

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER NEWSLETTER  
 FEBRUARY 2020 NUMBER 30  
**COPING WITH STRESS**

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In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. See the Rotary District 5440 website for past issues: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>

**HELP PEOPLE FACE THE REALITY OF VIOLENCE AND WAR**

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During war and its aftermath, there is always a need for helping people deal with the associated stresses as well as with a need for healing, both physically and emotionally. One essential step is to look honestly at all the repercussions of violence, no matter how troubling or sensitive the issue. While calls to “Support Our Troops” were repeated regularly at rallies and in editorials, it is not clear what the implications are for this kind of appeal when “our troops” are involved in violations of the Geneva Convention or violence back home, for example. Every culture must help their service men and women deal with the stresses of their experiences and navigate the challenges they face, especially when they return home with mental and emotional needs.



*In Burundi, East Africa, our Global Grant focuses on promoting sustainable peace, reconciliation and development. For one of the poorest nations on earth, emerging from colonization and civil war, there still remains a constant stress from the daily threats of theft, disorder, assault, and such, less the larger impacts of war and more the nagging community impact of conflict. Ex-combatants, in particular, represent a population that has often been traumatized yet lacks the education needed to acclimate back into civilian life.*

Know that sophisticated communication skills and high levels of emotional intelligence can help in processing information like what appeared in an article for *The New York Times* on January 13, 2008. According to Sontag and Alvarez there were 121 cases in which veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan committed a killing in this country, or were charged with one, after their return from war. In many of those cases, combat trauma and the stress of deployment—along with a range of other problems including alcohol abuse and family troubles—contributed to these tragedies. Volatile emotions then mix with violence and self-destructive tendencies to produce an explosive, deadly concoction. Three-quarters of these veterans were still in the military at the time of the killings. More than half the killings involved guns, and the rest were stabbings, beatings, strangulations and bathtub drownings. Twenty-five offenders faced murder, manslaughter or homicide charges for fatal car crashes resulting from drunken, reckless or suicidal driving.

According to Sontag and Alvarez, about a third of the victims were spouses, girlfriends, children or other relatives, among them 2-year-old Krisiauna Calaira Lewis, whose 20-year-old father slammed her against a wall when he was recuperating in Texas from a bombing near Falluja that blew off his foot and shook up his brain. A quarter of the victims were fellow service members, including Specialist Richard Davis of the Army, who was stabbed repeatedly and then set ablaze, his body hidden in the woods by fellow soldiers a day after they all returned from Iraq. And the rest were acquaintances or strangers, among them Noah P. Gamez, 21, who was breaking into a car at a Tucson motel when an Iraq combat veteran, also 21, caught him, shot him dead and then killed himself outside San Diego with one of several guns found in his car.

Add to this the alarming number of suicides among enlisted and returning veterans. According to the *Times On-Line* for October 3, 2008, “More American military veterans have been committing suicide than US soldiers have been dying in Iraq. . . At least 6,256 US veterans took their lives in 2005, at an average of 17 a day, according to figures broadcast last night. Former servicemen are more than twice as likely than the rest of the population to commit suicide. Such statistics compare to the total of 3,863 American military deaths in Iraq since the invasion in 2003 — an average of 2.4 a day, according to the website ICasualties.org. The rate of suicides among veterans prompted claims that the US was suffering from a “mental health epidemic”—often linked to post-traumatic stress.”

Note how troubling it is to read the graphic details about the human stories that underlie these statistics. It is no surprise that the proponents of a particular war do not like to see this kind of information made public. Yet it is in the public arena that democracy must play out. We must develop the skills needed to honestly face the realities that put stress on everyone. We must also provide the support services that some need to cope with the stresses in their lives.

### **METHODS FOR COPING WITH STRESS**

**Lloyd Thomas**, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns.

Identify your habitual coping mechanisms for handling stress. Here is a list of *negative* (and often unconscious) coping mechanisms. Following this list is a large selection of *positive* coping methods you may want to substitute for the negative ones. Feel free to add to the list.

ARNOLD BENNETT: *“Worry [stress] is evidence of an ill-controlled brain; it is merely a stupid waste of time in unpleasantness. If men and women practiced mental calisthenics as they do physical calisthenics, they would purge their brains of this foolishness.”*

**ALCOHOL:** Drinking to change your mood. Considering alcohol use a “friend” with whom you can “let down” and relax. Drinking to feel “in” with others.

