



**EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT STRESS  
BUT WERE TOO STRESSED TO ASK!  
(Well, Almost Everything)**

**Causes of Stress - Small and Large:**

Stress is a fact of life for everyone. Thinking back on your day, you can probably list dozens of things that caused you stress. Starting with small stressors, how many of these did you experience today: your alarm didn't go off so you started off the day running late; you spilled coffee on your work shirt; your preschooler dawdled eating breakfast and you had to rush; you were low on gas; you encountered an aggressive driver or had a stressful commute; your regular co-teacher was sick; there was a fire drill and all the kids got upset; when you got home there was nothing for dinner; your middle schooler had a ton of homework and needed help...? Things break and go wrong; there never seems to be enough time to get it all done; teaching your own kids responsibility takes time; it's hard to find any peace and quiet, etc.

Some causes of stress are bigger and take more out of us: money worries; perhaps the loss of a job or home; lack of affordable health care for your family; single parenthood; your own health problems and/or health problems of loved ones. Some positive and happy events can be stressful - starting a new job; having a baby; having your kids go to college - because they require an additional commitment of resources that are already stretched thin.

**Stress Specific to Providing Early Care and Education:**

The public's perceptions that early childhood isn't really a profession, that it can't possibly be hard, that it's just "babysitting" are causes of stress. In our society, early care and education is generally considered "women's work" and simply isn't appreciated, although this attitude is changing - just not quickly enough! Related sources of stress include: low wages with few, if any, benefits; few opportunities for career advancement; little-to-no paid vacation; and few opportunities for training and professional development.

The environment itself, and physical activities required, can be stressful. Classrooms are usually noisy and busy; there is limited adult-size furniture so educators sit, kneel, crouch, and even lie on the floor; the job requires a lot of stooping, picking up, carrying, and bending over. Educators must follow rigorous health and safety rules that include washing; changing diapers; sanitizing and disinfecting hands, surfaces, and toys; and sweeping up after snacks and meals - while simultaneously interacting responsively with the little ones in their care! And because little kids are sick so much of the time, early educators are also sick a lot, but may work anyway because of few sick days and limited health care. Many rooms can seem cluttered and disorderly, although good early educators have a method to the seeming chaos. While none of these may be stressful in and of themselves, there is a daily cumulative effect because this is the daily norm.

The kids themselves, because they have immediate needs and limited ability to meet their own needs, can be a source of stress, particularly if the child-to-adult ratio is high. Add kids with special education needs and those with behavioral challenges into the mix, and it's no wonder that early educators are exhausted at the end of the day! Partnering with families requires training, understanding, skill, time, and practice - and early educators cite this aspect of their work as stressful.

Depending on the setting, the hours can be very long with few breaks; there may not be enough resources to do the job well; there may be some isolation and lack of social supports; and early educators may not be getting the supervision and helpful feedback they need to be successful.

### **How Do You Know If You're Stressed?**

Believe it or not, many of us don't recognize signs of chronic stress until it's affected our quality of life and damaged our health - we want to believe that we can do it all, and it's hard to be vulnerable. Do you recognize any of the following **behavioral signs** in yourself? Have you found yourself being

cranky

irritable

impatient

messy, or controlling and perfectionistic

forgetful and spacey

lethargic

impatient with kids and even yelling at them

uninterested in things you usually enjoy

upset over small things

argumentative over nothing

neglectful of kids

much more often than usual? Could indicate stress.

What about the following **physical signs and symptoms**?

weight gain/loss, and overeating/loss of appetite

sleeping too much or not being able to sleep well

headaches, stomach aches, muscle aches and pains, frequent small ailments

fatigue and lethargy

teeth grinding and clenching

rapid heart beat and anxiety

shallow breathing

feeling nervous or panicky

craving and indulging in excessive sweets

using alcohol, tobacco, or drugs more than usual

### **What Stress Does to Your Body:**

Aside from causing you to behave in ways that don't reflect your hopes for yourself, and creating all those uncomfortable physical symptoms, unchecked chronic stress is really bad for your body! It's associated with a lowered immune system response that increases the likelihood of illness; high blood pressure, which itself causes damage to your body; problems with blood sugar metabolism; cardiovascular disease; reduced muscle mass; ulcers; etc. You can't avoid stress, but you can take care of yourself!