

## **Nevada State Board of Nursing 2012 Behavioral Health Conference**

**“When Life Hurts: personal meaning can provide strength and direction: a Logotherapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Perspective”**

**Tom Lavin MFT, LCADC, ACATA is a psychotherapist who has counseled over 500 nurses, helping them deal with depression, anxiety, work-life-family issues, critical incident stress, new grad stress, chronic illness, and substance abuse [as the counselor for employees of Renown Regional Medical Center (1997-2003) and Saint Mary’s Regional Medical Center (2003-2011)].**

***Tom provides psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and families.***

***His health and wellness television show, “New Skills for Living”, on the Reno, NV ABC affiliate, has provided important behavioral health information to our community for 18 years.***

***Tom’s work as a psychotherapist is dedicated to help people find meaning, strength, and fulfillment in their lives.***





## **When Life Hurts: meaning can provide strength and direction:**

### **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Logotherapy Perspective**

- When life hurts, life examples, choice...a tx perspective that facilitates resiliency for the patient and reduces compassion fatigue-burnout for the caregiver & stay grounded in our meaningful mission as dedicated healthcare providers
- “Respond rather than react”—the “Yes to life” paradigm
- Logotx Values: 1. Attitudinal 2. Creative 3. Experiential
- ACT: Accept, Commit, Take Action
- Accept: Diathesis stress model, “Yes to Life” is the foundation, Attitudinal value—defiant power of the human spirit: Acceptance
- Commit to what is important—personal responsibility
- Take the action [NIKE TX—just do it]—Creative and Experiential Values—ACT worksheets
- Self-care resources: support, mindfulness and religious-spiritual practices, nutrition, journaling, exercise, learning
- Revisit-“Respond rather than react”





## **When Life Hurts-Recommended Reading**

**Get Out of Your Mind and into Your Life, Steven C. Hayes**

**Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl**

**The Doctor and the Soul, Viktor Frankl**

**Existential Psychotherapy, Irvin Yalom**

**Stillness Speaks, Eckhart Tolle**

**When Things Fall Apart, Pema Chodron**

**Meaning in Suffering, Elizabeth Lukas**

**Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn**

**The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety, Forsythe and Eifert**

**The Happiness Trap, Russ Harris**

**Deep Survival, Laurence Gonzales**

**The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway**

**Lincoln's Melancholy, Joshua Wolf Shenk**

**The Story of My Life, Helen Keller**

**Lucky Man and Always Looking Up, Michael J. Fox**

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## **When Life Hurts**



*"Say 'Yes to life', in spite of everything."*

Viktor Frankl MD, PhD

*"Although the world is full of suffering,*

*it is also full of overcoming it."*

Helen Keller

*"...human beings demonstrate enormous courage, deep compassion...*

*Knowing they can be hurt, humans still love others.*

*Knowing they can die, humans still care about the future.*

*Facing the draw of meaninglessness, humans still embrace ideals."*

Steven C. Hayes PhD

*"Life is a choice. The choice is not about whether or not to have pain.*

*It is whether or not to live a valued, meaningful life."*

Steven C. Hayes PhD

*"In our own woundedness,*

*we can become a source of life for others."*

Henri J.M. Nouwen

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## **For Everything There is a Season**



**For everything there is a season...**

**a time to be born and a time to die,**

**a time to plant and a time to pluck up what has been planted,**

**a time to kill and a time to heal,**

**a time break down and a time to build up,**

**a time to weep and a time to laugh,**

**a time to mourn and a time to dance,**

**a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together,**

**a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,**

**a time to seek and a time to lose,**

**a time to keep and a time to cast away,**

**a time to rend and a time to sew,**

**a time to keep peace and a time to speak,**

**a time to love and a time to hate,**

**a time for war and a time for peace.**

**What gain has the worker from his toil?**

***Ecclesiastes 3:1-9***



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## *Responding rather than reacting*

### *Accept what is, as it is*

----Accept and allow your thoughts and feelings to  
emerge and just be there—the ones you like and the  
ones you don't like...  
take a few deep breaths and just let your thoughts and  
feelings be there...  
Take a few more deep breaths...  
and let your thoughts and feelings be there...  
—not judging them  
and not falling into the trap of attempting to avoid  
them or control them.  
Let them be.  
Remember, to accept them does not mean we like them or the situation...  
Just let your thoughts and feelings be there...let the situation be there...  
And then settle into accepting what is, as it is...  
If you're continuing to have a hard time accepting what is,  
go ahead and accept that you're having a hard time accepting...

### *Next focus on your values , what's important to you---is there something about this you want to change---your perspective or the situation?*

----Can you change it? Develop and plan a strategy to make the change you  
discern would be good...engage in NIKE Therapy---just do it---take  
positive, assertive action.

### *Next, if you can't change the situation today, let go:*

----Let it go for today.  
Just let it be.  
Let it go... and move on...focus your attention on other things you value.  
Letting go is also a form of taking action.

### *Later:*

---- If you feel the desire to change it and the time seems  
right, develop and plan a strategy to make the change you  
discern would be good...engage in NIKE Therapy—just do it---take positive,  
assertive action.

