

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?



Marc Marshall, CH CHMI

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

Houston...We have a problem here!

Just imagine that you are sitting in your classroom and there is another report of a gang fight, or assault, or perhaps a shooting. What is it that you are feeling? Unfortunately, these once rare occurrences have become a part of everyday life in our public schools. So, how do we recognize stress and what can we, as parents, society and educators do to change the narrative.

Over the course of the next several pages, I will share my thoughts and experiences with you from my perspective as a hypnotist, author and former teacher in alternative school environments.

The challenges that our students face is very real. The problem, that I see, is that we have ill-prepared them to have the tools to deal with stress and perhaps, even contribute to the pressure, simply because we don't know better. In our sincere desire to make things better, easier, or less painful, we have robbed them of important growth and social opportunities whereby they can learn.

However, as I will discuss below, the problem also has its roots in the increasing reliance on technology as the primary method of human communication and social interaction. Interacting through text, short videos, Tweets or Snaps is, at best two dimensional. It lacks intimacy that we get from physical face-to-face conversation. More concerning, is that the electronic communication removes many of the social cues that we need for effective and satisfying communications and which is so much a part of a real connection.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

It is the real connection that allows us to develop empathy and which makes us human. Humanity therefore requires us to be able to feel and to embrace feelings, even when painful. Experts in child development write about how the dynamics of child interactions have changed. Among the various issues that are often cited are the amount of time our children spend on their devices, the interferences of adults in mediating and rescuing children from socially challenging confrontations with peers, and the need for instantaneous gratification. And, the layering of desensitizing entertainment such as highly stimulating video games wherein the goal is to shoot, kill, rob, cheat, which are rewarded with more and higher rankings, or dehumanizing words in popular music, all lower the barre of acceptable human interaction.

But, the popular games, videos and music are only a symptom of the problem. Over the course of the past forty to fifty years the discourse between people has become much more uncivil. The violence that accompanied the civil rights movements, the assassination of political and social change leaders such as John and Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr., and the social riots of the 60's related to civil rights and the Vietnam War, brought the issues of the day right into our living rooms. It is here, that we can see the beginning of the desensitizing of American culture.

Even more than desensitizing us, those who grew up in the era of the cold-war 50's and 60's, experienced the beginning of a stressful and sometimes threatening environment. The sounds of air-raid sirens in preparation for a nuclear attack and the practicing of duck and cover drills of the 60's is repeated in its latest incarnation, the active shooter or intruder threat drills in our schools. And, unlike the duck and cover drills, which were in response to an external threat, the shelter in place, active shooter / internal or external threat drills, attack the very core of what should be a safe environment for learning and growing.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

The purpose of this article is to provide concrete solutions to how we can reduce stress in our children and ultimately in our society, not to get into the political quagmire of the causes. I choose to provide concrete solutions since we have lost our way in knowing how to respectfully disagree, compromise and find solutions. Rational civil discussion is impossible without rational civil people. Perhaps they too will see the wisdom in these simple steps.

What the Mind Conceives, the Mind Achieves

So to begin, I want you to take a drinking glass and fill it half way with water and then I want you to hold it in front of and ask yourself this question... "How heavy is that glass of water?" - Go Ahead - call out your answer. Does it weigh three ounces, or four or eight? You see, the absolute weight doesn't matter, it depends on how long you hold it.

The fact is that if you hold it for a minute, it's not a problem. If you hold it for an hour your arm would ache and it would be uncomfortable. And, if you hold it for a day, Your arm will feel numb and paralyzed.

You see, in each case the weight of the glass doesn't change. But the longer you hold it, the heavier it becomes. The stress and worries of life are like that glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and they begin to hurt. And, if you focus on them all day long - you will feel paralyzed and incapable of doing anything. It is important to let go of your stress. But how do we learn to do that and why aren't we teaching that skill in our schools?

As a clinical hypnotist I work with people to help them be the best they can be. This includes work in pain management, weight loss, smoking cessation, elimination of fears and phobias, dealing with Post Traumatic Stress, addictions, and managing stress and anxiety. As a comedy hypnotist, I relieve stress through laughter.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

Let's begin tonight with a technique that has its roots in 5000 years of history. It is based on the ancient Chinese study of body circuitry or meridians. It is the same basis for acupressure and acupuncture. The technique is called EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) or more commonly - Tapping.

