Parent Session

Stress and Anxiety
in
Twice-Exceptional Children

Carol Malueg and Nancy Cohen
PROJECT2EXCEL
University of St. Thomas
Table of Contents

Links to Pre-readings

Advanced Organizers for the Pre-readings – questions to think about while reading the articles

Discussion Notes-- a graphic organizer for note-taking during discussion

Discussion Questions

Rules for the Road

Food for Thought
Suggested Pre-Readings


- Because this chapter focuses on the stresses that one finds in children with gifts, how do these stresses (finding peers, fitting in to social situations, solving conflicts at home or accepting authority apply or not apply to a child who is twice exceptional. Are the stresses the same, lessened or replaced by other stresses, or exacerbated by twice exceptionality?


- Probst makes three statements about what works when trying to reduce a child’s (and family’s) stress:
  1. **(1) It’s the parent who has to do most of the work, not the child.** Children don’t have the experience to know how to change things. Where do you find the ideas, support, and courage to do “most of the work”?
  2. **(2) Our first task is to find specific points where we can be helpful.** What are some ways to achieve the objective view necessary for seeing small, specific ways in which to help your child?
  3. **(3) Our second task is to give children the chance to do it right.** This requires a lot of patience on the parent’s part. Where do you find your stress relief and recharge your patience?


- Strop advises that early identification is the key to helping twice-exceptional children thrive in school, stating that teachers will understand the child’s strengths and struggles and be able to support the child more effectively. Some parents are unwilling to let the school “label” their child, thinking it will cause more stress and make it less likely the child will get gifted services. What is your feeling on this? Does this article change your thinking about identification?


- Peters and Schuler discuss the forms that stress and anxiety can take in children and when to seek treatment. Do you agree with their advice? What are your personal guidelines for when to seek professional help for a child or other family member dealing with anxiety?

- Some children are more anxious than others. Do you see a difference in normal anxiety levels in your family members? Is your child just more prone to anxiety by nature, or might it stem from dealing with a learning disability?
## Discussion Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Strategies to try</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you already do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you want to try?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Share ideas from the reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What stressors can you identify in your child’s life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does your child react to stress?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you think of behaviors that might be caused by stress?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do you react to stress?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the stressors in your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does your child feel anxious often?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does your child show anxiety?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is his anxiety triggered by something specific (a teacher) or general (fear of failure)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you consider yourself an anxious person?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does your child acknowledge feeling stressed or anxious?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does stress come out as anger, sadness, or other emotions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is anxiety exhibited by avoidance, defiance, or other behaviors?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What have you tried?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What works for you when you are stressed or anxious?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are some ideas from the discussion you may try?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- From the reading?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What changes can you make for your child?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is it reasonable that Probst says in her article that parents are the ones who need to change? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Stress and Anxiety
**Discussion Questions**

1. What causes my child stress?
2. Do the same things cause me stress?
3. How does my child cope with stress?
   a. Tries to take control
   b. Shuts down or turns off
   c. Is defiant
   d. Gets angry
   e. Jokes
   f. Cries
4. How do I cope with stress?
   a. Counting
   b. Deep breathing
   c. List making
   d. Exercise
   e. Taking a break
5. What aspects of my life does this stress help or hurt?
6. Is stress “fixable”? Does it need fixing? When is stress a good thing?
7. When should I step in to make a change?
8. What kind of change do I want to make?
9. How can I help my child channel this stress into something positive?
   a. Exercise
   b. Helping others
   c. Developing healthy coping skills
   d. Relaxation exercise, like yoga or meditation
10. What do I model?
11. How can I help my child show himself some compassion?
12. Am I able to model this by showing myself compassion?
13. What is the difference between stress and anxiety?
    a. Level of stress
    b. Duration of stress
    c. Affecting other parts of life
    d. Generalized anxiety
14. Is my child anxious a lot of the time? About a lot of things?
15. How do you help your child cope with anxiety?
16. What is the difference between anxiety and fear?
17. Does your child have irrational fears? Rational fears?
Rules for the Road

