

Handling Stress

a newsletter for people who care about self-esteem

Issue 64 – Volume 11, Number 4 – July, August, 1991

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 64th issue of WE, a newsletter for and about groups of people who care about self-esteem and who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support, examining attitudes, and learning new skills. This issue is about **STRESS**, how to handle it and how to avoid some of it. You will find:

- Ways to neutralize stress.
- Ways to survive severe stress.
- A way to assess the stressors in your life: how many balls do you have in the air?
- A way to look at your own responses to stress.
- Ways to reduce family stress.
- Ways to help children reduce stress.
- One way to reduce stress in workshops.
- A review of a book that can help reduce the stress of living with an "active alert" child.
- A look at how we may feel and act when we are not stressed, Symptoms of Inner Peace.

Good energy and good luck!
Sincerely,

Jean Halsey Clarke

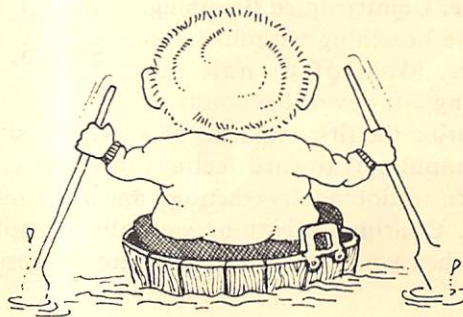
Surviving Severe Stress

When in a highly stressful situation here are some useful things to do:

- Ask yourself "Why is it good for me that this happened?"
- If you feel depressed, enjoy it. Really feel it. You have a right to feel miserable.
- Avoid television except for comedy shows.
- Go for walks. Do any physical exercise that makes you work up a sweat. Then try nap therapy.
- Spend time with people that you can laugh and have fun with.
- Ask yourself, "What have I learned about myself?"
- Avoid either rationalizing or condemning your actions. You don't change behavior by judging it.
- Avoid telling others what they are doing wrong.
- Avoid feeling like a victim or dwelling on "If only . . ."

- Start thinking, "Next time . . ." Picture a good outcome should anything like this ever develop again.
- Start planning a better future. Take a look at where you are now. Ask, "What would I like for myself that I could make happen on my own?" Then ask, "How can I get from where I am to where I would like to be and what help do I need?"
- Do something.

—Source unknown



“Instant Calming Sequence” Neutralizes Harmful Stress in Less Than One Second

by Robert K. Cooper, Ph.D.

When we feel distressed or anxious, our breathing changes, our muscles tighten, our posture sags, our thoughts become distorted, and we can be overwhelmed by negative feelings.

But there is good scientific news: we can defuse negative stress before it sets off this destructive chain reaction in us, but only if we catch it right away and institute an easy-to-learn series of adjustments I call the Instant Calming Sequence.

Most of us feel negative stress every day — when we get unexpected bad news, when we’re forced to make sudden important decisions, or are late for a meeting and stalled in traffic, among many other situations. Often, the first feelings are tension, tightness of the muscles of the back and neck, shallow breathing, and then anger, frustration or panic.

The Instant Calming Sequence can change your whole approach to these challenging situations. With practice, it will become an automatic reflex that takes less than a second to work with the body’s natural mechanisms to maintain relaxed confidence.

Step One. Uninterrupted Breathing. Continue breathing without interruption. Most of us halt our breathing for several seconds or more during the first moments of a stressful situation. This catapults us toward feelings of anxiety, panic, anger, frustration, faulty reactions, and a general loss of control. Continue breathing smoothly, deeply, and evenly when you first feel the pressure of tension and stress.

Instant Calming Sequence Steps

- Step 1. Uninterrupted Breathing**
- Step 2. Positive Face**
- Step 3. Balanced Posture**
- Step 4. Wave of Relaxation**
- Step 5. Mental Control**

Step Two. Positive Face. New evidence suggests that even the slightest smile may “reset” the nervous system to be less reactive to negative stress. A positive facial expression increases blood flow to the brain and transmits nerve impulses from the facial muscles to the limbic system, a key emotional center. Smiling changes neurochemistry toward favorable emotions, and these changes are powerful and swift. Learn to flash a slight smile at the corners of your eyes the moment stress strikes, and hold that smile internally.

Step Three. Balanced Posture. A common, self-victimizing reaction to stress is to slouch over, tensing the abdomen, back and neck muscles. This reaction only magnifies anger, frustration, or panic. Keep your posture buoyant and up, with head high, shoulders squared and loose, back straight. Pretend an imaginary sky hook is gently lifting your spinal column upward from a central point on top of your head.

