized that choice occurs at multiple points in the process of dealing with stress. When we are dealing with stress, there are many things to balance, many things to consider, and many options. In a certain sense, we might think that the task before us seems too formidable or that life seems too complex. However, we have self-righting mechanisms, or means of correction and, when we are under stress, we can learn to find those ways that are adaptive and work effectively. **Stress provides the barriers—we provide the detours.**

*Stress seems to always go up—until we get off its roller coaster.*

*No matter how you look at it, it matters how you look at it.*

*When stress gives no way out—let solutions all the way in.*

*Break down stress—by breaking down the problem into its parts.*

*There is no end to the problem in sight—when we look at it with blinders.*

*To have stress stay underground—live grounded in daily life.*

*Give stress promises galore—that you will solve it, keep your resolve, and learn to evolve.*

*When we are on the look out, problems don't just pop out.*



Ingrid had been livid at the treachery of her friend, who had stole her boyfriend. Ingrid was beginning to believe nothing could work out for her because she had experienced a most difficult childhood and, as a young woman, she had been letting men mistreat her. Ingrid has been sexually assaulted as a teenager and her mother had not believed her, thinking she must have provoked the guy. Her mother had been a single mother who had struggled to raise her along with her younger sister, and she had little time for her and her sister. Ingrid discussed things with her sister who was having the same problems with men.

Ingrid and her sister decide to find out more about how to deal with men and love and to understand how their upbringing had conditioned their reaction as young women in the present. They go to the public library and find a book like this one.

*To see the end,  
work the beginning.*

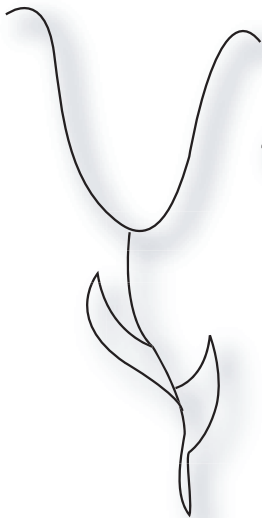
*The tortoise won because it didn't  
do anything hare-raising.*

*Buried problems give  
surface solutions.*

*The hare lost because it  
ran out of "team."*

*When we walk a different way,  
we may find a different path.*

*See the "for rest"  
between the "tries."*

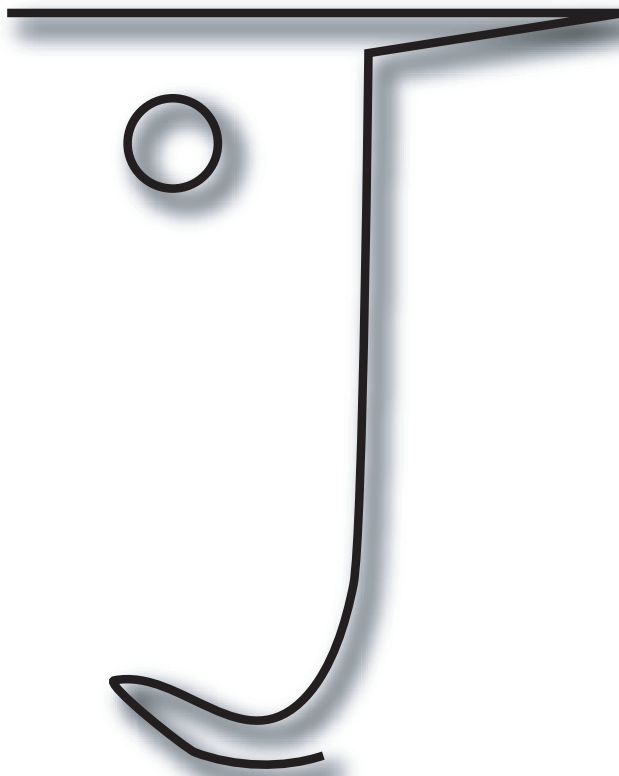
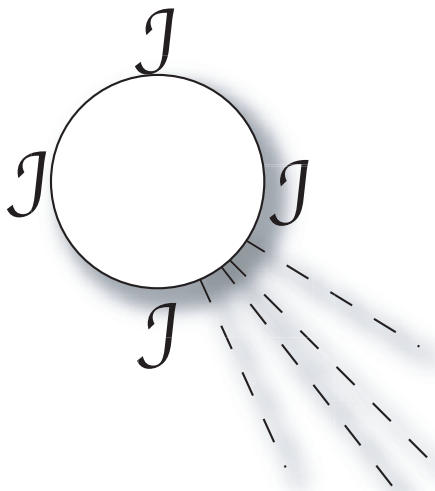


# universe

**The internal universe is  
as great as the one outside.**

# Chapter 10

## *Recovering*



*"J" is for the joy in  
living well with stress  
and with destressing.*



.....  
*Seeing a better recovery  
makes recovery better.*  
.....

**I**n Chapter 10, I examine a series of figures about recovery from stress. They show not only the steps in healing after stress, but also *a)* the steps in growing through stress, *b)* the steps in gaining from stress, *c)* the steps in the ability to deal better with stress each time that it enters our lives, *d)* the steps in learning to live with stress and, ultimately, *e)* how to profit from stress. **The more we are positive, the less stress is negative.**

In **Figure 10-1 (a/b)**, we see that although time has its own recovery curve, we can accelerate it with the right attitude. After our initial shock to a stressor, we can develop increasing self-control. **The doors that open to us are the ones that we open ourselves.** If we open them appropriately, the future that we want for ourselves more quickly becomes the present. Recovery from stress is our best redress.

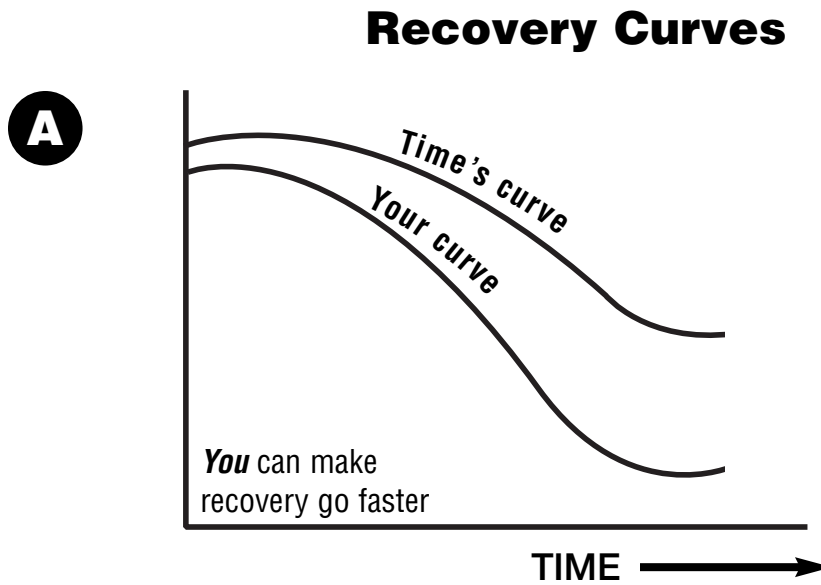


### Figure 10-1

All the curves that are graphed in these series of figures in Figure 10-1 involve 'X' and 'Y' axes. An axis means that the quality indicated on the axis can vary in quantity from low to high, from beginning to end, and so on. In these figures, all the bottom, horizontal, X-axes vary in terms of time. The left-side, vertical, Y-axes vary in terms of recovery of the quality indicated in the figure, or vary in a general sense, depending on what is involved.

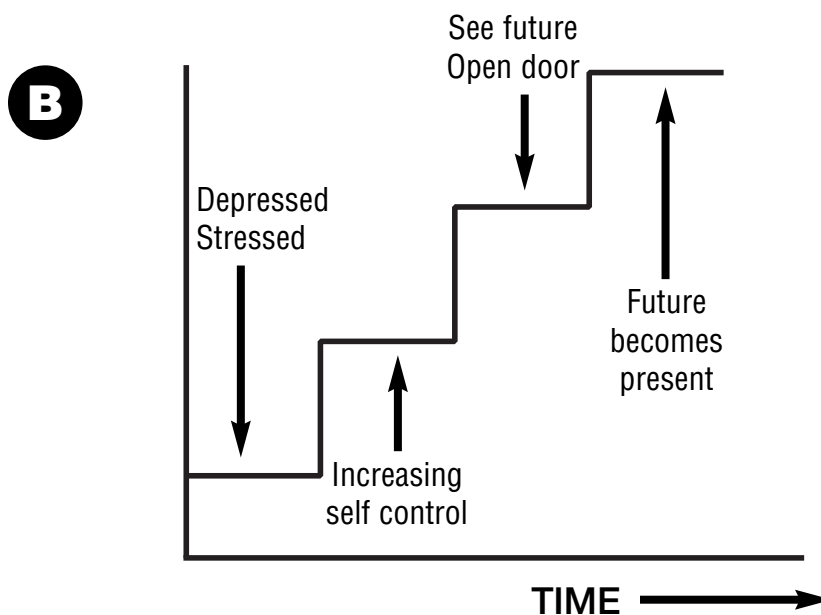
#### Figure 10-1a

The speed of recovery depends on the quickness of will.



