



De-Stress Kit for the Changing Times

from
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This booklet is for anyone who is experiencing extra stress due to the cascading effects of the financial meltdown, natural disasters, ongoing wars, or any personal challenges during these rapidly changing times.

The current economic crisis marks a significant turning point in the global changes taking place. The global community is being called on to shift from the pursuit of self-gain at the expense of others—to a more balanced system of care for the rights and needs of the people. Systems and societies have veered far from the heart and the core values of cooperation, fairness, and care for one another and the whole. For many people, hope is fading. Yet, many feel that things are being turned upside down to become right-side up.

Unfortunately, this realignment is causing increased stress and tremendous economic fallout that affects us all. It's obvious that the financial realignment process won't move in the express lane, but it can eventually stabilize. Each step the decision-makers take to significantly take care of Main Street will be a step closer to the time when the middle class and the poor can breathe more easily.

With compassion, I realize that it is much tougher for some than others. When a crisis occurs, there are different emotional stages that people go through: shock, denial, anger, blame, despair and more. *This process is painful, yet it helps to clear out the shock-overload on our mind, emotions and nervous system.* After this phase, it's easier for the heart to reopen. Then, with some genuine effort, people can start to rebuild their coping capacity as they gain more clarity and confidence to move forward. The process of recovery won't be the same for everyone because of different situations and differences in individual makeup. But be encouraged that you can create a psychological turnaround along the way and increase your ability to cope effectively—*especially if you work through your challenges with others.*

Creating a Turnaround

When a significant crisis happens (such as the current economic upheaval that is affecting so many), our stress tolerance level depletes from the initial shock and emotional pain. We become overwhelmed which inhibits our capacity to cope. Yet, it's completely understandable why we feel the way we do.

In the first phase, it can be helpful to experience and release the emotional build-up from shock, grief, anger and despair, or to just sit quietly with ourselves in the privacy of our own pain. After this first phase, however long it takes, eventually we need to engage in thoughts of self-care and remember our health concerns. Then we can take some simple steps to start to *offset* the effects of stress, which will make our recovery much easier. I understand it's hard at first, but the simple suggestions in this booklet can help make it easier to reconnect with our inner strength and security.

Though we can't necessarily make our challenges and anxieties suddenly disappear, we can *reset* our capacity to maintain more easily. As we take steps to reduce the stress where we can, it adds strength and clarity for sorting our way through the more difficult challenges.

Even though things "are as they are," we can start to make a psychological turnaround within ourselves, so that excess stress won't create a downward spiral in health. We can offset stress with some simple practices that facilitate attitude shifts and reduce energy drain. This will increase clear thinking as to how we can get the needed help for ourselves and our families.

When we are experiencing increased stress, it's often hard to hear some of the points that can most effectively help us. So in this booklet I will cover in a few different ways some important themes that I feel could be the most useful.

Here are some practices to help us reduce stress and reset our system to move forward in these changing times.

1. Communicate and interact with others.

One of the most important things that you can do is to communicate your feelings to someone or to a group of people going through similar experiences. Then engage in caring about others and offering emotional support. This especially helps to reopen

your heart, which increases fortitude and emotional balance. Whether you laugh together or cry together, there is often tremendous beneficial release.

When people gather to support each other, the energy of the collective whole multiplies the benefit to the individual. It's known that collective energetic cooperation can increase intuitive guidance and effective solutions for the problems at hand. When a group of people are "in their hearts," and not just their minds, the collective support helps to lift their spirits, which in turn releases stress buildup and anxiety overload.

If you inquire it's likely that you will be able to find a group of people who meet to address the same issues that concern you. Many people can feel a resistance to being around others; but in times of crisis and stress, group support can be helpful. Often it can prevent the acute stress overload that puts your health at risk. You can also find interactive groups, blogs and helpful services on the Internet.