Step Four. Wave of Relaxation. Scan all of your muscles in one fast sweep of your mind — from your scalp, jaw, tongue, and face to your fingertips and toes — to locate unnecessary tension. At the same time, flash a mental wave of relaxation through your body, as if you’re standing under a waterfall that washes away all the unnecessary tension. Your mind remains fully alert, your body calm. You are centered.

Step Five. Mental Control. Far too many of us waste our energy bemoaning every challenge we face. By wishing the situation weren’t happening, we set off a biochemical avalanche of victimizing thoughts and feelings. Break that pattern by repeating this thought: “What is happening is real and I’m determined to find the best possible solution right now.” If you look back at times in your life when you reacted poorly to situations, it’s usually obvious that had you remained calmer and thought more clearly during the first moments of the crisis, you could have chosen a better response. That’s

the key to this step — learning to insert that calm clear-mindedness at precisely the right place at the very beginning of each stress episode.

The bottom line is that with your senses alert, your breathing steady, your posture erect, your emotions controlled, and your mind clear and looking for solutions, you’re far better prepared to meet life’s challenges; to learn, to adapt to change, to grow; to respond to life appropriately and positively.

Robert K. Cooper, Ph.D., is the author of “Health & Fitness Excellence — The Scientific Action Plan,” published by Houghton Mifflin, from which this article was adapted.

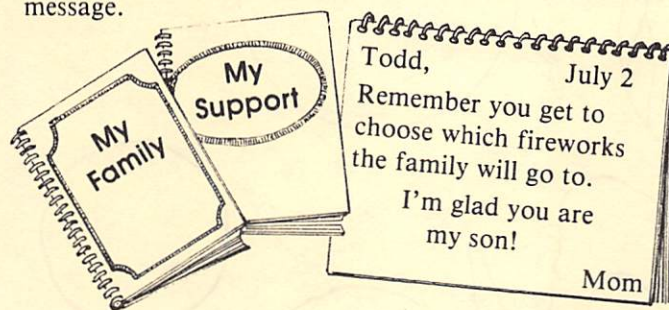
This article was published in *Self Care Journal*, May/June 1989 and is reprinted with permission.

Home Based Ways To Help Children Handle Their Stressors

Two books that you can make with your children can help reduce their stress and yours. Use spiral bound notebooks.

My Family Book

Use one notebook, My Family Book, to replace the bulletin board, refrigerator or kitchen counter as a place to leave notes for family members. Each time you write a note to another family member, date it and add a love message.



Looking back through the book can help children keep a sense of family history.

My Support, People, Places, Things

In this notebook, help your child make a directory of support people, places and things. It could include such items as:

- People to call if I'm home alone and get hurt.
- People to call if I'm home alone and bored or lonesome.
- Places to call or go to for help with . . .
- Places to call or go to for information about . . .
- Ways I can earn money.
- Ways I can help other people.
- Friends to play with, kids and adults.

—Thanks to Dr. Linda Shoop for these *wonderful* ideas.

Reduce Family Stress

"Building a strong family is the best insurance against the devastating effects of family stress," is advice from the Penn State College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension. Here are their suggestions.

A Dozen Ways to Strengthen Your Family

1. Spend time with each other, do things together as a family.
2. Plan ahead with your family so things *will* happen and not *just* happen.

3. Establish a reasonable balance between outside activities, work schedules, and your family.
4. Talk with each other and listen carefully to understand the other's viewpoint.
5. Show each family member consideration and appreciation, especially in everyday ways.
6. Respect each person — his/her ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
7. Develop pride in your family.
8. Resolve problems and conflicts in a constructive way.
9. Help each other and be willing to let others help you.
10. Contact and build ties with other families.
11. Take part in community affairs and use community services.
12. Develop a spiritual focus within your family.

Celebrate Your Stronger Family!

Reduce Stress in Workshops: A Coleadership Tip

When you are coleading a workshop, you can reduce stress for workshop participants by the way in which you introduce yourself. The people attending your workshop can focus more energy on the topic at hand if they do not have to spend time wondering about you and your coleader.

At a recent workshop on families, these questions kept pushing to the front of my mind.

"Do these people know what they are talking about? Are they just telling us about this topic because they recently discovered it? What have they done that would give them special insight? How long have they been 'experts' on this subject? Are these people married or lovers? Are the children they talk about his, hers or theirs? If they are a blended family, are they still in the honeymoon phase?"