# THE STRESS-REACTION CYCLE

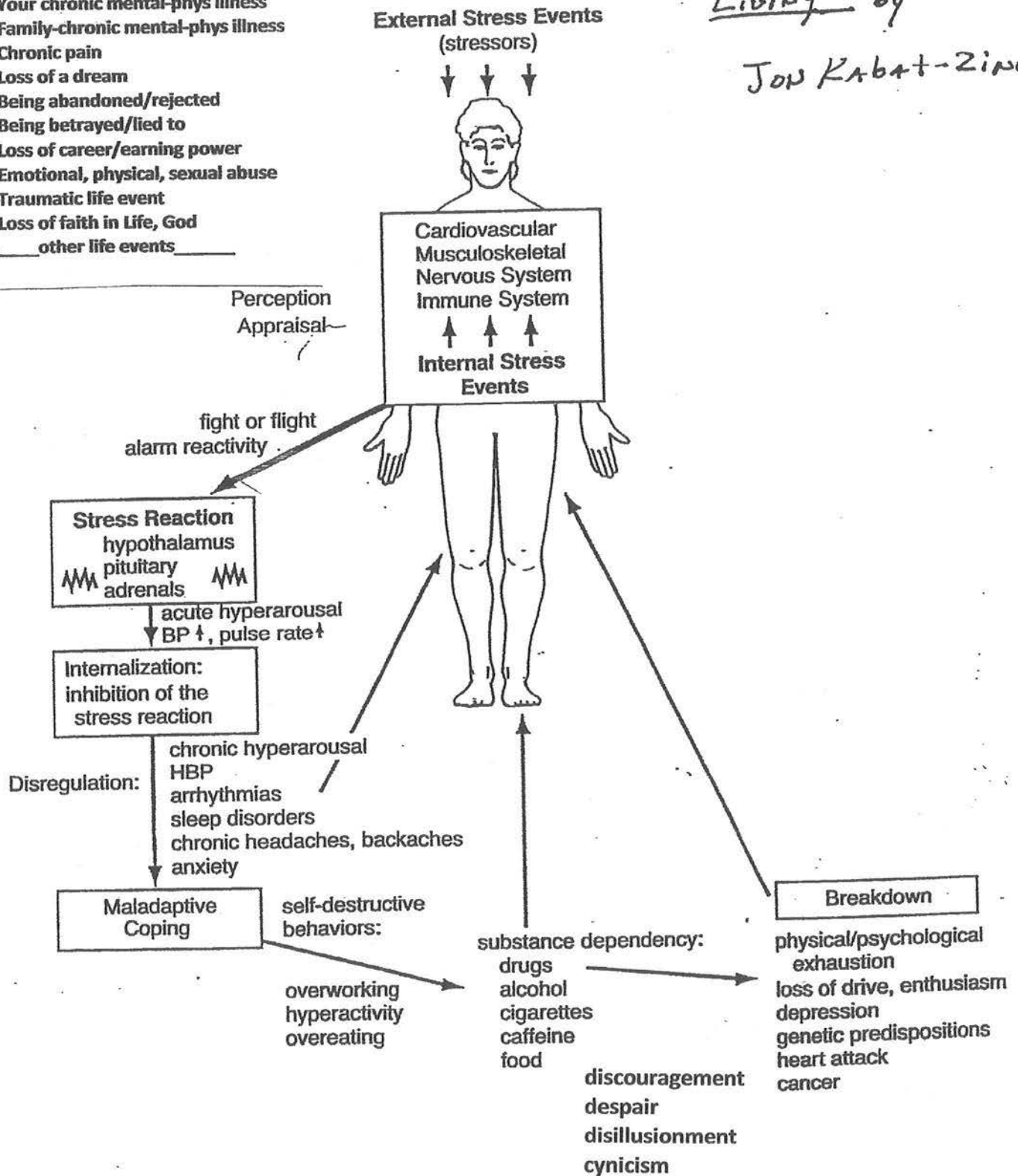
## When Life Hurts

- Death of Spouse/Child/Family
- Your chronic mental-phys illness
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- Chronic pain
- Loss of a dream
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- Loss of career/earning power
- Emotional, physical, sexual abuse
- Traumatic life event
- Loss of faith in Life, God
- other life events