2. Re-opening the heart feeling.

It is normal at the onset of a crisis for our heart feelings to shut down, especially during the initial shock and anger phase. When our mind operates too long without the heart's wisdom, it tends to overload from the sense of loss, and then our system gridlocks in anger, fear and despair. It's understandable to experience this, but it's really important to reopen your heart connection with people, as you can. When your heart reopens, self-security and confidence can gradually return. Be patient with the process and have compassion for yourself.

A good way to reopen your heart feelings is by offering kindness and compassionate support to others or volunteering somewhere to help others in need, even when you are in need yourself. Even small acts of kindness and compassion can make a big difference. This is one of the quickest ways to reestablish your footing and reduce the stress that could otherwise affect your health. Research has shown that care and compassion release beneficial hormones that help balance and restore your system. Worry and uncertainty increase stress hormones, even when you feel that you have good reasons to worry. Much stress can be reduced by caring for and interacting more with others.

If health problems prevent you from meeting with people, you can still benefit by sending genuine care and compassion to others. If you are homebound, try to have visitors so you can communicate your feelings to help release some of the emotional

pressure. If that's not possible, try to at least communicate with others by letter, phone or e-mail.

3. Practice appreciation and gratitude.

A helpful exercise for reducing stress and restoring emotional balance is to spend some time each day sending *genuine feelings of appreciation* to someone or something—be it children, family members, pets or others for whom you feel sincere appreciation. It's important that the appreciation be heartfelt (not just from the mind), since appreciative feelings activate the body's biochemical systems that help diminish stress and stabilize the psyche. The practice of appreciation and gratitude has been proven to help people reconnect with feelings of hope and the heart initiative to progressively move forward.

4. Decrease drama.

Another effective way to help stop energy drain and reduce anxiety is this: Practice not feeding the tendency towards “drama” during this critical time. When we constantly spin thoughts of blame, anger and “doom and gloom” projections about the future, it increases drama, which always makes things worse. Adding drama to a situation blinds intuitive discernment, which we need to find the most effective ways to navigate through challenges.

Start practicing by trying to decrease drama when sharing with others. When we *genuinely* share feelings from the heart with others, this reduces the tendency to keep amplifying and repeating the downside of situations—and increases the tendency to strengthen and encourage sober support and solutions. Naturally, there will be some drama while expressing our feelings to others. But when excessive drama continues, it blocks solutions because it drains the mind and emotions, leaving us feeling worse. Practice reducing drama, but try not to judge yourself or others for creating it. Everyone is doing the best they can until they get more stable and secure. Try to proceed with compassion through all your interactions.

More suggestions for decreasing drama:

When you catch your inner dialogue looping with excessive worry or fearful projections, or when you find yourself overdramatizing the downside of things, gently tell yourself: “That's not helping to change something that's already done; it can only make it worse.” Then make a genuine attempt to realign your thoughts and

feelings with those that support your needs and objectives. You may not be able to stop all the internal drama, but, you can effectively reduce your energy drain and offset your stress deficit with this exercise.

Continuously amping-up anger, anxiety and fear releases excessive levels of stress hormones, like cortisol and adrenalin, throughout the body. The long-play version of this can cause a cascade of physical health symptoms, along with potential mental and emotional imbalances. As you practice reducing drama, the energy you save helps restore balance, clarity and positive initiative.

Take care not to judge yourself if you slip backwards at times. It's okay. We all do. Just reinstate your heart commitment to practice, and then move on. Each small effort you make really helps.

5. Manage your reactions to the news.

During this time of economic and global instability, it's important not to compound our stress by projecting worst-case scenarios as we watch the news. That's why it's so important to practice listening to the news from a *state of neutral*, and resist the temptation to emote and obsess over the negative downsides of each issue discussed. We can maintain our own positions and keep our own opinions while still managing how much negative emotional drama we attach to events or disappointing information during and after news broadcasts. This is where a large portion of our stress accumulates. By listening or watching the news from a more *neutral* position, we can avoid pouring excessive emotional energy into replaying the issues, which can intensify anger, fear or anxiety. There's a difference between evaluating an issue and emotionally obsessing over it. By practicing neutral, it can help us manage our emotional energy expenditures and avoid stress overload.

