

January 20, 2012

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Thank you for participating in the January Brown Bag Lunch. Stress management is an important topic for families of gifted kids. I look forward to hearing what strategies you use, as well as learning about commonalities our kids share.

How much have you talked with your child about the stress they experience in life? Did you set aside time every day to be available to simply listen? Because families are the first and most influential teachers in the lives of our children, they have the power to help with stress management.

Because evidence shows that students win when families, community, and schools all work together, I'm providing another "homework" assignment to encourage you to engage at a deeper level with your child in the coming month. If you missed the first two family engagement assignments, you may download them from the Northern Colorado Wiki-space: <http://northerncoloradogtparents.wikispaces.com/>.

As you work through all or some of the activities in the attached packet with your child, please don't feel limited to the questions and suggestions here. Adjust, go deeper, go broader, and allow the discussion to lead you into new territories. Adjust these to fit the developmental level of your child (they are written with a middle school child's development in mind). If *you* have strategies, stories, ideas you'd be willing to share, log on to the Wiki-space and do just that, or drop me an email/give me a call. I'd love to hear from you.

If new questions or concerns arise as a result of these activities, please know that I am available to answer questions and/or to connect you to other people and resources that can be of assistance.

Thank you for being the primary teacher in your child's education. What a powerful life-foundation you're providing your child!

Sincerely,

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Interactive Family Homework Assignment, January: The GT Kid and Stress

Stress and Giftedness

Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith list eight “gripes” that are common to gifted students. Read this list with your child: <http://gateresources.blogspot.com/2008/04/eight-great-gripes-of-gifted-kids.html>.

Any of these could be a source of stress for your child. Ask your child if any of these gripes are true for him/her? Does he/she have other gripes not listed? Do any of these things feel stressful? Why or why not?

Because one of the identifying characteristics of gifted kids is their sensitivity to the world around them, ethical issues may concern them more than their peers, creating undue stress.

Having the potential to do “anything” is usually seen as a positive thing, but this can be overwhelming, creating stress. Adults: the following video features author Barry Schwartz talking about the “Paradox of Choice.” Watch the clip (it is 20 minutes long, or you may read the transcript located under the video screen) http://blog.ted.com/2006/09/26/paradox_of_choi/. Consider his theory that while we assume choice leads to freedom, that choice can ultimately be a burden and create paralysis. How does this relate to the choices your gifted child experiences each day or regarding his/her future and how it relates to the number six “gripe” in the Delisle/Galbraith list (“We feel overwhelmed by the number of things we can do in life.”)?

Perfectionism can also be an exaggerated problem for gifted kids. For more on perfectionism and activities and discussions you can have at home, see the December TIPS Assignment, available for download on the Northern Colorado Wiki-Space or by contacting me to have a digital copy emailed to you directly.

Talk together about the importance of taking risks, about perseverance, and about setting priorities and accepting failure. Remind your child often that it is okay to be imperfect—everyone is. Provide modeling of imperfection in yourself and how you handle it day to day. Remind your children that great things usually come out of failed attempts.

Watch the following brief video together: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBUm-l2X1cA>.

Did you know that our beloved chocolate chip cookie began as a mistake? Read the story at <http://voices.yahoo.com/invented-mistake-toll-house-cookies-mistake-286348.html?cat=23>.

You may have heard that Post-It notes were a profitable mistake. Share the story—and the Velcro mistake—with your child: http://library.thinkquest.org/J0112389/mistakes_that_worked.htm.

Discuss: why is it okay to try new things, even if you don’t succeed.

What is perseverance and why is it important?

When is it okay to give yourself permission to let go or to back down—or to give up? Why is it important to do this at times?

Read more about the importance of giving up: <http://www.lifeoptimizer.org/2009/10/29/giving-up/>.

Finally, simply *being* gifted can be a source of stress all its own. Read more about this and watch a brief (under 2 minute) video clip of a gifted student's stress:

http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2009/451_aug19/thisweek/090819_stress.shtml.

Stress, Its Causes, Your Reactions

Ask your student: What does "stress" mean to you? When have you felt stress recently?

Tell them what stress means to you and give them some examples of times you've felt stress recently.

Read the list of stressors on page 14 of *Too Stressed to Think* by Annie Fox and Ruth Kirschner (available for check-out from the Enrichment Resource Center at the Thompson School District's Gifted and Talented Office—contact me to make an appointment to come in and browse or to request the book be sent to your child's school for you to pick up). Ask your child: Do any of these make regular appearances and create stress in your life? How does your body react when you're stressed? How do you behave?

Listing your stressors is an important step. Don't skip it. Put them on a sheet of paper and revisit it regularly to check its accuracy to the stressors you encounter each week. You can't tackle stress if you haven't identified what stresses you out.