When you are coleading, be sure your introductions include:

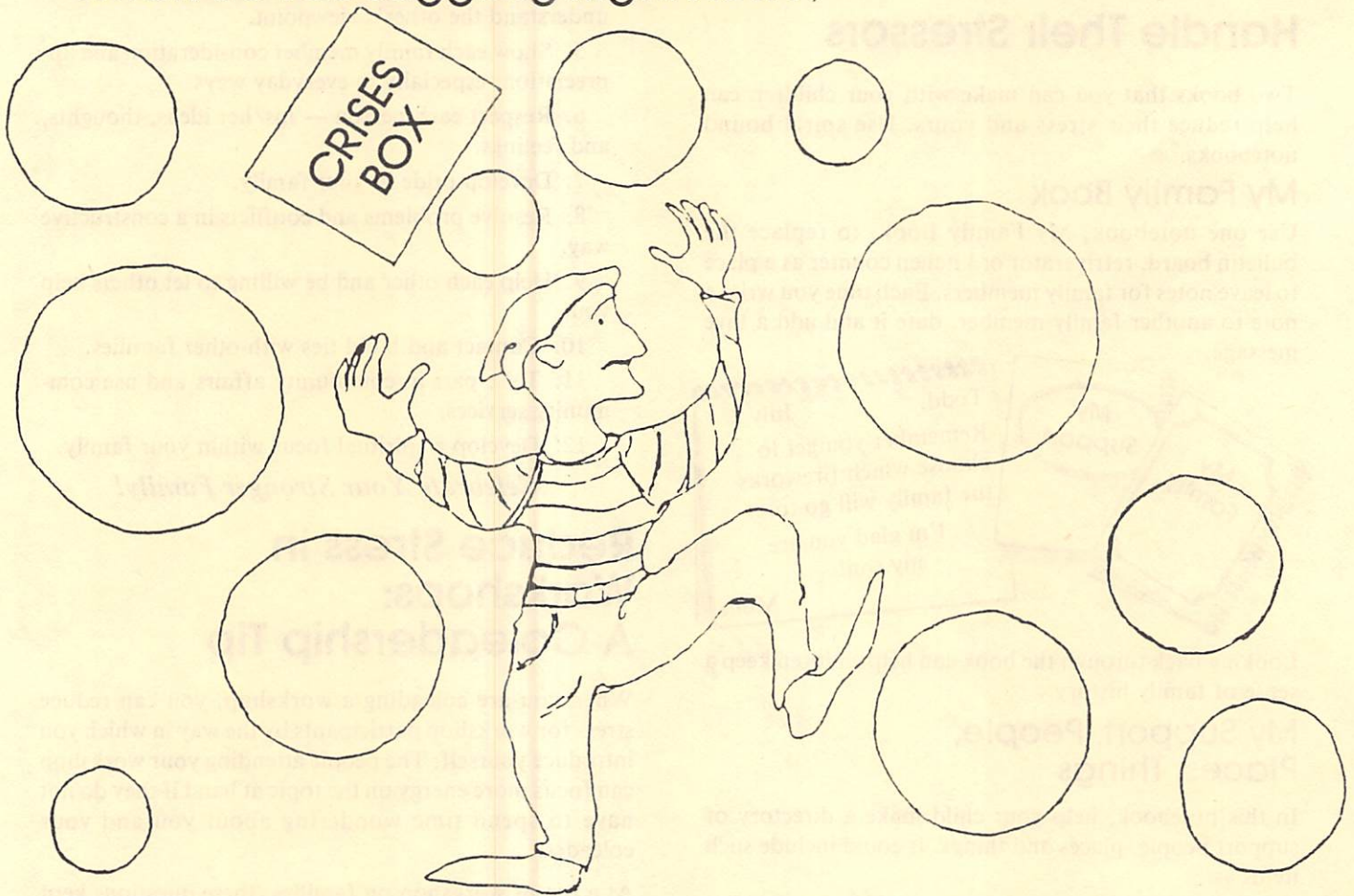
- Who you are.
- What you do.
- What in your background helps you understand the topic of the day.
- What is your relationship to your copresenter and the length of that relationship.

As a single leader offer the first three pieces of information.

Always remember to reduce workshop stress by posting and following clear ground rules.

THE JUGGLER

What Are You Juggling Right Now?



HOW I FEEL ...	HOW I ACT ...	HOW OTHERS TREAT ME ...

