**Life Is A Balancing Act: Training for Bright Minds Thursday January 26, 2012**

\*Overview..Stress how identify it, manage it, and reduce the stress in our lives.

1. What are some stressors in your life?

**\*\*Conversation**

**\*\*Stress is different for each person, it’s subjective..stressful to drive in traffic for one person not for another.**

**\*\*How are the stressors different in the life of a parent of a child that has autism? Are they?**

Social concerns-expectations, grief, limitations, self guilt

 Depression-child or the egg

Children with severe behavior challenges..does that reflect what you are doing or not doing?

\*\*Greater stress than other parents with normal developing children and children with disabilities. Kennedy Krieger Institute

Finances

Future Care giving Concerns

Grief

Not sleeping

Reactions from society..isolation

2. What is the impact of stress? Lecture

 a. Emotional

 b. Physical

\*\*Handout Stress Quiz

\*\*Noticing how your body is responding is a key to understanding that you are under too much stress..

3. What is stress?

\*\*Burnout..the extinction of motivation, illness, depleted energy, emotional exhaustion, less investment in personal relationships

4. What are the ways in which you deal with stress?

\*\*Focus on you..Stress is a family systems problem.

\*\*Fight or Flight

5. Ten ways in which to manage stress.

 1. Manage your time and resources-Goal Setting

 2. Deep breathing

 3. Progressive Relaxation

 4. Visualization/Meditation/Prayer \* add music

 5. Laughter

 6. Massage

 7. Be healthy

 Physically-excercise

 Socially-relationships

 Emotionally-solidarity, caring for yourself

 8 .Control Negative Self Talk or Positive Self Talk

In the midst of a cycle of heavy business travel, I found myself wide awake at 2am realizing that I had neglected to make a reservation for my travel to NYC in the morning. My thoughts went from bad to worse to horrific:

I’ll never get a seat on the Amtrak, I will miss our creative strategy meeting, all of our senior executives will get the plan done – but then they will realize they can do this without me – so they will eliminate my position.  I’ll never find another job, I’ll lose my house, my family will resent me and I will be all alone.  Lonely, destitute, without resources.

9. Utilize support system

 10. Celebrate successes

**Stress is Everywhere!!!!**

Have you ever heard someone say??

I think my hair is falling out.

I had a horrible night’s sleep last night.

My husband is driving me crazy.

My kids are just at that age, and they are driving me crazy.

I can’t remember the answer to that..I know I should know it.

What time again are we suppose to be there?

Where are my stupid keys?

This lady I work with is really annoying.

I have no energy..after 2 I am just worn out.

Exercise, yeh..I don’t do that.

I just don’t know what I want to do.

I don’t know what I want to eat, stop asking me just pick a place.

Wow..where did I misplace that paper. I totally forgot about adding those numbers.

I have a perpetual cold. I feel like I am always battling something.

Did you know Bill is going to have heart surgery?

Susie has cancer?

Ooh..I got bathroom problems..and yes all of the above!!!

My stomach so upset..every time I eat I feel funny inside.

Where is my INHALER I NEED IT NOW!!!

Is it just me or is It hot in here..and is this room spinning or is it me?

The doctor said my blood pressure is high!

My head hurts so bad and I think it is turning into a migraine.

I am gaining weight..What diet are you on, that one where you take in pregnant women’s pee.. I heard that is a good one..



**Zap Your Stress... Forever**

**Dear Friend,**

My name is Jan Bruce. I’ve always been a publishing entrepreneur and in 2002 I took over a magazine and lovingly gave it a rebirth as the one true source to help teach and support women in their goals to lead more balanced, greener, holistic lives. In 2004 I sold my magazine, WHOLE LIVING: BODY+SOUL, to Martha Stewart and agreed to stay at the helm.

Fantastic, right? For a while, yes. But 2009 did not start well….