**DENIAL:** Pretending nothing is wrong. Lying. Ignoring any problem or the stressful problem.

**DRUGS:** Abusing coffee, aspirin, street drugs or prescription medications. Smoking pot. Taking tranquilizers.

**EATING:** Eating beyond the point of satisfaction. Using food to address issues other than hunger, *e.g.* boredom, anxiety, comfort, etc. Binge eating. Always going on a diet.

**FAULT-FINDING:** Having a judgmental attitude. Complaining. Criticizing self, others and the situation. Blaming. Prejudice and hatred.

**ILLNESS:** Developing headaches, nervous stomach, back problems, major illness. Seeking caring through having something physically wrong with you. Becoming accident prone.

**INDULGING:** Staying up late. Sleeping in. Buying things on impulse. Buying things you don’t really need. Wasting time.

**PASSIVITY:** Hoping things will get better. Wishing without taking action. Procrastinating. Waiting around for a “lucky break.”

**REVENGE:** Getting even. Being sarcastic. Talking mean or insulting. Bullying. Violent acting out.

**STUBBORNNESS:** Being rigid and demanding your own way. Refusing to be “wrong” or refusing to acknowledge when you make mistakes.

**TANTRUMS:** Yelling, moping, pouting, swearing. Driving recklessly. Raging when frustrated.

**TOBACCO:** Smoking to relieve tension or boredom. Smoking to be “in” with others. Smoking to feel “grown-up.”

**WITHDRAWAL:** Avoiding the situation(s). Skipping school or work. Keeping your feelings and thoughts to yourself. Engaging in the “silent treatment.” Escaping to your own room (isolation).

**WORRYING:** Fretting over things that aren’t happening. Anticipating the worst. Thinking about all the negative events that could happen, but probably won’t.

**Instructions for your clients.** Can you identify your favorite negative coping mechanism(s)? Any of the above may work temporarily for you. But used over a long time, they can destroy your goals, your relationships, your hopes and dreams, your lifestyle...even your life.

### **POSITIVE COPING MECHANISMS**

Naturally, there are hundreds of coping methods that are positive in nature and do not exact the heavy toll as do negative copers. Here are a few positive coping mechanisms, listed under the categories of mental, physical, spiritual, interpersonal, family, and diversions. If you want to manage your stress better, pick one or two from each category and practice them until they become “automatic.”

### ***CATEGORY 1 - MENTAL “COPERS”***

**IMAGINATION:** Looking for humor in your life. Anticipating the future. Daydreaming. Using fantasy or visualization of fun, enjoyment and pleasure. In your mind, creating your desired future.

**LIFE PLANNING:** Setting clear goals for yourself. Planning for the future and designing strategies for achieving those goals and plans.

**ORGANIZING:** Taking charge of a project. Taking charge (responsibility) for your life. Making order and not letting things “pile up.”

**PROBLEM-SOLVING:** Solving problems by yourself. Seeking outside help when you need it. Resolving things or situations which you habitually tolerate (“zapping your tolerations”). Tackling problems “head on.”

**RE-DEFINING:** Explore other possible points of view. Look for the positive in every situation. Define the present moment as “perfect,” or the “way it should be.” Define a problem as a challenge or opportunity for a new experience or the development of a new skill.

**MANAGE YOUR TIME:** Practice prioritizing. “Work smarter, not harder.” Delegate your weaknesses to others. Discover and exercise your strengths. Consistently seek more efficient and effective ways to accomplish what you want. Plan for time to relax, enjoy yourself, and engage in fun activities.

### ***CATEGORY 2 - PHYSICAL COPERS***

**BIOFEEDBACK:** Learn to listen to the feelings and sensations your body sends you. Come to really know your physical limitations and, if you must exceed them, do it very slowly and cautiously.

**EXERCISE:** Pursue physical fitness. Jog, swim, dance, walk. Take weight-training and regular cardiovascular exercise at a local health club. Fit regular exercise into every day.

**NOURISHMENT:** Eat only when hungry. Stop eating when satisfied. Eat nourishing food for your health. Avoid junk food and all unnecessary drugs (including alcohol, caffeine, nicotine and THC). Take a vitamin/mineral/dietary fiber supplement.