Changes to make:

Name _____

Date _____

Being I'm glad you are alive.	Being You belong here.	Being What you need is important to me.	Being I'm glad you are you.	Being You can grow at your own pace.	Being You can feel all of your feelings.	Being I love you and I care for you willingly.
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GROUP ACTIVITY

The Juggler

by Carole Gesme

STRESSORS

Directions for the leader.

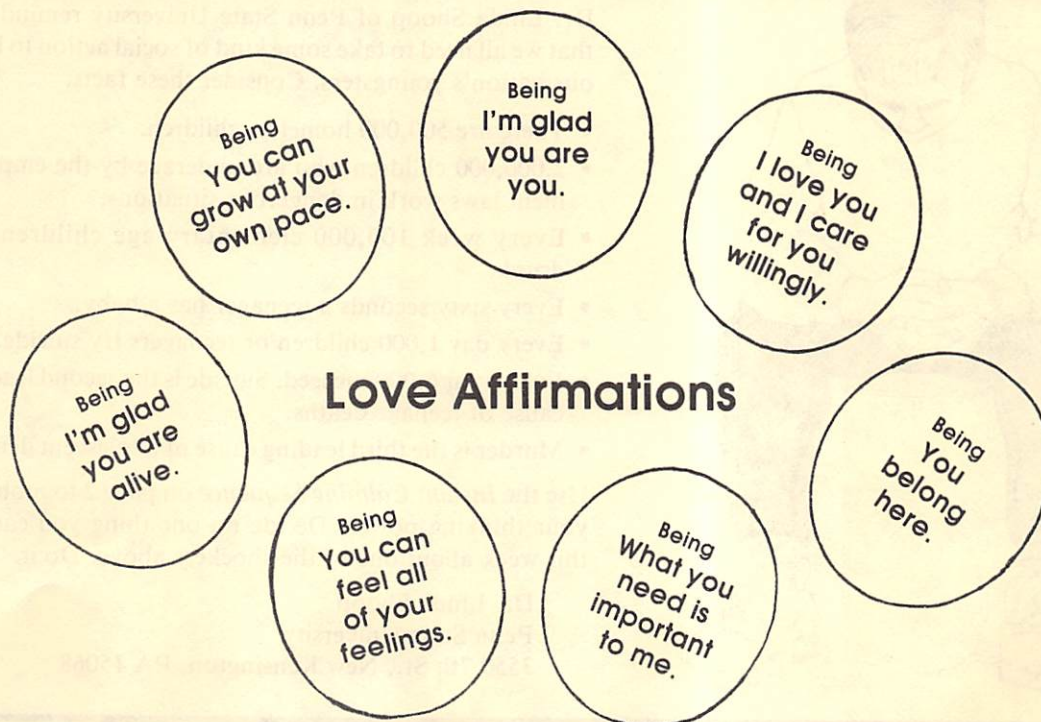
- Pass out copies of *The Juggler* handout, page 4.
 - Tell people that the purpose of this exercise is to help them identify specific stressors in their lives and think about what to do about them.
 - Ask each person to:
1. Fill in each ball with a word indicating what is going on in your life. What events, responsibilities, concerns are you juggling? Draw as many more balls as you need. (After most people have filled in their balls, tell people that if they are unable to fill in the balls by identifying specific stressors, they may have a crisis in their lives and they need to attend to that first.)
 2. Shade in the juggler where you feel stress in your body.
 3. Number the balls according to what is most important for you right now. (After they have finished, ask people how many of them put their most pressing stressors in the large balls. Tell them that often people label the small balls with stressors that are irritants but are not pressing right now.)
 4. Write your feelings for each circle in the spaces at the bottom of the page.
 5. List ways you act toward others when you feel each way.
 6. List ways other people treat you when you act this way.
 7. Are there some things you would like to change? If so, what can you do right now that will help you feel better and help the situation at the same time?
 8. Using the set of love affirmations at the bottom of the sheet, cover the balls with an affirmation that would fit the situation you are working on now and have two people read the affirmations to you.

NEEDS

- Carol Gesme takes this exercise to the next level by passing out a second copy of the handout sheet and going through the same exercise identifying NEEDS instead of stressors.

(You can order laminated ovals from Carole Gesme, 4036 Kerry Court, Minnetonka, MN 55345 612-938-9163)

Thanks to the Horizons Prevention Program, WVA, for this idea.



Words Can Help Children With Their Stressors

Children's lives are often filled with stressors. These stressors range from the internal stress of the two-year-old who is having to relinquish his position as center of the universe to the external stresses of school, other children, world events, and the family.

