

When I am stressed, I can't stop moving. I clean, do yardwork, exercise and take myself to exhaustion most days. When my son is anxious, he wakes up in the middle of the night and asks me to tuck him in again. When I notice he is waking up several nights in a row, I tend to be more attentive and spend extra time with him. I try to help him deal with his anxiety in positive ways such as exercise and just talking about it, but when I find myself unable to slow down, I usually ignore it until I can't ignore it anymore.

2020 has been one for the history books when it comes to stress and uncertainty. There is very little in our lives that can be considered normal and that has taken a toll on our minds, bodies, and overall health. What can you do about all of this excess worry? Everyone handles anxiety in their own way. I show how our family is coping to illustrate that point. When I am stressed, I typically try to ignore it, soldier through, and hope it gets better. When I notice my son is getting stressed, I do everything in my power to help him handle it in a healthy way. Lately though, I am trying to do better for myself because I know how important mental health is in all aspects of our lives.

So how can we handle stress in a healthy manner? The single most important thing that you can do is self-care. I am sure that you have heard all of the adages, but you truly can't pour from an empty pitcher. Find a way that you personally can relax and recharge. Take a walk, listen to music, meditate. Some may enjoy fishing, gardening, watching a movie, reading, the list goes on. Think to yourself, what do you like to do that you have not had enough time to do? In our current state of affairs, it is a good idea to make the time.

We also typically look out for others before ourselves. Right now, it is a good idea to check in on your friends. If someone you know is not acting like themselves, just asking them how they are doing can go a long way. Actively listening (listening to hear, and not listening to respond) is very important as it ensures that the person you are talking to is being heard. Although it is very hard to do sometimes, if you think someone may be suicidal, ask them out right. Studies show that talking about suicide does not make a person commit suicide. It does help them more that it doesn't. Thought that conversation may be difficult, is much easier to have than a eulogy to deliver.

For more information about handling stress in a healthy way, Cottonwood Extension and K-State Research and Extension has some excellent resources available. You can always call 620-793-1910, or e-mail at aboor@ksu.edu. We are also blessed to have The Center for Counseling and Consultation where help is available locally. The national suicide prevention hotline is 800-273-8255 or you can text HOME to 741741 if you prefer. Dealing with our present situation can feel overwhelming, but help is out there. Reach out, talk. People need you. Now more than ever we need to take care of ourselves and each other.

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