

## Identifying Stressors

### Relational Stressors

#### Identifying stressors by relationship

Sometimes it can be helpful to identify the stress in your life by your relationship to what and who is around you. These categories include:

- **Environmental stressors:** “Your physical surroundings can set off the stress response. Examples of environmental stressors include an unsafe neighborhood, pollution, noise (sirens keeping you up at night, a barking dog next door), and uncomfortable living conditions. For people living in crime-ridden areas or war-torn regions, the stress may be unrelenting.
- **Family and relationship stressors:** Problems with friends, romantic partners, and family members are common daily stressors. Marital disagreements, dysfunctional relationships, rebellious teens, or caring for a chronically-ill family member or a child with special needs can all send stress levels skyrocketing.
- **Work stressors:** In our career-driven society, work can be an ever-present source of stress. Work stress is caused by things such as job dissatisfaction,

an exhausting workload, insufficient pay, office politics, and conflicts with your boss or co-workers.

- **Social stressors:** Your social situation can cause stress. For example, poverty, financial pressures, racial and sexual discrimination or harassment, unemployment, isolation, and a lack of social support all take a toll on daily quality of life.”<sup>1</sup>

### Minor/Major – Temporary/Permanent Stressors

#### Identifying stressors by magnitude

Sometimes it helps to think about the magnitude of the events in your life. Ask yourself these questions: How big is the event or change? How long will it last? Is it a temporary or permanent situation? Decide if your stressors are:

- **Accidental hassles:** These are temporary stressors, but they can cause significant stress. Examples are losing the house or car keys, a flat tire, missing the bus, or getting a traffic ticket.
- **Major life changes:** These stressors can include positive and negative events. Examples of positive events are marriage, graduation, starting a business, or the birth of a baby. Negative changes include events like losing a job, divorce, or death in the family.
- **Ongoing problems:** These stressors include situations like an unhappy marriage, unstable job, poor relationship with a family member or coworker, or accumulating debt.<sup>2</sup>



### Internal Stressors

#### Identifying self-generated stressors

“Not all stress is caused by external pressures and demands. Your stress can also be self-generated. Internal causes of stress include:

- uncertainty or worries,
- pessimistic attitude,
- self-criticism,
- unrealistic expectations or beliefs,

- perfectionism,
- low self-esteem,
- excessive or unexpressed anger,
- lack of assertiveness,<sup>1</sup> and
- fears or apprehensions (e.g., fear of flying or heights; apprehension about speaking to strangers at a party).<sup>3</sup>

Whichever categories your stress falls into, a good way to start the process of managing stress is to first identify the cause of it. Identifying the causes of your stress is a first step toward finding strategies to reduce it.

**Sources:**

1. HelpGuide (2007). Understanding stress: signs, symptoms, causes, and effects [on-line]. Retrieved June 19, 2008. From [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_signs.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm).
2. National Library of Medicine (2007). X-plain: managing stress – reference summary [on-line]. Retrieved June 19, 2008. From <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/managingstress/htm/index.htm>.
3. Mayo Clinic (2006). Understanding your sources of stress [on-line]. Retrieved June 19, 2008. From <http://mayoclinic.com/health/stress-management/SR00031>.