**RELAXATION:** Practice tensing and relaxing each muscle group in your body (isometric exercises). Take a warm bath. Learn the relaxation response and practice it regularly. Listen to soothing music. Design a part of your environment to reflect peacefulness, security and tranquility. Go into that special place when you want to relax.

**SELF-CARE:** Energize your work and play. Treat yourself as you would treat a loved child or pet. Strive for self-improvement for the joy of it, and not necessarily to meet some standard or criteria set by others. Give to yourself some of your favorite things and experiences.

**STRETCHING:** Take short stretch breaks throughout your day. Learn stretching exercises.

**BREATHE:** Practice breathing exercises, deeply, abdominally and fully. Learn breath control exercises (e.g. panting, holding, timing, etc.).

### ***CATEGORY 3 - SPIRITUAL COPERS***

**COMMITMENT:** Involve yourself in a worthy cause. Volunteer some of your time. Invest yourself in a meaningful way. Serve or do someone else a favor. Persist in gaining self-knowledge, growth, goal-attainment and self-improvement.

**FAITH:** Find meaning and purpose for your life. Create a personal mission statement. Trust the process of life. Generate and nourish hope for your future. Believe in yourself.

**PRAY:** Count your blessings. Give thanks. Develop an “attitude of gratitude.” Pray for others. Share or confess those things about which you feel guilty. Ask for forgiveness. Practice meditation. Learn mindfulness.

**SURRENDER:** Let go of your problems. Learn to accept the current situation “as is.” What exists at the moment...IS! Keep in mind that *everything changes*. Allow yourself to “float on the river of life.”

**VALUING:** Give attention to what you find most valuable. Set priorities. Be consistent. Focus on the present moment. Spend your time and energy in ways that meet your values and standards. Use and control your own impulses. Develop your own, accurate belief system.

**WORSHIP:** Share your values, beliefs and feelings with others. Put your faith into action. Celebrate life within a “community of caring.” Honor your “higher power.” Recognize the forces operating in the world over which you have no control.

### ***CATEGORY 4 - INTERPERSONAL COPERS***

**AFFIRMATION:** Believe in yourself and trust others as well. Give yourself lots of encouragement and positive, self-affirming statements. Give lots of “positive strokes” to others as well. Attend to and notice the positive characteristics and qualities you have and the actions you take. Reward yourself.

**ASSERTIVENESS:** Display and state your needs and wants. Learn to ask directly for what you want. Say “no” with kindness. Be firm in communicating your feelings, thoughts and opinions.

**CONTACT:** Make new friends. Be a friend to others. Touch each other mentally, emotionally, physically, affectionately and gently. Really listen to others and respond from your understanding of their expressed point of view.

**SELF-EXPRESSION:** Show your feelings. Move your body freely. Exercise and demonstrate your skills and talents. Share your deepest thoughts, feelings and wishes. **Be yourself.**

**CREATE BOUNDARIES:** Set your own standards and boundaries and let other people know what they are. Accept others' boundaries. Drop some commitments when you have too many. Under-promise and over-deliver.

**NETWORKING:** Share desires, projects and interests with others. Ask for support from family, friends and acquaintances. Invite others to become involved with you and your activities.

### ***CATEGORY 5 - FAMILY COPERS***

**BALANCING:** Balance the time you spend alone/with your family/at work or school, with your interactions with family and friends. Accept your friends and family members for who they are now, and realize that nobody is perfect all the time. We all have our faults and weaknesses.

**CONFLICT-RESOLUTION:** Learn conflict-resolving skills which lead to "win-win" solutions. Intend your conflicts to result in everyone getting what they want. Forgive easily and readily.

**BUILD ESTEEM:** Attend to the positive qualities of yourself and those of your family members. Acknowledge out loud, the things you like or appreciate in your family members. Focus on personal and family strengths.

**FLEXIBILITY:** Be willing to take on new family roles and responsibilities. Become well-versed in many family activities and roles. Remain open to change. Be spontaneous.

**LINKING:** Develop friendships with other families. Make use of the personal and organizational resources available in your community.

**TOGETHERNESS:** Take time to be together, play together, and share time with each other. Build family traditions. Always express heartfelt affection for one another. Limit TV-watching and video-game playing.

### ***CATEGORY 6 - DIVERSIONS AS COPERS***

**GETAWAYS:** Spend time alone. Daydream. See a movie. Listen to music. Designate a "special place" in which to be alone. Go on a vacation.