10 Myths About Stress, from **Fighting Invisible Tigers**, by Earl Hipp

*Blue italics added by Project2Excel for use with twice-exceptional children*

**Myth #1. I must be crazy for thinking and feeling the way I do.** You’re not crazy. Stress can cause anyone to have frightening thoughts and uncomfortable feelings. It’s not that anything is wrong with you, just that you life is full of challenges and you’re still learning the best ways to manage the stresses in your life. *Talk with your child about how being gifted gives him more scope for thinking ‘out there’ thoughts that might feel crazy, and his areas of challenge give him more to struggle mentally against. Let him know that it is okay to think anything—we don’t have limitations on what our minds can do--it’s his actions that are important.*

**Myth #2. I need to handle these fears and problems by myself—if I ask for help it proves I’m not smart or good enough.** Actually, the opposite is true. Trying to handle tough situations alone most often leads to bigger problems. Reaching out for help when you need it is always the smartest way to stay healthy and perform at your best. *Let your child know that, in developing coping strategies to deal with a learning disability, she is building muscles that most people ignore. Just as it takes a spotter for a gymnast to build strength and grace, twice-exceptional kids need a spotter, too. The skills she is building may not land her on the Olympic team, but they will serve her very well all of her life.*

**Myth #2. No one will understand how I feel.** It’s true that some of the important people in your life may not exactly understand your worries or know how to help, but someone will. If one person doesn’t take you seriously, reach out to others until you find someone who does. *Lots of people don’t understand gifted kids’ needs, and even more don’t understand twice-exceptional kids’ needs. It is up to you, the parent, to find educators, mentors, and peers that will help your child (and you) find a sense of community.*

**Myth #4. I can think my way out of feeling bad.** Unfortunately, this isn’t true. Feelings are nonintellectual, which means no amount of thinking can help you change them. When we’re thinking about feelings, what we’re usually doing is worrying. Worrying doesn’t solve problems
and only makes you feel worse. Like setting a music player to play the same song over and over, worrying is just repeating thoughts about bad things that might happen. These fears can wear you down. *Help your child build a feeling vocabulary. Acknowledging his feelings, even when you think they are “over the top” will help him feel more comfortable sharing how he is feeling. Just that simple acknowledgment can be a stress-reliever for emotionally supersensitive kids who are usually told that they are over-reacting.

**Myth #5. If I keep busy, I’ll feel better about myself.** Staying active can help you to avoid dwelling on some small worries. But the big problems—those responsible for the major stress in your life—won’t go away until you face and deal with them in a constructive way. In fact, staying super active can lead to vicious circles and gradually make you feel worse over time. *Make time to have informal conversations with your child. Going for a walk or driving back from the store can be good times to talk about major issues she may be avoiding. Face to face discussions and family meetings can be too overwhelming for a child to broach a difficult subject, but may be a good way to follow up after the conversation has been started.

**Myth #6. If I can get through today, tomorrow is bound to be better.** Maybe, and maybe not. It’s possible that letting some time pass will make your concerns seem smaller or less serious. But it’s also true that avoiding problems as a long-term solution can lead to harder times. Living with stress every day also leaves you with less energy and sharpness to deal with the day’s challenges. The best strategy is to deal with negative feelings as soon as you’re aware of them. *Negative feelings may be a result of a negative environment. If stress is caused by a daily struggle against school, a bully, or a family issue, it is up to you to do something about it. Children don’t have the experience to know how to change their environment, or the power to do so. If a child’s giftedness is being ignored because the school is focused on remediation, or if a child is the target of bullying because of his differentness, some serious advocacy or a school change is in order.

**Myth #7. I should be able to figure things out by myself.** Who says? Being in the middle of a stressful situation is the hardest time to know what to do to make things better. Trying to figure it out alone cuts you off from the knowledge, experience, and support of others. That’s why getting the outside perspective of a counselor, family member, or other trusted adult can put you on the path toward feeling better. *No one is born knowing everything. Help your Stress and Anxiety
child see the value in other’s strengths and experience. This is a leadership quality that is very valuable! It is also a tool for the twice-exceptional child’s tool-belt, and is as important in decision-making as it is in creating a project with a group or winning a sports game. In a stressful situation, a leader calls in trusted advisers. That way, he benefits from many brains, and can make smarter, more well-informed decisions!

