

Motivation and Stress Management

Essential Skills for Parents, Teachers and Students

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Abstract

Nowadays it is frequently heard that people of different age including students commit suicide due to several reasons. It is generally found that individuals commit suicide either due to non-achievement of the desired goals or due to the firm faith in failure. The author has the opinion that it is solely because of the mismanagement of motivation and stress. In this article an attempt is made to elaborate the role of motivation and stress in an individual's life and the management of the same.

Introduction

Presently, problems related to motivation and stress has become a common phenomenon in our society. Motivation is the key to success. Without motivation, we cannot do anything, cannot achieve anything in our life. But, it is required to be controlled and regulated. The level of motivation has to be maintained as per the capability of the individual. If it is not managed well, it causes stress. Motivation and stress are interrelated. Right level of motivation generates positive tension, which is necessary to achieve a particular goal. If the level of motivation is not as per the capability of the individual, it causes negative tension, which is commonly called *stress* due to

which people become psychologically ill, head to take wrong steps and even commit suicide.

What is Motivation?

Motivation is an inferred internal process that activates guides and maintains an individual's behaviour. Motivation is the process of arousing, sustaining and regulating an activity. Motivation is the stimulation of actions towards a particular objective where previously there was a little or no attraction to that goal. Motivation is more formally a psychological or internal process initiated by some needs which lead to an activity which will satisfy that particular need. It also directs an individual's behaviour.

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It may be intrinsic or extrinsic, when motivation is due to internal factors; it is called the *internal* or *intrinsic* motivation. If the motivation is due to any external factor, it is called the *external* or *extrinsic* motivation. The extrinsic motivation if used properly, finally results into the development of internal or intrinsic motivation. At the initial stage, children do tasks to get chocolates, toys, a cycle or any other item that their parents have promised to give, after completion of a certain assignment. This process goes on and finally, the children develop intrinsic motivation to study and get position in the class. We drink water to quench our thirst because it is internal motivation. The more we are thirsty, the more immediate will be the drive to drink water and the amount of intake also will be much. In other words, we can say that we are highly motivated to drink water. All good or bad deeds performed by people are because of motivation. It is necessary to channelise, direct and regulate the motivation of the children for a better cause. Figure 1 shows the mechanism of motivation in setting and achieving the goals in a human life.

What is Stress?

Stress is a multifaceted process, that occurs in relation to events or situations in our environment termed as *stressors*, i.e., the activators of stress. It is our response to events that disrupt or threaten to disrupt our physical or psychological functioning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). *Stressor* may be a positive or a negative event but normally we think it as a negative one. Wide range of stimuli potentially produces stress.

Wide ranges of stimuli/stressors have some common characteristics. They are generally as follows:

- (i) Intense in nature
- (ii) Produce overload
- (iii) Individuals no longer adopt to them
(If adaptable, no stress is developed)
- (iv) Evoke incompatible tendencies, such as to approach or avoid some object, person or activity.

Evidences suggest that when people can predict, control, or terminate an aversive event or situation; they perceive it to be less stressful than when they feel less in its control (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Rodin and Salovey, 1989).

Unfortunately, stress is a common part of life in the last two decades – something which few of us can avoid altogether. For the same event different people have different levels of stress and/or enjoyment. The following paragraphs elaborate different aspects of stress and in Figure 1 it has been depicted that how an individual come into the grip of stress and how it can be avoided.

Physiological Responses to Stress

The sympathetic nervous system of our body prepares it for immediate actions. Usually these responses are brief, and the body soon returns to normal level. When we experience any stressor at random our blood pressure soars, pulse races, and we may even begin to sweat. In some cases when the stress is too high, the individual may commit suicide or even heart failure or any cardiovascular disease is possible to occur. These are parts of general pattern or reactions referred to as the *fight-or-flight*

syndrome, a process controlled through the SNS (Sympathetic Nervous System). Generally these responses are brief and a person soon returns to the normal level.

