

Stress Management

Strategies For Simplifying Life

With the arrival of the weekend, many of us breathe a sigh of relief looking forward to a change of pace from our hectic work week. Our weekend or days off from work, are in part intended to be times when we unwind and re-energize and yet many of us can't seem to fit in activities that provide such relaxation. Instead, we commonly find ourselves caught up in a complicated weekend schedule of "getting things done"... to the point where we breathe a sigh of relief when the weekend is over. If this sounds familiar, it may be time to consider implementing some strategies for simplifying life!

Windows of opportunity

A first step in simplifying life involves identifying one or two windows of opportunity where you can make some changes and reap the benefits of a simplified life.

Simplifying ... At Home

Sometimes our homes can be a place of chaos rather than comfort. If you can't find things in your home and are constantly shifting things from one spot to another, your home environment may be contributing to the complexity of your life.

Although it may take some additional time up-front, it can be beneficial to do a thorough cleaning or "purging" to let go of those things that you don't need. A general rule of thumb is that if we haven't used something or worn it in a year, we likely never will. A thorough cleaning can seem daunting - set aside 15 minutes a day to tackle a drawer, a part of a room or one pile; set a goal of completing your entire home over a two to three month period. Establish a "treasure chest" for things that are hard to let go of and at the end of the three month period, try again - sometime we may change our mind on some of the items. To keep our homes clutter free, we can apply the three "R" rules of reduce, reuse and recycle to our personal belongings by asking ourselves "do I really need this?", "can I use this again?" or "could someone else make use of this?". Create specific areas where you will keep things that you often spend time looking for: a bulletin board for the family schedule and notices; a file for bills and receipts; "one spot, the same spot" for things like keys, scissors, tape, nail clippers... those things that have a way of walking away.

Simplifying...With Family & Friends

When people are asked what they wish they had more time for in life, many people would respond by saying ... "I really wish I could spend more time with my family and friends." Sharing

experiences with family and friends can be very pleasurable and bring us immense joy. Unfortunately, they can also be stressful times, if events and activities involve a lot of planning, preparation or expense... so much so that we may find that we limit such activities because of the effort involved. One way to simplify our approach to socializing is to share responsibility for the planning and preparation of activities; taking in a simple activity together provides a common experience that we can later talk about - attend community based events such as a fall fair or craft show; organize a physical activity that all ages can participate in like a walk through the park, a soccer game or ice skating; come together around a pot-luck dinner or a picnic where everyone contributes in making the gathering memorable, manageable and worth repeating.

Simplifying Life by Being Present in the Moment...

Think about eating an ice cream cone (your favourite flavor) on a hot summer day... and finishing it off in ten seconds flat while racing to catch a bus and thinking about what to make for dinner...; Now think about that same ice cream cone, this time eating it very slowly and taking notice of things that are going on around you in the moment - the little child with an ice cream mustache, the birds singing and the warm breeze touching your face... and yes, you still have to catch a bus and make dinner. Which experience would you prefer? Focusing on the past and the future from time to time is important, however, when we spend a great deal of our mental time thinking about something that has happened in the past or something that will happen, we miss out on the pleasure and wonder of many of the "simple things in life". Making a concrete effort to focus on what is going on in the moment as often as we can, is an important strategy for slowing down and simplifying our lives.

Simplifying... Our Expectations of Ourselves

Part of feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of our lives may have to do with the expectations that we have of ourselves. Sometimes, our expectations of what we can accomplish in our personal time can be unrealistic. Do you find yourself constantly thinking about the things that you have to do? Are you hard on yourself when you can't get everything done? If you answered yes to these questions, you may be asking the impossible of yourself and are potentially burdened with critical or negative thoughts. Balancing the multiple demands of life today is an ongoing challenge and the true task at hand is not trying to do everything. Rather, we must ask ourselves, what must I absolutely accomplish today because it is truly important and then set our mind and efforts toward getting these one or two essential tasks done. A common companion to trying to do too much, is trying to do things perfectly. Perfectionism can set us up for disappointment as it is next to impossible to do most things "perfectly" and trying to do so takes an abundance of time and effort.

Letting go of our need to do everything and to be perfect in everything we do will open our minds to creative ways to simplify our lives. There are many factors that may contribute to feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of our lives and sometimes these factors are not always clear to us. Many people find it beneficial to speak to a professional counsellor, who can assist in identifying the source of the problem and specific strategies for addressing the problem

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