



## **How to Handle Life Frustrations: 6 steps to reduce the stress**

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Computer crashes, traffic tie-ups, waiting in long lines, and other unexpected problems can derail your day. How do you deal with these daily trials and troubles? If little things like losing your keys cause you to lose your mind, read on. This article suggests six steps for practical but deliberate decisions to handle these common life frustrations. In turn, it also reveals how ineffective choices can suddenly put you in stress soup!

### **Stress-producing response: Magnify the problem**

The first mistake we often make when faced with a frustrating moment is to magnify the problem. We tend to think the worst, and intensely focus on the negative event. A long line at the grocery store – when you’re in a big hurry – might make you think, “I will NEVER get out of here!” You’ve gone into disaster mode. Your blood pressure is escalated and you have chosen the worst attitude on the onset of the situation.

### **Stress-reducing response: Solution-focused attitude**

Rather than being a catastrophist and becoming plagued that you will have to take up permanent residence at the grocery store due to the length of the line, choose a solution focused attitude. Do not assume the worst. Consider ideas that will be helpful. It is best to begin with the attitude that things will still work out as you begin selecting options to solve the problem.

### **Stress-producing response: Become furious**

While we are in the throws of frustration, we can become furious rather quickly if we don’t reign in our emotions. We can allow the “pity party” to produce additional stress, causing more time and energy to be wasted. Fury can then turn to anger which, when acted out on, only delivers more damage to the situation.

### **Stress-reducing response: Determine degree of control**

The long line at the store is an example of something we don’t have much control over, so it is therefore useless to let it anger you. When others do things that irritate you, they may have control over their actions. They do not control how you respond to the irritation, however. Only you can control your response. If you frequently have late fees on your credit card bills - that IS in your control. You need to be more organized in your finances, and that problem will be prevented.

**Stress-producing response: Find blame**

Another time-waster is to be consumed with finding blame. “Whose fault is this?” You may discover someone did make a mistake, but does that fix the problem now? It probably does not. Finding blame focuses on an external issue, rather than how to best deal with it internally.

**Stress-reducing response: Put the problem in perspective**

There are so many little irritants that insert their way into our day, but is it really the end of the world? Most likely, there is always an alternative to deal with the problem. Put the problem in perspective, and also appreciate that it could always be worse.

**Stress-producing response: Rebel**

Those who refuse to accept that things will not always go their way tend to have a rebellious attitude, much like some difficult children. Since they are not looking for solutions, they have plenty of time to rebel and revolt. This disconnects them from the issue, or so they think. Instead, it only delays a resolution. To rebel against that long wait at the doctor’s office is not going to put you at the front of the waiting list.

**Stress-reducing response: Identify lesson learned**

During times of challenge or crisis it is always beneficial to consider what part you may have played in the problem and what part you can play in the solution. If your computer crashes and you lose an important document that has to be turned in today, perhaps completing the project ahead of the deadline would have eliminated that problem. If rush hour traffic is a source of your frustration, consider leaving home earlier to alleviate the stress of traffic *and* get a jump on the day.

**Stress-producing responses: Quit**

Giving up is the last stage in stress-producing responses to the frustrations of life. Quitting altogether is nothing but an escape from the situation. Giving up is different than simply taking a break or a breather in the middle of a trial to regroup and refocus. When you quit, you completely and permanently remove yourself from the challenge, which can ultimately cause more frustration and feelings of failure.

**Stress-reducing response: Acceptance of situation**

There comes a point in any disappointing circumstance where we can choose to accept the situation as is, and work with what is then possible. Accepting the situation is simply being realistic and rational, which is more productive and peaceful than just walking away in frustration.

### **Stress-producing responses: Stuck in stress soup**

When you are continuously surrounded by stress, it can feel much like drowning in a bowl of stress soup. You can become stuck in a cycle of turning external dilemma into internal trauma, affecting your health, relationships, and work.

### **Stress-reducing response: Decision of action**

Rather than allowing yourself to spiral out of control, make a deliberate decision on how to handle unexpected problems. Plan your next actions in a positive manner. Maintaining a positive and solution-focused attitude will help guide you through the trials and tribulations of living in today's world. This is a learned skill - and that is good news. Practicing patience, being proactive, and not being derailed by problems will lead to greater peace in all areas of your life.

The diagrams below demonstrate this process.

## **Dealing with Life's Frustrations**



**Ineffective / stress-producing choices: Focusing externally and reactively**

## **Dealing with Life's Frustrations**



**Effective choices: Focusing internally and rationally**

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**Contact Centerstone at (615) 460-HELP (4357),  
for information about help and support for you or your family.**

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**About Centerstone**

Centerstone ([www.centerstone.org](http://www.centerstone.org)), a not-for-profit organization, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. Serving the community for more than fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Centerstone provides services to more than 50,000 individuals annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

**About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS**

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or [susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org](mailto:susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org).

Centerstone offers counseling and problem-solving solutions for the life challenges you may face. Contact Centerstone at 615-460-HELP (4357) for more information.