

How Addiction in the Family Impacts You: A Stress Symptoms Checklist

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

When someone seeks counseling for addiction in the family, one of the first questions I pose is, "How is their addiction affecting you?" Initially, responses often center on complaints about the loved one whose substance use is causing problems. Descriptions of personal impacts usually come with phrases like "I have to..." Sometimes, family members begin with their feelings and actual impacts on their lives. However, there's a tendency to overlook or dismiss the influence of addiction on oneself and other family members, focusing solely on the loved one's struggles.

The affliction of the family member shapes decisions, emotions, and behavior. The truth is no one escapes the impact of addiction in the family. Merely witnessing a loved one's struggle affects your well-being. Often, family members lose sight of their own experiences, becoming so engrossed in trying to control and fix the problem that they lose touch with their feelings and even lose themselves.

Feeling out of control is shared among family members in pain. The good news is you have more control over your pain than you may think. Misery is optional. You can experience your feelings and find solutions for your recovery, with or without your loved one finding their way into recovery. Your recovery is not contingent on theirs. You don't have to wait for them to begin reclaiming your life, and taking care of yourself is not an act of betrayal. Your recovery is just as crucial as the loved one impaired by substances, and you do have power over your recovery.

So, how does addiction in the family affect you? Maybe that question permits you to talk about your feelings. Do you experience shame, guilt, hurt, fear, sadness, loneliness, anger, anxiety, helplessness, and

powerlessness? All of these are normal, especially in this abnormal family context. Family members facing addiction feel all these things and more.

How does addiction affect family members individually and collectively? You know you are stressed but may not know what that means. The stress of addiction in a family member can create stress-related emotional, psychological, physical, relationship, and spiritual problems.

"Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to an endless parade of threats - real or imagined." "An endless parade of threats" certainly describes the family experience of addiction in one of its members. Stress is a persistent alert about threats, perhaps even after the threat is gone. Stress involves a perception that we may not be up to the challenge of the threat. Anxiety is a poorly defined threat—something terrible might happen sometime in the future. Anxiety, stress, and worry are constant companions, all related to emotional, behavioral, and physical changes. Use The Stress Symptoms Checklist to identify how your family member's substance use disorder and your stress is affecting you.

The Stress Symptoms Checklist

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Below is a list of emotional or psychological symptoms of inadequately managed stress. Check the symptoms that you experience.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Nervousness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of enthusiasm
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mood swings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Restlessness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty focusing, concentrating, paying attention
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irritability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of motivation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Memory problems
<input type="checkbox"/>	Racing thoughts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling overwhelmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low self-efficacy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Depression

Below is a list of symptoms that people with inadequately managed stress experience. Check the physical symptoms that you experience.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Sleep disturbance <input type="checkbox"/> Getting to sleep <input type="checkbox"/> Staying asleep <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping too much <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares
<input type="checkbox"/>	Muscle aches, pains and tension
<input type="checkbox"/>	Headaches <input type="checkbox"/> Tension headaches <input type="checkbox"/> Migraines

<input type="checkbox"/> Gastrointestinal Distress <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive gas <input type="checkbox"/> Bloating <input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea/Constipation <input type="checkbox"/> Pain/Cramping <input type="checkbox"/> GERD <input type="checkbox"/> IBS
<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue, tired, or low energy
<input type="checkbox"/> Heart racing or pounding
<input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Low blood pressure
<input type="checkbox"/> Inflammation
<input type="checkbox"/> Hyperalgesia - the way you feel pain
<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased immune function
<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular menstrual cycles
<input type="checkbox"/> Cancer
<input type="checkbox"/> Asthma
<input type="checkbox"/> Obesity
<input type="checkbox"/> Alzheimer's disease
<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated aging

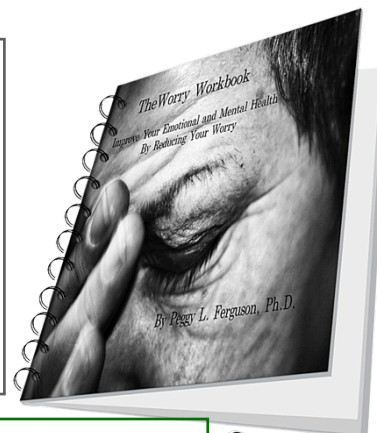
Below is a list of behavioral symptoms related to poorly managed stress. Check the behavioral symptoms that you experience.

<input type="checkbox"/> Making poor decisions
<input type="checkbox"/> Abandoning or reducing self-care activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs

<input type="checkbox"/> Other compulsive behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> spending <input type="checkbox"/> gambling <input type="checkbox"/> eating <input type="checkbox"/> overexercising <input type="checkbox"/> overworking <input type="checkbox"/> sexual behavior <input type="checkbox"/> electronics use
<input type="checkbox"/> Rumination - overworking the same thoughts over and over
<input type="checkbox"/> Social isolation and withdrawal

Look back at the symptoms you checked. Are you surprised at how many you checked? Developing your recovery program can work wonders on the level of stress and symptoms you have been experiencing. Many early recovery tasks help reduce stress, such as starting or stepping up a self-care routine, practicing mindfulness, identifying, owning, and appropriately expressing feelings, learning and practicing positive communication, and problem-solving behavior. Learning and practicing relaxation skills and stress reduction exercises are just the beginning of the "recovery tools for families" arsenal. You may want to make two or more copies of this worksheet— one to use now for a baseline, and others to use in the future to assess effectiveness of recovery to reduce your experience of stress.

"The Worry Workbook" is an essential guide to reducing your worry. It guides self-awareness and reflection, helping you pinpoint the root causes of your concerns, identify your options for problem-solving, and come to grips with the notion that there are some things that you have no power or control over. The Worry Workbook goes beyond the cognitive and emotional components to reducing stress. It assists you in exploring the contributions of your lifestyle as a source and solution to stressors. It's a hands-on resource featuring real-life examples and a powerful worksheet. [\\$4.95](#)



"Mastering Worries With Thought Stopping Techniques" is a concise Brief Lesson that equips you with a powerful thought stopping technique for taking charge of your worries and reducing anxiety. In this guide, you'll learn to identify and break free from the cycle of worry, mind-racing, rumination, and overthinking. By mastering these thought-stopping techniques, you'll feel empowered to reduce stress and regain control of your mental well-being, allowing you to live a more peaceful and fulfilled life. [\\$4.95](#)



Both are Digital Downloads Available Immediately