#### Figure 10-1b

Recovery is hastened when self-control makes haste.





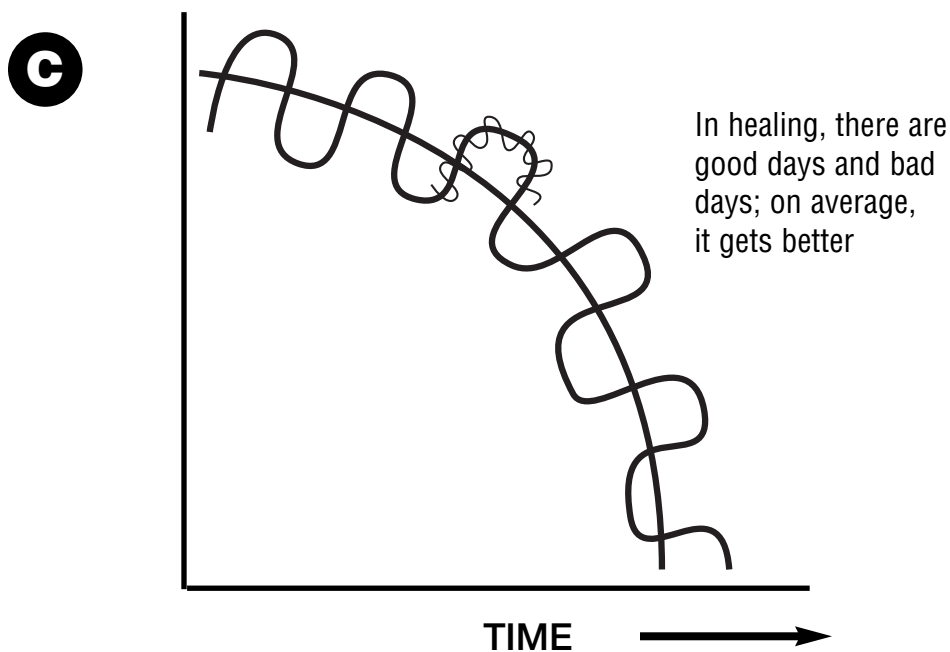
By removing stress from the equation, recovery moves faster.

Figure 10-1 (c/d) shows that, on the average, the healing process continues even when there are bad days. We must keep in mind that if we fixate too intensely on the bad days, we begin to live only those bad days and the healing process is retarded. For example, pain has a normal healing process, but if we worry too much, the pain might be twice as intense and twice as long.

### Figure 10-1 continued

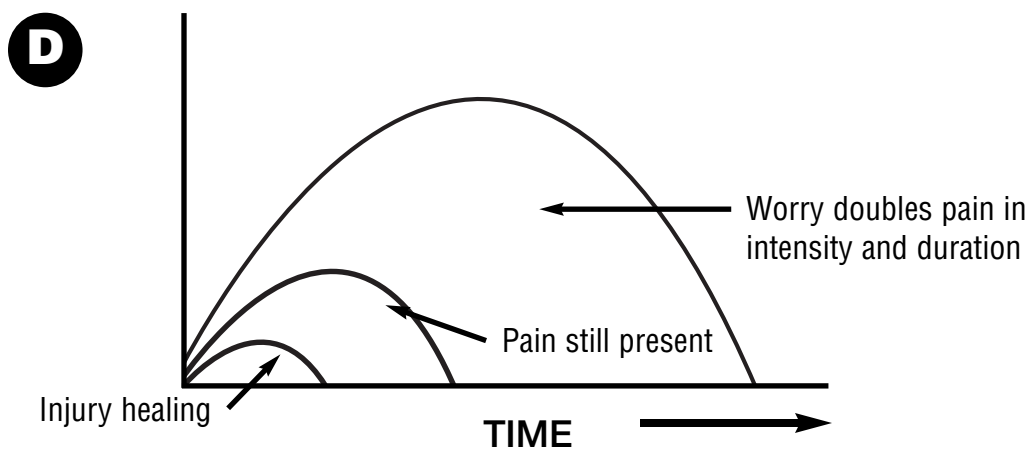
#### Figure 10-1c

Recovery gets better on the average despite ups and downs.



#### Figure 10-1d

Worry complicates recovery, lengthening it and intensifying it. So recover from worries.

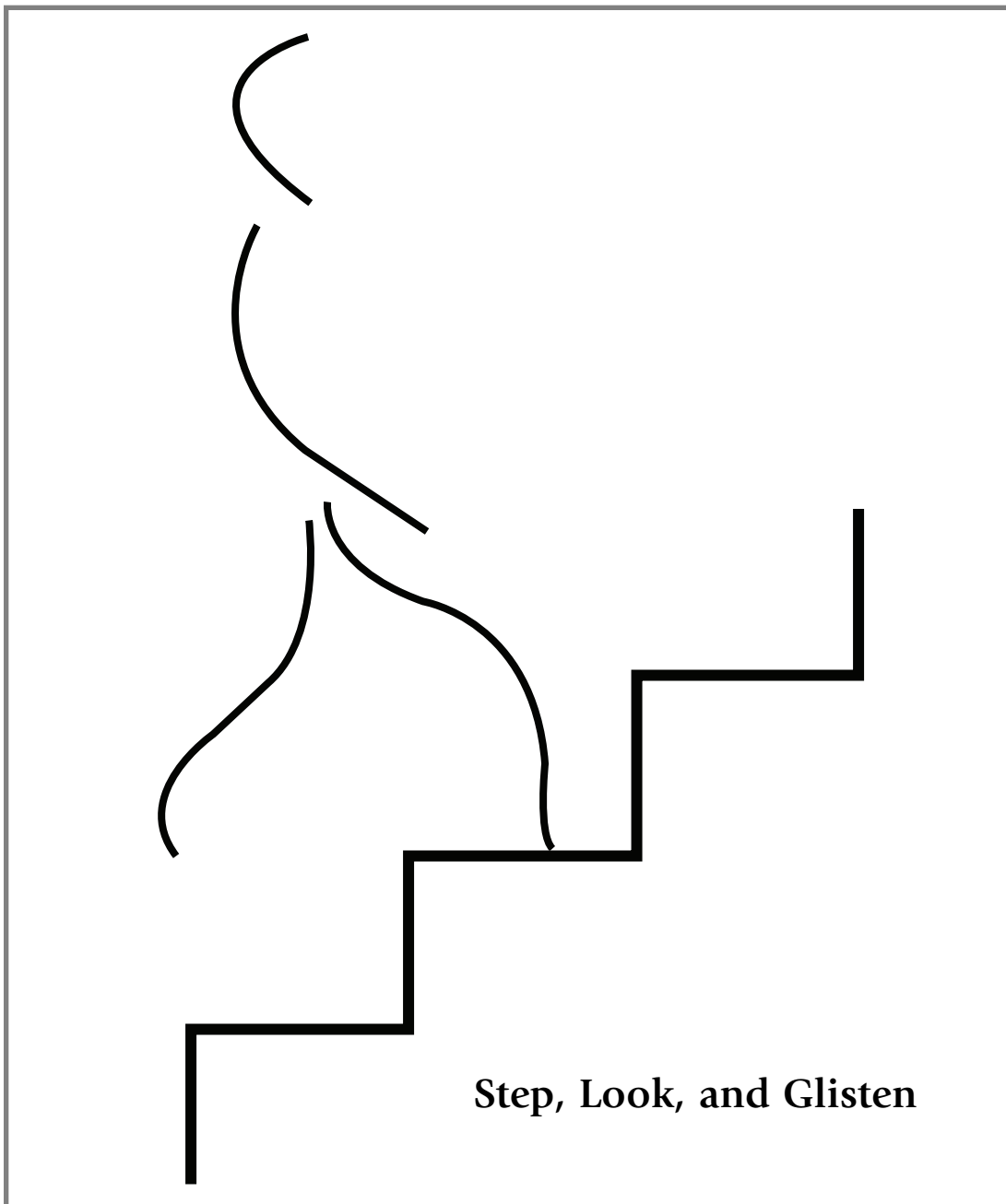




Even a little bit of stress slows recovery. In order to illustrate the process, let's assign some numbers out of 10 to the degree of tissue damage/pain and stress/anxiety that someone might be experiencing due to an injury. Assume that the tissue damage is the worst that it can be, for example, the individual has to stop work, there is a lot of pain, and so on. Assign to this circumstance a value of 10. Let's assume that the degree of stress/anxiety is much less than the actual tissue damage. For example, the individual is

.....  
*If we learn when we're  
down, ups will follow.*  
.....

.....  
*We cannot go up  
without downs.*  
.....



motivated, going to physiotherapy, and so on, but there is still some stress. Assign to this situation a value of 2. Thus, the physiological effects of the tissue damage and pain, at first, are much worse than the stress/anxiety, at a level of 10 vs. 2.

.....  
*Recovery begins  
when desire starts.*  
.....