Full Catastrophe

Living by

Jon Kabat-Zinn



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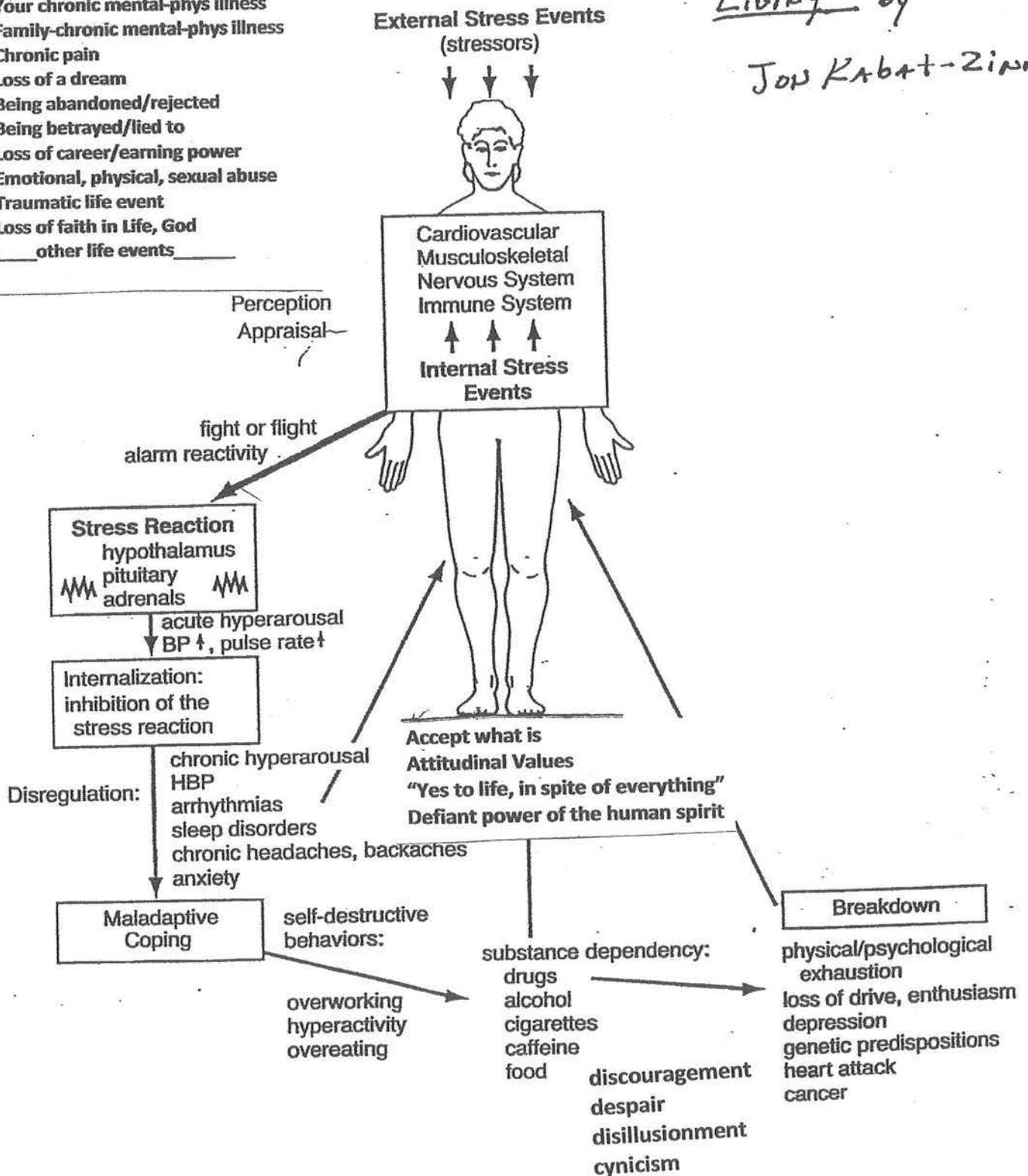
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# The unheard cry for meaning:

We can help when we listen to what's behind and beneath and in between

MD's Andrew Weil/Dean Ornish [paraphrase]: people stuck in despair will not make the healthy changes they need to make...people need meaning and hope...if people don't have meaning, anything to live for, why would they stop smoking, eat healthy, exercise, join a support group, or be compliant with medications?

Frankl: listen deeply to clients concerns, and we will often hear  
a need for meaning in their lives...meaning is essential

Yalom: "I find that virtually every patient I have worked with has either gratuitously expressed concern about lack of meaning in his or her life or has readily responded to inquiries about the issue."

Jung: "...about 1/3 of my patients have a meaning issue..."

Crumbaugh: research, using the "Purpose in Life Test":  
20% have "existential vacuum"...emptiness...a lack of meaning

When we listen, we hear people share:

"Why did this happen to me? This is too much. I can't go on."

- "I don't have a purpose. I'm lost."

- "I don't know why I'm doing what I'm doing."

- "I've lost out...I've run out of second and third chances."

- "I have no direction...I have no interests...I have no fun....nothing matters..."

- "Since that happened, I've just given up."

- "I'm bitter...I don't believe in myself or others..."

- "So what? Who cares? I'll never be happy. "

Dr. Aaron Antonovsky: people who survive extreme stress have a "*sense of coherence*":

- comprehensibility: strong feeling they can make sense of their experience

- manageability: they have access to the internal-external resources to meet  
the demands they encounter

- meaning: that these demands are challenges in which they can find meaning  
and to which they can commit themselves [meaningful life engagement]

**Personal meaning can provide strength and direction**

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## Fostering a Resilient Attitude: Attitudinal Values

“Say ‘Yes to Life’, in spite of everything”  
....access the “defiant power of the human spirit.”

Viktor Frankl, MD, PhD

- A family breaks up, a loved one dies, a sickness is incurable, a professional career is ended, a natural catastrophe destroys a home, or a finances force a bitter austerity.
- How do we respond to these “blows of fate”?
- We have a choice, regardless of how irrevocable the facts of the situation.
- We can accept the facts and ourselves, or we condemn the situation and ourselves.
- It is our decision: the cruelest fate does not have the power to decide how we will face it.
- We can show courage and trust in the future or we can despair.

Meaning and Suffering, Dr. Elizabeth Lukas

- All of us face natural adversities that influence our lives...but that does not mean we have no responsibility (or choice) in the situation.
- We are responsible for what we make we make of our handicaps; for our attitudes toward them; for the bitterness, anger or depression that act synergistically with the original “coefficient of adversity”...
- One is responsible for the attitude one adopts to the adversity—whether to live a life of bitter regret or find a way to transcend the handicap and fashion a meaningful life in spite of it.

