
Stress Management: Effective Ways to Prevent and Relieve Stress

As a child, I was always told to follow my dreams and study what interested me by teachers and counselors. However, I knew that this idea would not bode well with my family. Coming from a family with a long history of doctors and healthcare practitioners, my parents, particularly my mother, had a vision for me and all my siblings: to follow the path that they followed and become a doctor. Towards the end of middle school, I believed that my career path would align with my parents' vision, so I enrolled in the medical academy at my high school. As a result, I was required to take classes pertaining to medicine and the healthcare field. However, I had noticed that I was treating these classes similarly to how I treated all my other classes at the time, with a lack of enthusiasm and motivation. This led to me the realization that I was disingenuous about my interests in medicine and had faked it just to please my parents and spare them from disappointment. By the time college applications began, I was close to certain that I was not suited for medicine and wanted to pursue engineering or explore other fields of study, but I knew if I told my parents of my endeavors, it could be catastrophic. So, in an effort to please them and save myself from headaches, I enrolled in pre-medical requisite courses anyways.

First semester of freshman year, pre-med courses consisted of introduction science courses, which was not particularly challenging, so it was a bit easier to deal with the stress of studying something I had minimal interest in. However, classes became tougher second semester which made taking these courses even more difficult, so I told my parents how I felt about changing career paths. They immediately told me that I was only saying this because I was attempting to copy my older brother, who had also rejected pursuing medicine despite their wishes. Having experience dealing with a child who did not want to pursue medicine, my mother was not as surprised, however I was able to tell she was more disappointed. I was her last hope of having a doctor in the family for many years and the fact that all my cousins are pursuing medicine made her feel even worse. She did argue with me, but it wasn't the same way she had argued with my older brother, which was with passion and motivation. This time it felt as if she had already admitted defeat, which was not like my mother. Being as close as I was to my mother, it hurt me a lot to see her disappointed and have a sense of hopelessness. She never discussed the topic with me after our brief argument. She didn't become angry or yell or try to change my mind, which was also uncharacteristic of her.

All of this, along with me having difficulty in my academic life added up, and my behavior and attitude began to change drastically. I noticed myself become more irritable at the smallest things and started to lose my temper quicker. I approached my parents again telling them about my decision and this time my parents began arguing with me again, but with my father taking the lead. They suggested that I was immature with my decision and that by choosing a different career path, it would mean to them that I was not intelligent. This caused me to become more frustrated and upset, which led me to raise my voice, insult other family members, march upstairs and shut my door as hard as I possibly could. I would then sit on my desk-chair and would run through scenarios where I handled things differently and would begin to feel regretful on how I handled the situation and how I disrespected my parents. Yet, it felt as if no one was on my side and that I had no other choice besides yelling to get my point across. It felt like I was

arguing with a wall.

As a result, I began going out with friends close to everyday for hours after coming home from school, almost to the point where I would only be at home to sleep and finish up homework. Despite constantly being with friends and going to movies, I still found myself stressed at the end of the day, because I knew that my relationship with my parents was not where it used to be and that repairing it will help alleviate the stress. However, I knew reigniting the conversation would only drag us back into the same argument, which would just cause this cycle to repeat all over again. Instead, I decided to swallow my pride and resume talking to my parents as if the argument had never occurred, trying my best not to revisit the topic. I began walking on eggshells when explaining to them my academic endeavors, in fear that I will restart all the stress and negativity that was created because of our difference. However, through the passage of time my parents were able to tell me that they only want what is best for me and that they were only trying to do what their parents did for them and that if I am uncomfortable with pursuing medicine, I should pursue whatever my interests are in.

Even though this issue had put me in a tough spot, I learned what helps me alleviate stress and what does not. In the beginning of this issue, I thought that maybe talking the problem out with a friend and getting a second opinion may help, however I found this not to be the case mainly because it was very difficult for me to convey the feelings I had towards my parents and how we deal with issues in Pakistani culture. This narrowed down the potential solutions for me, because I knew that I lacked the ability to properly express myself to others, so I chose to tackle the issue independently. Firstly, I found that listening to Jordan Peterson, a famous clinical psychologist and professor, helped deviate my negative trains of thought. His lectures/podcasts really captured all my attention and redirected my focus on what he was saying, which was primarily on how to live your life to the fullest and how to better yourself as an individual. So, rather than focusing on my personal conflicts, I would be forced to listen on how to avoid conflict as much as possible. Secondly, I discovered that driving my car on the backroads of Sugarland really helped. These roads were less populated and had many twists and turns which made driving more fun and enjoyable and would also require my full attention due to the nature of the turns on the road and the constant input needed on the steering wheel. I would play music and drive from anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour, until I felt calm and relaxed.

Lastly, I found that mixed martial arts was the most effective method to alleviating the stress and tension I had been feeling, During this stressful period, I signed up for kickboxing classes, as opposed going to the Recreational Center on campus, and would go close to everyday and would practice my kickboxing along with the other people who were there, and it helped me force out a lot of my frustration through the punches I through as well as talking to my coach and other sparring partners, who were generally older than me and offered advice occasionally. Although this experience was not a pleasant one, I believe there was some positivity that resulted from it. I began listening to Jordan Peterson, who is now one of the very few people I look up to and a true inspiration. His words and ideas help better myself as an individual, especially during times of hardship. I also gained perspective on my communication skills. I believe I need to improve in terms of communication, such as when I am frustrated or angry, I am unable to convey it in a positive manner and always lash out and become rude person. In addition, I have also found that being humble and swallowing your pride is more necessary than winning an argument. By not arguing with my parents I was able to decrease the overall tension in the atmosphere of our house and resume a friendly relationship with my family. Overall, this experience was a very stressful one. However, it revealed many things that I was unaware of

about myself and I believe that it was for the better. I think I am now a stronger person than who I was before this event, both mentally and emotionally. Also, I learned that my parents were only doing what they thought was best for my future, and it was my mindset which led me to believe that they were against me and my endeavors. This experience has shown me that obstacles and problems in life have a positive aspect, whether you learn that you are lacking in something or whether you grow as a person.

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