How do we consider these two values together in order to understand better the individual's total degree of pain and suffering, or total psychological effect? In the mathematics of how tissue damage and stress interact in the recovery process, the resultant pain and suffering that is experienced is not, simply, just the addition of the values for injury and stress. It is not simply  $10$  (tissue damage/pain) +  $2$  (stress/ anxiety) =  $12$  (total psychological effect). If this were the appropriate formula, the stress/anxiety would be worth 20% ( $2/10$ ) of the value of the tissue damage/pain in terms of its impact in calculating the full psychological effect.

.....  
*When recovering takes  
a backward step,  
step up to the task.*  
.....

Rather, in the psychological realm, biological/physiological influences always are considered to interact in a multiplicative rather than in an additive way with factors such as stress and anxiety to produce the full psychological experience under consideration. Thus, rather than using an additive formula to represent how tissue damage and stress work together to give a complete understanding of the psychological experience in healing (i.e.,  $10 + 2 = 12$ ; where 2 is only 20% compared to 10), we need to use a different formula that changes dramatically the mathematical picture. That is, if there are 10 units of tissue damage/pain and 2 units of stress/anxiety after an injury, the total psychological picture is represented best by the value of 20, not 12 (i.e.,  $10 \times 2$  gives a product of 20, compared to the sum of 12). Therefore, even a minimal stress level of just 2 out of 10 multiplies out to twice as much the degree of tissue damage/pain from an injury (i.e., 20 compared to the original 10 = 200%). In short, even a little bit of stress can multiply the full psychological effect of an injury to make it twice as strong and twice as long as it could be without stress. Imagine what happens when the degree of stress is perceived as much more than  $2/10$  after an injury. This logic provides all the reason that we need to try to deal as best we can with stress after an injury.

.....  
*Recovery proceeds in jumps.  
Ride the waves.*  
.....

In **Figure 10-1 (e/f)**, we see that recovery curves are not as smooth as graphs portray them. Recovery curves often unfold sporadically, up and down, and in small steps and

big steps, rather than proceeding smoothly in a straight line. Gradually, they progress to certain thresholds, or critical points, where recovery accelerates, or where key steps happen. Nevertheless, before major changes and major improvements take place, often, there is a period of increased turbulence, or a period of difficult transition preparatory to those big steps. In recovering, before moving forward, often, there appears to be a step backward. However, consider that **backward steps simply may be reorganizations getting us ready for recovery**. Often, by stepping backward, we see more forward.

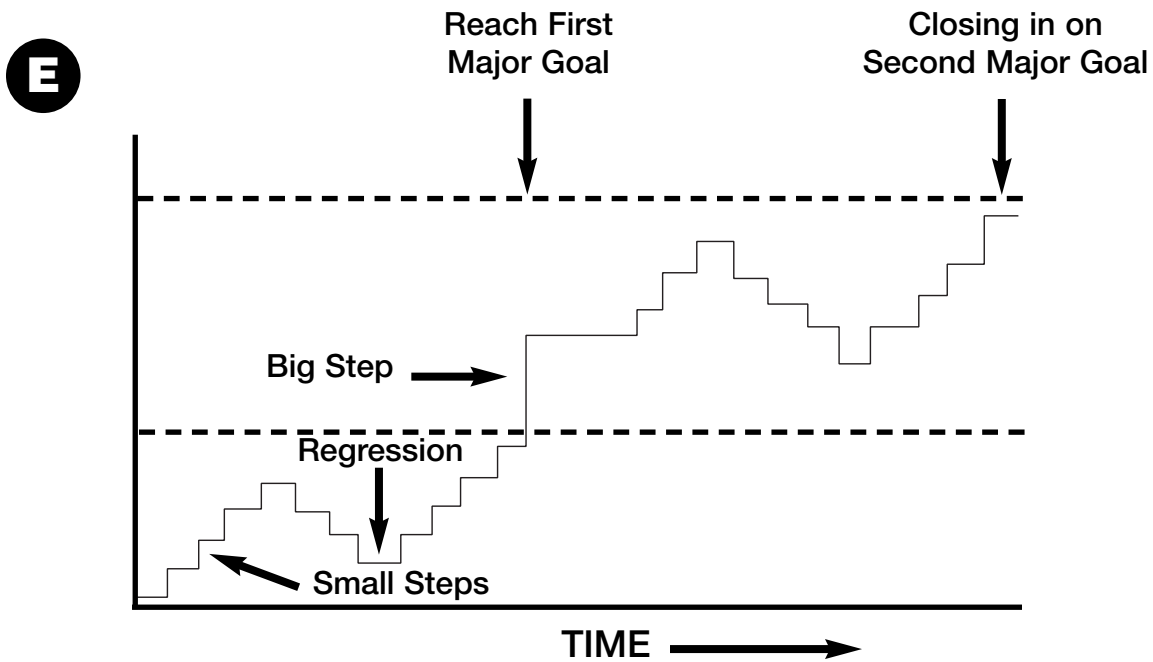
*To get on the road to recovery, start the drive.*

*Make marching toward positive growth—a moving experience.*

**Figure 10-1 continued**

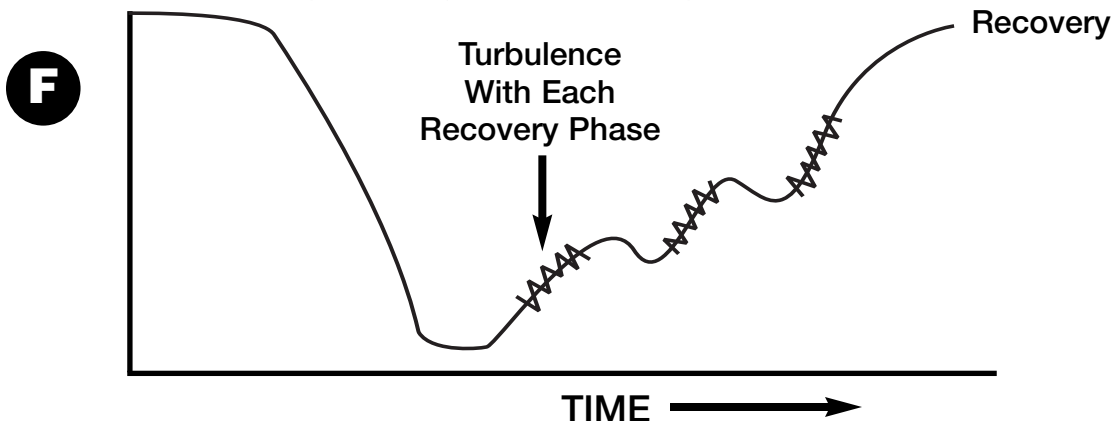
**Figure 10-1e**

Strong recoveries require small steps, and accept backwards ones.



**Figure 10-1f**

Turbulence at each of the steps in recovery is like the storm that precedes the calm.



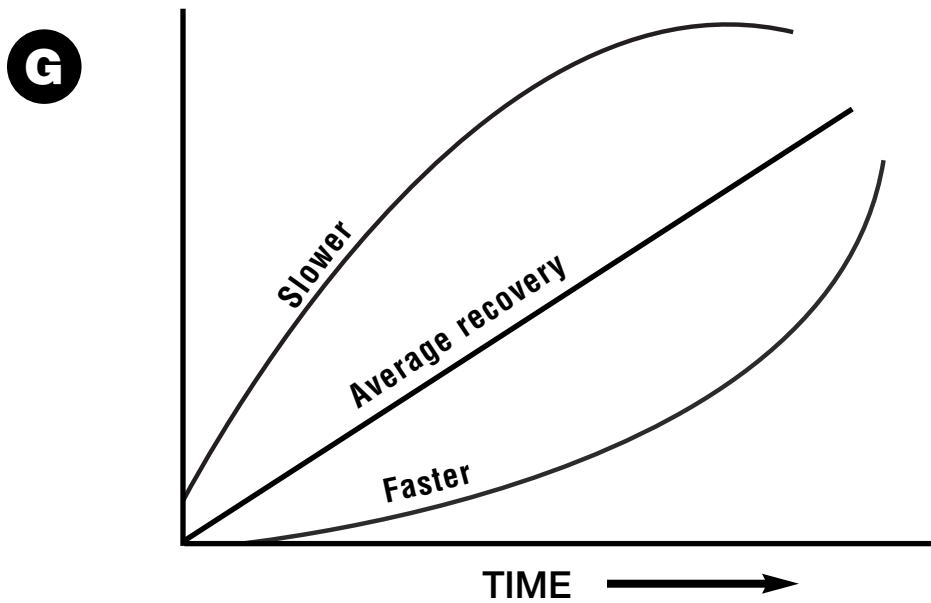
.....  
*Leave average rate  
of recovery—for the  
average person.*  
.....