You see, in the midst of my most glamorous and exciting career high ever – I felt stuck.  So stuck I had constant headaches and neck pain, I wasn’t sleeping well and more important, I felt I was missing my life. One morning I woke up and realized I was running myself into the ground.  My life had started to feel like a road show and I was the headliner -- I was smiling and OK while the lights were on for each performance, but then I’d kind of scrape myself off the stage, and soldier on to the next performance.

As the Publisher of WHOLE LIVING: BODY+SOUL magazine I knew a lot about wellbeing and health.  But, like many other women, I missed all the signs of stress.  I was burned out, restless, exhausted, and empty.  I was anxious and tense all the time.

I felt I was worrying… about something… every minute. I was angry. Even sadder, I had lost my direction, purpose and enthusiasm.

Sound familiar? I was being eaten alive by stress.

**That’s when I noticed how many other women were suffering, too.**

**I left my job, put the seeker in me front and center,
and set out to discover a proven antidote for stress.**

First, I did extensive research. I learned how deadly stress is for your body and mind:

* Constant stress will ruin your marriage or relationship, rob you of focus, swamp your ability to quickly recall all the information you need to do your job well, interfere with “thinking straight” and make you vulnerable to rushes of anger that feel like an emotional hijacking and leave your colleagues and loved ones in pain in its wake.
* Clinical studies have proven that stress cripples your health and makes you age faster. In a review in the Archives of Internal Medicine of extensive research on the stress-disease link, a Yale psychologist noted stress compromises your immune system to the point that it can speed the metastasis of cancer; increase vulnerability to viral infections like a cold or the flu; exacerbate plaque formation leading to hardening of the arteries and blood clotting leading to heart attacks; accelerate the onset of Type I diabetes and the course of Type II diabetes; and worsen or trigger an asthma attack.
* Stress can trigger ulcerative colitis and inflammatory bowel disease (gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, cramps).
* Stress damages your brain…and memory.
* Stress robs you of precious sleep, gives you pounding headaches and migraines, makes your hair thin or even fall out, boosts your blood pressure to dangerous levels… and often makes you fat.

**Material By:**

**Jan Bruce**
Founder of meQuilibrium
Health and Wellness Expert

**High stress for parents who are raising autistic children**

By **Madison Park**, CNN

July 23, 2010 6:03 p.m. EDT



Saiqa Akhter, 30, told a 911 operator that she strangled her two children because they were autistic.

**STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

* Mother said on 911 tape that she strangled kids because she didn't want them to be autistic
* Dealing with autism can be draining and isolating, advocates and parents say
* Cultural and language barriers may limit access to help and resources

**(CNN)** -- It's there on the 911 tape.

"Why did you do this? "the operator asked the woman who said she had killed her two kids.

"They are autistic," replied the mother. "Both are autistic. I don't want my kids to be like that."

"I want normal kids," Saiqa Akhter, 30, said in the Monday emergency call. The Irving, Texas, mother is charged with capital murder in the death of her two children, Zain Akhter, 5, and his younger sister, Faryaal Akhter.

The state's Department of Family and Protective Services confirmed to CNN that the boy had autism; it did not have information about the girl.

Parents of children with autism say the challenges are daunting and often isolating as the kids can have outbursts, meltdowns and intense needs. But they say their children are also vital, loving parts of their lives.Autism's effects vary widely; it's a spectrum, not a single disorder, that impairs communication and social skills. While there is no cure, autism treatments and early interventions have been found to help.





*Video: Mother to 911: 'I killed my kids'*

Several research studies have found that mothers of children with autism have higher levels of psychological and parenting-related distress than other moms of children with developmental delays.

It can be overwhelming, said Marguerite Colston, vice president of the Autism Society, which has local chapters throughout the country.

"Once you get a diagnosis, you can't be a parent, you have to be a case manger, an education specialist," she said. "You've got to figure out the medical system. It's overwhelming to think I have to advocate and navigate the system. The level of stress is terrifying."