When we're under extreme stress and anxiety, it can be helpful to manage the amount of news we watch. Many people are afraid to watch the news because of dreading what they might see and yet also afraid not to watch it in case they might miss something important. When experiencing high anxiety and depression, cutting back on news occasionally can help lower the *intensity* of our fear and anxiety. It's the *intensity* that makes fear and anxiety seem unbearable at times. You have to experiment to see if cutting back helps you, as it has many others who are experiencing high anxiety. You have to decide based on your stress load and how sensitive your emotional nature is to constant media drama around issues that amplify anger or fear. It's about managing your media intake according to honest

assessment of your particular situation. We shouldn't judge the media, as we are responsible for what we watch and how we react to it. It's our job to balance and manage our exposure and our perceptions of how the news affects us.

6. Prayer or meditation.

Prayer or meditation can make attitude adjustments easier, especially as you center in your heart and try to find a more objective state. Feeling compassion for yourself and others or feeling gratitude can be a form of prayer or meditation. These practices help quiet the mind and can bring you new perspectives that restore hope and direction. Research has shown that sending appreciative or compassionate feelings to other people or issues can have a beneficial effect on the hormonal and immune systems. Anything that boosts the immune system is worth practicing, especially during periods of prolonged stress. Sending appreciation, care or compassion to others also helps to balance the nervous system and create more harmonious heart rhythms. This, in turn, helps balance your mental and emotional system, which helps reduce anxiety and feelings of overwhelm.

Whatever your religious or spiritual practices may be, genuinely applying them through these challenging times can be very beneficial. Such practices have been shown to restore hope and increase confidence. While stress can cause a disconnection from your heart feelings, this connection can be re-established. Many people have made comebacks from painful places. I have and you can as well, with genuine commitment and self-application. The most important step I took in recovering from a past crisis was reopening my heart through deeper care, compassion and appreciation for others. This sparked the gradual return of my inner self-security—the missing piece in moving on and recreating my life.

7. Heart-focused breathing to reduce stress and anxiety.

Practice breathing while imagining your breath passing in and out through your heart area or the center of your chest. Envision yourself as taking a time out to refuel your system by breathing in an *attitude* of calm and balance (like breathing in an emotional tonic to take the rough edges off).

The key to making this exercise effective is to generate the *true feeling* of calm and balance. You can substitute calm and balance at times with breathing the feeling of appreciation or compassion (or whatever attitude you choose to breathe). This can be done in a quiet place or while walking, jogging, and even in a conversation

once you get familiar with it. It's very helpful for reducing anxiety, anger and mild depression.

Here is the short version of the above technique for quick reference:

1. Imagine the breath passing in and out through the heart or the center of the chest.
2. Breathe an attitude of calm or balance (or whatever positive feeling you choose) to help restore balance.

Heart-focused breathing is being taught by doctors, nurses and clinics throughout the world. It's especially helpful during times of crisis or whenever you experience anger, anxiety or emotional overload. Heart-focused breathing exercises can help you shift stress-producing attitudes more quickly and *reset* your stress tolerance baseline.

8. Sleep.

Sleep is especially important during times of increased stress. However, many people can't sleep well due to increased stress. If you have a hard time sleeping, get what sleep you can and try not to overdramatize your concerns about it, as that only makes it worse. *Breathing an attitude of calm and relaxation for five minutes or so before bed has helped many people get more restful sleep.* The Internet offers many suggestions for improving sleep, including diet, exercise and stretching. But as with most advice on the Internet, you have to use discretion.

Due to increasing problems with sleep issues, many are turning to prescription medications. While medication may be necessary in some situations, people have a tendency to overmedicate in the pursuit of quick fixes. It's worth checking out alternative methods, in case something simple helps. If medication is necessary, it is wise to follow the advice of a physician.

9. Exercise.

Exercise can be very beneficial when you are feeling stressed. Often when experiencing anxiety and emotional pain, people don't have the initiative to exercise. However, if you can exercise even a little, it can help clear the fog and tension accumulated from anxiety, anger and worry. Exercise won't take away your reasons for getting stressed, but it strengthens your capacity to manage stress with less energy loss.

