

# Stress Management: Changing Your View of a Stressor

*"It can be hard to turn that stress off at the end of the day."*

As a firefighter and paramedic, Shannon Richter deals with stressful situations every day. Stress affects everyone differently, so stress management plans have to be customized to what's causing your stress, how you respond to that stress, and what will best relieve it. To create your own plan, you have to first identify the symptoms of your stress.

*"Headaches, neck strain, high blood pressure."*

And how those symptoms affect you.

*"You're irritable, you're snapping at your coworkers, your wife, the kids. It can be affecting your concentration."*

After identifying how stress affects you, look for relief techniques that will work best for you. Shannon takes a moment to just breathe.

*"If I experience any stressful event or notice that I'm getting stressed out by something then I take that immediate time for myself. Taking some quick breaths and relaxing."*

Taking a few slow, deep breaths can also calm you down. That's a technique Claudine Jackson uses to ease the symptoms of her anxiety disorder and the stress that comes along with them.

*"The breathing exercise it's more like a inhale, exhale, slow deep breaths and then blow it out. Slow deep breaths and then blow it out. And not breathing through your nose, but more so through your mouth. And it just kind of relaxes your entire your body and makes you feel better."*

Another good way to manage your stress is to talk about it in a setting that is designed to help. Shannon's fire department offers a special peer support program to do just that.

*"We're supporting each other because we've all been here. We've all done this. We've all gotten stressed out. We've all had highs and lows. We've all had exciting calls and sad calls, so we've been there too. We're going to help you out."*

Christopher Wojnar uses another technique to relieve stress, which is a part of his everyday life living with Bipolar Disorder. His stress reliever is Positive Self-Talk. It's kind of a personal pep talk that can help you change the way you react to a stressful situation.

*"There are these negative thoughts that just come out of nowhere sometimes. It's really battling those and using positive self-talk and using tools to try and change your thoughts to be positive."*

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Besides going back to school, Christopher is an intensive care nurse, a father, and a new husband. That's a lot to handle, but he says the positive thoughts and supportive family help him stay calm.

*"Those positive affirmations have been huge for me as well as using support systems and communicating effectively, I think are my biggest things."*

Meditation is another stress relief tool. Mindfulness Meditation involves taking just a few minutes of quiet time to focus on what's happening around you at that specific moment, rather than on the many things that might be causing you stress.

*"Getting away from a lot of past-oriented thinking and a lot of future-oriented thinking. The focus with Mindfulness Meditation, we're trying to help an individual bring their attention and present focus to the present moment that they're in."*

Meditation can help you calm those worries or anxious thoughts that might be in your brain. It's been a huge help to Mary Beth Schultz.

*"Life was a lot different before I could manage my stress. It was. Before I would lose my patience very quickly. I let things bother me too often. And when that happened, you know, my day was just totally disrupted."*

Mary Beth uses both meditation and yoga to help handle the stress of taking care of her elderly mother and figuring out her life in retirement. She says it's important to make the time to clear her head.

*"It doesn't take long, 10 minutes, 15 minutes. When I can accomplish that, I find a lot of inner peace and I awaken in such a way that I feel better."*

*"It's quite fascinating that just a simple act of practicing being mindful, being mindfully aware of the present situation that one is in, how that can help to reduce a lot of significant psychiatric burden."*

Changing the way, you think about and respond to stress is the first step in learning to cope with stressful situations. If you feel you need help controlling the stressors in your life, talk to a mental health professional.