"Our nation doesn't have the system to support the parents. The services are not there to match the needs."

In Texas, local Child Protective Services officials had worked with the Akhter family for two months in 2009, linking them with community resources to help them deal with the children's medical and developmental issues, according to the state's Department of Family and Protective Services.

This week, Akhter told the 911 operator that she had first tried to kill her children with bathroom cleaner, but they would not drink it. So she said she strangled them with a wire. Akhter is being held in the Dallas County jail in lieu of $1 million bail.

Akhter's uncle said that her son had autism and suffered from a severe speech impediment but had been improving with speech therapy, according to CNN affiliate WFAA. He also said that the 2-year-old girl had health problems. Relatives said the Akhter family was originally from Pakistan and had lived in North Texas for a while, according to [WFAA](http://www.wfaa.com/news/crime/Irving-girl-dies-mother-to-be-arraigned-today-in-brothers-death-98919064.html).



Archana Dhurka, at right, shown with her family, said raising Ankush, 10, also at right, is challenging and rewarding.

Archana Dhurka, the mother of a child with autism in Plano, Texas, said she was disheartened to hear the story. Dhurka, who is of Indian descent, said it doesn't help that autism tends to be highly stigmatized in South Asian communities.

Raising a special-needs child and a family while juggling work can feel overwhelming, she said.

Once in a while, she said, "You get that feeling like, 'I just want to die.' It's hard. There's anger and a lot of emotions you go through. When you sit down and calmly think," she said, she realizes "that's not the solution."

When Dhurka learned that her eldest son, Ankush, had autism at the age of 2, she didn't tell her family about it for three to four years.

"It was just very, very hard," she said.

The culture "especially in India, probably in South Asian countries, is you have to be the best, be super smart," she said. Parents want to be able to say their child, "does math, he's the top of the class, he's gifted and intelligent."

**Tips for parents of children with autism**

-- Look for professionals to learn how to manage behaviors
-- Find professionals who can care for children when parents need to take care of other things
-- Seek counseling for parents from therapists who understand autism
**Source: Brian Freedman, Center for Autism and Related Disorders at Kennedy Krieger Institute**-- Find local resources
-- Discuss children's needs and goal priorities with care providers
-- Have fun, take a parenting role more than a teacher role
**Source: Dr. Wendy Stone, University of Washington Autism Center**

Autism Society
hotline: 1.800.3AUTISM
http://www.autism-society.org

The pressure is not limited to minority communities, as parents of children with autism experience anxiety and depression regardless of their socioeconomic group or race, said Dr. Wendy Stone, director of the University of Washington Autism Center in Seattle.

"Parents who have less access to information, resources or to a community of parents who have similar experiences or needs are clearly going to have a more difficult time managing both their child and their own health," she said.

Colston of the Autism Society, who is also a parent of a child with the condition, said local chapters are reaching out to affected Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali and other minority families.

Dhurka hears the misunderstandings about autism and cultural issues from her and her husband's family. They know about Ankush's condition, but she says they questioned why the boy couldn't recite his ABCs and commented that Dhurka had worked too much during her pregnancy.

Dhurka, who has a master's degree in computer science, left that career and is now an autism behavior therapist who works with immigrant families affected by the condition.

"Some of the parents can hardly speak English," she said. Advocating for their children can be "very intimidating" for families with cultural and language barriers, she said.

Some immigrant families come to her sobbing -- lost and overwhelmed.

Dhurka can relate. Her husband travels frequently for business to be able to pay for Ankush's therapies, making their marriage a long-distance one. Her youngest son, who doesn't have autism, clamors for her attention. On top of that, she said, she has four-hour telephone battles with an insurance company to get Ankush's treatments covered. At some point, she breaks down to cry, too.

But Ankush brings tears to her eyes for other reasons.

The free-spirited 10-year-old always has a big smile on his face. He runs around singing along to his favorite Bollywood movies. He never masks his affection for his therapists or his family -- getting hugs and tickles. He relishes the joys in life, as he squeals and splashes in a swimming pool.