The medical profession has long known that emotional issues can dramatically affect our body chemistry and that, in turn, can lead to everything from rashes and headaches to addictions, impaired immune systems and cancer. We see consistent evidence of this when we apply the Tapping process. As guilt, anger, fear, trauma and the like become resolved, physical ailments often subside simultaneously. From time to time we also see physical symptoms fade by simply Tapping on the meridian system without directly aiming EFT at emotional contributors. In this case, it appears that one of the contributors to the physical ailment may be strictly energetic and thus merely balancing the meridians can bring about symptom relief.

Begin by identifying an issue that is you stress, pain or anxiety. Now, on a measure the intensity of this discomfort on a scale of 1 to 10 (low intensity to high) The third step is to acknowledge the issue. One way to do this is by repeating a simple mantra or statement will tapping various points in the body -

Example for stress:

"I am important and know that I can relax. Releasing stress and tension help me to be happier and healthier."

"I know that when I am happy, I can focus and achieve my goals"

"I know that my happiness does not depend on anyone else. When I smile it releases stress."

"I am kind and know that I can help others to enjoy life"

"I am smart and I know that when I focus on positive goals... Positive things happen in my life."

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

Begin by tapping (using your finger tips) at the top of your head at the top of the forehead, repeating your mantra. Next move to the sides of top of your eyebrows. Continue tapping by your temples/ side of your eyes. Move down to under your eyes. Tap under your nose (above your lip). Move next to the point of your chin, follow to the beginning of your collarbones and end tapping in Karate chopping motion the fleshy side of your hands. When you are done, re-scan and see how you are now feeling. Notice the tingling and feeling of calm that has begun to sweep through you. Repeat this to reduce the intensity of the prior feeling.

I want to tell you a short story;

Once there was a poor man who traveled the countryside begging for food and money. He had lived this way for years and had grown to accept his struggles as his destiny. One day as he was resting in a park, he came across an old friend who he had not seen for years. The two of them spent the morning talking and catching up on each other's lives. When it was about time to part, the friend invited the poor man home for dinner. The friend was a very successful trader who enjoyed a life of luxury. When the poor man arrived, the two men spent the evening sharing stories, laughing, eating, and drinking. It got late and the friend saw that the poor man had too much to drink, so he invited him to sleep over.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

While the poor man was sleeping, the friend sneaked into his room and took his robe. Within the lining of the robe, he sewed a precious jewel. The next morning, the poor man left the home and went on his way, not knowing what his friend had done. Years later, the two men crossed paths again. The friend shook his head when he looked at the poor man. It was obvious to him that, since their last meeting, the poor man had continued to live his impoverished existence, even though he had in his possession a priceless jewel. This version of the Buddhist parable *The Jeweled Robe* points to the fact that inherent in every human being lies hidden a precious jewel, whose qualities are that of wisdom and potentiality.

Unbeknown to us, we are just like the poor man in the parable. Each of us has an aspect of our life that we are struggling with, oblivious to the precious jewel within us. We are oblivious because we are not mindful to much of our life. Rather than having a direct experience of our life, most of us experience our lives through the filter of our belief systems. Many of these limit our ability to experience the depths of who we are and the world around us. These belief systems were not chosen by us; rather, they were acquired through generations of socialization by our family and society. Each generation perpetuates their belief systems, which then becomes entrenched in our institutions, including education.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

Here is the other thing about stress. Stress results in the release of Cortisol – our stress hormone. Cortisol reduces blood flow to the pre-frontal cortex (the front of our brains), which is in charge of wisdom, reason, logic, empathy and inhibition. This is the reason why we can't hear "other people's point of view" when we are stressed and why we can't say "NO" to our vices when stressed. Simply put, the pre-frontal cortex cannot do its job. Cortisol also increases the amount of fat we retain in our bodies, raises blood pressure and stops other systems from functioning normally.

You see, what the mind conceives the mind achieves! That is – Perception Equals Reality. When you are stressed, you are always in the fight/flight/freeze mode. And, the unfortunate thing that I see is too many people who come to me are focused on the negative aspects of life. This, is very much the root cause of their stress and anxiety.

