



Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope

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Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope



Agenda

- 1 Stress & Anxiety: Definitions
- 2 Stress & Anxiety: Signs of Overload
- 3 Stress & Anxiety: Identifying Sources
- 4 Stress & Anxiety: Strategies to Help Gifted Children
- 5 Stress & Anxiety: Contemplative Practices
- 6 Stress & Anxiety: How Nature Helps Children Reduce Stress
- 7 Stress & Anxiety: Helping Kids Develop Self-Advocacy
- 8 Stress & Anxiety: References

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Hans Selye



Definition

- A term coined by endocrinologist Hans Selye
- “The non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it.”

Implications

- Life is filled with change and adaptation
- Stress is universal and experienced by everyone
- Stress is physical; however, reactions are unique
- Awareness of personal reactions is essential
- Identifying sources of change and resulting stress can be helpful

Source: Hyde & Forsyth, 2008

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Hans Selye



Distress

Caused by negative situations

- Underachievement
- Multiple passions
- World events
- External pressures
- Internal pressures
- Illness/injury
- Intensity/sensitivity/perfectionism

Eustress

Caused by positive situations

- All A's; high grades/scores
- Top prizes
- First class performer
- Attractive
- Highly creative, innovative
- Social competence

Source: Hyde & Forsyth, 2008; Fiedler & Kane, 2007



Anxiety

- Non-specific sense of apprehension, worry, foreboding, angst, unease that something awful will happen
- Unidentified stress or source
- Same physical symptoms as stress; stress reaction is hyper-active and is not turned off
- Range of feelings from disquietude to terror
- 13 of 100 in the nine to seventeen age group have anxiety disorder



Source: Hyde & Forsyth, 2008

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The Bad News

- You can't cure stress by thinking or worrying about it.
- Being bright, talented, creative, motivated, smart, ambitious, and even good looking can add to the stress in your life.
- Academic success and drive aren't enough to make life manageable. The world is too complicated and intense, and it's changing too fast.

- There are no easy answers, simple solutions, or quick fixes for managing stress.
- Only a handful of families and schools teach the life skills you need to successfully deal with stress.
- Too much stress can lead to significant reactions; can be psychological/emotional/physical.

Source: Hipp, 1985; Fiedler & Kane, 2007

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The Good News

- You *can* learn to understand why your life gets oppressive, depressive, stressed or otherwise unhealthy.
- You *can* learn to live in a new and better way.
- You *can* feel more in charge of your world.
- Understanding signature strengths can build resilience.
- Protective factors can enhance well-being.

- Even a small change in your lifestyle can make a big difference.
- Kids can learn the signals from their body and make adjustments accordingly.
- Awareness of individual needs/routines for food, exercise and sleep provide more stability.
- Social supports (teachers/friends/family) may provide refuge.

Source: Hipp, 1985; Fiedler & Kane, 2007

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SPICES: Facets of the Self

Social relates to interpersonal connections (to others and to community)

