

Introduction Slide:

Hello, my name is Kristal Draper.

I am the Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent for Hot Spring County.

Managing Stress: Turning Challenges into Blessings

All of us experience stress of one kind or another. Some stresses may be large, and some may be small, but we all have stresses in our lives.

Even happy events can be challenging.

This lesson teaches you ways to turn your stresses into growth and your challenges into blessings.

Slide 2:

We all have experienced many kinds of stress in the last few years.

These Include:

- Storms & Natural Disasters
- Wars - with all the challenges of deployments and separations
- Economic Problems - job loss, tight budgets, and/or bankruptcies

Probably one or more of these challenges has affected you and the people you love.

We could create a separate publication for dealing with the stress related to each of these challenges.

And maybe there would be a whole new set of challenges next year.

Since there are key principles that relate to all areas of stress, we have developed handouts that deal with stress in general and we invite you to apply these principles to the individual stresses that you face.

Slide 3: Your Challenges: What have you faced? “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” By Theodore Roosevelt

Slide 4:

Before we talk about how to deal with challenges, let's think about some of the challenges you have faced.

Please look at the **table on page 3 of the Managing Stress: Turning Challenges into Blessings materials**. The chart on your page will look like the chart on the screen.

What challenges have you faced in the past? Please list those in the first column, small, medium and large challenges.

Challenges might be anything from a traffic accident to enduring a difficult pregnancy to the loss of a loved one—anything that has been a challenge in your life.

What you have learned from each of the challenges you listed?

Please pause the video to complete your chart.

Think about how are you better because of each of those challenges? Maybe greater patience, compassion for others, or a greater appreciation for simple blessings. If you would like to post a comment those are welcomed but not required.

Slide 5:

The old idea about stress was that certain events led to certain amounts of stress.

For example, in the Life Change Scale, it was assumed that events like the death of a family member, an injury or illness, or being fired from a job would be very stressful for all people.

Even some positive events, such as marriage or pregnancy, were seen as stressful events. So, the **old idea** was that certain events led to certain levels of stress. If you added up all your life events, you could know your stress level.

One way to represent this is that A (the events in your life) **leads to** X (the level of stress).

It turns out that this idea simply doesn't work. What is stressful for some people in some situations is much less stressful for other people.

Slide 6:

A family scientist named Reuben Hill observed that people who suffered from very similar challenges manifest very different levels of stress. He suggested that it was not the events themselves that led to stress; rather the events, together with our resources and meaning (or interpretation) of the event determined how much stress we experienced.

Let's consider a couple of examples. Hill studied the ways families were impacted by war. One family might send a parent off to war and still thrive while another family that seemed similar might suffer. Maybe the thriving family had friends and extended family nearby who helped with the demands of life. This is a valuable resource.

Maybe this family interpreted the opportunity to support the war effort as a great act of patriotism. This meaning makes the absence of a family member less painful. Such families are likely to thrive.

In contrast, another family might be far from family and friends. Maybe they feel very alone. This lack of resources makes the event (the deployment of a parent) far more challenging. This family might also dislike war. Or maybe they lost a relative to war. The gloomy meaning attached to war would make the absence of a family member still more stressful.

This same principle applies to all forms of stress (i.e., loss of loved ones, sickness, financial problems, etc.) whatever they are. When we bring our resources and positive meanings to challenging events, we are more likely to do well than when we lack resources or assign a gloomier meaning to an event.

This is good news! It means we are **not** the helpless victims of life. We can rally resources. We can change the meaning of problems by the way we think about them.

As a result of these discoveries, Reuben Hill developed what he called the A B C to X [simply pronounced "A, B, C, X] model of stress. Let's talk more about these ideas.

Slide 7:

Resources: What tools do you have?

One factor that helps us deal with challenges is our resources. Some people have a wealth of resources that help them deal with challenges as they arise.

For example, when a person loses a loved one, having a network of caring friends can make a big difference.

Another example: When a person suffers health or financial problems, having flexibility and optimism can make a big difference.

Another resource that can play a major role in helping us deal with stress effectively is religious faith. Research shows that people who have a strong religious faith are better able to deal with challenges.

Let's turn to page 5 in *Managing Stress: Turning Challenges into Blessings*.

Look at the list of resources that are there and mark the ones that you have. Then, in the table below, please write ways that you might use some of those resources to deal with the challenges you are currently facing.

Please pause the video to complete this activity.

Listing resources can be helpful when dealing with the challenges we face.

For example, creativity might help someone find a new opportunity after a job loss. Having previous experience with challenges can teach us skills and attitudes to help us deal with new challenges more effectively.

Slide 8:

Your Meaning: How do you make sense of challenges?

Another factor that determines whether or not difficulties lead to stress, is the meaning we assign to our experiences.

For example, when we face unexpected challenges, it is common to panic. We may think that we will not survive—that we are doomed to misery. Choosing to think differently about the situation can make a big difference.

For example, one man used to say, “We don’t have any problems around here, but we sure do have some interesting situations!”

Slide 9: We can turn lump of coal experiences into diamonds by the way we think about them.

Can you think of people who have faced terrible challenges and been enriched by them? Think of friends, family members, or historical figures who have turned challenges into blessings.

One example of this might be Mr. Smith in Kansas. When he was told by the doctors that he had degenerative multiple sclerosis, he was at first saddened. When the doctor asked if he could cope with this chronic illness, he responded that he had suffered through childhood asthma and learned to cope with difficulties. He expected the same would be true with the MS.

Think of challenges you have personally faced that have become blessings as you have thought about them differently.

Slide 10:

Take a few minutes to record your responses on page 6.

You may want to pause the video here to write down your thoughts.

Slide 11:

Research has shown that challenges can bless us!

Three blessings of challenges stand out.

- They help us draw closer to other people
- Develop greater compassion,
- Learn to value the simple things in life.

Slide 12:

One person who has inspired thousands of people is Helen Keller. Though she lost her sight and hearing as a young girl, she still made remarkable contributions to our nation. The summary of her life is given on page 7 under the heading "Inspiring." Please pause the video while you read her story.

Slide 13: Now it is time for Your Story

Our resources and the way we think about our challenges can help us manage our stress.

On the last page of the Managing Stress: Turning Challenges into Blessings handouts, write some ideas about how you would like to be remembered. How did you turn the challenges you faced into a life of goodness, growth, or strength?

Write a few words about the way you want to be remembered. After you write about how you would like to be remembered, take a few minutes to write about the ways you plan to deal with challenges yet ahead in your life.

Slide 14: Conclusion

The surprising conclusion about stress is that it always invites, and often forces, us to grow. We can choose to be better for it *or* bitter because of it. If we use our resources well and think about stress in positive ways, we can turn challenges into blessings.

Slide 15:

If you would like information regarding our programs please visit our website at www.uaex.edu.

Thank you for your time!!