



De-Stress Kit for the Changing Times

from
Doc Childre
Founder of HeartMath®

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This booklet applies to anyone who is experiencing extra stress due to the cascading effects of the financial meltdown, natural disasters, the ongoing wars, or for *any reason* through these rapidly changing times.

The financial meltdown marks a significant turn of the spiral in the global changes taking place. Global consciousness is being called on to shift from the pursuit of self-gain at the expense of others—to a more balanced system of care for the rights and needs of the people. Systems and societies have veered far from the heart and the core values of cooperation, fairness and care for each other and the whole. For many people, hope is fading; yet many feel that things are being turned upside down to become right-side up.

Unfortunately, this realignment is causing increased stress and tremendous economic fallout that affects us all. It's obvious that the financial realignment process won't move in the express lane, but it can eventually stabilize. Each effort the shot-callers make to significantly take care of Main Street will be a step closer to the time when the rich, the middle class and the poor can all breathe out again.

With compassion, I realize that it is much tougher for some than others. When a crisis occurs, there are different emotional stages that people go through: shock, anger, blame, despair, grief and more. *This process is painful, yet it helps to clear out the shock-overload on our mind, emotions and nervous system.* After this phase, it's easier for the heart to reopen. Then, with some self-effort, people can start to rebuild their coping capacity as they gain more clarity and confidence to move forward. The process of recovery won't be the same for everyone because of different situations and differences in individual makeup. But be encouraged that you can create a psychological turnaround along the way and increase your ability to cope effectively—*especially if you work through this with others.*

Creating a Turnaround

When a significant crisis happens, such as the current economic upheaval that is affecting so many, our stress tolerance level depletes from initial shock and emotional pain. This is followed by feelings of overwhelm which inhibit our capacity to cope; yet it's completely understandable why we feel the way we do.

It can be helpful at the onset to experience and vent the emotional buildup to release the steam and the pressing energy. We need time to experience our shock, grief and anger, or to sit quietly with ourselves in the privacy of our own pain. After this first phase, however long it takes, we eventually need to engage in thoughts of self-care and remember our health considerations. Then we can make some simple efforts to start offsetting the stress effect, which will make coping much easier. I understand it's hard at first, but the simple suggestions in this booklet can help make it easier to reconnect with your inner strength and security.

Though we can't necessarily make our financial challenges and anxieties suddenly disappear, we *can* do simple things to *offset* our recurring stress, reduce fear and reset our capacity to maintain more easily. As we take steps to reduce the stress where we can, this adds strength and clarity for sorting our way through the more difficult areas.

Even though things "are as they are," we can start to make a psychological turnaround within ourselves, so that excess stress won't create a downward spiral in health. We can offset a lot of stress by practicing some "attitudes of adjustment" until we reestablish our coping capacity. This will reduce energy drain and increase clear thinking on how to get the needed help for ourselves and our families.

When we are experiencing increased stress, it's often hard to hear some of the points that can most effectively help us. For this reason, I will repeat a few different themes in this booklet that I feel could be the most useful.

Here are some practices to help cope with stress and reset our system to move forward in these changing times.

1. Communicate and interact with others.

One of the most important things that you can do is to communicate your feelings to someone or to a community of people sharing the same experience. Then engage in

caring about others and offering emotional support. This especially helps to reopen your heart, which increases fortitude and emotional balance. Even if you laugh together or cry together, there is often tremendous beneficial release.

When people gather to support each other, the energy of the collective whole multiplies the benefit to the individual. It's known that collective cooperation of a group can increase intuitive guidance and effective solutions for the problems at hand. When people are in their hearts, and not just their minds, the collective energy helps to lift the individual spirit which releases stress buildup and anxiety overload.

In most cases, if you ask around you can find a group of people, small or large, who meet to address the same issues that concern you. Some people may have a resistance to being around others; but in times of crisis and stress, I would urge you to reconsider it. Often it can prevent the acute stress overload that puts your health at risk. It gets easier as you start to experience the benefits. You can also find interactive groups, blogs and helpful services on the Internet.