When we are exposed to chronic sources of stress then the sequence of responses are given by our body to adapt to the stressor. Selye, 1976 termed this sequence as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), which consists of three stages:

- (i) **Alarm Stage:** The body prepares itself for immediate action; arousal of the SNS releases hormones that help to prepare our body to meet threats or dangers (Selye, 1976). If stress is prolonged then second stage begins.
- (ii) **Resistance Stage:** Arousal is lower than the alarm stage, but our bodies continue to draw on resources at an above-normal rate in order to cope effectively with the stressor. If exposure to the same stressor or additional stressors continued for longer duration, this drains the body of its resources and leads to the third stage.
- (iii) **Exhaustion Stage:** During this stage our capacity to resist is depleted, and our susceptibility to illness increases. In severe case of prolonged physical stress, the result may be suicide or death.

Cognitive Appraisal of our Stress

It is observed that when confronted with the same potentially stress-inducing situation, some persons experience stress, whereas others do not. Why? One reason involves *individuals' cognitive*

appraisals. In simple terms, stress occurs only when the particular person perceives the situation as threatening to his important goals (often described as *primary appraisal*) and that he will be unable to cope with these dangers or demands (often described as *secondary appraisal*) (Croyle, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The amount of stress we experience depends on our cognitive appraisal of the event or situation, the extent to which we perceive it as threatening and our inability to cope with it (Hingson et. al., 1990).

Some Major Causes of Stress

Stressful Life Events: Death in the family, injury to self or children or any other in the family, war, failure in school or at work, or unexpected problems, etc.

The Hassles of Daily Life: Daily life is filled with countless minor sources of stress that seem to make up for their relatively low intensity by their much higher frequency. It includes wide range of everyday events, such as having too many things to do at once, shopping, unwanted guests, domestic problems, and concerns over money.

Environmental Sources of Stress: Many environmental sources like flood, earthquake, famine, heavy rains, epidemic or endemic and natural disasters also cause stress in an individual. Man made disasters, such as Chernobyl accident through nuclear reactor, Bhopal gas tragedy, bomb dropping at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and many other problems like the same nature can cause stress in an individual.

Work-related Stress: Jobs and careers are central source of stress. Some of the factors producing stress in work setting are obvious; such as sexual harassment, discrimination, extreme overload of work and unsatisfactory working conditions. Interestingly, being asked to do too little can also cause stress. Such under load produces intense feelings of boredom and these in turn can be very stressful.

Career Related Stress: Every individual or student in the age group of 14-18 and onwards usually have a career option in their mind. If it seems to be unachievable due to several reasons, it causes stress. The students of Class X and XII boards usually have an aim to achieve certain levels or marks say, 90 per cent or 95 per cent, with the thought in mind that they are going to pursue engineering or medical or some other careers or take admission in a particular college or stream. If these aspirations seem to be broken, they develop stress and many of them commit suicide.

Stress and Health

The relation between stress and personal health is strong indeed (Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1992). According to Frese (1985) some authorities estimate that stress plays some role in 50 to 70 per cent of all physical illnesses. Among these some are most serious and life threatening like heart disease, high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, ulcers and even diabetes. Stress can influence our physical and psychological well being, our performance on different tasks and even the ultimate course of our careers. Prolonged exposure to stress may disrupt our biological and immune system.

Continuous encounter with stressors over time causes burnout in the individual.

Figure 1 depicts the process through which an individual passes from the state of zero motivation to the state of highest level of motivation. It also depicts how an individual gets stressed and how stressful situation may be avoided. Needs are the starting point from where the action of individual begins to fulfill that need. If there is no need, there is no action. If there is an intense need there will be an intense action. If the need felt is not much intense or of a volatile nature, then the action taken by an individual to fulfill that need will also be not intense or will be volatile in nature. It is essential at this juncture that the teachers and the parents help students to understand and feel their needs, but the needs should be such which may be fulfilled with certain degree of physical, mental and economic investment which is possible to be invested by the individual and by the parents.

These help students to set their goals which are achievable by them commonly called *realistic goals*. If an individual achieve this goal, he is satisfied and the next need appears before him and he strives to achieve this goal. As the needs have no ends, so this cyclic process goes on. On the other hand, if an individual could not achieve the desired goal, he becomes dissatisfied. Two opposite conditions are observed in the individual either he is still confidence or losses his confidence. In the first condition, the individual analyses his courses of actions, develop new plan of action and enforce it. This time either he succeeds or again fails and remains dissatisfied.