Think about words. Beside the very important task of providing consistent rules and structure and teaching children the social, sports, study and other skills they need, adults can help children with words. The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse wants parents to understand that "Words Hit As Hard As A Fist." PSA suggests that parents use words that help.

I/We love you.
That's great.
Good job.
You look terrific.
What did you like best about today?
You're very special.
Let's talk about you.
You played with your friend/brother/sister so well today.
I/We want to help you . . .
You cooperated so well.
It's okay to cry.
What can I do for you to help you feel better?
Can you help me/us do this?
I'm/We're so proud of you.
You made such a good choice.

I can see why you're angry.
Let's talk about it.
You are so caring.
I believe you can do it.
Did you do that all by yourself? That's great.
You are so thoughtful.
Believe in yourself as I believe in you.
Thanks for your help.
I/We like how you shared so nicely.
That was so respectful.
You're such a good worker.
You did _____ so well.
Don't give up.
You're so nice to be around today.
Just do the best you can.
You learned that so quickly.
Thanks for fastening your seatbelt by yourself.
I'm/We're glad you did that without being asked.
What would you like to do with me/us today?
You're going to be just fine.
How can you/we fix it?
You are so helpful.
Angels can do no more.
Give it your best . . .
You are what matters.
I'm sorry I got angry and yelled at you. I know it hurt your feelings.
I'll try not to do it again.
We can do it together.
You made me happy; I hope you made you happy.
And in general, words that validate a child's feelings and give her/him encouragement.

America's Stressed Children



Dr. Linda Shoop of Penn State University reminds us that we all need to take some kind of social action to help our nation's youngsters. Consider these facts.

- There are 500,000 homeless children.
- 2,000,000 children who are underage by the employment laws work in dangerous situations.
- Every week 100,000 elementary age children get drunk.
- Every sixty seconds a teenager has a baby.
- Every day 1,000 children or teenagers try suicide.
- Every year 6,000 succeed. Suicide is the second leading cause of teenage deaths.
- Murder is the third leading cause of adolescent deaths.

Use the *Instant Calming Sequence* on page 2 to mobilize your thinking power. Decide on one thing you can do this week about one of the shockers above. Do it.

Dr. Linda Shoop
Penn State University
3550 7th St., New Kensington, PA 15068

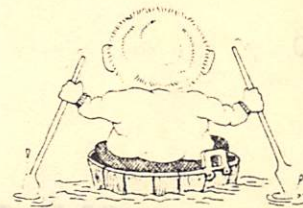
SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Responses to Stress

The purpose of this activity is to examine learned responses to stress.

Individually:

Fill in the following grid. If you don't know the answer, guess.



When in a stress-filled situation, what did or does:

	say	do	feel
My father			
My mother			
Other significant adult from my childhood			
My favorite teacher			
My spouse, partner or close friend			
My usual response			
The way I would like to respond			

In a group:

- Share some responses of other people on your grid that are similar to your own.
- If the way you would like to respond is different from the way you usually do respond, notice if any one else on your grid had or has that response.
- Consider whether you would like to use that person as a model or whether you need a new mentor.
- Tell the group two other ways you can get support for the new responses you desire.



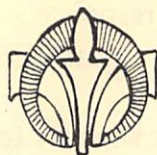
SYMPTOMS OF INNER PEACE

Be on the lookout for symptoms of inner peace. The hearts of a great many have already been exposed to inner peace and it is possible that people everywhere could come down with it in epidemic proportions. This could pose a serious threat to what has, up to now, been a fairly stable condition of conflict in the world.

Some signs and symptoms of inner peace:

- A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
- An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- A loss of interest in judging other people.
- A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- A loss of interest in conflict.
- A loss of the ability to worry. (This is a very serious symptom.)
- Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature, and self.
- Frequent attacks of smiling.
- An increased tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

—Thanks to Ellen Peterson for sharing this list. Original source unknown.



BOOK REVIEW

Living With The Active Alert Child

by Linda S. Budd, Ph.D., Prentice Hall Press.

If you feel stressed because your child seems to live life on fast-forward, you may have an Active Alert child. Read Linda Budd's book and find out.

"It's not as if Mathew is actually a bad kid, at least no worse than most. He's just always too busy, too strong, too curious, too energetic — and it gets him into trouble. He can also be the kindest, most loving and gentle child, so sensitive to other feelings."

"At last someone understands!" This will certainly be the phrase that many parents will use as they read Linda Budd's wonderful book describing the active alert child, his characteristics, his needs, how to parent him, and how to take care of yourself while parenting him.