2. Re-opening the heart feeling.

When one's heart reopens, self-security and confidence can gradually return. Be patient with the process and have compassion for yourself. It's normal at the onset of a crisis for our heart feelings to shut off, especially during the shock and anger phase. When our mind operates too long without the heart's wisdom, it can start to overload from the sense of loss, then our system gridlocks from anger, fear projections and despair. It's understandable to experience this, but it's really important to reopen your heart connection with people, as you can.

A good way to reopen your heart feelings is by offering kindness and compassionate support to one another or volunteering somewhere to help others in need, even when you are in need yourself. Any little acts of kindness or compassion make a big difference. This is one of the quickest ways to reestablish your footing and reduce the stress that may affect your health. Research has shown that care and compassion release neurochemicals that help balance and restore your system. Worry and uncertainty increase stress, even when you feel that you have good reasons to worry. Much of this type of stress can be reduced by caring for and interacting with people more.

If health problems prevent you from having access to others, you can still benefit from sending care and compassion to others just in genuine thoughts and feeling. If you can't leave home, try to have visitors so you can communicate your feelings to help release

some of the emotional pressure. If that's not possible, try to at least communicate with others on the phone or computer.

3. Practice appreciation and gratitude.

A very helpful exercise for reducing the stress load and restoring emotional balance is to commit some time each day to sending *genuine feelings of appreciation* to someone or something—be it children, pets, family members or whatever you can feel sincere appreciation towards. It's important that the appreciation is *genuine (heartfelt and not just mind thoughts)*, as this activates the body's biochemical systems that help to diminish stress and stabilize your psyche. When low in spirit, the practice of appreciation and gratitude has proven to help people reconnect with their spirit of hope and the heart initiative to take progressive steps.

4. Decrease drama.

Here is another effective way to help stop the energy drain and reduce the anxiety: Practice not feeding the tendency towards “drama” during this critical time. As we constantly spin thoughts of blame, anger and “doom and gloom” projections about the future, this increases drama which always makes “tough enough” worse. Adding drama to a situation blinds our personal intuitive discernment, which is needed to find the most effective ways to navigate through challenges.

Start your practice by not adding excessive drama when sharing with others. When we share *genuinely from the heart* with others, there's less tendency to keep amplifying and repeating the downside of situations—and more of a tendency to strengthen and encourage sober support and solutions. Naturally, there will be some drama while venting your feelings to others and that's okay, especially during the first phase of a crisis. But when excessive drama continues to persist, it blocks solutions because drama drains the mind and emotions, leaving you feeling worse after the interaction. Practice reducing drama, but try not to judge yourself or others for creating it. People are doing the best they can until they get more stable and secure. Try to proceed with compassion through all your interactions.

More suggestions for decreasing drama:

When you catch your inner dialogue looping with excessive worry or fearful projections, or when in conversations with others that constantly dramatize the downside of things, gently tell yourself: “That's not helping to change something that's already done; it can

only make it worse.” Then, make a genuine attempt to realign your thoughts, feelings and conversations with ideas that support your needs and action plans. Accept that you may not be able to stop all the internal drama loops and anxiety at this point. But, you can effectively reduce your energy drain and offset your stress deficit with this exercise.

If we continue to generate amped up anger, anxiety and fear through our mental and emotional system, these feelings release excessive levels of stress hormones, like cortisol and adrenalin, through our body. The long-play version of this can cause a cascade of physical health symptoms, along with potential mental and emotional imbalances. Decreasing drama reduces stress overload so that it doesn't create health problems later or make existing health problems worse. As you practice, then the energy you save becomes energy that helps to restore balance, clarity and positive initiative.

Take care not to judge yourself if you slip backwards at times. It's okay. We all do. Just reinstate your heart commitment to practice, and then move on. Each effort you make really helps, however large or small. Efforts will get easier as you realize their helpfulness.

5. Manage your reactions to the news.

In this time of economic and global instability, it's important not to compound our stress by projecting worst-case scenarios as we watch the news. That's why it's so important to practice listening to the news from the *state of neutral*. Being *neutral* means not reacting too fast to each story, not jumping to conclusions without all the information, and managing the temptation to emote and obsess over the negative downsides of each issue discussed. Maintain your opinions, but practice managing how much negative emotional drama you assign to events or disappointments during news broadcasts. This is where a large portion of our stress accumulates. Then practice *being neutral* regarding the news throughout the rest of your day to avoid pouring excessive emotional energy into replaying the issues. There's a difference between evaluating an issue versus emotionally obsessing over it, which drains energy and can intensify anger, fear or anxiety. By practicing *neutral*, you can learn to identify and manage the difference in evaluating an issue or being owned by it. It's okay to maintain your opinions and views, but it's important to manage your emotional expenditures to avoid stress overload.