Existential Psychotherapy, Irvin Yalom, MD

- Let me suggest that the bad things that happen to us in our lives do not have a meaning when they happen to us.
- But we can give them meaning
- We can redeem these tragedies from senselessness by imposing meaning on them
- I suggest not asking “Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?”
- A better question would be “Now that this has happened to me, what am I going to do about it?”

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Harold S. Kushner

“No suffering can defeat us if we are prepared to search for its meaning.”

Dr. Elizabeth Lukas, PhD

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## **Acceptance**



***“...accepting your pain is a step toward ridding yourself of suffering...”***  
Dr. Steven C. Hayes, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

***“Radical acceptance is the only way out of hell---it means letting go of fighting reality.  
Acceptance is the way to turn suffering that cannot be tolerated into pain that can be tolerated.”***  
Dr. Marsha Linehan, Dialectical Behavior Therapy

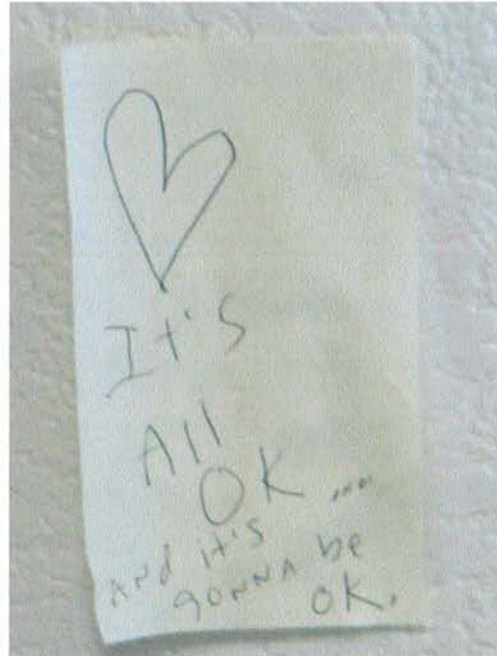
***“Accept that I cannot accept?”***  
***“Yes, bring acceptance into your non-acceptance. Then, see what happens.”***  
Eckhart Tolle, “Stillness Speaks”

***“Acceptance leads to ‘the peace that surpasses understanding’...  
Acceptance is both an attitude and a process.  
The attitude of acceptance flows from Dr. Frankl’s “Say ‘Yes to life, in spite of everything’; it is a perspective that affirms life as it is, not as I always want it to be.  
The process of acceptance can be brief, like in the amount of time it takes to snap our fingers, or, take quite a long time, like in the amount of time it takes for the sun to rise and set two thousand times.”***  
Tom Lavin, “Meaningful Living Series”



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## **The Peace That Surpasses Understanding**



### **The experience of mental-emotional-spiritual pain**

**is like the ground has opened up and we're falling into the void...**

**nothing to stand on... and nothing to hold onto...**

**At those times we can say "Yes...OK...OK" and there emerges**

**the peace that surpasses understanding.**

**We find we then have a place to stand and something to hold onto.**

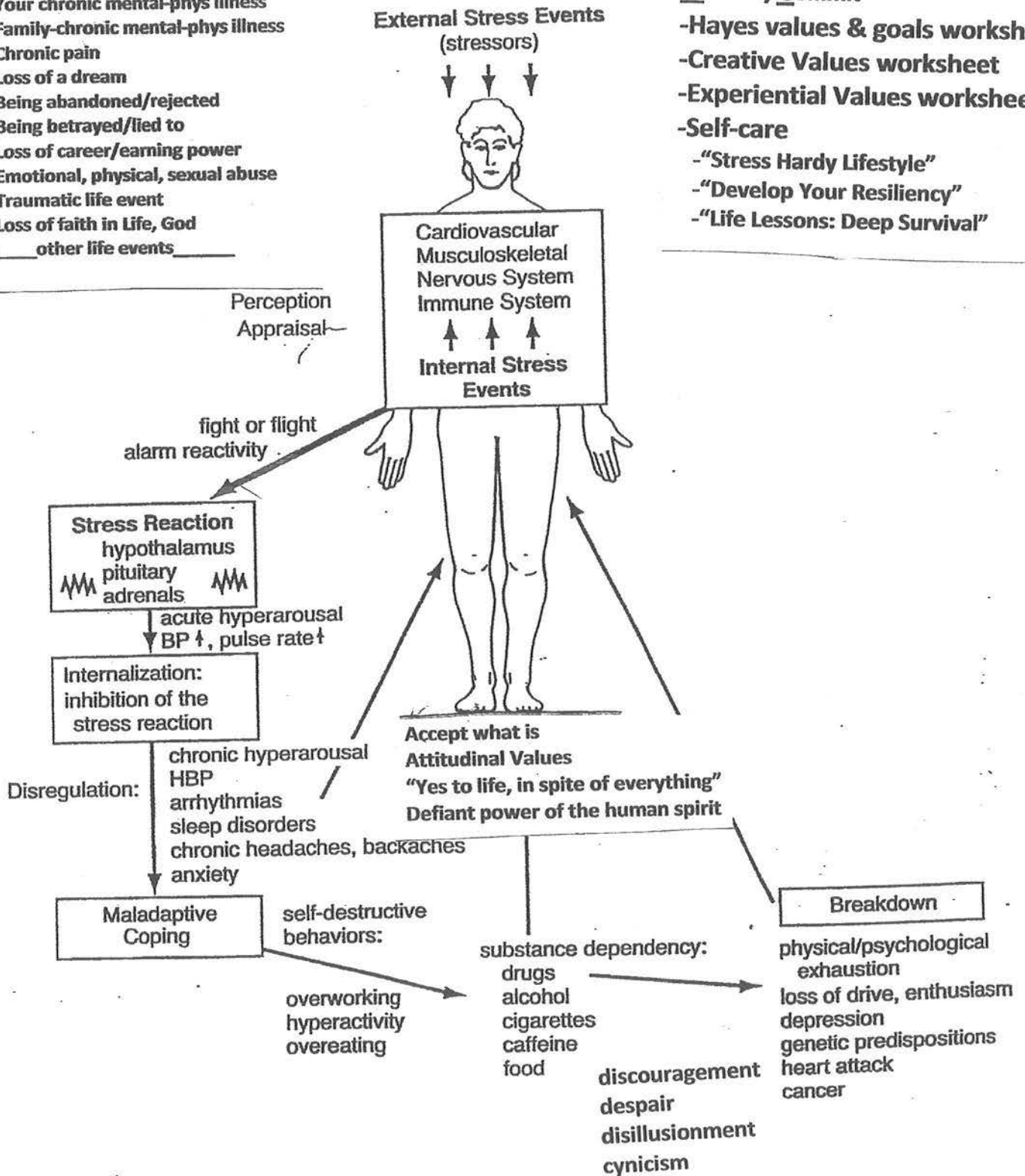
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## Choose/Commit