Active alert is the name that therapist and researcher Budd has given to the child who is unusually and consistently active and alert. A temperament classification, this is not a learning disorder or a pathological label, but the description of a particular kind of healthy, normal child whose unique set of gifts and characteristics demands parenting skills that are creative, resourceful, exciting, sometimes exhausting, and occasionally contrary to the skills that work well with children who exhibit similar kinds of behavior but are of a different temperament type.

This readable book filled with easy to understand information and theory and heavily laced with examples, includes the characteristics of the active alert child, how to parent that child, and how to recognize and avoid the land mines or potential problems created by this child's sometimes unique responses to everyday living situations. Also find the particular way in which this active, kinesthetic child learns, what she needs in school and from a teacher, and the characteristics of active alerts who are adults and how they like to parent.

Author Budd's discussion of the potential supports and pitfalls for active alert children in various family systems is one of the ways in which she gives parents encouragement to develop the parenting style that fits for them. Using Larry Constantine's description of family systems as closed, open, random or synchronous, Budd helps readers focus on and accept the system within which they are raising their active alert child.

In this book Budd offers us a twenty point questionnaire to help us decide whether or not we have an active alert child. The list will be helpful, supportive, and comforting to parents who have an active alert child who has been misunderstood or even diagnosed as having some disorder. Parents who do not have active alert children will find this book helpful because some of the twenty qualities are present in most children, and applying the parenting skills for those particular areas may be very helpful to parents who have been tempted to say about a child, "This is a really good kid, but there is this one part that we never learned to handle very well."

○—————○

The eleven characteristics of active alert children that author Budd describes and attends to in detail are:

Active	Fearful	Fluctuating
Alert	Intense	Self-Esteem
Bright	Attention-Hungry	Performers
Controlling	Trouble Getting Along	Emphatic Ability

Her presentation of the enigmas presented by these children and ways in which to deal with them is particularly helpful. For example, Dr. Budd shows how to provide clear structure that puts this child who needs to control in control of himself but not of the whole family.

The list of affirmations for each of the eleven characteristics provide; a wonderful way for parents to simultaneously affirm the child for being who she is and remind the parent about how the child needs to be treated. For example, on alertness:

It's okay to try things out.

You can be excited and still go slowly.

You can think before you act; thinking will not spoil actions.

You can be tactful and still be honest.

It's okay to experiment with ideas; it's okay to explore options.

It's okay to want privacy.

You can say no.

It's okay to withdraw for awhile.

I will not let you hurt yourself.

I will not let you hurt others.

It's okay to say what you know; it's okay to remain silent.

Asserting that the child/teacher connection is a vitally important relationship, the author lists five characteristics that parents can look for in a teacher for the active alert child. Seek someone who:

- enjoys the energy and affirms the ideas of an active learner;
- is clear in setting boundaries but believes children are more important than rules;
- recognizes and identifies feelings, — their own as well as the child's;
- affirms a child's competencies while clearly stating that the child must respect the group, the environment and himself;
- Decreases arenas of competition within the classroom setting; i.e. shuns ability grouping, blackboard contests, etc.
- provides choices of what to do within the classroom or how to do those tasks, but not both, e.g. "You may choose an activity from the math center to work with, but you must follow the instructions for the one you choose."

It seems to this reviewer that these guidelines might be used to advantage by parents of any child.

If you think that you may have an active alert child, read this book. If some of the ways you are parenting your child don't seem to be effective, there will be help in this book for you. If you don't understand how your child learns, this book could be a great source of comfort and information.

Thank you Linda Budd for the ten years of research that made this book possible and thank you for writing it in a way that is easy to understand.

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Opening Activity

for focusing on handling stress

Hand out name tags.

Choose a partner.

Make a name tag for him and ask him to tell you about one thing that used to stress him and why it no longer does.

Introduce your partner and tell the group what no longer stresses him if he is willing for you to share that information.

Closing Activity

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share one way they are going to improve the way they handle stress.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.

STRESS

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WE

16535 9th Avenue N.
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• Ideas and activities or
materials to use individually
or in support groups.

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**September 9-13, 1991
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REMINDER:

Facilitators who have already taken the workshop anywhere may repeat it in Minneapolis for half price.

**Introduction to
Transactional Analysis TA 101**

**September 6, 7, 1991
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

**The Professional Tool Box
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October 12, 1991

Power and Identity

November 9, 1991

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Write to WE for details on the workshops.

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