

# Frontline

*This newsletter is dedicated to professional caregivers.  
It is our hope that this newsletter will help you give  
comfort and strength to those you serve.*

## How to *Stay* Stressed

*(As if professionals needed instruction)*

Professionals deal with clients who are handling distress that may have been induced by abuse, family discord, illness, death, or a multitude of other stressors. Stress is the pain experienced when day-to-day problems exceed the abilities to solve them. It's a knotted feeling in the stomach — a headache that won't go away — anxiety that doesn't end after an exhausting day. While stress is often considered in emotional terms, it also creates physiological changes. It floods the body with adrenaline, speeds up the heartbeat, and deactivates the immune system. Unremitting stress can cause a feeling of detachment, degraded interpersonal relationships, and a sense of low personal accomplishment.

**No Stress-Free Zones for Professionals**  
The famed Dr. Colin Murray Parkes of the Department of Psychiatry of the London Hospital Medical College introduced his article "Caregiver's GRIEF" with these words:

"Senior nurse, busy day, two deaths on the ward, turns to her junior, "For goodness sake stop sniveling. I've got enough on my plate without your breaking down all over the place. If you can't keep your feelings under control you shouldn't be doing this kind of work."

Satirically, Dr. Parkes dramatically expresses the urgent need for professionals to become more cognizant of the stressors in their frenetic careers; i.e., dealing with death and dying issues, hysterical counselees, blizzards of paperwork,

inane regulations. Hospital personnel, social workers, psychologists, and clergy et al. are at precarious risk. What to do when the reservoir of adaptive energy is squandered, when each task becomes a hassle rather than a challenge? The following are sure-fire recipes for forcing the body into overdrive, making life joyless, and dispatching professionals into early graves.

*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

*(Who guards the guardians? Alternate translation:  
Who cares for the caregivers?)*

-- Juvenal, Satires VI, 347

### **Set Unattainable Goals**

In your mind you have an image of yourself as the heroic problem-solver, a kind of superman/woman, maybe a little "Messianic." Thus you are more invulnerable to personal needs than the rest of the population. There is nothing you can't or shouldn't do. You have messages on the front and back of your sweatshirt. On the front, "HOW AM I DOING?" and on the back, "I SHOULD HAVE DONE BETTER." Perchance if an almost unrealistic goal is attained, never reward yourself. There is still so much to do and so little time.

### **Don't Show Your Vulnerabilities**

You were raised to be strong in the face of adversity, to put on "a brave front" no matter what. Act one way even when you're feeling the

Winter 2003



By Dr. Earl A. Grollman

opposite. You don't want others to recognize your imperfections. Deep in your gut you may not really believe in yourself and the work you are doing. It is better to have no close friends who might learn the revelation – that you are an IMPOSTOR!

### **Friends are for Quakers**

You may be a solo performer in a private practice or the sole clergy person in a church/synagogue/mosque. Or, you are responsible for many people employed in a large organization or institution. You are always giving to the lonely and emotionally undernourished your unstinting time and endless compassion. You are the expert in human support. You really don't need a supportive network. Nurturers don't need nurturing. The result is that many of you have colleagues, but few, if any intimate relationships. And besides, you don't have the time.

### **Who Has the Time?**

The work that you are doing is so crucial that without your support the universe would be doomed. It is essential that you overcommit your time and over promise your counselees. Naturally you can't keep your appointments on schedule and allot sufficient time to do what you had planned. As far as family is concerned, one day when your schedule is less hectic, you will make it up to them. Indispensable professionals love to be harried so they speed to keep a late appointment. It is a thrilling chemical rush. How dare you say "no" to multitudes who require your help?

### **Never Say No**

"Please me." Your whole life may have been to please Mother and Father. If you acted, thought, or felt in a way that was not acceptable to them, you were scolded or made to feel guilty. Now, you need to please everyone else. Make them happy by living up to their expectations, however unrealistic. Whatever people ask, give in to their wishes. Ignore your own needs and surrender unconditionally to their requirements.

### **Relaxation — What's That?**

Adequate rest, listening to soothing music, visiting a museum, walking in the park, going on a vacation — sounds great, but you're just too occupied, at least right now. Meditation and that spiritual stuff aren't for you. You can't slow down, sit quietly, and even contemplate what brings peace, beauty, and serenity to your life. The anesthetic of achievement is just too alluring.

### **Exercise the Brain, Not the Body**

The mind must be vibrantly alive. Intellectuals don't go in for breaking a sweat cycling, jogging, swimming, or even walking. Time should be better used for noble causes. A few hours sleep is all you really require.

### **Food Isn't a Priority**

Read a professional journal while eating. If you're in a hurry, there's a fast food restaurant nearby. You'll take care of those extra pounds tomorrow. A buzz from caffeine is just what you need when you are tired and rushing to meet another deadline.

### **Your Profession is Your Life**

In your high-tension career it is impossible to separate your life from your work. Rescuing others from stressful lives makes you feel so good about yourself. When placed upon a pedestal by clients, sacrifices are demanded. Address their needs from sunrise to sunset. Work through lunch. Occasionally break bread with colleagues while discussing common concerns. Bring unfinished business home at the conclusion of the workday and use weekends to achieve the myriad details that you just didn't have the chance to complete.

How fulfilling to provide clients with the wisdom and motivation to make positive changes in their lives so that they are more centered and calm. You have given them the tools to cope with the challenges of their stressful existences. "Do what I suggest" is so efficacious for them. How about "Do what I am doing?" It's not easy to disguise yourself as Superman when you are a human, finite Clark Kent. Be careful so no one, including yourself, will pull your cape open and discover who you really are. Remove the speck in the other person's eye without realizing there is a log in your own.



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### **About the Author**

*Dr. Earl A. Grollman, a pioneer in crisis intervention, is the author of more than twenty-five books, and lectures extensively throughout the world.*

*A list of his award-winning books on grief and loss may be obtained from:*

*United States: Beacon Press:*

*25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108*

*Tel: (617) 742-2116*

*Canada: Oxford University Press:*

*70 Wynford Drive, Don Mills, Ontario M3C 1J9*

*Tel: (416) 441-2941 • Fax: (416) 441-0345*

*Internet Connection, Netscape:*

*<http://www.beacon.org/Beacon/award.html>*

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