Figure 10-1 (g/h) indicates that recovery does not just follow one line, whether it be smooth or roughly drawn. Rather, some parts of recovery happen quickly and other parts happen slowly, or some sections in the recovery curve are more turbulent and others less turbulent. Also, it could be that parts of recovery are always at risk for side effects. For example, prior to stress, our capacity for resisting anger

**Figure 10-1 continued**

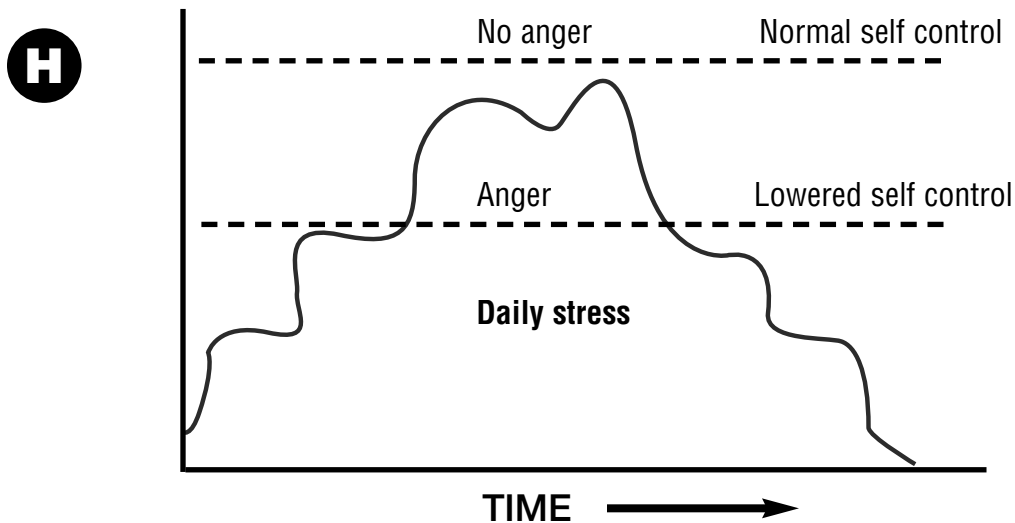
**Figure 10-1g**

Some recoveries happen faster than others. Be optimistic.



**Figure 10-1h**

Being in recovery lowers self-control. Self-control lowers the time being in recovery.



reactions may have been high, but once stress arrives, our capacity to cope may become lower, and we become much more impatient. The more we understand this pattern and deal with it, the less we will compromise our recovery with unwanted and unwarranted vicious circles. **In trying to recover, optimism and self-control can be the wheels moving wellness closer.**

.....  
*Bumps on the road show  
 there is one.*  
 .....

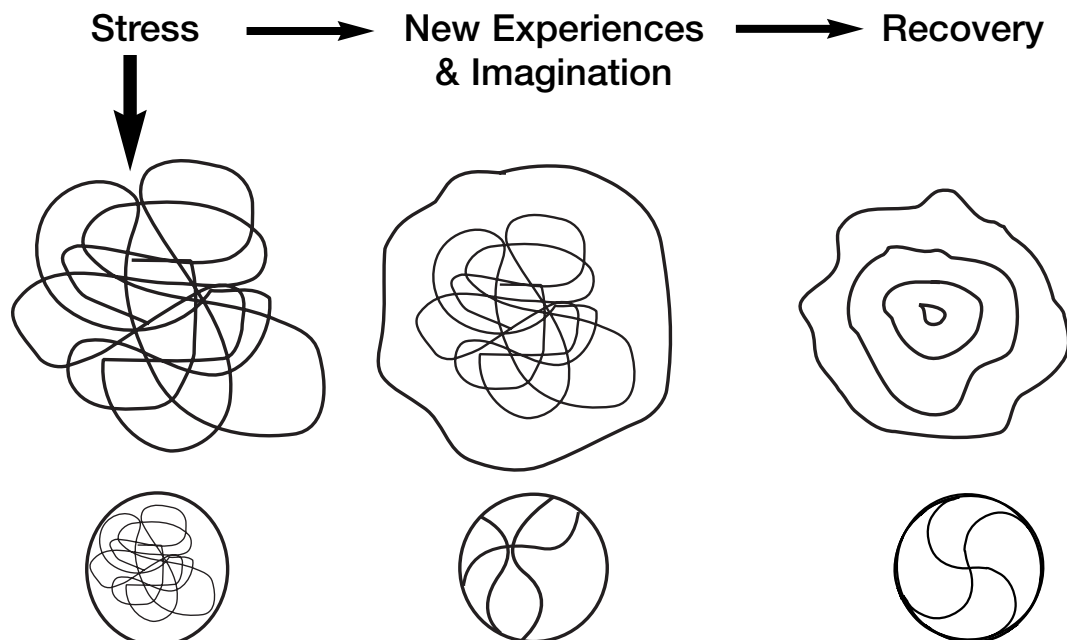
Figure 10-2 shows how stress can induce a very chaotic and painful personal experience that can lead to corresponding reactive effects in our physiology, for example, in terms of neurons firing in the brain. Even though stress can create powerful experiential and neuronal patterns buried deep in the mind and brain, we can moderate it in order to facilitate adjustment and better experiences and neuronal firings. For example, when we use appropriate relaxation and visualization exercises, more positive experiences and neuronal firings are created that balance the negative ones due to the stress. **The more we surround the negative with the positive, the more the negative is neutralized.** Eventually, memories and neuronal firings are modulated, incorporated into larger positive ones, and gracefully contained. Chaos is not an end-state, but a mid-point.

.....  
*Stress leaves no stones  
 unturned—until  
 we turn the corner.*  
 .....

**Figure 10-2**

The need for recovery upsets. But recovery is a need.

### Graphically Coming to Terms



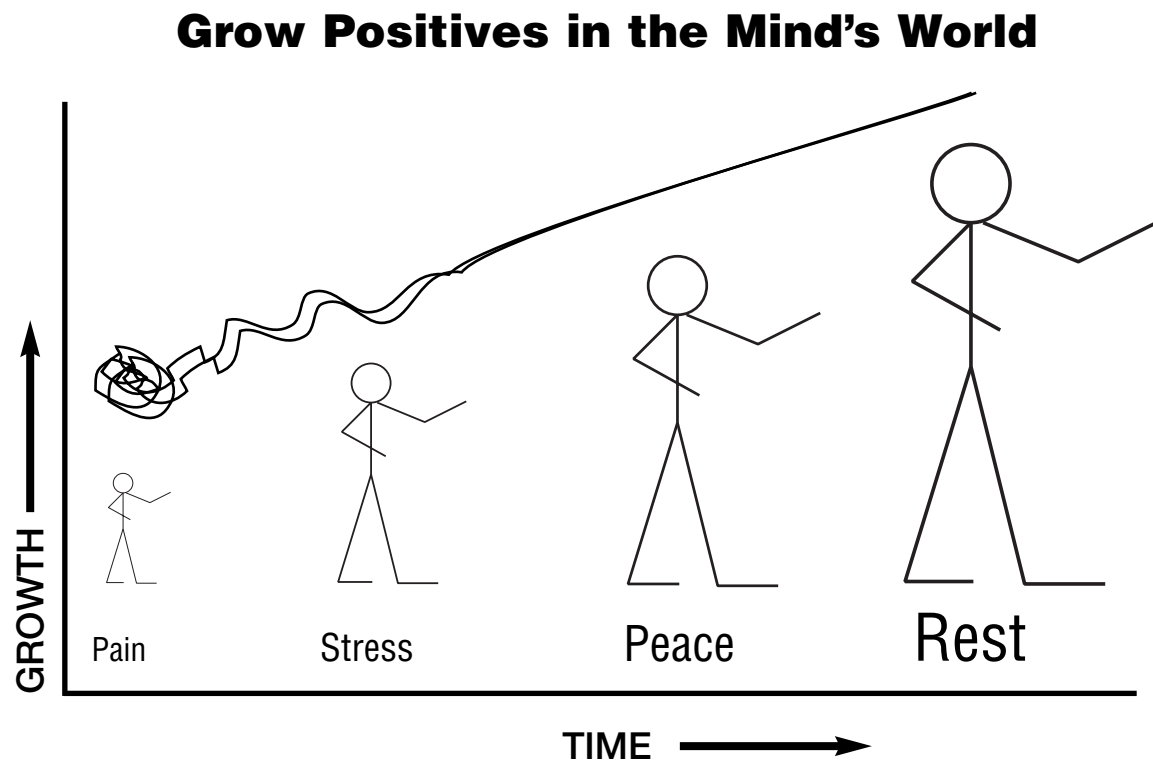
*Stress grows—until we grow.*

*Recovery can bring us  
further than life  
had charted for us.*

Figure 10-3 illustrates that the mind has the power to smooth out the chaos and confusion induced by stress and pain. Over time, positive forces in our energy fields shift the turbulence of tension into peaceful patterns. **The natural evolution of our mind's reaction to stress is that it finds its resting point where calm prevails.** We need faith in the destressing process in order to help it unfold optimally. We can add destressing techniques to the mind but, in the end, there is a natural psychology in each of us to which we should listen.

**Figure 10-3**

Pain and stress may begin, but we are the ones who continue.



