



December marks the official beginning of winter, the end of the semester, and the start of the holidays. The semester is over and grades are turned in. We now approach the winter break when we can turn our attention from faculty to family for the few weeks before spring semester begins. Since no one wants to be 'the grinch who steals the holidays' we have provided some helpful hints and tips for communication under stress. §

Charles M. Shultz:
*"All you need is love.
But a little chocolate
now and then doesn't
hurt."*



Communication Under Stress

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Communication is not only sharing information but is also about understanding the emotions and intentions behind the information. Keeping that communication effective in stressful situations can be challenging. Here are some of the tips which can be used to communicate effectively under stressful situations.

Here are some tips on how can you improve your communication when you are stressed.

1. Concentrate on your breathing — taking slow, deep breaths can help you calm down and reduce any anxiety or rage.
2. Try to relax your muscles, especially those in your shoulders and jaw.
3. If you can remove any potential distractions from your surrounding environment, such as laptops, televisions, and phones.
4. Make a list to help you prepare for the conversation.
5. When you are not speaking in a conversation, the finest piece of advice is to actively listen to what is being said and answer when appropriate.
6. Instead of using 'You' statements, use 'I' statements.
7. Make a sincere effort to comprehend the viewpoint of the other person. Even if you don't agree with all that's been said.
8. Negotiate a compromise.
9. Recognize that resolving your stress may require more than one talk.
10. If the conversation does not seem to be progressing in a favorable way, suggest continuing the conversation at a later time.



What to do if a conversation gets too stressful!



Here are some tips on how you can help bring the conversation back on to an even footing:

- Keep an eye on your surroundings.
- Try not to gesticulate.
- Maintain your gaze.
- It's all about the tone and tempo.
- Be clear and concise.
- Only focus on the facts.
- Deal with the here and now. §

Resources:

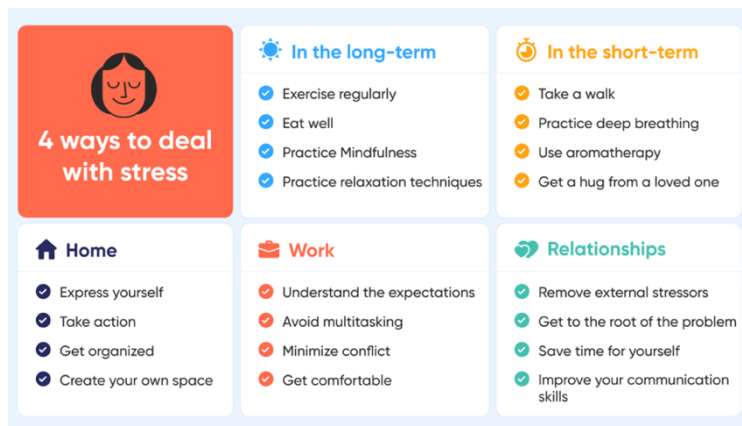
<https://3dsuccess.org/communicate-effectively-when-stressed/>

<http://www.stress.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/A-Guide-to-Communication-and-Stress.pdf>

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/191754896611424703/>

Stressed during the end of the semester, here are some helpful tips!

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*Near the end of the semester tensions can rise in the classroom; communications between students and faculty can become more stressful. To add to that chaos, returning home and communicating with family members can be an added stressor. While there are many benefits to seeing family such as catching up, home cooked meals, and petting the family dog, there can also be tension around some topics. The infographic above, with four ways to deal with stress in our different environments, is a great and easy way to help. While at school and taking finals, grading finals, and getting the last of the semester work done it is important to remember that it is all connected to our other environments.

*If you find yourself in a stressful conversation, look to the infographic to the right about four core skills of effective communications. These four skills of Listening, Confidence, Emotional Intelligence, and Negotiations can be used at the work, home, or anywhere. They also have some stress relief tips similar to the infographic on the top.

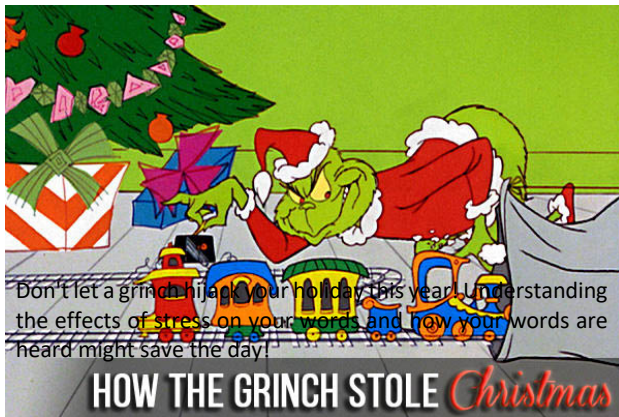
*An article by Smith and Pergola from the [NASD website](#) reviews stress and communication techniques as well. The authors talk about the need for good social support when in stressful situations caused by miscommunications. I like how they mention the positive ways a family can communicate under stress. Families should talk through things calmly, respect each other feelings, and listen to what each person has to say. The end of the communication conflict should end on a positive note. While every family has conflict, using these and similar communication skills can support a healthy and effective conversation. §

Resources:

<https://nasdonline.org/214/d000012/stress-and-communication.html>
<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/pandemic-guide-communicating-about-holidays/>
<https://3dsuccess.org/communicate-effectively-when-stressed/>
<https://www.betterup.com/blog/stress-management-techniques>



Communication Under Stress
Margaret Ménache, ODR Interim Director
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The holidays and stress seem to go hand-in-hand. One online holiday stress checklist includes: doing too much; eating, drinking, and spending too much; too much togetherness; and not enough togetherness. Then, there is the stress of the traditional family festivities that aren't necessarily festive for all members of the family. This particular year adds in "supply chain disruptions," travel disruption, and a general slide away from civility.

Communication, miscommunication, and even lack of communication, are threads that run through all these situations. While "good" communication cannot ease all the holiday stresses, it can reduce the stress in many situations. Stress, itself, hijacks our ability to understand what is being said to us. It's easy to sink into a vicious cycle of stress, poor communication, more stress, worse communication...

Several things happen when we're under stress.

- Rather than the usual seven ideas or concepts we can handle, people can only process three; how much detail do you need to make your point?
- Of those three, they are likely to forget the middle message; can you refine your key conversational point further?
- People often can only understand information at about four grade levels below their actual grade level; be clear in your own mind what you want to communicate and work to state it clearly and succinctly.
- Negative statements overwhelm positive statements; if you can state something or ask a question with positive rather than negative phrasing, do it.
- People are more aware of nonverbal communication and are more likely to place a negative interpretation on it; you might have your arms wrapped around your chest because you're cold but that could be interpreted as disapproval to someone under stress.
- It is always the case that people want to know that you care before they care what you know; this is even more true in stressful situations.

Are you a fortunate person whose family gets along well and enjoys holiday gatherings and festivities? That's wonderful! In your shopping, travel, dining out, and other social activities you will likely interact with people who are far more stressed than you are. What a gift to them if you can use some of these communication tools and possibly help them reduce their own stress. §

Resources:

www.verywellmind.com/understanding-and-managing-holiday-stress.3145230.
Dr. Vince Covello on risk communication and message mapping: <https://vimeo.com/20290221>;
<https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1015/ML101590283.pdf>; <https://centerforriskcommunication.org/>