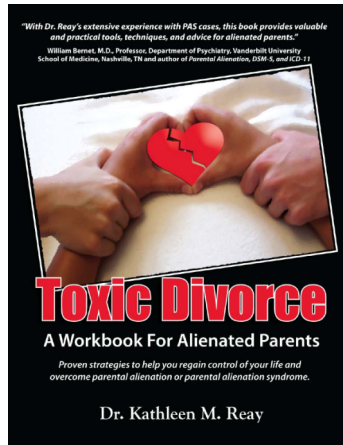


Toxic Divorce: A Workbook for Alienated Parents

Excerpt



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

How to Rise Above the Stress

Stress is something that each and every one of us faces on a daily basis, some more than others. We all need a certain amount of stress in our lives to remain alive. Quite simply, the stress response is a natural physical reaction to the perception that we are experiencing some type of threat. Consequently, stress is inevitable when you're being alienated by your former spouse and family. Having the ability to rise above this stress first requires a greater understanding of the nature of stress.

What is so fascinating from both physiological and psychological viewpoints is that most individuals feel less able to cope when the stress response is triggered. So why is that? From an evolutionary perspective, the answer is that the stress response developed millions of years ago when the greatest threats to well-being involved violent life-or-death situations. Back then, as a hunter or a gatherer, you might have been attacked and killed by a large predator in the bush; or, you might have been attacked by another tribe in the jungle when you least expected it. Your greatest odds for survival likely involved one of two choices: fight as hard as you possibly could, or run away as fast as you possibly could. There's a risk that you would not have survived if you chose to do nothing. That is why the stress response is also called the fight, flight (run), or freeze (do nothing) response. You may have heard of the term "survival of the fittest" meaning that those who fought the hardest or ran the fastest were more likely to live and to pass along their characteristics to their offspring (Darwin). Therefore, the trigger for the stress response to be activated is a belief or perception that we are under some type of threat or endangerment whether real or imagined.

Numerous physiological changes take place when you perceive a threat and your stress response is activated. They are:

- Increased heart rate to help pump blood more efficiently to your working muscles.
- Increased pulse rate and heart pounding.
- Increased respiration to get additional oxygen from the environment.
- Increased blood sugar levels due to the release of glucose from your liver.

- Increased blood supply to your large muscles through the widening of blood vessels in those areas.
- Decreased blood supply to your digestive system and skin through the narrowing of blood vessels in those areas.
- Increased flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol, are released into the bloodstream.
- Immune and sexual functions are suppressed.

And much more!

Additionally, numerous emotional and behavioral changes occur during the stress response.

They are:

- The stress response makes you feel alert.
- The stress response helps you stay focused.
- The stress response helps you stay energetic.
- The stress response gives you extra strength to defend yourself.
- The stress response helps you rise to meet various challenges.
- The stress response helps keep you on your toes.
- The stress response helps sharpen your concentration.
- The stress response can literally help save your life.
- The stress response can voluntarily suppress your emotions.
- The stress response can trigger fear and negativity.

And much more!

Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health conditions including, but not limited to, high blood pressure, heart attacks, heart disease, strokes, infertility, digestive problems, sleep difficulties, obesity, autoimmune diseases, certain types of cancers, skin conditions, increase of the aging process, anxiety disorders, depression, and various types of pain throughout the body.

The types of pressures that you experience in the here and now are real. Due to the widespread damage stress can cause, it's important to recognize what your own limits are. Just how much stress is considered too much actually differs from one person to another. Some individuals can roll with the punches while others will fall apart at the slightest annoyance. Still others seem to thrive on the challenge and excitement of a high-stress environment. Your ability to tolerate stress as an alienated parent will depend on many factors.