- Hayes values & goals worksheets
- Creative Values worksheet
- Experiential Values worksheet
- Self-care
  - “Stress Hardy Lifestyle”
  - “Develop Your Resiliency”
  - “Life Lessons: Deep Survival”



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## Vision-Decision-Action

*"If you bring to mind a picture of who you want to become,  
and keep it and hold it there long enough,  
you will become as you have been thinking."*

William James

**Vision I have for myself:  
characteristics/qualities I want to develop:**

-curiosity	-learning	-confidence	-spirituality
-compassionate	-justice	-neatness	-love
-responsible	-wisdom	-creativity	-adventure
-integrity	-health	-faith	-respect
-connectedness	-joyful	-honesty	-patience
-reliable	-humility	-loyal	-balance
-intimacy	-courage	-optimism	-passion
-generosity	-enthusiasm	-humor	-grateful
-openness	-playful	-authentic	-strength

### -Vision-Decision-Action

--To become that person, 1 change I will make in the next week:

-what change \_\_\_\_\_

-when change \_\_\_\_\_

-how/resources to support  
change \_\_\_\_\_

-how I could keep myself from accomplishing this  
change \_\_\_\_\_

### **Ripple Effect:**

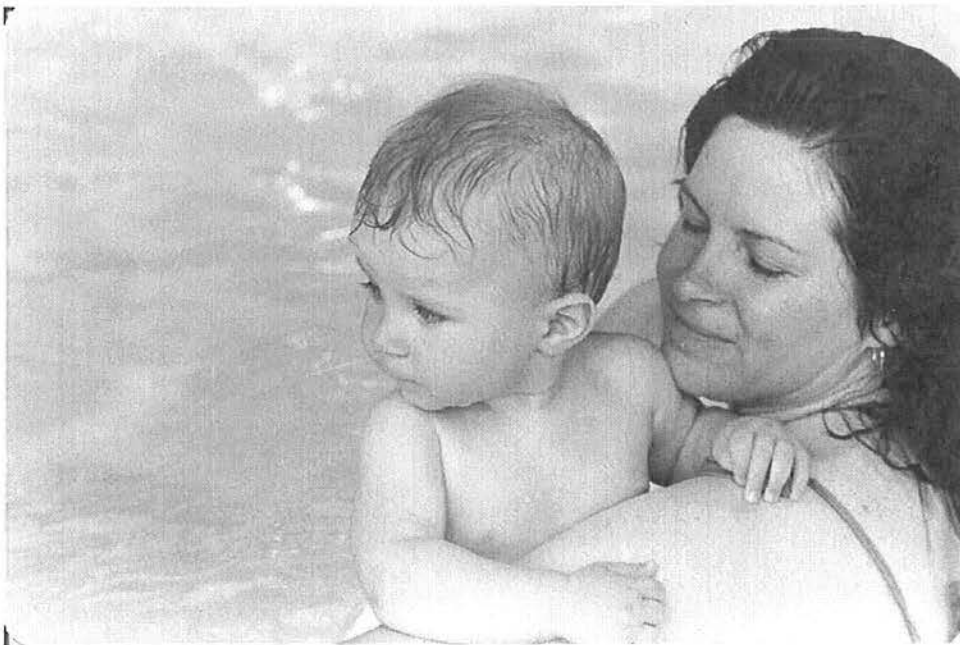
Starting off with one small,  
healthy change

can lead to profound, long term life-enhancing changes

**Nike therapy: Just do it**



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**“...a person should not ask what he may expect from life,  
but should rather understand that life expects something from him...**

**...human existence always points, and is directed, toward something  
other than oneself...towards meanings to fulfill, or toward other  
human beings to encounter lovingly....man is human to the extent  
that he overlooks and forgets himself by giving himself to a cause  
to serve or another person to love.”**