**Ultimately, the steps that we take follow our feet.**

*Taking the right train of thought  
brings us to the brain station.*

*The best cures are the ones  
we mind ourselves.*

*Good solutions are made,  
then borne.*

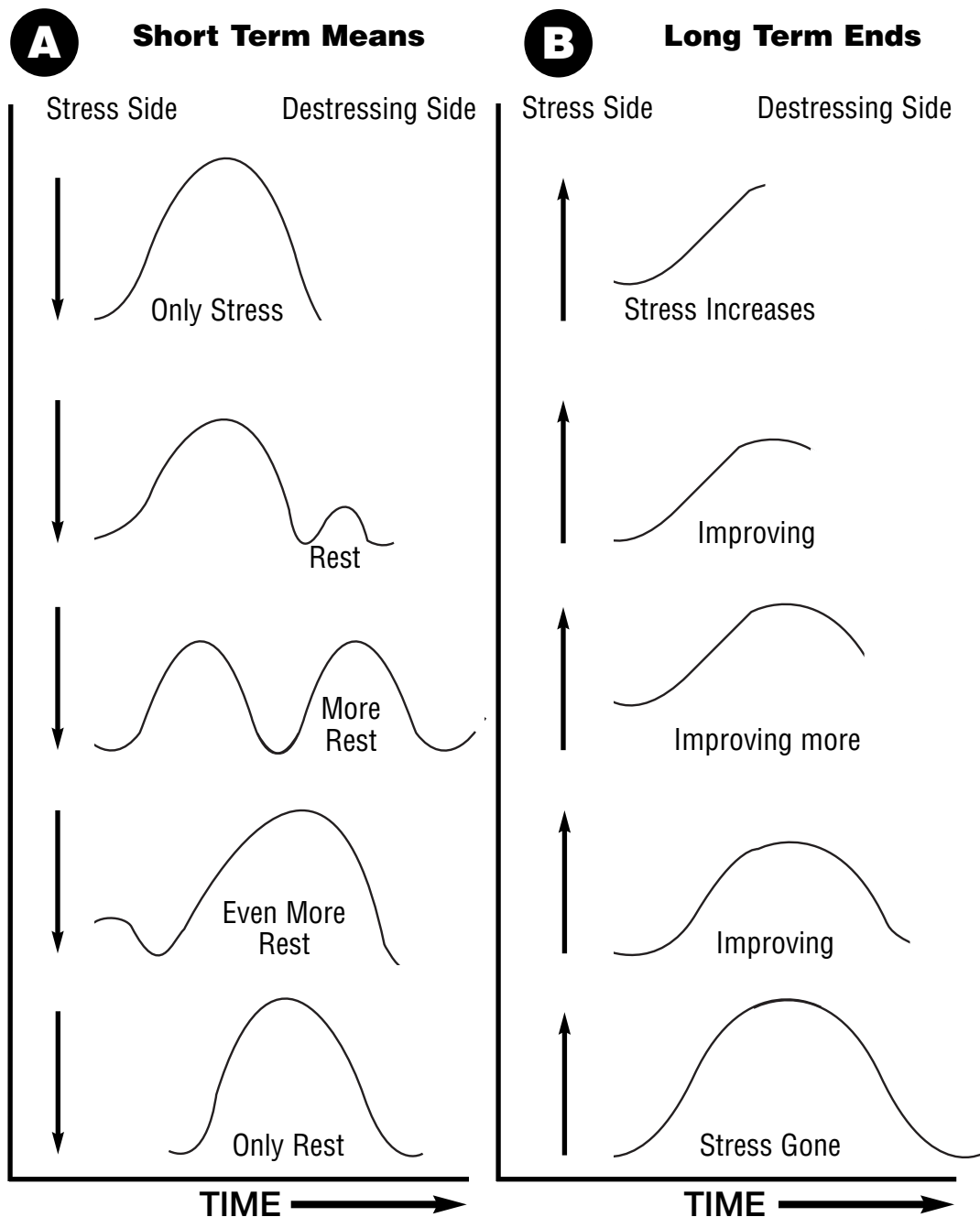
Figure 10-4 illustrates that we can come to terms with stress both over the short term and over the long term. In the short term, stress needs antidotes, such as rest and improved balance. In the long term, by having an appropriate attitude,

*Stress retreats as we advance.*

**Figure 10-4**

In the long term, we can make short of stress.

## The Long and the Short of It



---

*When discovery is a constant in life, success is constant in recovery.*

---

---

*When we deal hard with stress, it is hard for it to continue.*

---

**J**acky was jittery and jumpy, too much so to read Chapter 10. She won't recover until she does. Chapter 10 gets you going.

using appropriate coping strategies, and implementing appropriate plans, gradually, the highs of stress can reach a moderate equilibrium so that we can return to an even keel. Our psychological systems are oriented to finding this state. We can become destressing experts by following our positive natural inclinations, by thinking more optimistically, and by acting more adaptively. We can always begin to find rest by visualizing the wind rustling the leaves of trees directly above us as we lay on the grass beneath their expanse.

In **Figure 10-5**, I emphasize the need to let stress come out so that we can deal with it. Sometimes, we are not aware of all the stresses impinging on us. Or, a stress is so overwhelming that we prefer not to deal with it or are incapable of dealing with it. We put it under wraps and try to distance ourselves from it. But it lies within us, like a sore beneath the skin that we cannot see, still causing discomfort. Every time we or someone accidentally brushes against the sore, it stings and disrupts our ongoing activity as we react to the pain.

**It is easier if we get the stress out of the closet and deal with it so that it does not sneak out of the closet to make uninvited appearances.** When a balloon is stretched to the maximum, it loses its resistance and inflates more easily the next time. Similarly, the stress balloons in our minds expand quickly and readily even if there is only a reminder of the original stress. We need to “de-stretch” these stress balloons in our minds. The first step is to acknowledge that there is stress so that we can deal with it, come to terms with it, go beyond it, and engage in constructive activities. Then, we work on the stress so that the psychological sores begin to heal, the closet door hiding secrets open, and the stress balloons begin to shrink. **Stress will have left its mark, but there is no reason why it cannot become a mark of courage.**

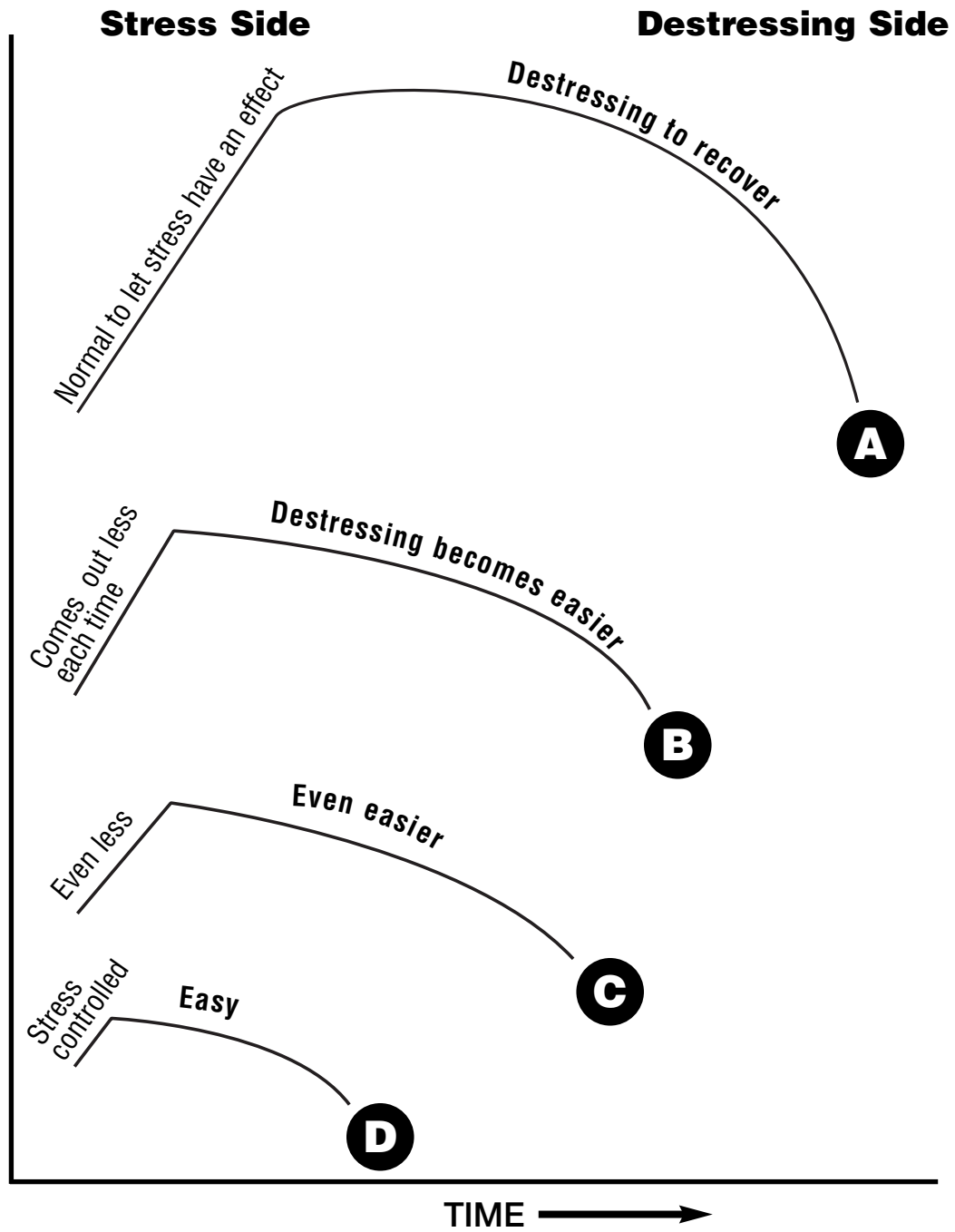




**Figure 10-5**

As we get stronger from dealing well with stress, it gets unwell.