When you're under extreme stress and anxiety, it can be helpful to manage the amount of news you watch during a week. Many people are afraid to watch the news because of dreading what's next, and afraid not to watch it in case they might miss what's next. When dealing with high anxiety and types of depression, cutting back on news occasionally can help lower the *intensity* of fear and anxiety through these times. It's the *intensity* that

makes fear and anxiety at times seem unbearable. You have to experiment to see if cutting back helps you, as it has many others who are experiencing high anxiety. You have to decide based on your stress load and how sensitive your emotional nature is to constant media drama around issues that amplify anger or fear. It's about managing your media intake according to honest assessment of your particular situation. We shouldn't judge the media, as we are responsible for what we watch and how we react to it. It's our job to balance and manage our exposure and our perceptions of how the news affects us.

6. Prayer or meditation.

Prayer or meditation can make attitude adjustments easier, especially as you center in the heart and try to find a more objective state. Radiating compassion to yourself and others or feeling gratitude is a form of prayer or meditation. It helps quiet the mind and can bring you new perspectives that restore hope and direction. Research has shown that radiating appreciative or compassionate feelings to other people or issues has a beneficial effect on the hormonal and immune systems. Anything that boosts or offsets the taxation on the immune system is worth practicing, especially in prolonged stress. Sending appreciation, care or compassion also helps to balance the nervous system and heart rhythm. This, in turn, helps to balance your mental and emotional system, which can help with anxiety and types of depression.

Whatever your religious or spiritual practices may be, genuinely applying them through these times can be very beneficial. Using prayer or meditation can help to restore hope and increase confidence. Once hope is re-activated, then confidence is progressively restored. We all can connect with our source of strength through our heart, but it's very understandable how stress and crisis can cause a disconnection from our heart feelings at times. This connection can be re-established. Many people have experienced comebacks from painful places. I have and you can also, through genuine commitment and self-application. My most important step in recovering from a past crisis was reopening my heart through deeper care, compassion and appreciation for others. This sparked the gradual return of my inner self-security—a big missing piece for me in moving on and recreating my life.

7. Heart-focused breathing to reduce stress and anxiety.

Practice breathing while imagining your breath passing in and out through your heart area or the center of your chest. Envision yourself as taking a time out to refuel your system, by breathing in the *attitude* of calm and balance (like breathing in an emotional tonic to take the rough edges off). This can be helpful if you casually focus and are sincere with the process.

The key to making this exercise effective is to generate the *true feeling* of calm and balance (or whatever attitude you choose to breathe). You can substitute the attitude of calm and balance at times with breathing the feeling of appreciation or compassion. This can be done in a quiet place or while walking, jogging and even in a conversation once you get the feel of it. It's real handy for reducing anxiety, anger and mild depression.

Heart-focused breathing is being taught by doctors, nurses and clinics throughout the world. It's especially helpful during a crisis and anytime you experience anger, anxiety or emotional overload. After you have practiced these heart-focused breathing exercises for a while, you'll be able to shift stress-producing attitudes more quickly as they come up and *reset* your stress tolerance baseline.

8. Sleep.

Sleep is especially important during times of increased stress. However, many people can't sleep well because of increased stress. More are turning to prescription medications than ever before, but it's worth checking out alternative methods prior to that, in case something simple helps. You have to decide what you need based on the seriousness of your sleep problem.

Breathing the attitude of calm and relaxation for five minutes or so before bed has helped many people get more restful sleep. The Internet offers many suggestions for improving sleep, including exercise and stretching. Some may be effective for you, some may not. Experiment to see what works, but don't be persuaded to try things that don't feel right to you. If you have to take prescription medication, you can start out with low doses or cut pills in half or thirds in case *less* works for you.

An important point: If you have a hard time sleeping, get what sleep you can and try not to continuously worry about it. Mind-looping worry only multiplies the problem as it drains energy, especially when you've missed a lot of sleep. Take the steps to do what you have to do, but practice reducing excessive worry about your sleep patterns.