***The Doctor and the Soul, Viktor Frankl MD, PhD***

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## **The Ripple Effect**



*Do you want to be a positive influence in the world?  
First, get your own life in order.  
Your behavior influences others through a ripple effect.  
If your life works, you influence your family.  
If your family works,  
Your family influences the community...the nation.  
Remember that your influence begins with you  
and ripples outward.  
All growth spreads from a fertile and potent nucleus.  
You are a fertile and potent nucleus.*

From: Tao Te King

## The Ripple Effect

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## DISCOVERING MEANING Through Creative Values (78)

Life Goals, Aims and Ambitions (Personal, Interpersonal, Professional)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What has held me back this far? (Personal shortcomings, circumstances, etc.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Assets/strengths that can help me accomplish my aims, goals, ambitions.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What I can begin to do to accomplish my aims, goals and ambitions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



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## **Life Moves Pretty Fast**



**"Life moves pretty fast.**

**If you don't stop and look around once in a while,  
you could miss it." Ferris Bueller**

## EXPERIENTIAL VALUES

Meaning is experienced in relationship with the world. We are in relationship with the world when we're aware and alive to possibilities.

- I. Experiential Meaning can be experienced in a loving relationship. Describe your experience of our your commitment to experiencing a truly loving relationship in your life.

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- II. Meaning is experienced by each of us through our unique relationship with the world. In being free, responsible and unique we can search out those experiences which enhance our aliveness and sense of meaning, where we experience ourselves and life more fully. (Some examples are: playing music, appreciation of nature, photography, painting, drawing, pottery, horseback riding, canoeing, skiing, medication, yoga, TaiChi, bird watching, opera, art gallery, theatre, museum, zoo, hiking, travel, sightseeing, camping, sewing, crafts, poetry, fiction, etc.).

List experiences that are meaningful, enriching and fulfilling for your (or ones you are willing to try):

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Are you committed to arrange your life to allow these enriching experiences to be a part of your life?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Fabry, J., Guideposts to Meaning, New Harbinger Publications, 1993**

### VALUES ASSESSMENT RATING FORM

Read and then rate each of the values narratives generated by your therapist and you. Rate how important this value is to you on a scale of 1 (high importance) to 10 (low importance). Rate how successfully you have lived this value during the past month on a scale of 1 (very successfully) to 10 (not at all successfully). Finally, rank these value narratives in order of the importance you place on working on them right now, with 1 as the highest rank, 2 the next highest, and so on.

Domain	Valued direction narrative	Importance	Success	Rank
Couples/intimate relationships				
Family relations				
Social relations				
Employment				
Education and training				
Recreation				
Spirituality				
Citizenship				
Health/physical well-being				



GOALS, ACTIONS, BARRIERS FORM				
Domain	Valued direction	Goals	Actions	Barriers
Couples/intimate relationships				
Family relations				
Social relations				
Employment				
Education and training				
Recreation				
Spirituality				
Citizenship				
Health/physical well-being				

Values Worksheets  
Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life  
 Steven C. Hayes, PhD

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***Stress-Hardy Lifestyle***  
**Tom Lavin MFT, LADC**

**“Responding rather than reacting to stress; learning to have our stress, without our stress having us.”**

**“Serenity is not freedom from the storm...but finding peace within the storm”.**

**A key question is: *What changes do I need to make in my lifestyle, attitudes and relationships that will allow me to be at peace with myself, others and life?***

In the course of a week, life offers us many invitations, challenges, and opportunities. When we calmly respond with confidence, trust and courage, we have a chance to address these life situations in a positive, healing way for ourselves and others.

When we are able to respond rather than react, we are able to “bounce back”.

### **Do One New Thing**

A wise therapist will often recommend to a patient who wants to change; “just do one new thing”.

Following are the “Universal Resiliency Guidelines” that I give to students in the “Resiliency” classes. You might find it helpful to study the guidelines and ask, “If I started integrating this One New Thing into my life this week, would it improve my life in the long run?”

***Choose one*** and begin to practice on a regular basis:

- ♥Enjoyable exercise - “blow off steam” physically with activities such as running, walking, or gardening.
- ♥Avoid self-medication - There are many chemicals, including alcohol, that can provide temporary relief; they do not help you adjust to the stress itself. Many are habit-forming.

- ♥ Get enough sleep and rest - Most people need at least 7 to 9 hours of
- ♥ Balance work and recreation - Schedule time for recreation.
- ♥ Talk out your worries - ("A joy shared is a joy doubled; a problem shared is a problem cut in half".) It helps to share "the good, the bad and the ugly" with someone you trust and respect. This may be a friend, family member, clergyman, teacher or counselor.
- ♥ Learn to accept what you cannot change - If the problem is beyond your control at this time, decide to accept it. (Accepting does not mean "I like it.")
- ♥ Do something for others - Sometimes when people are distressed, they concentrate too much on themselves.
- ♥ Take one thing at a time - Work on the most important thing and let the others go for now.
- ♥ Nutrition - Minimize caffeine, sugar.
- ♥ Journal - Write down your thoughts and feelings. This can help you let go of anger, anxiety and depression.
- ♥ Make a gratitude list daily - Thank people: share your gratitude.
- ♥ Learn to say "No" when you need to.

sleep. If you have persistent sleep problems, you should consult your doctor.

- ♥ Have a "quiet place" you can go to relax and let go. (Even twice a day, for 10 minutes can help).
- ♥ When you find yourself getting upset or worried, ask yourself, "How much does this really matter?"
- ♥ Let go of wanting "more" things.
- ♥ Take a class or join a group that will be fun or meaningful.
- ♥ Take time to listen to good music.
- ♥ Take a nature walk.