When he utters new vocabulary words, Dhurka and her husband cry with joy -- Ankush is making progress.

"We're seeing that parents may experience stress, they're very grateful for having their children and love them very much," said Brian Freedman, clinical director of the Center for Autism and Related Disorders at the Kennedy Krieger Institute. "We see both elements in the research."

Dhurka talks to other families to help them overcome their denial about autism and connects them to support groups, medical experts and therapists. With the South Asian families in the group, she exchanges Indian recipes for children with special dietary needs.

"It's a good place," she said, about a support network. "I'm not alone."

## Specific to Parents of children with Autism

## Interactive Autism Network

## Stress and Well-being

Most parents of children with disabilities or chronic health problems suffer a great deal of stress. There is evidence, however, that parents of children on the autism spectrum suffer the most stress of all. [1](http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/articles/parental_depression_references)

There are several reasons why the stress of those parenting children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is so high. All parents of children with disabilities must cope with grief, worries about the future, and the struggle to find and obtain appropriate services. Parents of children with ASDs face some additional stressors. First, they often live with uncertainty about what caused their child’s autism, as well as possible guilt (no matter how undeserved) over whether they did or failed to do something that led to their child's ASD.

Second, the core disability associated with ASDs is a social one. Most parents hope for a warm and loving relationship with their child. It is bewildering to find you have a baby who does not like to be held, or a child who will not look into your eyes. Parents adapt, learning to love the way their child loves, but usually not without having passed through some confusion and pain.

Third, no matter what their specific ASD diagnosis or IQ, children on the autism spectrum often have problem behaviors, from refusal to sleep to intense and frequent tantrums to extreme rigidity. These behaviors can make living with them day-to-day very trying and lead to another variety of guilt: the kind you experience when you are not feeling loving toward a difficult child. In addition, such behaviors strain the entire family, impacting sibling relationships and marriages.

A number of studies have specifically linked the troublesome behaviors of children on the autism spectrum to high levels of parental stress. [2,3,4](http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/articles/parental_depression_references)  Such stress is not only damaging in its own right, but also has been linked to higher rates of depression. [5](http://www.iancommunity.org/cs/articles/parental_depression_references)

* \*\*\*\*Remember to **be good to yourself**. Love, honor and value yourself. You're doing a very hard job and you deserve some quality time, just for you.

**The Relationship Between Autism and Parenting Stress**

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**Abstract**

OBJECTIVE. We assessed associations between parenting a child with autism and stress indicators.

METHODS. In the 2003 National Survey of Children’s Health, parents or other knowledgeable adult respondents for children aged 4 to 17 years reported their recent feelings about their life sacrifices to care for their child, difficulty caring for their child, frustration with their child’s actions, and anger toward their child. Responses were compiled in the Aggravation in Parenting Scale. Parents of children reported to have autism (*N* = 459) were compared with parents of: (1) children with special health care needs including emotional, developmental, or behavioral problems other than autism that necessitated treatment (children with other developmental problems [*N* = 4545]); (2) children with special health care needs without developmental problems (*N* = 11475); and (3) children without special health care needs (*N* = 61826). Weighted estimates are presented.

RESULTS. Parents of children with autism were more likely to score in the high aggravation range (55%) than parents of children with developmental problems other than autism (44%), parents of children with special health care needs without developmental problems (12%), and parents of children without special health care needs (11%). However, within the autism group, the proportion of parents with high aggravation was 66% for those whose child recently needed special services and 28% for those whose child did not. The parents of children with autism and recent special service needs were substantially more likely to have high aggravation than parents of children with recent special service needs in each of the 3 comparison groups. Conversely, parents of children with autism but without recent special service needs were not more likely to have high aggravation than parents of children with other developmental problems.

CONCLUSIONS. Parenting a child with autism with recent special service needs seems to be associated with unique stresses.