9. Exercise.

If it's convenient, you'll find exercising very beneficial through these challenging times. Often when experiencing anxiety and emotional pain, we don't have the initiative to exercise. I was that way until I gave it a chance. I soon realized it was helping to *spin off* and clear the fog and tension accumulated from anxiety, anger and worry. Exercise won't take away your reasons for getting stressed, but it strengthens your capacity to manage your stress with less energy loss.

You don't have to do a total workout to help clear your thinking and stabilize your emotions. Experiment and find what's comfortable for you, but at least try to get your heart rate up a little for a period of time. Try to be conscious not to replay negative mind loops while exercising. It helps to balance the emotions and calm the mind if you practice the attitude breathing techniques (described in #7) while you exercise.

10. Reduce *comparing now with the way it was*.

One of the hardest things for any of us not to do after a crisis or major change is to *compare the way life was before with how it is now*. That's really okay initially as we move through shock, grief or deep loss. The time it takes to vent our anger and recover from despair can be different for all of us—and time can't be forced because healing heartache doesn't respond to schedules or agendas. Yet, in our own time, we will start to regain some stability and be able to move forward with our life.

In a past personal crisis, eventually I realized that to move forward, it was time to redirect my thoughts and feelings from the past situations I couldn't change, in order to be at peace *now* and build the future. After I experienced an understandable period of grief, I started to realize that I was perpetuating deep pain and depression by constantly comparing *now* with the *past*. Often, my heart's intuition would whisper: "Constantly comparing with the past is not helpful for you now. It's time now to use your energy to move forward with life and your responsibilities." It was hard at first, but being honest with myself, I knew it was time to take a responsible step towards reducing the emotional toll and inertia from dwelling in the past.

Below is a practice that helped me. This practice I am suggesting is mostly for after the first phase of our initial anger, grief or despair. No one would expect us to be able to stop comparing the past with the present during the first phase of sadness and despair. Comparing is part of that. Be comfortable with your own timing, however long it takes you. Some people do not experience as much loss, pain or despair as others because their situation is different. For them, the first phase could be much shorter, so they may choose to use this practice earlier in their emotional recovery process.

Suggested practice:

With self-compassion and patience, make a genuine heart commitment to practice recognizing some of your thoughts and feelings of comparison with the past. As you become aware of these thought loops and feel your energy down-spiraling, realize that it's normal to have these thoughts and feelings. Yet, know that constant preoccupation

with them can drain and repress your spirit, which you need at this time to re-stabilize and move forward. Then, in an easygoing way without force, choose something to focus on that doesn't cause as much pain and energy drain.

It often helps to switch thoughts by changing what you are doing in the moment or changing the subject if you are rehashing the past with someone. You can also replace the thoughts with appreciation for someone you care about. With practice you will be able to recognize the thoughts and feelings and then just—*shift focus*—to something that doesn't bring you down and leave you with depressed feelings. When this is done from the heart and not just the mind, then *you are transforming* feelings—not repressing them.

We can all make progress in restoring our peace, yet we have to play an active part in it. Emotional self-maintenance is an important part. I'm not suggesting that you never have thoughts or feelings about your past. Your own heart discernment knows when you're caught in a depressive mind loop or when you're just appreciating the past with good memories.

Lots of energy can be saved with this practice and it can especially help to prevent or soften some of the normal depression that accompanies an emotional setback. With self-compassion and patience, you *can* emerge from the depths of challenging times, especially if you connect with the strength that comes from truly putting your heart into the intention to move forward. In the past I tried to move forward but without much progress, then I became aware that I was doing it mostly from the mind with little heart involvement. When you approach your situation with humility and genuine care, this activates the power of your heart, which quickens your recovery and re-stabilization.