## Let it All Hang Out

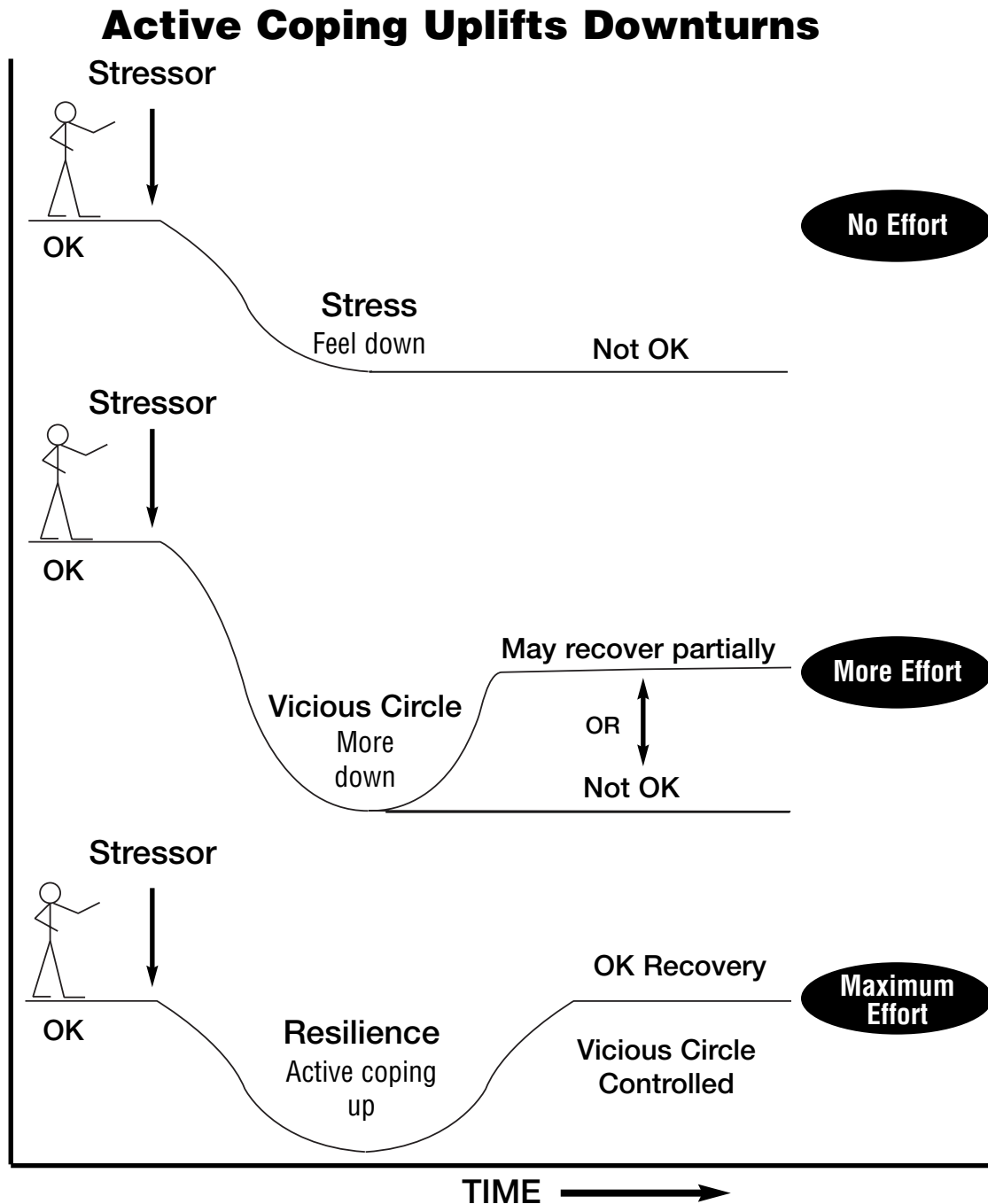


*Coping is an active skill that can be learned in the school of daily living.*

Figure 10-6 illustrates that recovery involves not only improving, but also stopping things from getting worse. Stress puts down, but vicious circles can develop to push us down deeper. When this happens, the normal recovery that

**Figure 10-6**

Resilience to stress is a quality that can grow through resisting stress.



Active Coping =  
Perceive, plan, prioritize, prepare, pace, persist, perform, and perfect

takes place after stress is put at risk. We need to learn active coping. Passive coping involves letting things happen, wishful thinking, and depending on professionals. Active coping involves problem-solving from the beginning of stress to its end. **To end stress, problem solve it from beginning to end.**

Figure 10-7 emphasizes that recovery from stress or injury can bring gains that would not have been achieved without the stress or injury. Recovery in any one area can be more than partial, and it need not return only to the point where it would have been had the stress or injury not occurred. It is entirely possible that we can grow with stress, that we can learn from it to the point that we are psychologically stronger, and that our life course has changed for the better from having experienced the stress. These positive outcomes are only possibilities, and there is no guarantee that such improvements will happen. **However, growth after stress can be part of healing and we should let it grow.**

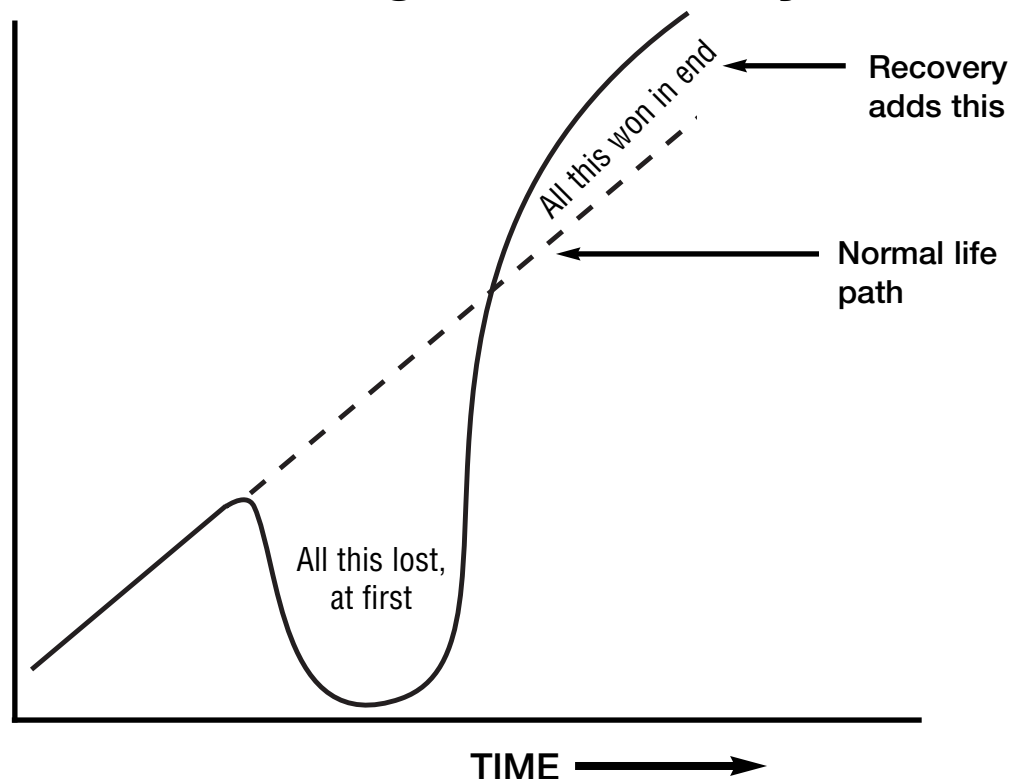
.....  
*Being in recovery can lead to improvements beyond what we can imagine.*  
 .....

.....  
*Recovery is different for different people—  
 Be yourself.*  
 .....

**Figure 10-7**

Recovery never means only loss, especially when we want gain.

### Gaining From Recovery



When we master stress, we become master of ourselves.