**Myth #8. Life is so serious.** Life does have many serious moments, but not balancing the pressure of these times with fun, rest, and relaxation will only make the hard times that much harder. You deserve to feel good about yourself and the life you have. *Help your child find activities that are relaxing and fun for her. These may not be the same things that you consider fun or relaxing. If her strength is building things, think twice about entering her into Lego-league competitions if she gets stressed out about time limits and the competition environment.*

**Myth #9. All I need is to be left alone for a while.** Being alone can be helpful sometimes. But if your way of dealing with major stress in your life is to be by yourself and avoid talking to anyone, you can quickly get out of touch with reality and your support system. *Sometimes gifted and twice-exceptional kids spend time alone because they have not found like-minded peers in their schools or neighborhoods. Help your child find his true peers in summer gifted programs, Saturday classes geared to gifted kids, and activities that attract kids with his same interests.*

**Myth #10. I don’t have time to practice stress-management techniques.** The basics of stress management relate to activities you’re probably already doing every day—things like eating well, getting exercise and rest, and having fun. Learning about a few tiger-taming skills—like time management, relaxation exercises, and goal setting—can help you have even more quality time. *Model the tiger-taming skills you use, and help your child find, or create, techniques that will work for her. Remember, these may not be anything like what works for you, especially when it comes to organization and time management. Relaxation exercises can feel silly at first—practicing them as a family can give relaxation importance and make the exercises a bonding experience.*

(pp 19-20)

Stress and Anxiety
Stress and Anxiety

Food for Thought

Stress is a FUNGUS!

Stress can give us headaches, make us feel angry, sad, frustrated, or just plain tired. The reasons for feeling stressed out can be really obvious; they can be anything from an upcoming test, a friend moving away, to something big, like someone you care about is sick. But, sometimes stress just sneaks up on us, and we feel angry or frustrated without really knowing why. Sometimes it’s even hard to tell how we feel. The good news about stress is that we can take control of it and make it work for us. We can’t always make the stressors go away—stressful situations and events are an inevitable part of life. What we can do is change the way we react to stressors.

Activity – fill in the blanks

F – Face it. I am feeling stressed out! I know I am stressed because I am _________ (tired, headachy, unfocused).

U – Understand it. I am feeling this way because ________________.

N – Name it. I am _______________ (angry, jealous, sad, afraid)

G – Get a grip. Do I want to do anything differently? I don’t want to feel ___________ about this.

U – Use the energy. What change can I make to the situation? To my own reaction to it? I am going to __________ because I want _______________ to happen.

S – Succeed. Do your best and feel good about how you handled things. It wasn’t easy, but I __________!

Created for PROJECT2EXCEL by Carol Malueg
Stress is a FUNGUS!

Fungi grow and thrive in dark places where no one bothers them. Stress can grow and thrive when it’s hidden away and ignored, too. You can take control of stress by bringing it out into the light and doing something about it! Save the fungi for the pizza!

**F – Face it!** The first and most important step in controlling stress is knowing that you are stressed out to begin with! Sometimes stress masquerades as anger, sadness, or fatigue (tiredness).

**U – Understand it!** Why am I feeling this way? What is going on that is making me tired, unable to focus on my work, or snap at my classmates or family? Am I afraid of not doing well on a test or assignment? Is my life changing in some way, small or big?

**N – Name it!** Name those feelings! Some feeling stress can create or make bigger are; anger, jealousy, fear, tiredness, frenzy (wanting to do a lot of things at once), sadness, frustration, or perseverance (wanting to keep going even when it’s time to stop). Talk it out with someone—a family member or friend might have some valuable insight!

**G – Get a grip!** Do you want these feelings to control you and your life? What good will it do to let the feelings take over? What good will it do to take control of the feelings and live your life the best way you can?

**U – Use the energy!** If you decided not to let stress control you, figure out how you will control it! What changes can you make to the stressor (the thing that is causing your stress)? For instance, you can ask your parent for help organizing your room, or you can talk out an argument with a friend. Talking things out is a great stress-buster! Sometimes you can’t change the stressor, like if your family is moving, or if someone is sick. In those situations you can use the energy to change the way you react to the stressor. You can pack your own things for the move, or make a card for a sick friend. Be sure to find someone to talk it through with—chances are they need someone to talk with, too!

**S – Succeed!** Stress is a part of life. Look to the people in your life that you admire and see how they deal with stress in their lives. Use their strategies and FUNGUS to deal with stress in a productive way, and you will become a role model for others! Just remember that no one is perfect, and no one deals well with all stress all the time. We are human, after all. If stress gets to be too much (and it does for everyone from time to time) talk it out with your parents, your teacher, or another trusted adult.

Created for PROJECT2EXCEL by Carol Malueg