11. Reducing Fear.

Fear is multiplied by fanning the flames of drama. After the shockwave of the economic crisis, how could millions of people not be imprinted with fear and uncertainty about the future? And now, we are constantly confused by the news and Internet with conflicting opinions about what to do. It's really okay if your present reactions to the sequential crises are fear from uncertainty and lack of trust. When uncertainty overshadows spaces that we were once secure in, then fear feels a need to embrace and protect us. Fear can benefit us as an alarm in fight or flight situations. However, prolonged fear exaggerated by drama eventually creates harmful hormonal and immune system responses that compromise our health. These biochemical changes often produce an overload of *fear* when just *practical caution* would suffice in many situations. Even animals respond differently to fear or balanced caution from people. Fear and caution can sound like the same thing, but the

difference between them can make a *big difference* in what hormones are released in your system. Practical caution releases beneficial hormones, while prolonged fear releases hormones that are harmful to your system.

Take as long as you need, but after the first phase of shock, anger and initial fear during a crisis, then it's beneficial to practice reducing the *state of fear* to an attitude of *balanced caution*. There's a difference in how these two states affect you mentally and emotionally. Constant fear represses your spirit and numbs your heart connection with yourself, your family and others. This blocks hope, while exhausting the initiative of those around you. When living from the state of fear, *it owns you* and can eventually erode your discernment and cognitive function which you need through challenging times. Living from the attitude of *balanced caution* is different: The attitude of *caution* is protective yet it allows you to maintain balance, make clear choices, and is much better on your mental, emotional and physical health.

With practice you can eventually reduce some of your feelings of *fear* to attitudes of *balanced caution and discernment*. I respect that it's hard not to experience frequent waves of fear when life is crumbling around us, no matter what form of emotional management we try. Sometimes circumstances leave us with fear that just can't be helped for awhile. Here are some suggestions that helped me with this, after I experienced a personal crisis and got tired of living repressed by fear. Just apply these suggestions as you can and don't be hard on yourself if your progress feels stuck at times.

These exercises have helped many people start the process of reducing and replacing fear with a more beneficial state of mind.

Exercise:

Tell yourself the following:

"I understand why I'm living in fear and anxiety, but it's draining my energy, putting my health at risk and interfering with clear decision-making."

"I'm tired of being restricted by fear and I'm ready to shift to an attitude that's easier on my nervous system, my health, and those around me."

"I'm aware that fear has repressed my spirit and my ability to make effective choices. My constant fear hasn't changed anything for the better so I have nothing to lose by exploring a new attitude for moving forward."

"I don't expect to eliminate all my fears and projections overnight, but I *commit now* to

at least practice reducing my fear to a more balanced attitude of *practical caution and discernment in places where I can.*”

“I realize that *any* progress can help free up my mind, emotions and spirit to move on with what needs to be done and feel better while doing it. I’ll set my own pace in reducing my fears and will have compassion for myself in the process.”

Read this once a day for awhile and don’t care whether anything changes overnight. By re-reading this, it can help you remember to practice downshifting the feeling of fear to a more balanced feeling of caution and discernment as you move forward. Re-reading also helps to anchor this in your emotional nature which makes commitment and progress easier.

Exercise:

Sit quietly and from your heart remember that enough stress is already going on, without having to wear a backpack of fear on top of that. Breathe quietly through your heart for awhile and imagine that you are breathing in the attitude of courage and strength to do what you have to do, without being preoccupied with fear. Do this with a genuine attitude and it helps with taking the significance out of fear, which is an important step in fear reduction. Practice this for a few minutes a day and anytime you feel a strong wave of fear. It can begin to make a difference.

I understand and have experienced the grip that fear can have on us. But, with genuine heart commitment you can make perception shifts that at least reduce the fear, which will increase your capacity to feel better while attending to your needs. Continue to practice taking the *significance* out of fear a little at a time, as you can. Be easy on yourself; and know that it’s really okay when you can’t eliminate all fear or anxiety as it comes up. Understand that *any progress counts*—which encourages more progress.

12. Engage with your family.

Have open communication within your family about the stress that each of you is going through. It’s important not to bottle up your feelings and repress the stress, as this only multiplies it. Make agreements to give more allowance and latitude to each other, or if someone is snappy or irritable at times not to take it as personally. Especially explain this to your children, because they usually can’t understand the depth of what the adults are experiencing. Be as positive around children as you can and reassure them that although times are tough now, we can work things out in time. Just keep communicating with your family, even if it’s hard at times. It does help.