Intellectual relates to cognitive abilities

Emotional relates to intrapersonal connections; affect



Physical relates to physical being; the body

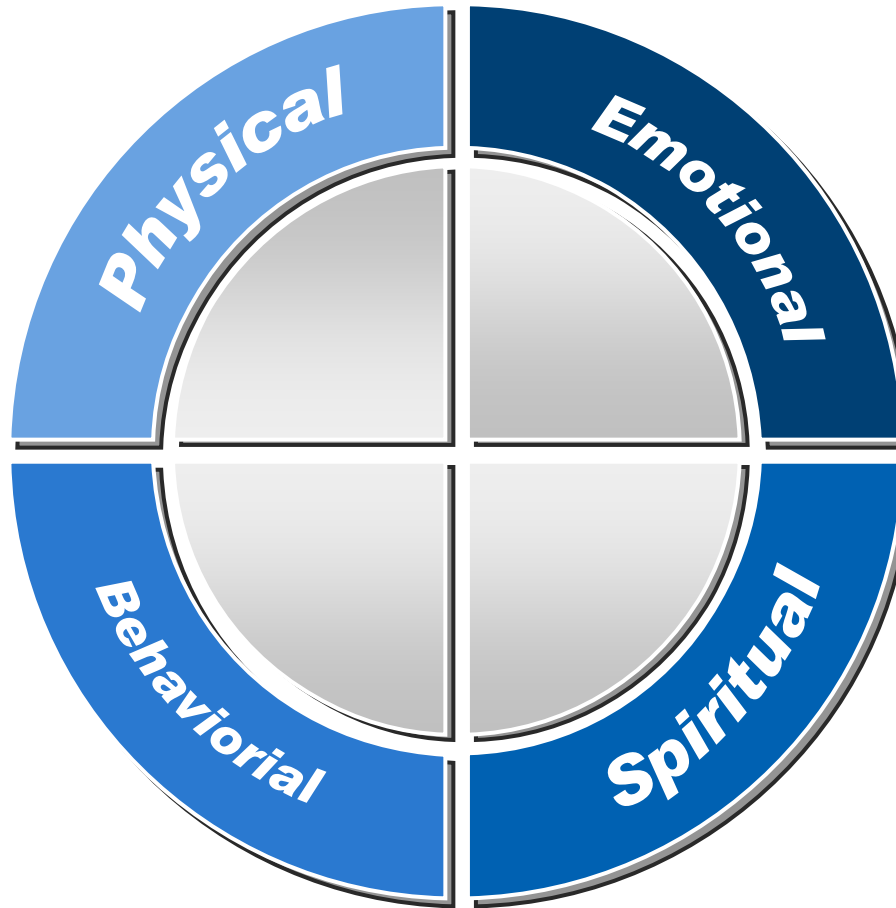
Creative relates to imagination

Spiritual relates to meaning and purpose

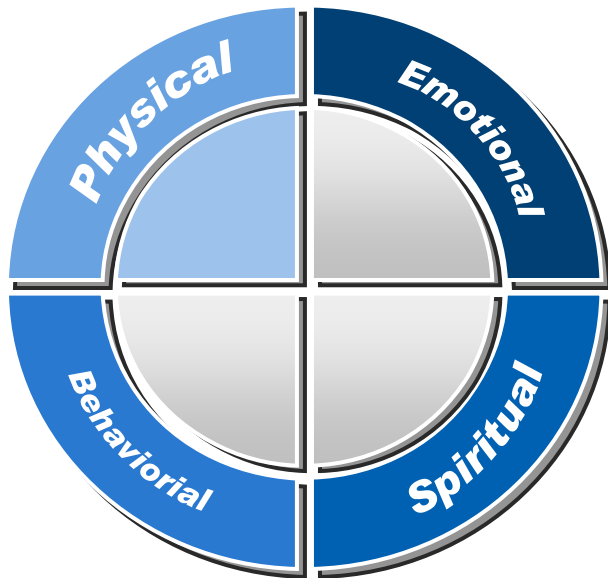
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Signs Of Stress Overload



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Physical Reactions to Stress

- Autonomic nervous system (don't think)
 - Sympathetic nervous (fight-or-flight)
 - Parasympathetic nervous (rest-digest)

Physical Signs of Stress

- Heart rate increases
- Respiration increases
- Blood pressure increases
- Perspiration increases
- Acuity of senses
- Adrenal glands secrete cortisol

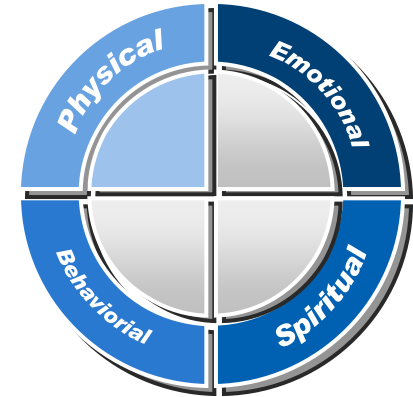
Source: Hyde & Forsyth, 2008

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Signs Of Stress Overload- Physical

- Sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite
- Chronic fatigue
- Vague stomach upset
- Low grade infection
- Rashes
- Frequent colds
- Headaches



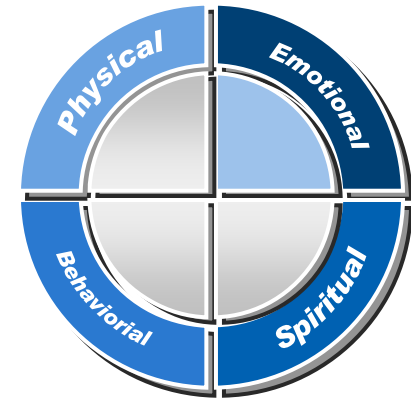
Source: Youngs, 1986

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Signs Of Stress Overload - Emotional

- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Panic
- Inappropriate laughter
- Feelings of failure
- Feelings of unworthiness