Answer the same questions for yourself. Everyone has different stressors, everyone handles stress differently. Discuss the different ways each member of the family deals with stress. What strategies are ineffective or create more stress? What strategies seem to help the individual who practices them?

Fight, Flight, Freeze

If your child is not familiar with the idea of fight or flight—particularly if he/she is young—take some time to explain that your body reacts to stress by trying to confront it (fight) or to get away from it (flight). Brainstorm together some times when you have had each of these reactions and whether this was the best way to deal with the stressor in those circumstances.

Here's a short animated description of fight or flight:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7S_BB7R8NMU.

Sometimes our bodies don't choose fight or flight; it chooses "freeze." This is when your body shuts down mentally and physically to a stressor.

Brainstorm together some situations when you've frozen under distress, taken flight, or put up a fight.

If you'd like an illustrated explanation of "Fight or Flight," check out *Fighting Invisible Tigers: A Stress Management Guide for Teens*, by Earl Hipp (available at the Enrichment Resource Center at the District Gifted and Talented Office or call me and I can have it sent directly to you for pick up at your child's school).

Can't Fight? Can't Flee? Can't Freeze? Then Flow!

Who is responsible for your stress? You are . . . no exceptions. The sooner you accept it, the sooner you can deal with it. Blaming your teacher for the load of homework, or your parents for irritating you, or your friend for distracting you takes away your power. You are responsible for your choices and choosing your reaction to stress. No one can *make* you feel the way you do. Feelings are chosen.

The exception to taking ownership of a problem is when the problem isn't really yours. Can you give an example of a time you stressed out over something that was really someone else's problem? Gail Roberts and Lorraine Guttormson write in *You and Stress: A Survival Guide for Adolescence*, "Realizing and accepting that someone else's problem isn't yours to solve can take some of the pressure off you." They suggest you work through this situation by completing the following sentences:

1. A problem I have no control over is:
2. I can help myself feel better anyway by:

Discuss the above statements in relation to stressful situations you and/or your child have recently encountered or are currently dealing with.

The book *The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook* by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle explains that there are three ways to take positive action when one is stressed:

1. You can diminish or eliminate the problem you associate with your stress;
2. You can change your attitude toward the problem; or
3. You can lower your stress level by engaging in one or more stress-reducing activities.

Read the sections below for more information on each of these three actions.

Diminishing or Eliminating Stressors

This is a difficult category to speak of generally. How we do this depends so much on the stressor itself. If our stressor is a bully at school, what are the different ways we can eliminate the problem? You can probably create quite a list!

If our stressor is public speaking, our strategies for diminishing or eliminating the stressor are quite different. What are some possibilities?

If our stressor is an argument between our parents at home, what are some ways we could diminish or eliminate *this* stress?

Look back at your personal list of stressors. Pick one or two of them and brainstorm together ways to diminish or eliminate them. Are there times when this might be the best strategy? Are there times when this strategy might be harmful?

Take a few minutes to watch this short (under 3 minutes) video clip from the BBC that explains what stress is, how it affects us physically, and some quick tips for dealing with stress:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE&feature=related>

Attitude Adjustments

Have you ever picked up a glass of milk only to take a sip and discover it was plain juice? Even if you like juice, because you expected milk, it probably tasted terrible to you! Our minds are very powerful.

Here is an interesting family-friendly activity to try on a rainy day. Cut a piece of string, yarn or thread about 18 inches long. Tie one end to a paper clip. Wrap the other end around your index finger. Place that index finger on your forehead and lean over a table or counter with your head and upper body bent so the paperclip dangles down in front of you, hovering just above the surface below (if the string is too long, wrap it a few more times around your finger). Have someone else read the following steps:

1. Concentrate on the paperclip. Focus intently. Tune out everything around you until you feel a connection to the energy of the paperclip.
2. Imagine the weight of that clip and concentrate so the clip is perfectly still below. Feel the powerful tug on the string by that clip, allowing gravity to hold it firmly in place.
3. Maintain your concentration as, in your mind's eye, you begin to imagine that paperclip is moving in a clockwise circle. Slowly at first. Don't move your body, but watch that paperclip begin to swing a bit on the string, gradually moving in a circle. See the weight of the paperclip pulling at the string, winding itself around a circle.
4. Keep focusing as your paperclip makes an ever larger, circular, clockwise movement.
5. Bring the clip to a full halt. Focus as it works to find gravity's grip and to be supported by the quiet air around it.
6. Maintain your concentration as, in your mind's eye, you begin to imagine that paperclip is moving in a counter-clockwise circle. Slowly at first. Don't move your body, but watch that paperclip begin to swing a bit on the string, gradually moving in a circle. See the weight of the paperclip pulling at the string, winding itself around that circle.
7. Keep focusing as your paperclip makes an ever larger, circular, counter-clockwise movement.
8. Once again, bring the clip to a full halt. Focus intently, tuning everything else out, as it is firmly gripped into stillness.
9. Stop and read these directions for someone else.

