Stress Management Source: <http://www.cultureofsafety.com/childcare/stress-management/>

**What is stress?**

The stress response is the body’s way of protecting you. At some point, however, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to health, mood, productivity, relationships, and quality of life. As stress levels rise, attitudes throughout the company become tense, work becomes sloppy, and costly mistakes are made.

**Ways to recognize stress (in yourself and co-workers)**

When stress becomes unhealthy, everyone in the workplace is impacted. The ability to identify a coworker struggling with stress can not only benefit that individual, but also the entire working environment. The same goes for recognizing stress in your own life. Here are signs and symptoms of excessive job and workplace stress:

* Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
* Apathy, loss of interest in work
* Problems sleeping
* Fatigue
* Muscle tension or headaches
* Social withdrawal
* Difficulty concentrating
* Using drugs or alcohol to cope

If you, or one of your coworkers, are exhibiting any of these symptoms you should notify a supervisor as soon as possible. In most cases a temporary adjustment of work duties may provide the relief needed to approach work with a more positive outlook.

**Action steps to reduce stress at work**

These organizational modifications can help reduce workplace stress. Managers should seriously consider implementing as many of these steps as possible and employees should actively encourage management to execute these policies.

* Improve communication by sharing information to reduce uncertainty about jobs and futures;
* Consult your employees and be sure the workload is suitable to employee’s abilities and resources;
* Avoid unrealistic deadlines;
* Offer rewards and incentives for good work performance; and
* Cultivate a friendly social climate by providing opportunities for social interaction among employees.

**Implications of Stress in Childcare**

**Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)**

Nearly 1,400 children are injured or killed by aggressive shaking every year in the United States. Of these injuries, roughly 25% will result in fatalities; of those that survive, 80% will suffer permanent disability. Typical disabilities resulting from Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS), a form of abuse in which the brain repeatedly slams against the inner walls of the cranium, include cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and impaired motor and cognitive skills. No parent or caregiver starts their day saying, “I think I’m going to shake a child today”. Nearly every SBS incident can be directly associated with the caregiver’s inability to cope with extreme levels of stress or helplessness. Often times this stress is caused by a combination of continuous crying or fussiness and other external frustrations.

**Coping with a stressful environment**

Unlike most other professions, childcare providers are unable to leave the workplace when it becomes too stressful. Federal and state regulations typically require minimum supervision ratios, making it difficult to find precious “alone time”. The Wisconsin Children’s Trust Fund has developed the A.N.G.E.R. Workout System, a five-step program to help manage feelings of anger and stress:

* **Accept:** Don’t deny your feelings of frustration. Recognition helps you manage your actions more effectively.
* **Name:** Name and identify the emotions that have built up to the point that made you so angry. Did you get enough sleep last night? Are the bills piling up?
* **Get it out:** Put the baby in a safe place like the crib, leave the room, and close the door. Allow the baby to cry while you address your anger. Actively express your anger by yelling into a pillow or beating on couch cushions.
* **Energize:** Allow yourself to feel calmer, more relaxed, less anxious, less tense, and less stressed. Don’t return to the baby prematurely. Ask for help if you think you are unable to manage your feelings.
* **Resume:** Return to the baby after a 10-15 minute break if you can do so in a calm, cool manner.