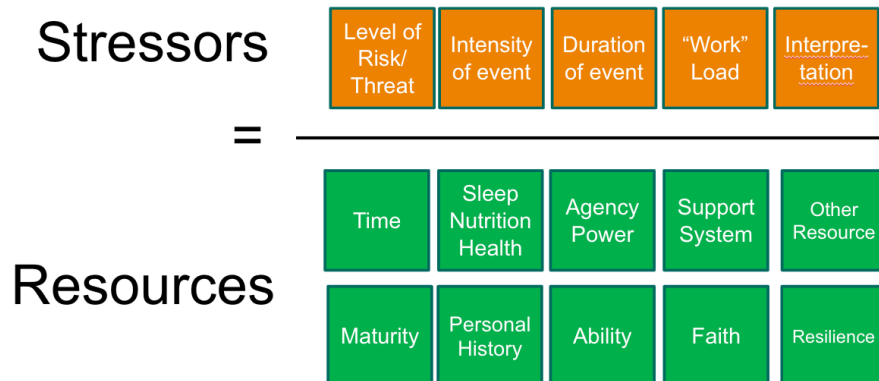


Factors Impacting Stressful Events

People respond differently to a given situation and may experience varying degrees of negative impact, partially depending on a person's internal and external resources to deal with it as well as the nature of the event itself. Simply put, when there are greater levels of stressors and less resources, the more stressful and traumatic an event would be to that person. The following graph captures a framework to think through stressors and resources:



These categories are not meant to be exhaustive, but to give you a sampling of some major areas to consider. Also, these are not meant to be used to compare one experience of suffering to another, but to provide helpful categories to both validate our experience and give direction to ways we can minimize the negative impact where possible.

Stressors related to the negative event or incident:

- Level of risk/threat – what is at stake; the greater the threat involved in an event, the more stressful it is.
- Intensity of the event – includes your personal involvement in the event. Though the level of risk associated with coronavirus is the same everywhere, it was felt more intensely in the epicenters. It also includes resulting personal hardships such as job loss.
- Duration of the event – the longer a negative event lasts, either in duration or frequency, the greater impact it will have. It wears down our coping resources as well as increases a sense of powerlessness, which is associated with negative effects.
- "Work" load – the amount of work or responsibility the event requires from you personally.
- Interpretation – the more negative the interpretation of our experiences, the more stressful the event would feel. It also includes broader societal reactions to the event.

Particularly detrimental is moral injury: distress from witnessing or failing to prevent acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.

Following are categories of resources to consider in dealing with life's stressors.

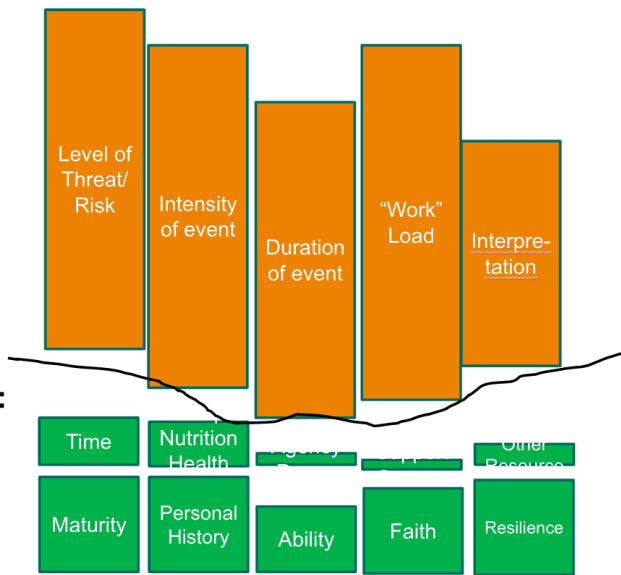
Resources that are more enduring and developmental in nature:

- Age/Maturity – age and maturity at the time of the event greatly affect our ability to cope since the level of emotional and cognitive abilities available to a person differ by maturity level.
- Personal history – in general, the more a person has a past history of trauma, the more vulnerable they are to being traumatized by a new negative event.
- Ability – the greater a person's ability and competency in the area related to the specific stressor, the less stressful the event. For example, an EMT would feel less stressed in medical emergencies than someone who has no training.
- Faith – spirituality has been shown to be beneficial in reducing the effects of negative life events.
- Resilience – the ability to recover quickly from difficulties, a capacity developed over time that affects a person's response to stressors, including patterns of self-care.

Resources that are more transient and can differ at the time of a specific negative event:

- Time available – time can help a person handle the workload and the stresses involved.
- Health/Sleep/Nutrition – being healthy helps a person handle the stressors of an event better than if they have already been worn down physically.
- Agency/Power – the greater the sense of agency over the event, the less detrimental it feels.
- Support system – feeling safely connected and supported by loved ones greatly increases a person's ability to handle negative stressors.
- Other resources – Access to other external support can reduce the level of stress experienced.

Stressful
Traumatic =



As you can see from the graph above, when the stressors overcome the resources, people become overwhelmed and can be negatively impacted, especially if the event or stressor lasts longer than expected. Using this visual, you can work with people to:

Identify ways they can reduce the level of stressors and increase resources to help mitigate the negative impact of stressful events

Not all things will be within the person’s control, but to the degree one can control it, help them name and implement changes.

Name the factors that are beyond their control and explore opportunities for increased dependency on God

Explore ways they tend to experience God more personally

As mentioned above with the resource of a support system, all of us were created to be social creatures and to co-regulate with others, especially our heavenly Father. A child who is afraid of the dark would say, “Mama, come with me.” In the parent’s safe and loving comfort the child can feel soothed enough to do what they could not do alone.

This is how God addresses people who are under fearful situations in scripture. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you...” (Is 41:10). The trick is that we need to be able to access His presence experientially so that our nervous system could feel safe and connected in His care. It may take the form of imagery, music or meditating on a particular passage visually. As we work with people, we can help identify a particular way they tend to experience Jesus’ love to help them truly appropriate the “God with us” that He promises.