**HOBBIES:** Write, paint, remodel, create something, garden, plan and develop "projects," engage in sports, learn to play a musical instrument, sing. Engage in activities unrelated to your usual ones.

**LEARNING:** Take a special class. Read. Join a club. Surf the Internet. Make learning new things a priority. Never stop acquiring new knowledge.

**MUSIC:** Play your own instrument. Sing. Dance. Join an orchestra or choral group. Listen to music. Take music lessons.

**PLAY:** Learn new, non-competitive games. Play them with friends or family members. Go out with friends. Develop a playful attitude. Don't take things so seriously. Find humor in situations. Laugh regularly. Go for walks, runs, and dances.

**WORK:** Engage in meaningful work. Go after accomplishments. Tackle a project unrelated to your usual activity. Keep your mind and body occupied with enjoyable activities. Volunteer. Join a service club. Assist a friend or neighbor in one of their projects.

## **COPING WITH STRESS CIVILLY: NATURE'S EXAMPLES; HUMANS FACE IT DIRECTLY!**

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To overcome stress of an attack, you can fire your internal organs as does the sea cucumber or sacrifice your own life to protect the colony as does Malaysian Soldier Ants using violent muscle contractions that releases poison from fluid-filled glands. Humans have been known to expel body fluids to ward off an attack and to commit suicide in defense of their positions, but those are not generally acceptable stress reduction mechanisms for most situations.

You could change color as will cuttlefish or make seasonal plumage changes as will ptarmigan to blend into their environments. Dressing in camouflage for sneaking up on wildlife during outdoor activities, wearing smart business attire for the board room, and avoiding the "tourist look" in foreign countries generally improves your chances of fitting in appropriately and lessening unnecessary stress.

Humans and wildlife can avoid stress temporarily using three primary behaviors: hiding, fleeing, and fighting which logically are best used in that order. When used in the reverse order-- fighting, fleeing, hiding--conflict is inevitable and outcomes are risky. One cannot fight, run, and hide forever, so learning how to face reality and to cope civilly is the key.

Coping mechanisms can be healthy if used to address real problems, opportunities or dilemmas or they can become the problem and destructive if used as addictive substitutes for realistic behaviors. For example, eating is necessary to survive, and an elk might have its head down and feign eating to not appear frightened by predators, even though the elk are alert and ready to run if necessary. However, if eating becomes a compulsion when stressed, then weight gain and addiction to food or beverage can lead to new stressors. We can see this issue in personal lives and amongst family pets.

Procrastination is a commonly used and abused coping mechanism delaying some projects while allowing work on others; however, if every project is delayed and work is not accomplished on time because of procrastination, then productivity suffers, and stress increases.

Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund, included the Defense Mechanisms below and how humans use them to falsify reality. Apply these to situations that you encounter in life, work, and in the news. If you watched the Presidential Impeachment trials, then perhaps you can recognize many of these in those proceedings.

[http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/coping/defense\\_mechanisms.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/coping/defense_mechanisms.htm)).

- **Denial:** claiming/believing that what is true is actually false.
- **Displacement:** redirecting emotions to a substitute target.
- **Intellectualization:** taking an objective viewpoint.



- **Projection:** attributing uncomfortable feelings to others.
- **Rationalization:** creating false but credible justifications.
- **Reaction Formation:** overacting in the opposite way to the fear.
- **Regression:** going back to acting as a child.
- **Repression:** pushing uncomfortable thoughts into the subconscious.
- **Sublimation:** redirecting 'wrong' urges into socially acceptable actions.

Stress needs to be addressed rationally. It cannot be avoided forever. Face it directly with civil actions.

### **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROVIDES A POSITIVE WAY TO COPE WITH STRESS**

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**Factual Synopsis:** While suffering from extreme stress related to his school, work, and relationship, Micah drank to the point of severe intoxication in his dorm room. While intoxicated, he broke his window attempting to illegally access a balcony, was extremely aggressive towards a neighbor and volatile with Residential Advisors (RAs), and ultimately tried to jump out the window. Police were called and took him to the station for a mental health assessment.