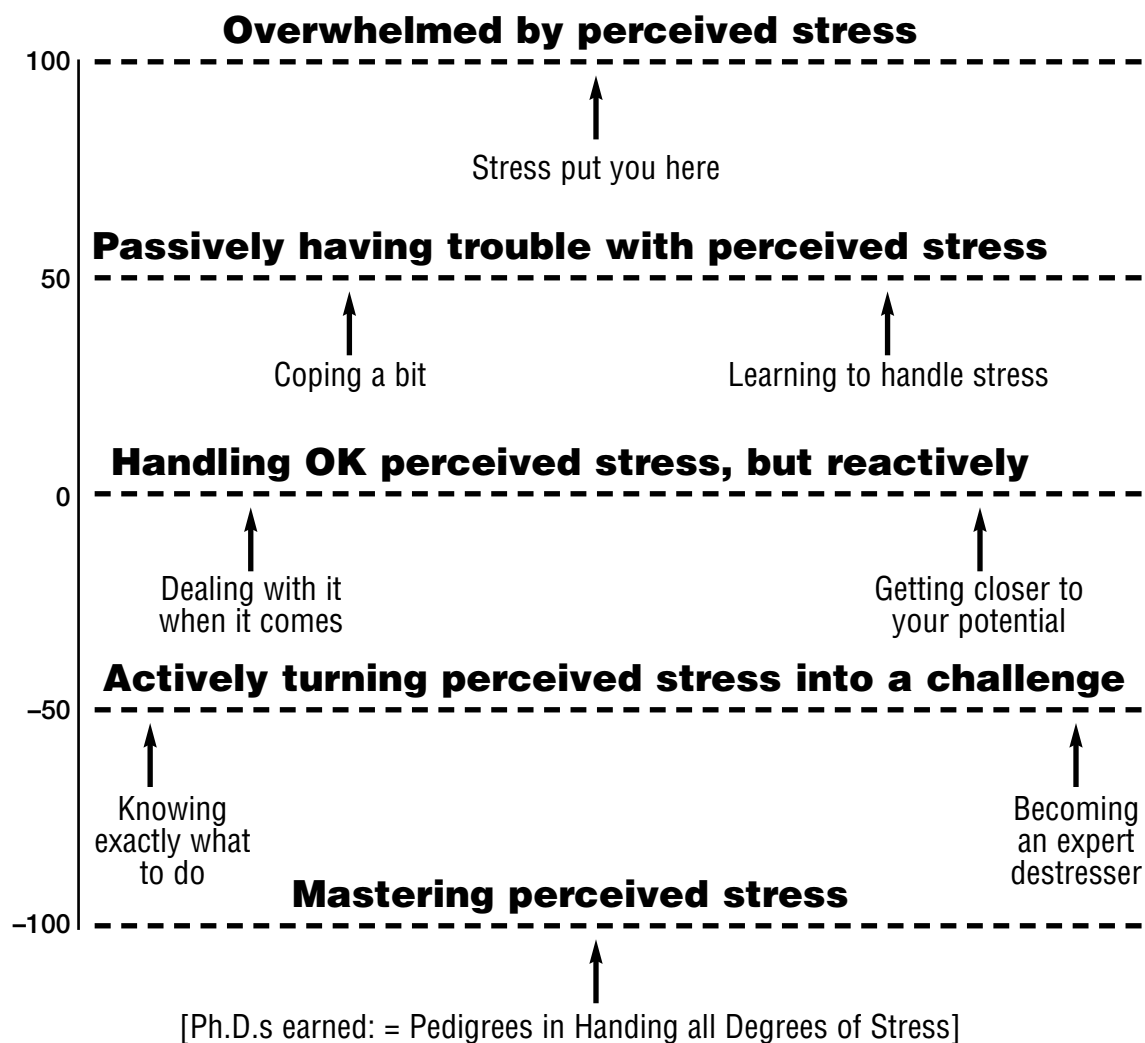
Recovery gives stress—when we give up.

Figure 10-8 shows that we can all become experts in handling stress. It emphasizes that to become better stress handlers, we need to be like guides, and learn to live with stress, making the experience a challenge rather than a chore. Two important stress control techniques concern perceiving stress as something controllable and then actively attempting to deal with it. By learning active coping and stress control strategies, stress becomes less active.

Figure 10-8

When you Master stress, you get your Doctorate, too.

## Get Pedigrees Against Stress Degrees



In **Figure 10-9**, I explain that, when a new stressor comes along, it acts on a background of any unresolved stresses still present. The more these have been dealt with, the less they interact with new stressors in a vicious circle. Past stresses

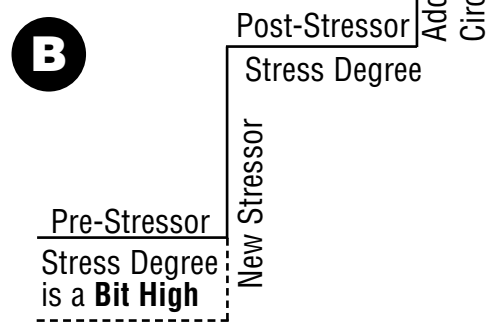
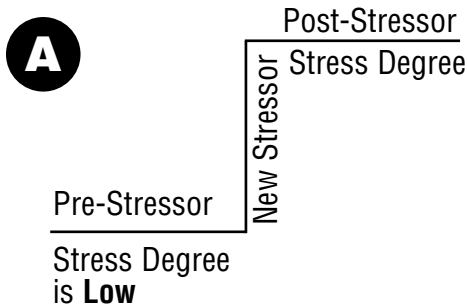
*When we let problems linger, answers do not.*

**Figure 10-9**

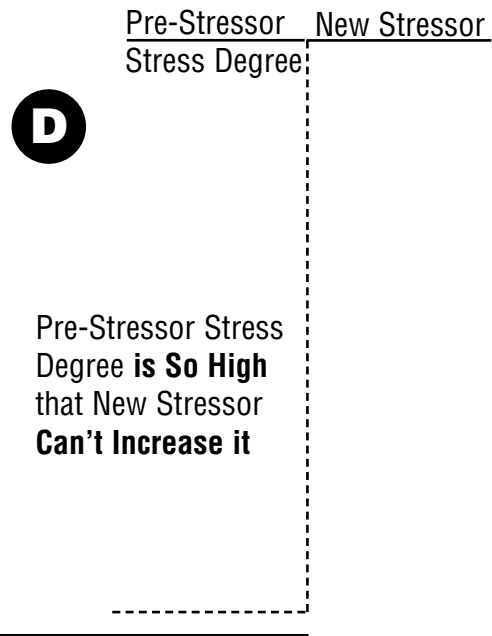
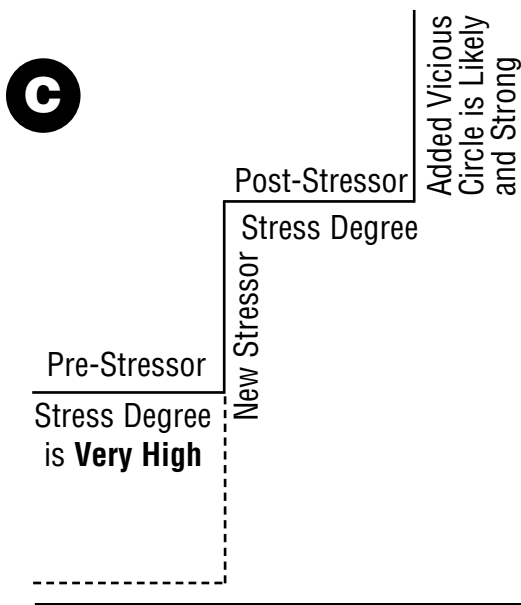
Dealing with ongoing stress as it comes up, makes future stress easier to deal with.

