

'Tis the season when the big "S" comes to town... that's right Stress! It is a time when our kids cycle from sugar high to low every three minutes. When our 'to do' list grows longer than our arm and everyone expects us to be extra jolly despite concerns for a dwindling bank account and an inability to find that 'perfect' gift for special people on our list! Stress is a big part of this season for many and certainly worth taking a moment to think about.

I like to compare stress to an elastic band. Without any stress in our lives we wouldn't be living. Picture an elastic band just sitting in a drawer waiting for some sort of reason for being. That band has the ability to do a lot of things and is capable of far more than initially seems possible. Stress is what gets that band moving...it provides purpose and even direction. What happens though when that band tackles too many things at once? Or gets pulled in too many directions? At some point, without some kind of intervention, the band will snap! Too much stress is unhealthy, unproductive and unforgiving.

So what can you do about it? There are lots of great ideas (see the box below), but the one I find most effective is to remind myself that this is my life. I love my job, so I make myself take the time to love my job. When I'm rushing my kids out the door because I want to beat the traffic (both on the road and in the mall) I remind myself that my kids will build more memories from these daily interactions (i.e. my growling at them to quit dawdling) than they will from my ability to beat the traffic. When I'm working on that craft that I insist must get done (our yearly picture poster), I remind myself to stop and enjoy the process of the craft instead of running a list over and over again in my head of all the things I need to get done before I can go to bed. None of these things are easy, but I find they help. And besides, if I'm going to max out any elastic, I'm going to make it good and make sure it's one that provides me with extra room to grow ☺.

Simple Stress Busters

- Pay attention to the voice in your head. Any time you speak negatively to yourself replace the thought with something positive (call me if you're not sure how to do this).
- Develop a list of coping statements (i.e. I can do this; It always works out...)
- Notice tension in your body and do some stretches to work it out
- Learn some relaxation techniques for both the mind and the body (Yoga is great for this)
- Laughter is a great way to reduce stress – even when it starts out forced
- Separate your 'to do' list into categories and then respond to them accordingly. For example
 - Things that MUST get done
 - Things that SHOULD get done
 - Things that WOULD be nice but not absolutely necessary
 - Things that SHOULDN'T even be on my list in the first place (i.e. FRIVOLOUS)

For those things that MUST get done – but still seem insurmountable – break them down into smaller, more 'doable', steps. Remember asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength, so delegate wherever you can and then let it go.

Wishing you lots of love, laughter and light hearted moments this season!

Debbie Pokornik is the owner of empowering NRG. She is the author of *Peak at Parenting; Natural, Realistic Guidance for the Busy Parent* (releasing late 2009) and believes all parents can use support at some point in their parenting experience. For other great parenting tips or to book Debbie for keynotes/workshops, go to <http://empoweringnrg.com>