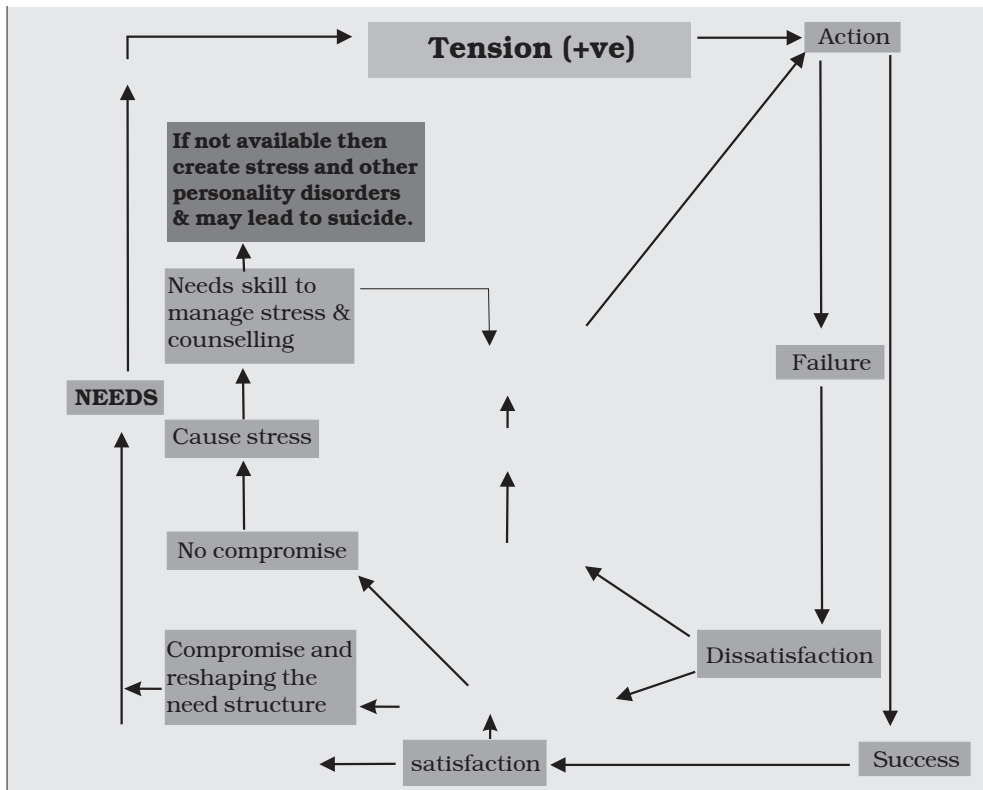


Fig. 1 : Motivation and stress Management

If he is still confident, then follows the previous path and if he is losing his confidence then again two diverse situations are observed. Either the individual compromises and reshapes his need structure or he does not compromise. If he compromises, it is well and good and with the help of parents, teachers, friends and well wishers analyses his potential and sets the goal he can achieve. It is a wise decision. On the contrary, if he is in no mood of compromise, then the situation begins worsening. He is neither

achieving nor compromising with his set goal.

This develops a kind of stress in the individual which deepens day by day. At this juncture the individual needs proper counselling and skill to manage stress. If it is available to the individual then either he reshapes his needs' structure or develop new plan of action and try to achieve the set goal. On the other hand, if proper counselling is not available to the individual then it creates personality disorder or it may lead the individual to suicide which is very common nowadays.

Educational Implications

As explained above with the help of flow chart (Figure-1), motivation and stress are very important to lead a successful life but needs to be controlled and well regulated. It is level which makes them useful or harmful. Following steps may be taken by parents, teachers and students to avoid stress and if stress arises then to de-stress.

- Help students/children to set realistic goals by helping them identifying their real potentialities or capabilities.
- Parents or teachers should not set the goals of their students/children. In other way parents or teachers should not thrust their goals on them.
- Parents should not set high level of expectations from their children which they are not capable. Expectations should be well calculated and should be well regulated to pose a satisfactory level of challenge to the children.

How to identify whether you are having stress or not?