It isn't necessary to do a total workout to help clear your thinking and stabilize your emotions. Experiment and find what's comfortable for you, but at least try to get your heart rate up a little even for a short time. As you exercise, try to be conscious not to replay negative mind loops. It helps to balance the emotions and calm the mind by practicing the attitude breathing techniques (described in #7) while exercising.

10. Reduce comparing the present with the past.

After a crisis or major change, one of the hardest things for any of us is to stop *comparing the way life was before with how it is now*. That's really okay and understandable. The time it takes to recover from loss can be different for all of us—and time can't be forced because healing heartache doesn't respond to schedules or agendas. Yet, in our own time, we will start to regain some stability and be able to move forward with life.

I have had experience with this. In a past personal crisis, eventually I realized that to move forward, it was time to redirect my thoughts and feelings from the past situations I couldn't change, in order to be at peace *in the now* and build the future. After I experienced an understandable period of grief, I started to realize that I was perpetuating deep pain and depression because of constant comparison. Often, my heart's intuition would whisper: "Constantly comparing what is going on now with what happened in the past is not helpful for you. It's time to use your energy to move forward with life and your responsibilities." This was hard at first, but, being honest with myself, I knew it was an important step towards reducing the emotional toll and inertia that come from dwelling in the past.

Below is a practice that helped me. Generally, it is most helpful after the first phase of anger, grief or despair. No one would expect us to be able to stop comparing the present with the past during that period. Comparing is part of that. Be comfortable with your own timing, however long it takes. Some people do not experience as much loss, pain or despair as others because their situation is different. For them, the first phase could be much shorter, so they may choose to use this practice earlier in their emotional recovery process.

Suggested practice:

With compassion and patience for yourself, make a genuine heart commitment to practice recognizing some of your thoughts and feelings of comparison with the

past. As you become aware of those thought loops and feel your energy down-spiraling, realize that it's normal to have these thoughts and feelings. Yet know that constant comparison can drain and repress your spirit, which you need at this time to re-stabilize and move forward. Then, in an easygoing way without force, choose something to focus on that doesn't cause as much pain and energy drain. You can practice switching your focus to another subject matter or change what you're doing in the moment if your situation allows it. You can also replace the thoughts with appreciation for someone you care about *in the present*. Of course this is easier at certain times than at others.

With practice you will be able to recognize the thoughts and feelings and then *shift your focus* to something that doesn't bring you down and leave you with depressed feelings. When this is done from the heart and not just the mind, then you *are transforming* feelings—not repressing them.

We can all make progress in restoring our peace, yet we have to play an active part in it. Emotional self-maintenance is an important part of the process. I'm not suggesting that you never have thoughts or feelings about your past. Your own heart discernment knows when you're caught in a depressive mind loop or when you're just appreciating the past with good memories.

We can save lots of energy with this practice and it can be especially helpful in preventing or softening some of the normal depression that accompanies an emotional setback. With self-compassion and patience, you *can* emerge from the depths of challenging times, especially if you connect with the strength that comes from truly putting your heart into the intention to move forward. In the past I tried to move forward but without much progress until I became aware that I was doing it mostly from the mind with little heart involvement. When you approach your situation with humility and genuine care, it activates the power of your heart, which quickens your recovery and re-stabilization.

11. Reducing Fear.

Fear is a normal response to uncertain and challenging times. It is compounded by over-dramatizing what causes us to be fearful. After the shockwave of the economic crisis, how could millions of people not be imprinted with fear and uncertainty about the future? And now, we are often confused by conflicting opinions on TV news shows and the Internet. It's really okay if your reactions to the ongoing crises are fear from uncertainty and lack of trust. When uncertainty overshadows spaces

that we were once secure in, then fear is set in motion to embrace and protect us. Fear can benefit us as an alarm in fight or flight situations. However, prolonged fear exaggerated by drama eventually creates harmful hormonal and immune system responses that compromise our health. We often produce an overload of *fear* when just *practical caution* would suffice in many situations. Fear and caution can sound like the same thing, but the difference between them can make a *big difference* in what hormones are released in your system. Prolonged fear increases hormones that are harmful to your system.