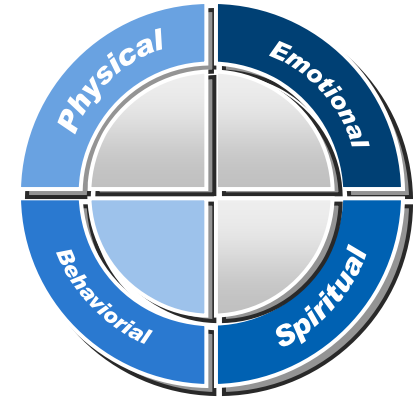


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Signs Of Stress Overload - Behavioral

- Fighting
- Stealing
- Refusing to do school work
- Loss of interest in appearance
- Yelling/significant & frequent tantrums
- Running away from school or truancy
- Attention-seeking behaviors (significant)
- Arson

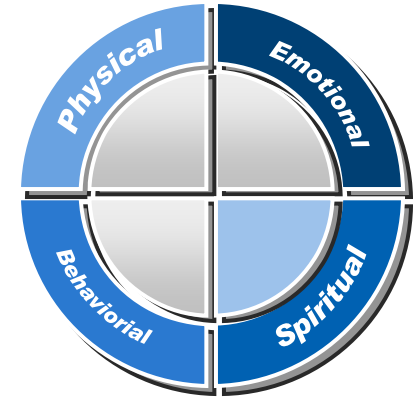


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Signs Of Stress Overload - Spiritual

- Loss of meaning and purpose
- Confusion about feeling connected to self and others
- Feeling rudderless; without a moral compass
- Loss of compassionate nature
- No sense of belonging
- Abandonment of spiritual practices (meditation, visualization, prayer, mantra)

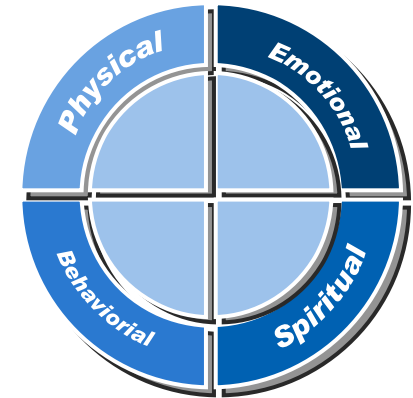


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Stress Overload Can Lead to:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Phobias
- Panic Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Depression



When stress interferes with daily life and self-management is not enough, then calling a mental health professional is essential.

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The stress profile of each gifted child is affected by:

- **Asynchrony of developmental tasks in each area**
- **Birth order in the family**
- **Gender**
- **Family constellation (including extended family)**
- **Cultural, linguistic, economic background**
- **Temperament (introversion/extraversion; range of intensity/sensitivity; optimism/pessimism)**
- **Overexcitabilities (Dabrowski)**
- **Unique combination of cognitive/affective characteristics of giftedness**



Differentiating Characteristics of Gifted Children

- **Unusual emotional depth and intensity**
 - need to have philosophical discussions; guidance

- **Idealism and sense of justice, which appear at an early age**
 - need to transcend negative reactions by finding values to which he/she can be committed

- **Advance level of moral judgment**
 - need to receive validation for nonaverage morality

- **Strongly motivated by self-actualization needs**
 - Need to be given opportunities to follow divergent paths and pursue strong interests

(Source: Clark, 2008)



General Sources Of Anxiety (No Control)

- **Terrorism**
- **Natural disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis)**
- **Exposure to violence (media; personally)**
- **Exposure to drugs/alcohol/risky behaviors**
- **Death; loss of loved one including pets**
- **Bullying (including cyberbullying)**
- **Discrimination (race, gender, sexual orientation)**
- **Changing family circumstances (divorce, moving, financial)**
- **Loss of romantic relationship (real or imagined)**
- **Relationships with friends/peers**

Source: Stress 101



Situational Stress of Gifted People



- conflict between our values and the values of others (what is and what ought to be)
- interpersonal disharmony
- lack of intellectual stimulation or challenge
- challenges beyond our capability to respond
- threats to emotional or physical well-being
- lack of resources to accomplish a task
- time constraints
- difficulty choosing from equally attractive options



Self-imposed Stress of Gifted People



Source: Fiedler, 2007

- setting excessively high standards for ourselves
- fear of failure, fear of success
- negative self-talk; self-criticism
- emotionally loaded/highly evaluative beliefs about ourselves and our environment
- believing that everyone should love, respect, and praise us
- buying into others' negative evaluations of us
- catastrophizing
- worrying



Existential Stress of Gifted People



- global concerns (e.g., nuclear disaster, war, poverty, world hunger, the environment, etc.)
- idealism
- anger at fate
- isolation
- need for meaning and purpose

Source: Fiedler, 2007

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Sources of Stress for Gifted People