13. Don't blame yourself.

Don't blame yourself for the crisis, as this only adds stress without any benefit in return. Try not to keep replaying in your mind all the things you could have done to prevent your situation. We have all been caught off guard by unexpected events and changes, so be easy on yourself. Moving forward is easier without carrying baggage and guilt from *what you could have or should have done*.

14. Write a letter from your heart to yourself. (Or you can use the following letter as your own while mentally inserting changes to suit your situation.)

Let the letter be an acknowledgement of where you're at, and then let it affirm your commitment to moving forward with your life.

Dear Self,

I have good reasons for the stress, anger and pain that I am experiencing and who wouldn't, if in my situation. I am becoming aware of the increasing personal stress I'm accumulating because of all the anxiety; trying to make survival decisions for myself and my family while depressed; finding it hard to get to sleep and when I do, it's not deep enough to restore my energy needs; having racing thought loops that only project a hopeless future; fear of job loss, mortgage pressures, retirement insecurity, etc. *(Make your own list to suit your situation.)*

I'm aware that if I don't get off of this stress-express, it could bring down my health, regardless of my justified reasons, even good ones. I'm not a bad person for experiencing these emotions for the last while. I needed some time to experience the anger, grief, and despair as it has helped me release some of the pain, though not all of it. But now I'm starting to feel that for the sake of my health, my family and my future, it's time to reestablish my grip and move forward. Even if I can't completely erase the anxiety of the future just yet, I realize that small steps can still cross a large room, in time.

In the past, there have been times when I've had to connect with a deeper strength, to pick myself up from tough situations and move on. I can do it again. I'll practice releasing the losses that I can't change and commit to the changes that will make now and the future better. I'm looking forward to helping others through this and being more open to help from others. I'll practice each day, listening to the feelings in my heart to discern my steps, while making sure I at least move my feet when it's time to step forward. I can handle now what needs to be done. I just needed to reach deep in my heart and reawaken the strength that was bruised and sleeping. I'm back now.

(P.S. From the heart, tell your mind to join you in making this turnaround and regaining your grip. If your mind is reluctant and resistant at times: know that when your heart commitment is strong enough, the mind will finally “come on board.”)

In closing, right now the first shockwave of the financial meltdown is still reverberating. And new stress waves are occurring regularly, with each report of a major job layoff, another big company going bankrupt or a natural disaster. People wish things were the way they were before and that’s understandable. We often lose much energy until we can accept what’s already happened. We plug up energy drains with this *acceptance*, and then the energy saved becomes creative energy to sort out and do what’s needed now and to improve the future.

Remember, energy drain and types of depression diminish more quickly as we work together and increase our care for each other. When the heart reopens, that always increases creative solutions both on a personal level and for the collective whole.

This booklet is not intended to be a complete package for dealing with the stress of these times. There are many references for help on the Internet and advisors in your local area if you seek them out. The important thing is to find something that helps you and commit to it.

If parts of the content in this booklet assist you in any way, you can print the booklet and highlight areas for easy reference. Rereading anything that is helpful in stressful times supports initiative and confidence. Don’t underestimate the inner strength and emotional management capacity that you have, once you put genuine heart into your commitments. A little practice is a small price to pay for accessing the connection to the caretaker within.

Realize that thousands are in similar situations during these changing times. Together we can all move through this and help create a world that is more fair and balanced for “we the people”.

With Deep Care,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doc Childre". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "With Deep Care,".

Doc Childre

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- If you would like to contribute \$1.00 to help bring this booklet and other stress relief information to more people, go to <http://store.heartmath.org/store/Donations/De-Stress-Donation>
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About Doc Childre

Doc Childre is the founder of the Institute of HeartMath, a non-profit 501(c)(3) research and education organization. For many years, the Institute of HeartMath has been dedicated to mapping and validating the importance of the heart-mind connection in intuitive development and personal growth.

The Institute's research on stress, intuition and emotional physiology has been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals and presented at numerous scientific conferences worldwide. HeartMath tools for stress relief and emotional management are being used by companies, government, the military, hospitals, clinics and schools.

Doc Childre is the co-author of the following books: *The HeartMath Solution*, *From Chaos to Coherence*, *Transforming Stress*, *Transforming Anxiety*, *Transforming Anger*, *Transforming Depression* and *The HeartMath Approach to Managing Hypertension*.