Take as long as you need, but after the first phase of shock, anger and initial fear during a crisis, then it's beneficial to practice reducing the *state of fear* to an attitude of *balanced caution*. There's a difference in how these two states affect you mentally and emotionally. Constant fear represses your spirit and numbs your heart connection with yourself, your family and others. This blocks hope, while exhausting the initiative of those around you. When living from the state of fear *it owns you* and can eventually erode your discernment and cognitive function which you need through challenging times. Living from the attitude of *balanced caution* is different: the attitude of *caution* is protective yet it allows you to maintain balance.

With practice you can eventually reduce some of your feelings of *fear* to attitudes of *balanced caution and discernment*. I respect the fact that it's hard not to experience frequent waves of fear when life is crumbling around us, no matter what form of emotional management we try. Sometimes circumstances leave us with fear that just can't be helped immediately. Here are some suggestions that helped me after I experienced a personal crisis. In time, I became tired of living repressed by fear and decided I had to do something about it. Apply these suggestions as you can and don't be hard on yourself if your progress feels stuck at times.

These exercises have helped many people start the process of reducing and replacing fear with a more beneficial state of mind.

Exercise1:

Having an honest "self-talk" can help replace feelings of fear with more positive attitudes. For example, you can tell yourself the following:

"I understand why I'm living in fear and anxiety, but it's draining my energy, putting my health at risk and interfering with clear decision-making."

"I'm tired of being restricted by fear and I'm ready to shift to an attitude that's easier

on my nervous system, my health, and those around me.”

“I’m aware that fear has stifled my spirit and my ability to make effective choices. My constant fear hasn’t changed anything for the better, so I have nothing to lose by exploring a new attitude for moving forward.”

“I don’t expect to eliminate all my fears and projections overnight, but I *commit now* to at least practice reducing my fear to a more balanced attitude of *practical caution and discernment* where I can.”

“I realize that *any* progress can help free up my mind, emotions and spirit to move on with what needs to be done and to feel better while doing it. I’ll set my own pace in reducing my fears and will have compassion for myself in the process.”

Reading this daily for awhile can help you practice downshifting feelings of fear to more balanced feelings of caution and discernment. Re-reading with feeling also helps to anchor this in your emotional nature which makes commitment and progress easier.

Exercise 2:

Sit quietly and from your heart remember that enough stress is already going on, without having to wear a backpack of fear on top of that. Breathe quietly through the area around your heart and imagine that you are breathing in the attitude of courage and strength to do what you have to do, without being preoccupied with fear. Doing this with a genuine attitude helps take the significance out of fear. Practice this for a few minutes a day and anytime you feel a strong wave of fear. It can begin to make a difference.

I understand and have experienced the grip that fear can have on us. Continue to practice taking the *significance* out of fear a little at a time, as you can. Be easy on yourself; and know that it’s really okay when you can’t eliminate all fear or anxiety as it comes up. Understand that *any progress counts*—which encourages more progress.

12. Engage with your family.

It is helpful if we can keep open communication within our family and circle of close friends about the stress that everyone is going through. It’s important that family members not repress stress or bottle up feelings, as this only makes things worse. Make agreements to give more allowance and latitude to one another and if

someone is snappy or irritable at times not to take it as personally. Especially explain this to children, because they usually can't understand the depth of what the adults are experiencing. It's important to be as positive around children as we can and reassure them that although times are tough now, we can work things out in time.

13. Don't blame yourself.

Blaming yourself for the effects of the crisis is not beneficial and only increases stress. It is not helpful to keep replaying thoughts of all the things you could have done to prevent your situation. Everyone has been caught off guard by unexpected events and changes, so be easy on yourself. Moving forward is easier without carrying baggage and guilt about what you could have or should have done.

14. Write a letter from your heart to yourself.

(Let the letter be an acknowledgement of where you're at, and then let it affirm your commitment to move forward with your life.)

