

Helping Others Cope With Stress

With this year's low agricultural prices, farm families and others related to farming are feeling increasing degrees of stress.

What can you do to help others cope more effectively? Here are nine points to assist you in relating to individuals experiencing stress.

- **Take time to listen.** Stressed individuals should not be rushed. By taking the time to listen, you are showing that you care. Ask questions so you clearly understand the problem. By asking questions, the individual must respond to you in a manner that helps them frame and understand their own problem.
- **Be non-critical and non-judgmental** as the individual shares his/her troubles. While their problem may not seem huge to you, it is to them.
- **Counsel on a one-on-one basis.** Be a good listener - don't interrupt. Try to draw them out. Get them to talk. This can be a tremendous pressure reliever.
- **Be empathetic.** We cannot know how the individual feels unless we have been there. Avoid one-upmanship.
- **Try to separate the problem causes from the symptoms.** Assist the individual in recognizing the difference. As the saying goes, sometimes it's hard to see the forest for the trees, especially when we're in the middle of the forest.
- **Try to help the individual think logically and rationally.** Jotting things down on a yellow note pad and prioritizing them can do wonders. Keep it simple.
- **Encourage the individual to get back into a routine of doing things.** Stress often brings on apathy and a loss of interest in things formerly enjoyed.
- **Learn to recognize the signs of stress.** There are many excellent publications available.
- **Above all, make sure the individual retains ownership of his/her problems.** If you pick them up, both or you have a problem and you lose your objectivity.

Dealing with stress often calls for professional help that is beyond your capacity regardless of how sincere you may be. When this happens, suggest that the individual seek professional help. In lesser situations, just being a caring, empathetic, supportive, and unhurried listener can go a long way in helping an individual through a difficult situation.