

leadership ladders:

STEPS TO A GREAT CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK

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managing stress

Stress (noun): mental, emotional, or physical strain or tension
(Dictionary.com, 2011)

*Pressure and stress
is the common
cold of the psyche.*

~Andrew Denton

Amongst the paperwork, deadlines, emotional crisis, lack of resources, resistant clients, and the many other obstacles social workers face regularly, many cannot imagine a work life without stress. Though challenging workplace factors may be reality for social workers, there are helpful ways to remain composed and relaxed even when faced with adversity.

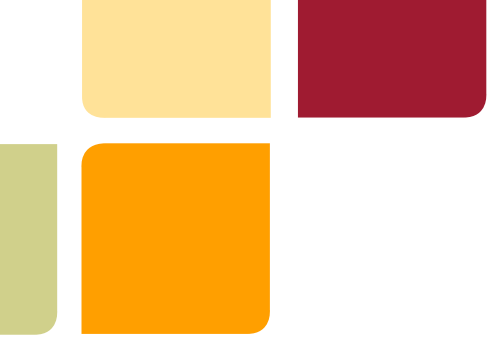
Feeling confident in your ability to stay calm and relaxed can help you enjoy and further your career. Consider these approaches on a daily basis to maintaining your balance.

» BE PREPARED

Planning ahead can help alleviate stress. Getting directions before leaving for an appointment, reviewing notes before a meeting or court proceeding, and even



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*The greatest
weapon
against stress
is our ability
to choose
one thought
over another.*

~William James



choosing an outfit the night before a significant event can make a big difference in how well-prepared you feel.

» **MEET BASIC NEEDS**

You are better able to meet the needs of others when your own needs are met. Take time to take care of your basic needs such as, getting enough sleep, eating regularly, drinking enough water. Meeting these needs can help you have the physical and emotional energy to adequately and efficiently complete tasks.

» **MANAGE YOUR TIME**

Knowing what needs to be done and allotting an appropriate amount of time for each task will assist in alleviating stress. Scheduling in time for last minute assignments and crisis management can also be beneficial. Understanding what needs to be completed is the first step in completing it. Figuring out how to complete everything that needs to be done can take some creativity and time, however the rewards are well worth the investment.

» **FIND SUPPORT**

Discussing what is on your mind with a friend or co-worker can be very helpful in reducing stress. Another person can listen, lend advice, and even provide a distraction to challenges. Trusting your thoughts with another person can help you avoid feeling isolated and alone and also help foster a feeling of connectedness.

» **HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

A positive attitude can change everything. Sometimes simply changing the way you think about a situation can help you feel better and more relaxed about it, even when the circumstances do not change. Rephrasing negative ideas or statements to positive ones can make a big difference in your ability to cope. For example, instead of saying, "I have no idea how to handle this situation," you can say, "This situation is providing me with an incredible learning experience."

» **LAUGH**

Don't take things too seriously—after all, laughter is the best medicine! Having a sense of humor is an important tool in surviving stressful situations. Keeping things in perspective and enjoying yourself will help relieve stress and increase your coping ability.

» **BREATHE**

Simply breathe. When experiencing stress, it is common to ignore how you are breathing. Taking deep, purposeful breaths and staying aware of your breathing rhythms can help your body and mind stay calm.

RESOURCES

National Association of Social Workers
Center for Workforce Studies provides information on the social work workforce. This information includes helpful resources to enhance professional skills.
www.socialworkers.org

Help Starts Here is a website where social workers offer tips for the public regarding common issues of everyday life including mental health issues.
www.helpstartshere.org

REFERENCE

Dictionary.reference.com (2011). *Definition for "stress."* Retrieved on June 15, 2011 from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stress>

National Association of Social Workers (2009). Professional self-care and social work. In *Social Work Speaks* (8th ed.) pp. 268-272. Washington, DC: Author.