

One to-do list that won't add to stress: 10 ways to make life easier, more fun

By Paula Gray Hunker
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"It is important not to become stressed about de-stressing your family life," Jeff Davidson says with a laugh. As management consultant and author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Stress," Mr. Davidson offers a list of the top 10 signs that you're overstressed. The list begins with: "(1) You check the obituary column each morning to make sure you're not there and (2) You skip the rest of this list." So we'll skip the list and move to the top 10 tips toward managing stress, compiled from books listed in the "More info:" box.

1. Simplify your life; set priorities

Mr. Davidson argues that life has become "visibly, countably more complicated." Don't feel that you have to do everything — and do decide what critically needs to be accomplished. As you arrange priorities on your "to-do" list, make sure business pressures don't squeeze out family needs.

2. Build a support network

One of the stresses of modern life is the loss of the extended family and small, close communities. Create your own. Whether your support comes from close friends, neighbors, church or synagogue or even work colleagues, make sure you have both emotional and logistical backup. Don't wait until you are in a crisis before establishing this support.

3. De-clutter

Victoria Moran, author of "Shelter for the Spirit," says to begin regaining control in tangible areas, such as organizing closets and drawers. Clutter is stressful. Physically organize your life and offload unwanted household goods.

4. Unplug

Life has become far too noisy, and too many distractions have invaded the home. Thomas Moore,

author of "The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life," suggests having rooms with no electronic devices and limiting use of television, telephones and computers to specific, non-evening hours.

5. Have dinner together

Mr. Moore says an evening meal together has the sacred power to keep families together. In a busy, stressful life, when even children are booked, make dinner together — in the home — a constant.

6. Make schedules and boundaries

Even quiet time must be scheduled. Mr. Davidson suggests penciling in quiet time for each family member. Also set scheduled moments, such as dinner time, when no outside intrusions will be allowed. Mrs. Moran also recommends keeping a weekly Sabbath as a family.

7. Don't divide your attention

Stress is increased when we try to accomplish two tasks at once. Focus. Don't eat and watch television. Don't talk to your children and do your work. Also, don't inadvertently schedule conflicts. Keep a family calendar by the phone to avoid such mistakes.

8. Keep items where they're used

Keep items together (coffee, filters, cups). Since morning is the most stressful time of day in most homes, Mr. Davidson suggests creating a table by the door for *outgoing material only*. That is where packed book bags, lunch bags, coats, briefcases and umbrellas

go. Items that come into the house should be taken directly to their destination — dry cleaning to closets; homework to desks.

9. Share tasks

Mrs. Moran says women need to learn to relax at home without guilt. Tasks need to be dispersed to all family members, including children, so that work is accomplished without anyone bearing the brunt of the burden.

10. Have fun — NOW!

There will always be some task, some event, some reason why stress is in your life. Waiting for a good time to work on limiting stress will ensure that the stress will never lessen. Begin *now*. Make sure that family fun is high on the to-do list each week.

