

## **Stress, Friend or Foe?**

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When my children were young I played a silly game with them. Before I could see them, I would hear them coming from around a corner or up the stairs and I would call out, "Who goes there, friend or foe?" They would always laugh and answer, "Friend!" Yes, I was always glad to see their familiar faces even though at times the stress of parenting felt like the answer might be "foe!"

What is stress, anyway? We all have it. Sometimes it can be helpful- when we have a deadline and need to get something done-it can help to push us until our work is done. When it's too much it can also wreak havoc in our bodies, with our emotions and in our relationships. At times we can feel overtaken by stress as if whatever the stress is, it is in charge of us.

How can we in times like these make stress our friend? The answer to this question lies in our ability to be present and know the extent to which we have been giving stress more power to hurt us. How often do we add to our stress by not eating properly, staying up too late, overworking and not allowing time to relax and have fun? We can return stress to a friendly influence in our lives by taking steps to take back our power and focus on what we do have control over.

First, be aware of what stresses you. Whether it's parenting issues, work pressures or financial worries know specifically what is stressing you out. Knowing this will help you to recognize when you need to slow down, get help or pay particular attention to how you are treating yourself.

Next, find out how you are adding to the stress. How are you taking care of yourself? What routines are a part of your life that support you in doing your job and staying healthy? Is fun a regular part of your life? Look at your support network to see if you are able to tap in to that support when stress is high.

Then make a plan for adding daily practices that strengthen and calm you and get the support to follow through on your plan. Stress has always been a part of life even though stress seems to be at an all time high, it doesn't have to rule. Next time you get a sense stress is approaching ask yourself, "Friend or foe?"