Situational

- Conflict between our values and the values of others (what is and what ought to be)
- interpersonal disharmony
- lack of intellectual stimulation or challenge
- challenges beyond our capability to respond
- threats to emotional or physical well-being
- lack of resources to accomplish a task
- time constraints

Self-Imposed

- setting excessively high standards for ourselves
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- negative self-talk
- emotionally loaded/highly evaluative beliefs about ourselves and our environment
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Existential

- global concerns (e.g., nuclear disaster, war, poverty, world hunger, the environment)
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Basic Tools for Stress Management

- Remember the “basics” (Maslow's basic needs) - H.A.L.T.
- More basics: Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep (don't forget!)
- Identify what's what:
 - what stresses *you* out,
 - when enough is enough for *you*, and
 - what works for *you!*
- Make contact - the “talking cure” or the “writing cure” or the “texting cure”
- Books can help—for you and your kids



Basic Tools for Stress Management

- *Your rights are all right* - learn how to assert yourself appropriately
- Your “sacred circle” - supportive relationships (for you and your child)
- Progress is progressive - one step at a time! “Inch by inch is a cinch; yard by yard is too darn hard!”
- Humor helps
- Who's in charge here? Saying “no”—Parenting classes?
- Know when to ask for help; vulnerability is OK



Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids With Stress

Interpersonal

- Explore topics, where appropriate, that create cause for concern (e.g., what do you think about the destruction of the rain forests? In what ways could our family eliminate hunger?)
- Limit exposure to unsettling images/sounds from media sources and computer games
- Role play or use “social stories” to rehearse how to deal with uncomfortable social situations
- Provide situations for connecting with intellectual peers or mentor
- Share information on personality type (introversion vs. extraversion and implications for social situations)

Situational

Self-Imposed

Existential



Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids With Stress

Intrapersonal

- Provide specific techniques for conflict resolution and teach appropriate assertiveness
- Elicit suggestions from kids on how to use time more efficiently
- Demonstrate decision-making strategies (how does the family select a movie?)
- Use journals to help kids sort out their feelings, fears, joys and frustrations
- Help kids set goals by week, unit or semester – evaluate both the goals and goal-setting process.; modify goals with the kids when their goals aren't achieved

Situational

Self-Imposed

Existential



Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids With Stress

Intrapersonal

- Teach creative problem solving strategies and apply to personal situation
- Hold family meetings regularly
- Model creative, risk-taking behaviors; encourage “courageous conversations” so kids can speak their truth and others can witness
- Probe personal beliefs and concerns; help kids identify issues/stressors

Interpersonal

- Have family try something that no one has done and allow to observe how adults deal with mistakes
- Provide opportunities for different circles of friends

Situational

Self-Imposed

Existential



Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids With Stress

- Provide opportunities for students to learn more about world events and the process of change
- Explore service learning projects so there are outlets for caring; model compassion as family
- Teach kids how to search for careers that address deep concerns
- Bring gifted students together to develop relationships with older, younger, or online peers
- Use bibliotherapy and cinematherapy to provide an “arms-length” approach for delving into topics
- Connect kids to mentors who share similar concerns and passions
- Encourage/discuss spiritual leaders via biographies/film
- Explore activities such as Peace Jam/Future Problem Solving

Situational

Self-Imposed

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Contemplative Practices

What?

Quiet the mind, focus attention, adopt a receptive attitude

- **Relaxation Response**
- **Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation**
- **Chanting; music (60bpm)**
- **Meditation**
 - **concentration**
 - **loving-kindness**
 - **mindfulness**
 - **guided visualization**

