



*Our children,
our hope,
our future*

May is Mental Health Awareness Month!

At OPS, we are celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month by providing families with information and exercises designed to foster conversations about mental health between parents/guardians and children. The information and exercises will be focused on identifying stressors, identifying stress symptoms, ways to manage stress, and developing coping skills.

This is the 2nd packet addressing
STRESS MANAGEMENT:
How can we prevent it
and/or "dial it down"?



Review

In last week's packet, we took a look at what stress is, what causes you stress, and how you know when you are stressed. Hopefully, you and your family learned a little about yourselves and each other. This week, we will look at some of the most common ways to manage stress, what you're already doing (good or bad), and what else could be changed.

Stress Management Basics

A small amount of stress is actually beneficial: it motivates us to do what needs to be done and helps us focus on the task at hand. When stress gets too burdensome or chronic it becomes detrimental to one's health. Therefore, some of the best ways to manage stress is to take better care of yourself to begin with.

They're called "basics" but they aren't universally implemented (certainly not by me!), nor are they easy to maintain consistently. These are the factors that, when prioritized and practiced consistently, go a long way to prevent stress symptoms from wreaking havoc:



- **DIET:** Most people think of diet as what they eat. Eating a balanced diet that's low in saturated fats, sugar and simple carbohydrates, while high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber is important. Just as important, though, is when, why, and how you eat. Do you eat too much or not enough when you're stressed? Do you opt for "comfort" foods instead of healthier, more nutritious options? Do you eat standing at the sink, in the car, or at your desk? All of these factors will affect the quality of your diet. The goal, however, is not to eat perfectly all the time. That can be too stressful in and of itself! As a wise man once said, "Everything in moderation, including moderation!"

- **SLEEP:** It's common knowledge that our bodies ideally need 8 hours of sleep each night, yet it's the first thing to be sacrificed when ~~we have kids~~ there are deadlines looming. As with diet, the quality of one's sleep is just as important as the quantity. Do you wake often? Have trouble falling asleep? Are you sleeping too much or not feeling refreshed even when you do get enough sleep? Is your 8 hours interrupted? (For example, do you fall asleep on the couch for a few hours before getting up to go to bed? That is interrupted sleep!)



- **EXERCISE:** Our bodies are made to be moved and challenged, and our minds work better when they are. Study after study consistently shows the many benefits of exercise – both immediate and long-term - for both body and mind, yet many people still do not make it a priority. Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of exercise 3 times per week, but lucky for us, every little bit counts! Start by increasing your steps or your walking pace, introduce a few minutes of resistance training each day, or combine exercise with leisure and join a sports league or take a dance class.

- **LEISURE:** Sounds more like a luxury than a necessity, doesn't it? In fact, a quick Google search will show that attention to adult leisure-time activities is minimal unless talking about leisure in retirement. Our cultural emphasis on work and achievement has minimized the role of leisure in the average person's life, yet experts agree that having unstructured time to pursue one's interests is important for maintaining life's balance, meaning, and a sense of personal value. Unstructured time has been shown to be especially important for children who use it to pursue their own interests, develop social skills, engage in imaginative play, and daydream.



Taking Inventory

As you may remember from last week, any change can cause stress, even a change for good. So before making any changes, it's best to first take "inventory" of your current habits. This will help you recognize where changes are needed most and what to change sooner rather than later.

-----**FAMILY FORUM TIME!**-----

Worksheet 3: Wellness Tracker

Instructions: The worksheet below will help you take a preliminary look at your eating, sleeping, exercise and leisure habits. Depending on the ages of your children, you may choose to do one tracker for the entire family or have each family member complete his/her own tracker.

- TIPS:
1. For the "Food" section, remember to note what, why, when, and how if you feel that information is relevant/important for your analysis.
 2. In the "Mood/Mind" section, record how you felt in general that day. For example, "energetic, focused, happy" or "sluggish, tired, foggy, irritable."

Alternatively, you may choose to use an electronic tracker available on many websites, apps, and/or devices. (See "To Learn More" below). Then, as a family, answer the "Questions for discussion" listed on the following page.

Next Steps

After tracking your habits for a week and answering the discussion questions, you now have the beginnings of a plan to make changes that will help "dial down" your overall stress level. Start small and only make one change at a time. Add the next change when you feel it would be manageable. But remember, it's normal to

“slip up” from time to time. Progress is not a straight line! It takes trial and error; two steps forward and one step back – that’s still progress!

Next week’s packet will address coping strategies to further help manage stress.

To Learn More

If you’d like to learn more about “the basics” of stress management, please visit the following online resources:

[Everything You Need To Know About Stress](#)

[The Basics of Stress Management](#)

[62 Stress Management Techniques, Strategies, & Activities](#)

[Need Stress Relief? Try the 4 A’s](#)

[20+ Fitness Tools That Track Your Exercise, Meals, Sleep, and More](#)

[The 7 Best Apps to Make You Healthier](#)

Worksheet 3: Wellness Tracker

Name: _____

	Day 1: /	Day 2: /	Day 3: /	Day 4: /	Day 5: /	Day 6: /	Day 7: /
Food:							
Breakfast							
Lunch							
Dinner							
Snacks							
Water (# of cups)							
Exercise (mins/type)							
Sleep (# of hours; quality)							
Leisure (# of hours; doing what)							
Mood/Mind (how did you feel overall?)							

Worksheet 3: Wellness Tracker

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the things you/your family are doing right?
2. What are the areas where changes need to be made?
3. Which changes would be relatively easy to make? (Drink more water, get to bed earlier, etc.)
4. For the changes that would require a greater commitment, what small step could be taken in the "right" direction?
5. Do you notice any patterns between you and other family members?
6. Did you learn anything new about yourself or another family member?