## New Stress Adds When Past Stress Hasn't Been Subtracted

### Past Stress Manageable



### Past Stress Unmanageable



TIME →

*Breathing exercises have no side effects.*

*Recovery can be more than anyone predicted—when we follow our own prediction.*

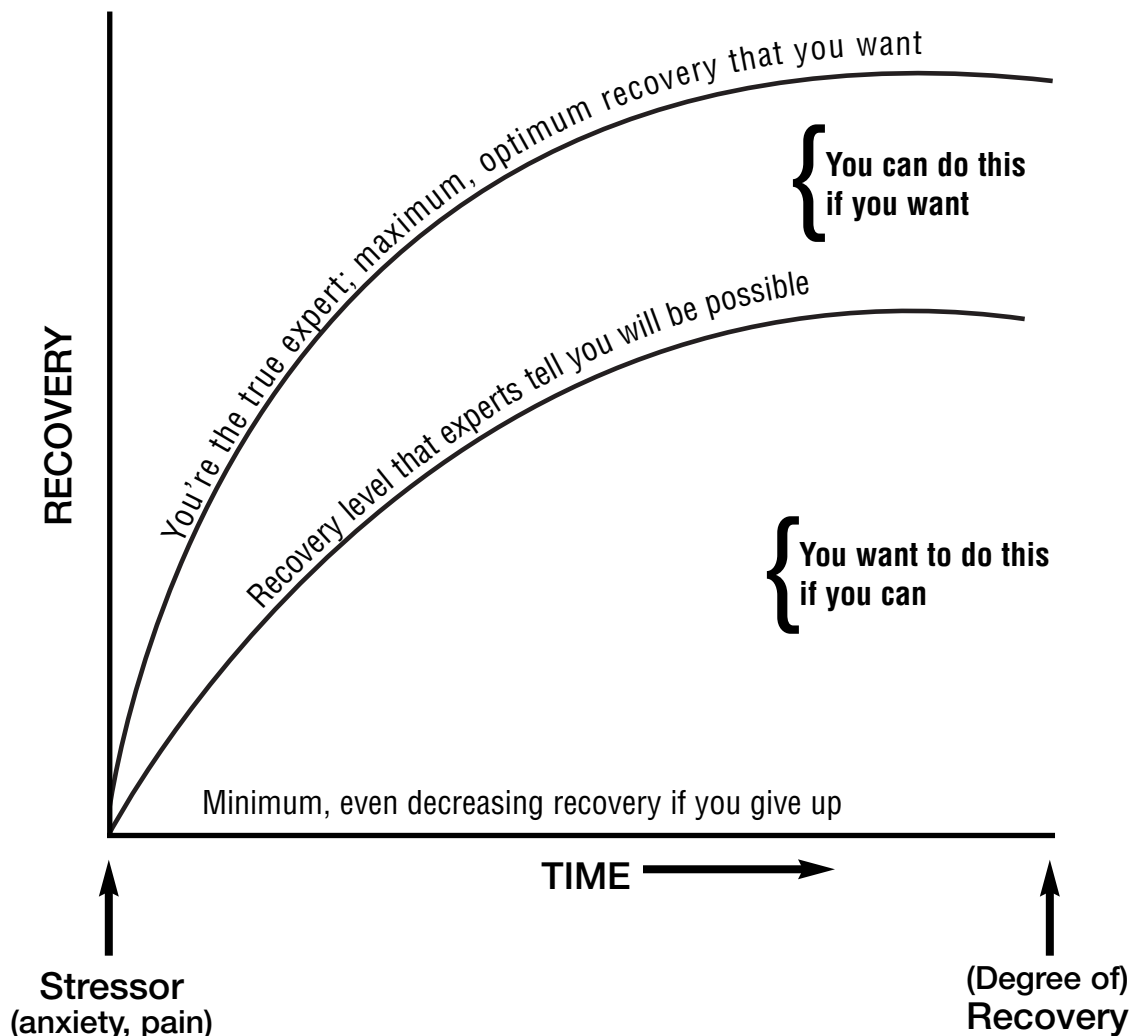
left unresolved can be so high that a new stress has no or little appreciable effect on us, no matter how severe it is. The more we let stress make us vulnerable by not dealing with it, the less we can deal adequately with each new stressor. **When we let stress collect, new ones tax us.**

Figure 10-10 brings us full circle in graphing different degrees of recovery. Experts may tell us that we can only recover so far. We have a choice to make: we can choose to believe the experts who give us less than optimal predictions for our recovery or we can choose to tell ourselves that we

**Figure 10-10**

The desire to recover brings recovery beyond itself.

## The Desire to Recover is Yours to Discover



are the true experts of ourselves and we can go as far in our recovery as we want, within certain limits. Recovery does not follow one timetable for everybody. It varies with factors such as will, motivation, and optimism. Desire speeds up recovery just as despair slows it down. **By seeing beyond the ceiling, we escape the floor.**

*Recovery proceeds slowly but surely—when we believe that surely it will happen.*

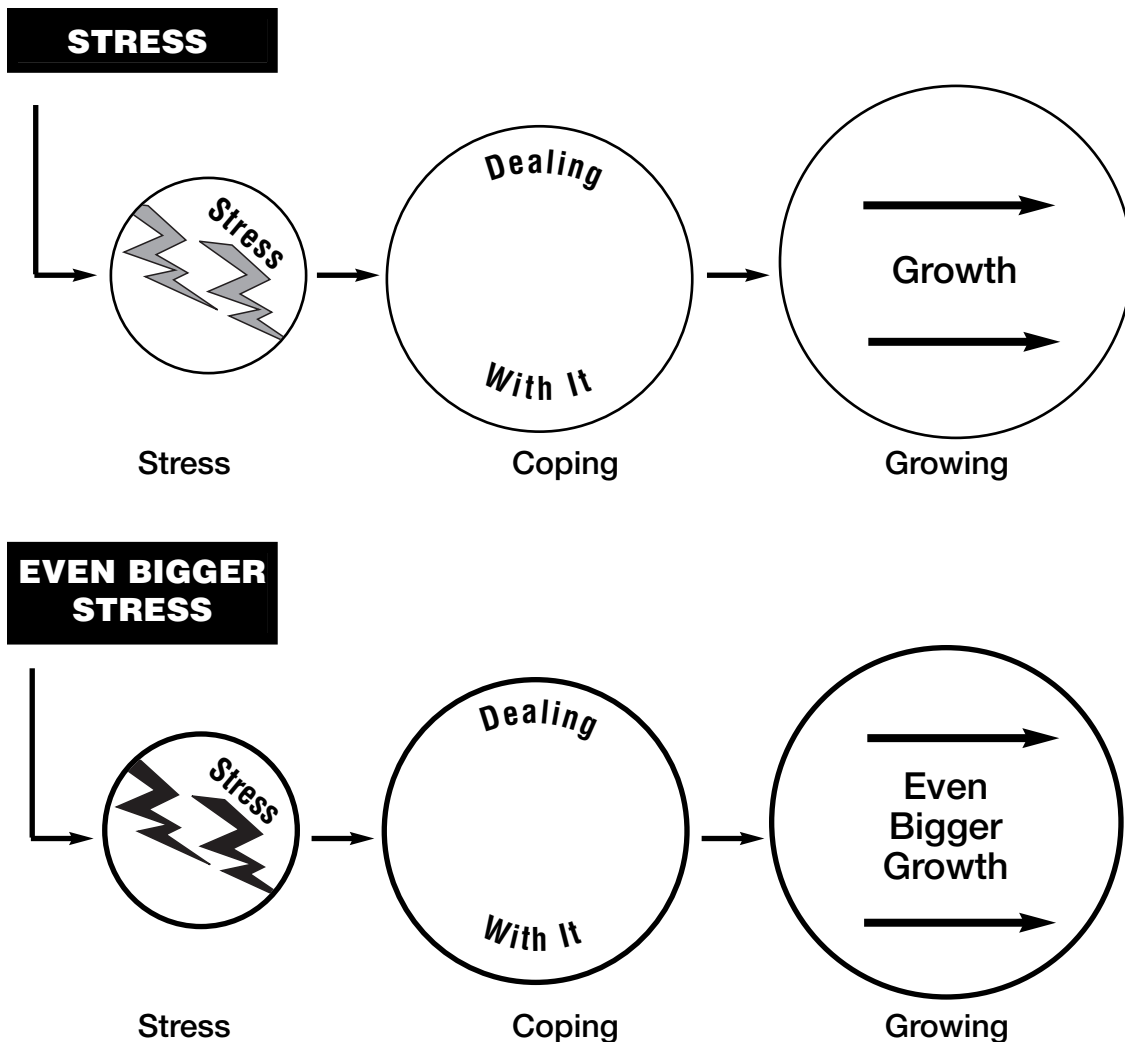
Figure 10-11 informs us that stress does not always lead to negative consequences. Stress can be seen as a challenge. We can develop the skill to see stress consistently in this way. We can learn that stress is not something about which we must always feel negative. In fact, we can learn to **handle stress** so that it always leads to coping and growth.

*The bigger the crisis, the bigger the challenge.*

**Figure 10-11**

Stress can be a good teacher when we are a better learner.

## Stress as a Growing Experience



This brings us to the end not only of Chapter 10, but also of the book. Both stress and needed destressing procedures have been explained. Techniques of dealing with stress can help moderate, control, or even eliminate it. The degree to which we endeavour to understand these lessons will determine how much we can destress after we experience stress and how much we rejoin joy. **Destressing is not too hard to learn—when we decide to give it a lesson.**

Jack was getting quite emotional. He had never been this way. He was high then low; he could be happy and then sad, depending on what was happening in his life. His partner did not understand these mood changes.

She describes to her friends what had happened to Jack. They advise her to go on the Internet and search for sites dealing with self-help. Jack's partner finds a book similar to this one listed on the web.

### Stress Is A Story With The Endings That We Write For It

<i>Life has stressful turns— until we set it straight.</i>	<i>Take pills with water—or visualize a water scene.</i>	<i>Physical exercise builds both muscle power and brain tower.</i>
<i>Stress can have its way with us, or we can find a way to deal with it.</i>	<i>Muscle tension should only be present when we tense our muscles as part of a tense-relaxation exercise.</i>	<i>Depression can be headed off— with good marshall resource arts.</i>
<i>Stress comes in multiples— therefore, we have to be singularly strong.</i>	<i>Positive thoughts are the mind's best defend.</i>	<i>"The pain of it all"—is what pain thinks when we destress.</i>
		<i>When pain interferes—tell it that it is rude.</i>



*Put on a show for stress—  
have it watch your fortitude.*

*When stress jumps a tall  
building—put up a flag pole.*

*Say what you want about stress—  
except that it belongs.*



# Ultimate

**The ultimate challenge is to  
climb the mountain to  
contemplate change.**