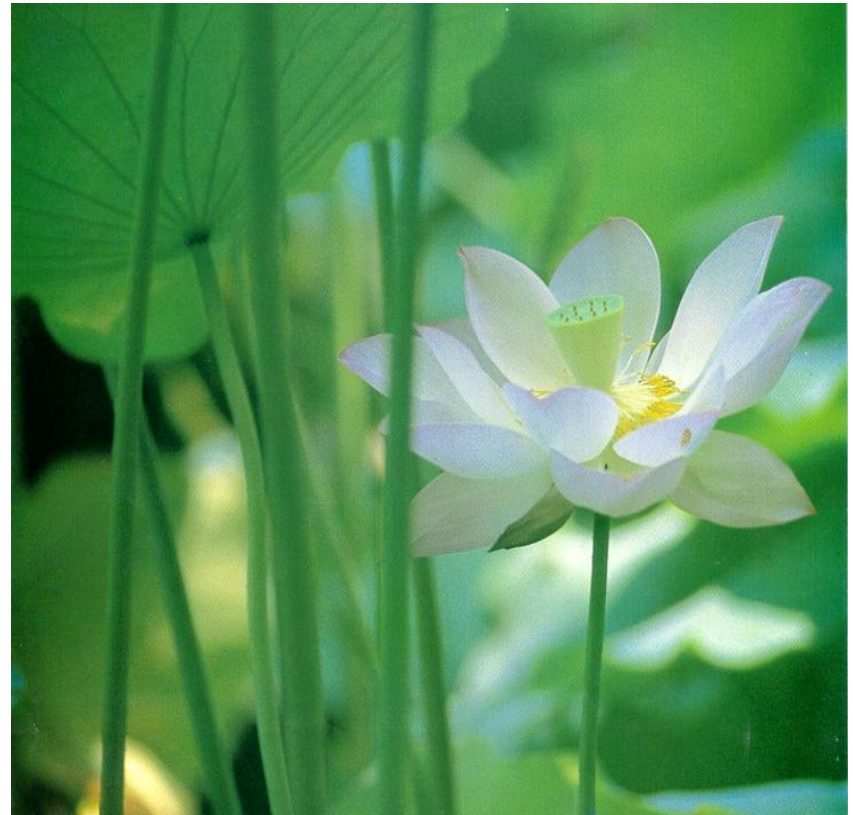
Why?

- **Gifted kids dwell on things that create internal dissonance (e.g. global issues, natural disasters)**
- **Existential angst appears earlier in the developmental process for many gifted kids**
- **Executive functions of the brain (planning, organizing, self-regulation) may lag behind cognitive development; education/training helps**
- **Intensity and sensitivity may create significant emotional turmoil for gifted kids**
- **Profiles of gifted children should be matched appropriately to the practice; find the ones that work**



Contemplative Practices

- **Mind-body connecting; walk the labyrinth**
- **Visualization**
- **Practice imagery/fantasy**
- **Tai-chi; Yoga; Brain Gym**
- **Bibliotherapy, cinematherapy**
- **Journaling**
- **Experiences in nature**
- **Time with pet**
- **Artistic practices (calligraphy, mandalas)**



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How Nature and Play Helps Kids Reduce Stress

- Research links mental, physical, and spiritual health to connection with nature
- Effective stress reduction is apparent after experiences in nature
- Deeper sensory awareness and sense of interrelatedness of beings emerges with environmental education
- Nature provides healing/respice for those children in unhealthy life situations

“The ability to play is critical not only to being happy but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative, innovative person.” Stuart Brown

Sources: Louv, 2005; Kane & Fiedler, 2006





How Nature and Play Helps Kids Reduce Stress

- **Stimulates powers of observation and enhances perceptive abilities**
- **Fosters creativity including construction of forts, shelter, tree houses (a sense of place)**
- **Instills a sense of peace and a deeper connection to the Universe**
- **Inspires creative endeavors such as poetry, art, storytelling, and drama**
- **Opportunities for problem-solving, team-building, healthy risk-taking**
- **Provides opportunities for positive experiences that are self-generated and without any or little expense**
- **Play enables individuals to live a good life**

Sources: Louv, 2005; Kane & Fiedler, 2006

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Helping Kids Develop Self-Advocacy

Be Responsible

- For Your Behavior
- For Your Feelings

Make Choices

- Expectations

Get to Know Yourself

- Name Your Feelings
- Talk About Your Feelings
- Dealing With Strong Feelings

Get and Use Power

- Personal Power
- Role Power

Source: Fiedler & Kane, 2007



Communication Tips for Self-Advocacy

- **Use “I” statements for effective communication**
- **Teach tools of active listening**
- **Role play difficult conversations**
- **Help children distinguish between assertive and aggressive communication styles**
- **Provide examples of cynical or negative styles of communication and the effects on listeners**
- **Demonstrate effective nonverbal communication**
- **Help kids practice self-advocacy (start small); be available for support**
- **Collect examples of children who are able to get others to listen**

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From Positive Psychology: Elements of Well-Being Theory

Properties

- **Contribute to well-being**
- **Pursue for own sake**
- **Defined and independent of other elements**

Measureable Elements

- **Positive emotion (includes happiness)**
- **Engagement (flow)**
- **Meaning**
- **Relationships**
- **Achievement**

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Positive Education: Teaching Well-Being to Young People

Strategies include:

- Gratitude and appreciation
- Nurturing relationships (how-to)
- Resilience
- Identifying and building on strengths
- Creating meaning
- Optimism



Source: Seligman, 2011

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“Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering.”

~Pooh's Little Instruction Book, inspired by A.A. Milne

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**Do You Have
Any Questions?**