### *The Ripple Effect*

*Starting off with one small,  
healthy change  
can lead to more profound  
life-enhancing changes.*

### Resources

- ♥ **EAS/Employee Assistance Services** offer free, confidential counseling to employees and their families: Phone 323-3330.
- ♥ **Full Catastrophe Living**  
by Jon Kabat-Zinn

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## **Develop Your Resiliency**

**“It’s not what happens to you that matters,  
what matters is what you do with what happens to you.” George Bernard Shaw**

**Being able to bounce back from of difficult times is essential to health and happiness: this  
“bounce-back-ability” is also referred to as “resiliency”.**

**We all experience difficult challenges throughout our lives: family relationship problems, children with learning disabilities, our own or our spouse’s or parents’ chronic health issues, struggles with domestic violence, addiction, death, financial bankruptcy, loneliness, difficult work relationships, career frustrations, times of feeling lost or feeling we have lost our sense of meaning in life.**

**During these difficult times we can develop a deeper sense of resiliency or we can succumb to the distress of “the slings and arrows” of life.**

**Good News: Research on resiliency shows that resiliency can be developed by consciously nurturing the following characteristics:**

- 1. Make Connections: develop healthy relationships by sharing, asking for help, assisting others.**
- 2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems: ‘this, too, will pass’, develop optimism**
- 3. Accept that change is a part of life, be flexible, re-evaluate goals and expectations**
- 4. Engage: assess what seems best, decide, take action**
- 5. “If it doesn’t kill me, it will make me stronger”: adapt a perspective that this distressing situation will make you stronger, wiser, more compassionate.**
- 6. Enhance your repertoire of self-care: physical, mental, emotional dimensions of your life.**

**Resources: 1. “The Resilience Factor”, Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte**  
**2. [www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org)**



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**Life Lessons: 8 (+2) principles to use if lost in the Amazon [or facing any life challenge]**  
from Deep Survival, by Laurence Gonzales

**“To my surprise, I found an eerie uniformity in the way people survive seemingly impossible circumstances...those who practice what I call “deep survival”...It doesn’t seem to matter whether they are surviving being lost in the wilderness or battling cancer, whether they’re struggling through divorce or facing a business catastrophe – the strategies remain the same.” Laurence Gonzales, Deep Survival**

**“If it doesn’t kill you, it will make you stronger.”**  
paraphrase of Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche

**Right now, if you’re facing a significant challenge in your life, study these 8 (+2) principles, and see if you can apply one—or a few—to support you in successfully surviving, transforming and transcending this challenge.**

### **Partial List of Gonzales’ “Rules of Survival”:**

- 1. Don’t get caught in the trap on immobilizing fear/panic: “I will survive and succeed.”**
- 2. Enjoy the journey (*no matter how scary*), “I will stay calm”**
- 3. Learn to not fear pain (“This will pass”; “I will not let this stop me”)**
- 4. Celebrate each success as you work your way through the process**
- 5. Channel anger constructively—use anger for motivation and energy**
- 6. Surrender to “what is”, accept setbacks as part of the process**
- 7. Set attainable step by step goals and make plans to achieve them**
- 8. Don’t get discouraged, don’t give up**
- 9. and 10.: (*added by me*: maintain your vision of what you really want to accomplish; look to see how you can help others along the way)**