For most people, even though they've been told not to move, the paperclip moves exactly as directly. Why is this? What does this tell you about the power of our expectations on our realities?

Have you ever dealt with a stressful situation by changing your perception of it? For instance, many students experience test-anxiety—a stressor that almost surely gets in the way of good performance when it is most needed. If these students could remember that a test is not a measure of their self-worth but is simply a measure of how they performed on this particular test on this particular day and time, in these particular circumstances, perhaps they would feel differently. It is important to remember that a perfect score is not the goal. Mistakes can mean that they are stretching, growing, learning something new, or moving out of their comfort zones (these are positive things).

I once had a business in which I had to make phone calls to people to find new clients. I called to invite them to attend free workshops I offered. These phone calls stressed me out even though they were important to the success of my business. They loomed over me for days at a time. I was terrified of being rejected. Then someone taught me the "Twenty No's" Game. The object of the game was to try to get twenty people to turn me down/reject my offer. I had to continue making phone calls without quitting until I arrived at twenty rejections. This simple shift in focus took the sting out of rejection. Amazingly, I filled my workshops long before I was anywhere near my twentieth "no" because I had changed my attitude about being rejected.

Look at one or two stressors from your list. Discuss how you could make changes in your attitude that would affect the problem before you.

Give Your Stress the Spa Treatment

Sometimes one of the best ways to deal with stress is to engage in a favorite way to relax. What are some of your favorite de-stressing relaxing activities?

Breathe, Sleep, Relax

Breathing may seem obvious, but it is one of the first things that becomes difficult when we are stressed. It is also a great, free, always-available thing we can do to turn stress around.

Find an appropriate script, audio, or video recording (online or at the library) of deep breathing exercises, or find a yoga DVD or class to try out. Schedule time to do one or all of these activities regularly. Do it as a family, if you can.

A book or YouTube video on breathing that is particularly good for younger kids:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiaUV-OiBGE&feature=related>

Laugh

Laughter and smiling is good internal exercise. Smiling reminds our brain that everything is okay and begins to change the chemistry that leads to stress.

It is okay to fake it until you make it, in this case. Faking a smile, or faking laughter actually tricks your brain into relaxing. Take a look at motivational speaker KarynBuxman talk on this subject:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybnzd4zu8xs>.

What makes you laugh? Talk about ways to find laughter individually or together every day.

Want to get the ball rolling? Check out these short clips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RP4abiHdQpc>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p32OC97aNqc>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2slyKFkk2s&feature=related>

Recharge—people, hobbies, passions

What are your passions in life? What are the activities or people you can count on to lighten your mood, decrease your blood pressure, and make you feel good.

Have each member of the family create a Ten Best Recharges List. Encourage each other to use it when stress is getting to you. Even better: do something from the list every day.

Exercise & Food

One of the best stress-reducers of all is exercise. Take the dog for a walk, shoot hoops in the driveway, run up and down the stairs ten times, go for a bike ride, close the door to your room and dance, or pick a form of exercise that suits you and your personality.

Read what the Mayo Clinic has to say about the stress-relieving benefits of exercise:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/exercise-and-stress/SR00036>.

You are probably aware of how stress impacts your food cravings. The whole idea of “comfort foods” comes from stress-induced cravings, but did you also know that different foods can hurt or help you manage your stress? Eating a diet heavy in B vitamins and omega 3 fish oil can enhance your mood. Caffeine, sugar, salt, and fat can send you into a downward spiral.

Read more at http://www.ehow.com/facts_4826761_healthy-foods-reduce-stress.html.

Want some low-stress snack ideas? Check out http://www.lowstressfood.com/files/upload/Low-Stress%20Food%20in%20She%20Knows%20Blog_1.pdf.



**Email the responses on the next page to me or mail them to:
Thompson School District, ATTN: Jennifer Solt at LS/GT, 2890
N. Monroe, Loveland, CO 80538**

Dear Families,

Please provide some feedback and reactions to this assignment. Write YES or NO for each statement.

_____ 1. As a family, we have a more thorough understanding of what stress looks like for gifted kids and how to combat it.

_____ 2. We enjoyed completing the assignment together.

_____ 3. This assignment engaged us in discussions that helped us gain new insights into one another and/or helped us formulate important questions or discussion points for one another.

_____ 4. I would like to participate in another interactive family assignment.

Any other comments: _____

Thank you for your feedback and for participating in this family activity.