

## Cardinal Families - Health Action Network - Stress Management

### What is Stress?

Stress is a reaction to situations, events or people. Stress can be in the form of a big project at school or dealing with a difficult friend. Stress impacts how your body and your mind feel on a daily basis. When stress is good stress, it prepares you to meet a challenge. But when stress becomes too strong or lasts too long, it can start to negatively impact your health.

### **High levels of negative stress have been linked to:**

- Headaches
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Obesity
- Getting sick more easily
- Longer recovery time from illness

### **Unhealthy ways to cope with stress include:**

- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using other drugs
- Lashing out at others
- Eating comfort food

Note: These may help us feel better for a short period of time but will likely make us feel even worse in the future!

### Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

#### *Deep Breathing:*

1. Sit comfortably in a chair and close your eyes.
2. Breathe in through your nose and inhale as fully as possible filling your lungs from the bottom to the top
3. Exhale very slowly through your mouth.
4. Repeat the deep cleansing breaths 10-20 times.

#### *Progressive Muscle Relaxation:*

1. Lie down or sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Starting at the top of your body, slowly tighten your forehead muscles, hold for 10 seconds and then slowly release.
3. Move down your body, tightening and relaxing the different muscles one at a time.
4. Notice how your body feels when the muscles are relaxed.

#### *Imagery:*

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Try to imagine a place that is relaxing for you such as a beach or a field.
3. Take a 'mind walk' to that place, taking in all the sights, sounds and scents.
4. Allow yourself 5 minutes to be in this place you love before coming back to reality.

#### Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

#### *Exercise:*

- Take a 10 minute walk during the day.
- Exercising 3 to 4 days a week can help you feel less stressed all the time.

#### *Social Support:*

- Reach out to a friend or family member to talk about what is bothering you.
- You don't even have to talk about your stress; just spending time with people we love can help us feel more relaxed.

#### *Recognition, Acceptance, and Action:*

There may be times when we have no control over things that cause us stress. However, we do have control over HOW we deal or cope with the stress.

- Recognize the stress is not in your control.
- Accept the things you can not change.
- Take action in a way that is healthy for you and your loved ones.