# THE STRESS-REACTION CYCLE

## When Life Hurts

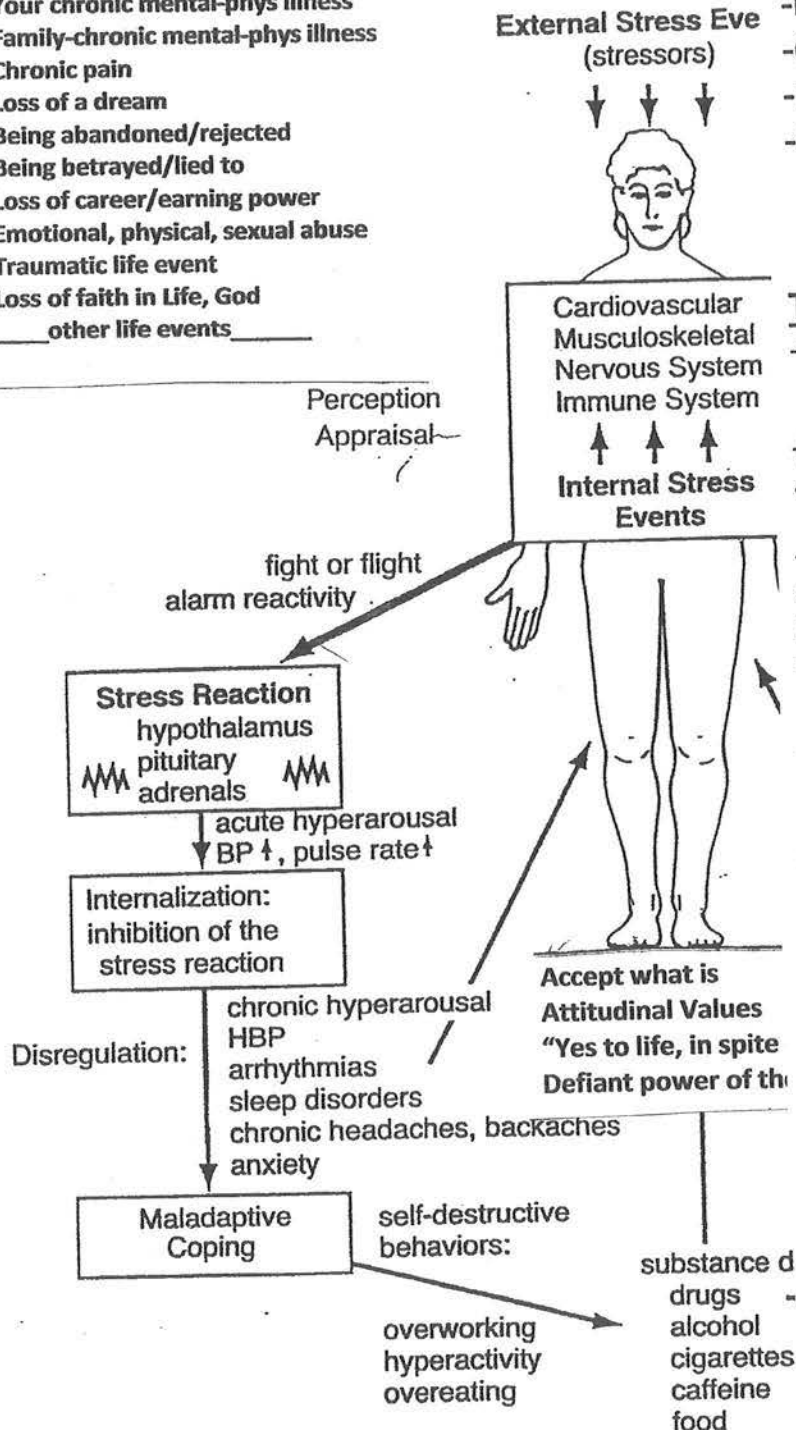
- Death of Spouse/Child/Family
- Your chronic mental-phys illness
- Family-chronic mental-phys illness
- Chronic pain
- Loss of a dream
- Being abandoned/rejected
- Being betrayed/lying to
- Loss of career/earning power
- Emotional, physical, sexual abuse
- Traumatic life event
- Loss of faith in Life, God
- other life events

## Choose/Commit

- Hayes values & goals worksheets
- Creative Values worksheet
- Experiential Values worksheet
- Self-care
  - “Stress Hardy Lifestyle”
  - “Develop Your Resiliency”
  - “Life Lessons: Deep Survival”

## Take action

- “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. Tao Te King
- Nike TX: Just do it—engage with life  
...don’t try, do...take that step
- Willingness: “...is both a stance toward life and an activity. It is about doing...ultimately, willingness is about finding a way to live a meaningful and productive life with our pain.”  
*The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety*
- Courage: to have heart...if you get discouraged, acknowledge that...and get back up and keep going
- Patience: creating a new life takes time.... one day at a time...Often, it is two steps forward and one step backward
- Encouragement: to give heart – to help someone find their strength to believe and do  
-“You alone can do it, but you don’t have to do it alone.”
- “Devotion-I’ll be there for you”
- Patient-accept the loving, nurturing support of others
- Patient to agent-provide loving, nurturing support
- Gratitude



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### Attitude of Gratitude: a healthy perspective on life each day

Gratitude is an attitude, a perspective on life.

Having and expressing an attitude of gratitude helps reduce distress.

Sometimes it's a feeling, other times the feeling is not there. But, even with the feeling not there, we can have the attitude.

Looking through the "pair of glasses of gratitude", we have a certain perspective on life.

Sometimes when we are having a difficult time, it's hard to feel grateful and hard to have an attitude of gratitude. At those difficult times, we have to try hard to remember and focus on people, places, things, and experiences for which we are grateful.

Remembering and focusing: this is called nurturing an attitude of gratitude.

After remembering and focusing, expressing our gratitude through words or actions nurtures it even more, and makes it more real and present in our life.

Psychological research shows we human beings much more easily remember negative events and this negativity will persist and overtake our consciousness, causing us to have a "negative attitude" unless we balance the negative out by consciously remembering and expressing gratitude.

Sometimes, taking a couple of minutes each day to make a gratitude list and making a commitment to express gratitude can help us nurture an attitude of gratitude, and can help us let go of a negative attitude.

Taking the time to make a list and nurture an attitude of gratitude is not an attempt to make natural feelings like sadness, grief, hurt, or fear go away. Taking time to make the list, and think about who/what we have to be grateful for changes the perspective on these painful feelings and can help us deal with painful feelings. It is not to cover them up, or make them go away. It is looking at our life, even the difficult things, through the pair of glasses of gratitude.

5 things I am grateful for today:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

How I will express my gratitude today \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Devotion: I'll be there for you**

Lilly is a Great Dane who has been blind since a medical condition required that she have both eyes removed.

For the last 5 years, Maddison has been her sight.

The two are inseparable.





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## **The Starfish Story**



Original Story by: Loren Eisely

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking things up and throwing them into the ocean.

Approaching the boy, he asked  
"What are you doing?"

The youth replied  
"Throwing starfish back into the ocean.  
The surf is up and the tide is going out.  
If they're left on the beach, they die."

"Son", the man said,  
"don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach  
and thousands and thousands of starfish?  
You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the ocean.

Smiling at the man, the boy said  
"Just made a difference for that one."