

Why Am I Acting Like This?! Because Stress Changes Our Behavior

Our brain works best when we feel safe. When we feel a threat coming, our brain moves into a different “state.”

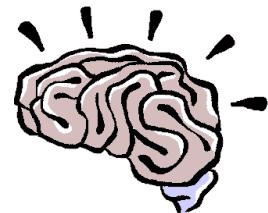
The working of our brain depends upon our Stress State.

When there is no threat, we are in a “**Calm State**,” and we can use all of our brain’s thinking power. But as we feel more stress, our thinking is more emotional and reactive. In a way, when we get stressed we get “dumber!”



In the **Alarm State**, we have less “brain power” because we have to focus on the threat. The more threatened you feel, the more you shut down the “thinking” part of your brain.

If we are really stressed, we move into the **Fear State**. Our behavior is all about survival. In this state our thinking is on auto-pilot.



Here are some changes many of us are experiencing because of stress:

- Change #1: Exhaustion** - Our brains are working on overtime and our energy level is running low. We feel really tired, but don't know why!
- Change #2: Unhealthy Eating** - In the Alarm State our brains love sweet and fatty foods. That's why we reach for the potato chips and the candy when we feel stressed!
- Change #3: Emotional Outbursts** – In the Alarm State we are more emotional. This is why we are crying and yelling more often during this crisis.
- Change #4: Foggy Thinking** – We can't focus and forget simple things. In the Alarm State, we don't have access to our full thinking brain.



Here are some suggestions to help when you are in the Alarm or Fear State:

- Suggestion #1: Self-Compassion** – Give yourself grace and forgiveness during this time. Be realistic that your list may not get finished and you will make some mistakes, due to the stress that everyone is feeling.
- Suggestion #2:** Think “**crunchy foods**” – carrots, apples and nuts are healthier and give the *crunch* that our brain likes.
- Suggestion #3: Turn off screens and notifications** – Quiet leads to calm. Turn off phone, television, radio and social media when you can.

A Message from the Building Better Lives Initiative
of the Franklin County Family & Children First Council
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