Stress is difficult to measure but a stressful individual or student can be identified by the observation of his behaviour patterns. A person can identify himself or herself whether he or she is under stress? The general identifying characteristic of stress is the deviation of an individual from daily life routine. Some people thrive on a busy lifestyle and are able to cope well with life crises. Other people feel tensed or stressed by the slightest deviation from

their set daily routine. Levels of stress may increase or decrease depending upon varying changes in the environment of the individual. Following are the indications of a stress among the students:

- Not being able to sleep properly due to worries going through your mind.
- Showing impatient or irritable at minor day-to-day problems.
- Not being able to concentrate at study due to many things going through your mind.
- Being unable to make decisions like what to study, when to study, how to study, how to face test?
- Drinking or smoking more.
- Not enjoying food so much. Reduced daily diet.
- Loss of appetite.
- Being unable to relax and always feeling that something needs to be done.
- Feeling tense. Sometimes this includes a 'knot' in the stomach or feeling sweaty with a dry mouth or a thumping heart.
- Low out put of study as compared to the previous level of achievement.
- You want to keep calm, quite and do not want to interact more with others even with your family members.

How stress can be avoided?

Following is a list of suggestions that may be useful to avoid and combat stress:

Try to Create Stress list

You should try creating a 'stress list'. Try keeping a note book over a few weeks or so, and list the times, places, situations

and people that make you worried, add to your anxiety and aggravate your stress levels. In this process a pattern may emerge. Once you have identified any typical or regular causes of stress, following two things may be done help yourself.

- If you discuss this with a close friend or family member, it may help them and you to be aware of the reasons why you are feeling stressed. Simply talking it through may help.
- Secondly, these situations can be used as 'cues' to relax. You can use simple relaxation techniques (see below) when a stressful situation occurs or is anticipated.

Try simple relaxation techniques

- **Deep breathing.** This means taking a long, slow breath in and very slowly breathes out. If you do this a few times on regular basis, and concentrate fully on breathing, you may find it quite relaxing.
- **Muscular tensing and stretching.** Try twisting your neck around each way as far as it is comfortable and then relax. Try fully tensing your shoulder and back muscles for several seconds and then relax completely.

Try practicing these simple techniques when you are relaxed and then use them routinely when you come across any stressful situation.

Positive Relaxation

Set specific times aside to positively relax. Don't just let relaxation happen or not

happen, at the mercy of study, work, family, teacher, etc. Plan it and look forward to do it. This may vary from people to people. Some prefer to take long bath, some a quiet stroll, some sitting and just listening to a piece of music, etc. You can do anything which make you relaxed, happy and energised you for further study. These times are not wasteful and you should not feel guilty about not 'getting on with things'. They can be times of reflection and putting life back in perspective. You may set time aside for a relaxation programmed such as meditation or muscular exercises. You can also buy relaxation tapes to help you learn to relax.

Time out

- Try to allow several times a day to 'stop' and take some time out. For example, getting up 15-20 minutes earlier than you need to be a good start. You can use this time to think about and plan the coming day and to prepare for the day's events unrushed. You should take regular break in study. After one hour of continuous study one should relax at least for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Take a regular and proper lunch break, preferably away from study room. Don't study over lunch; instead enjoy food and people around you.
- Once or twice a week, try to plan some time just to be alone and 'unobtainable'. For example, a gentle stroll or a sit in the park often helps to break out of life's hustle and bustle.

Exercise

It has been experienced by people that regular exercise reduces their level of stress. (It also keeps you fit and healthy and helps to prevent cardiovascular diseases.) Any exercise is good but try to plan at least 30 minutes of exercise on at least 5 days a week. A brisk morning walk on most days is a good start if you are not used to exercise. It also improves sleeplessness.

Drugs Stimulators, Smoking and Alcohol

Never try these things. They may reduce your stress for a while, but they are silent killers. They are more dangerous than the stress itself.

Hobbies

Many people find that a hobby which has no deadlines, no pressures, and which can be picked up or left easily takes the mind off stresses. For example: sports, knitting, music, model-making, puzzles, and reading for pleasure. Try to develop good hobbies.

Treatment

If it seems that the level of stress or anxiety has become severe or it is difficult to cope with, see a doctor. Further treatments such as anxiety management counselling, other therapies or medication may be appropriate.

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