You can use the following letter as a guide, while mentally inserting changes to suit your situation.

(Speak to yourself from your heart as you do this.)

There are good reasons why I am feeling stress, anger and pain. Who wouldn't, in my situation? I am aware of my increasing personal stress because of all the anxiety over trying to make survival decisions for myself and my family; finding it hard to get to sleep and when I do, it's not deep enough to restore my energy; having racing thought loops that only project a hopeless future; fearing job loss, mortgage pressures, retirement insecurity, etc. *(Make your own list to suit your situation.)*

I'm aware that if I don't get off of this stress-express, it could bring down my health, regardless of my reasons, even good ones. I'm not a bad person for experiencing these emotions for the last while. I needed some time to experience the anger, grief, and despair as it has helped me release some of the pain, though not all of it. Yet now, I'm starting to feel that for the sake of my health, my family and my future, it's time to reestablish my grip and move forward. Even if I can't completely erase the anxiety of the future just yet, I realize that small steps can still cross a large room, in time.

In the past, there have been times when I've had to connect with a deeper strength, to pick myself up from tough situations and move on. I can do this again. I'll practice releasing the losses that I can't change and commit to the changes that will make now and the future better. I'm looking forward to helping others through this and being more open to help from others. I'll practice each day, listening to the feelings in my heart to discern my steps, while making sure I at least move my feet when it's time to step forward. I now can handle what needs to be done. I just needed to reach deep into my heart to reconnect with my inner strength and gain a sober view. I'm back now.

(P.S. From the heart, tell your mind to join you in making this turnaround. If your mind is reluctant and resistant at times, know that when your heart commitment is strong enough, the mind will finally "come on board.")

In closing, right now the first shockwaves of the financial meltdown are still reverberating. And new stress waves are occurring regularly, with each report of a major job layoff, another big company going bankrupt, mortgage foreclosures, and more. We can help offset these stress waves in ourselves as *we work together and increase our care for one another*. When the heart reopens, it always increases creative solutions both on personal and collective levels.

This booklet is not intended to be a complete package for dealing with the stress of these times. There are many other resources both in the community and on the Internet that may provide information and services. The important thing is to find something that helps and then commit to it.

If any parts of this booklet assist you in any way, consider highlighting them for easy reference. Rereading anything that is helpful in stressful times supports initiative and confidence. Don't underestimate your capacity for inner strength and emotional management, once you put genuine heart into your commitments. A little practice is a small price to pay for accessing the connection to the caretaker within.

Realize that thousands are in similar situations during these changing times. Together we can all move through these challenges and help create a world that is more fair and balanced for all.

With Deep Care,



Doc Childre

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- If you would like to contribute \$1.00 to provide printed copies of the *De-Stress Kit* to people in need, it would be appreciated. Go to <http://store.heartmath.org/store/Donations/De-Stress-Donation>
 - If you would like to receive future Stress Relief Information for these challenging times, go to <http://www.heartmath.org/signup>

If you choose, please help us distribute this booklet to others during this time of increased stress by:

- Downloading the online version of the *De-Stress Kit* at <http://www.heartmath.org/destresskit> forwarding it to other people and posting it on your Web site
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 - Printing copies for friends, family, associates and organizations
- For more Stress Relief Resources, go to <http://www.heartmath.org/destress>

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About Doc Childre

Doc Childre is the founder of the Institute of HeartMath, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 research and education organization. For many years, the Institute of HeartMath has been dedicated to mapping and validating the importance of the heart-mind connection in intuitive development and personal growth.

The Institute's research on stress, intuition and emotional physiology has been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals and presented at numerous scientific conferences worldwide. HeartMath tools for stress relief and emotional management are being used by companies, government, the military, hospitals, clinics and schools.

Doc Childre is the co-author of the following books: *The HeartMath Solution*, *From Chaos to Coherence*, *Transforming Stress*, *Transforming Anxiety*, *Transforming Anger*, *Transforming Depression* and *The HeartMath Approach to Managing Hypertension*.