**Narrative:** Micah told the co-facilitator and me that he takes pride in his ability to do it all. Before this incident, Micah was working 35 hours per week at two jobs on top of being a full-time student studying architecture. During the pre-conference meeting, Micah described that on a normal day, he would go to classes, get done at about 3pm, go to work, work until 11pm, eat dinner, and then start his homework, leaving him only a couple hours to sleep before he got up to do it all again. When it felt like he was losing control of something, like when his grades started to slip, he would respond by piling more on. He was good at his jobs. His manager at the supermarket promoted him and gave him more hours, so when school wasn't going well, he threw himself into more work. He was operating like this for a while, on very little sleep, ignoring the issues with his school work and piling more on to not deal with it when he found out his long distance girlfriend cheated on him. Micah described it as a sort of breaking point. Once his personal life was in shambles too, he just couldn't take it.

To deal with the stress, Micah started drinking. He drank a few bottles of wine alone in his room. He attempted to reach out to a friend to talk, but she was busy with school work, so he continued to drink. Eventually, he tried to get out on the balcony by crawling through his window and in the process, accidentally put his head through the glass. At that point, he went down to tell the RA on duty (Beth) about the broken glass. Beth could immediately see that Micah was not doing well. He was angry with his next door neighbor and was screaming at him. What followed was over an hour of emotional volatility with Micah screaming, crying, and disclosing information about his girlfriend who had cheated. Paul and Beth were unable to get Micah to settle down or go to sleep so fearing for his safety and the safety of others eventually called the Hall Manager and the police.

The police initially decided that Micah wasn't a threat and started to leave. One of the RAs (John) was then alone in the room alone with Micah when all the sudden he stood up, looked out the window and said, "John, I'm going to jump out this window and there is nothing you can do to stop me." John called out for the police who came into the room and after a physical struggle, were eventually able to handcuff Micah and take him to the station for a mental health assessment.

Micah was given a room outside of the hall to stay in and temporarily banned from the hall while arrangements were made for the restorative justice meeting. He was also instructed to begin meeting regularly with the Student Support Coordinator (Jenny). Jenny helped Micah to get extensions for his assignments from his professors so that he was able to take some time to recover from the breakdown.

Throughout the pre-conference and conference, it was clear that Micah has some more serious mental health issues that contributed to his inability to adequately track the conversation and his manic behavior. Mental health concerns can add a difficult component to restorative justice because the process is not therapy and cannot provide the full services that the offender needs. What is important is to remember that behavior communicates needs. In this case, Micah's breakdown signals a need for greater emotional and well-being support through regular meetings with a counselor. Therefore, when we talked about what needed to happen next to repair the harms and make things right, the first thing that was suggested was for Micah to get the counselling support required in order to not have a breakdown like this again. He ended up agreeing to a weekly meeting with a counselor in addition to the weekly meeting with the Jenny, the Student Support Coordinator, and expressed that both of these meetings would be very helpful.

Restorative justice cannot operate without access to other resources to help fulfill the needs that so often fuel crime. The gift of restorative justice is that the process is able to surface those needs so that they can be addressed and so that the response to the crime or rule violation does not cause further harm. In Micah's case, if this incident had happened last year before the University began using Restorative Justice, Micah would have been immediately evicted from the Residential Hall with no further contact or support. He would have been cut off from his community of friends, would not have the encouragement or structure to pursue counselling, and would need to find a new place to live. With the overwhelm Micah was already facing, my guess is that these added stressors would have resulted in a downward spiral and further breakdowns.

We see this so often in the mainstream justice system. An offender commits a crime to fulfill a need (whether that is for food, or safety, or mental health support, or clothing for an interview, or respect) and often the crime is a last resort and signals that parts of the person's life are in serious disarray. Instead of relieving the stressors that led to the crime by working to identify the needs behind the behavior, the criminal justice system often just adds to the stress with fines, curfews, loss of privileges or incarceration. Rather than finding a way to redress the harm, further harm is caused.

Instead, in Micah's case, he was provided with a different place to live near his friends, but away from the room with the window that could access the balcony, he decided to leave both jobs and focus on his school work, he began attending weekly counselling and support meetings to get the help he needs, and he has committed to giving back positively to the residential hall.

### **PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION**

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities> If you would you like to respond to one of the pieces in this newsletter, check out our blog [www.rotarypeacebuilder.com](http://www.rotarypeacebuilder.com) and join the conversation! If you would like to contribute to a future newsletter, visit [www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/](http://www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/). See the Rotary District 5440 website for past issues: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>. Future issues may explore the following: March—Nuclear Weapons, Use, Probabilities and History.