So what if you had the tools to relax every single day? How much better would your life be? You see most of spend our lives thinking about what we could have done, should have done, want to do, going to do, need to do, but not what we are doing. These are the reasons why so many people are stressed. And the unfortunate part is not only does this have a deleterious effect on your health, but it also robs you of enjoying the things going on around you. You go through the motions of life. You do things mindlessly. You eat meals and don't remember what you ate or appreciate the flavors. You miss experiences because you are trying to multi-task instead of focusing on a single task.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

Our students, have these challenges and more. They are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. They are learning how to navigate the world and deal with people, and they are dealing with issues of self-doubt, body image, and social pressure. They are seeking acceptance from peers while not really sure how to relate to the adults in their lives. Of course, there are additional pressures that they face like academic performance, social group acceptance, and trying to make sense of an environment where adults are often more out of control than students. They have many questions and they think they have all the answers. Their social life is driven by their devices. Watch a group of students sitting around (adults do this as well) and notice how they are focused on their devices. There is very little direct, interpersonal interaction. It is amazing how disconnect they are even when connected. The problem is that they are not present.

This is where mindfulness meditation is incredibly valuable in helping restructure their lives, and improving happiness and health. In my book – *Staying in the Moment – Helping Students Achieve More Through Mindfulness Meditation*. I provide simple exercises that educators can bring into their classrooms that fit into the tight time constraints of our classrooms. I wrote this book based on my own experiences teaching “At-Risk” students in an alternative high school. It was written to help educators and parents improve outcomes in their students, just like I saw in my students. It is simple and highly effective at helping people develop life-long tools that help them self-regulate, focus, and achieve goals.

Mindfulness meditation does not require hours of practice. It does not require a special teacher. It is simply taking 10 or 15 minutes to shut off the noise of life and focus on a single thing. Every client that I see in my clinical hypnosis practice is taught mindfulness meditation as part of the work we do. And, I find those who practice mindfulness, as I instruct, report great success in making the important changes that I work with them on during our hypnosis session.

Are Our Kids Too Stressed?

More importantly, it gives students two very important messages that will make a difference in their lives. First, they are being taught a skill that moves them from being reactive or acting mindlessly, to being proactive (being present and with purpose.) This is important in helping students self-regulate, focus, and take positive action in their lives. It is a tool that will go with them long after Algebra or Chemistry have ceased to be points of focus. The second part, which is perhaps more important, is the connection that is created between the teacher and students when they share mindfulness practice. The implicit message is clear... "You are important and cared about." Imagine how much more civil our schools and society can be with a simple change in our daily lives.

About the Author:

Meet Hypnotist, Author and Motivational Speaker, Marc Marshall



Marc is an award winning, certified stage and clinical hypnotist, author and motivational speaker with experience entertaining both large and small gatherings.

He uses his skills and talents in a variety of areas that include self-improvement or clinical hypnosis, motivational speaking, and comedy stage hypnosis.

Marc has worked with individuals and corporations throughout the United States to improve outcomes in personal lives of and organizations.

As a clinical hypnotist, he has helped people lose weight, stop smoking, deal with long held fears, deal with stress and anxiety, manage pain, improve sports performance, eliminate addictions, and improve sexual function.

His performance resume includes appearances on live shows for Refinery29 Live and Elite Daily's TrashED. He has performed at comedy clubs, the Monroe County Fair (MI), the Osceola County Fair (Kissimmee, FL), the Red River Valley Fair (Fargo, ND), for schools, proms, graduations, conferences, conventions, corporations, as well as the most challenging of environments - street hypnosis on the Las Vegas Strip and local fairs and festivals. He was featured performer at New Jersey's premier First Night Celebration - First Night Morris for New Year's Eve 2018.

His book, "Staying in the Moment - Helping Students Achieve More Through Mindfulness Meditation" helps educators, parents and students get better results in the classroom through the adoption of mindfulness exercises as part of the curriculum. It is available on all major platforms and formats.

For more information email - info@hypnomarc.com or visit his website - www.hypnomarc.com