Lesson 10.1 Understanding and Handling Stress

**Goal:** To gain a greater understanding of stress and how it impacts on lives.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers

## Procedures:

1. This lesson will focus on recognizing and handling stress.

2. Write the word **STRESS** on your clipboard or flip chart in large, bold letters. Mention that for the next 30 minutes the focus will be on understanding stress, recognizing how it feels, identifying sources of stress in our lives and learning ways to reduce it.

3. Write **FEELS LIKE** directly under the word Stress. Using a combination of psycho drama and self-report, ask each parent to stand up, make a body posture of how they look when they feel stress, and then to write one feeling word on the paper best describing how they feel inside when they feel stress. Take turns. Ask the parents not to discuss anything just yet, just to demonstrate stress and write one feeling word on the paper labeled “stress feels.”

4. After each parent has had a chance, process his or her responses. Let them share how they feel, not to discuss the cause of the stress, but rather how it feels.

5. Next, place the sheet of paper on the table or floor. Next, write the word **STRESSORS** on the paper. Explain that stressors are the things in life that cause or contribute to stressful times.

6. Again, ask each parent to offer one or two stressors they have in their life and write the stressors on the paper. Ask each parent to share what he or she identified as stressors in their lives.

7. Referring to the information located on **Pages 78-80** in the **Parent Handbook** titled, **“Understanding and Handling Stress,”** explain that stress is the emotional response to the demands of life. In reality, there is no way to live a life without stress, but only to reduce its negative influences in life.

8. Explain that there are two types of stress: good stress and bad stress. Good stress is the kind that energizes us to fulfill our dreams, accomplish our goals or complete our daily tasks. Get examples of good stress. Example: Getting up early to get things ready to go on a picnic; trading in an old car for a new one; getting ready for a date.

9. Bad stress, on the other hand, drains our energy and weighs us down. Bad stress is called distress. Get examples from the parents of distress. Example: No money to pay bills; living in a high crime neighborhood; living in domestic violence.

10. Distress is generally the result of our basic needs not getting met. Review the list of stressors identified by the parent(s). Determine what areas of unmet needs the stressors fall into. See examples on the next page:

d. Try to stay in the present. It is helpful to stay in the relative present rather than bring up things that happened 12 years ago.

e. Stick to the point. Do not get carried away with other problems. One problem per session, stay in the present, and stick to the point.

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| **NEED** | **STRESSOR** |
| Physical | Not enough sleep |
| Emotional | Loneliness |
| Intellectual | Job dissatisfaction |
| Social | No friends |
| Spiritual | No purpose/direction in life |
| Creativity | Bored |

11. Rank the need areas by the number of stressors listed by the parents; e.g. the need area listed #1 is the one with the most parents listing it as a stress area.

12. Determine what major area or areas of unmet needs contribute to the distress in people’s lives. Remind the parents that having a solid plan to get one’s needs met is an obvious way of reducing stress in their life.

## Notes and Suggestions:

Stress is a major contributing factor to the maltreatment of children in our society. Whether stress is displayed by the parent who shakes a baby, yells and screams in utter frustration, or “is at wit’s end” and lashes out physically at children, the reduction of and management of stress is viewed as a significant factor in creating a nurturing family.

In almost all cases of supervised visitation the child(ren) will be expiring high levels of stress with all of the changes in their lives that led to supervised visitation. Providers must be diligent to prepare participants on what types of conversations are permitted at the program that still allow the parent to help their child(ren) deal with stress.

**Visit Time:** As parents transition to the supervised visit, ask them to identify areas of stress that their children may be experiencing.

**Post Visit:** If possible spend 10-15 minutes processing the visit after the children leave. Ask the parents(s) how they might be able to help their children deal with the stress in their lives.

**Home Assignment:** Ask the parents to identify two areas of stress during the time between visits and list the ways they will attempt to reduce the impact of this stress.