**Emotional Behavior 101:**
After recording entries in your stress journal for a few weeks, you should have a good idea of what stresses you – and you should also see a pattern of behavior emerging. Because we need to understand not only the stressor but also how we feel about the experience, we need to understand the role that emotions play in our ability to positively cope with stress.

We know that stress is unavoidable and that, at times, we all face disappointment and discouragement. No one is trying to minimize the level of your stress or sorrow as you face these challenges. What we could benefit from, though, is a way to put these stressful situations in perspective and not let them define us or dictate our lives.

**We Feel the Way We Think:**
Our level of stress depends on how equipped we feel we are to handle stressful situations successfully. Emotions play a significant role in our reactions, and the way we talk to ourselves influences our emotions. The result is that we feel the way we think. We need to remember that, between the event and the emotion, we talk to ourselves, and if our self talk is irrational and untrue, we experience stress and emotional disturbance.

One approach we can take is to develop alternative emotional responses. We can

- Turn rage into annoyance or irritation
- Turn anxiety into concern
- Turn intense guilt into regret
- Turn depression into disappointment
- Turn shame into irritation

It may seem silly but if you decide to be annoyed rather than filled with rage, you will feel calmer. If you choose to regret an action – instead of feeling burdened with heavy guilt – you will feel less stressed out. The intensity of your reaction to stress is a choice that you make. It’s all about you!

**Good Things Do Happen (Believe It or Not):**
Most of us are familiar with Nietzsche’s quote, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” Sometimes, living through a stressful time makes us feel like this quote was written just for us. But Nietzsche also said, “He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.” He was referring to our blessings and how they sometimes can give us the courage and ability to face challenges.

Another way to handle stress, therefore, is by counting your blessings. Research has shown that people who express gratitude and appreciation are more alert, have more energy, and are more likely to help others. Those who are grateful also tend to be better at coping with stressful situations; they enjoy better health and are more able to adapt to change in their lives.

**COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS**

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Attitude of Gratitude:
Having an attitude of gratitude, like choosing a level of emotion, is something you make a conscious choice to do. There are some simple ways to cultivate this kind of thinking:

- First of all, listen to yourself to notice if you are positive, or if you are complaining a lot. If you are negative, look for a blessing in difficult situations.
- Get in the habit of being thankful for small things. Everyone does not have some of the opportunities that many of us take for granted: a cup of hot coffee, clean clothes, a warm shower, safe neighborhood, or a loving and supportive family.
- Find some way to use your talents by volunteering. Volunteering helps us to understand that other people have it worse than we do and it helps us to appreciate what we do have.
- Post an inspiring quote somewhere visible that reminds you to be thankful.
- Check your energy level. When you are feeling tired, feeling thankful can raise your energy level.
- At the end of the day, count your blessings.

What to do this week:
An easy way to get in the habit of being more grateful is to keep a gratitude journal – or you can continue to write in your stress journal, but now add something to be positive about. At the end of the day, write down 3 to 5 things for which you are grateful. Some days it may be easy to come up with an abundance of blessings. On other days, you may be thankful that you finally got to go to bed; the bed was warm and clean and you had a roof over your head and food to eat.

Tip:
You will notice a profound change on how you look at your life and how you deal with stress. Once you start being aware of – and appreciating – your blessings, you will notice that you feel like less of a victim during stress-filled times, and more of a competent and blessed person who can handle challenges.

Follow up:
Keeping a gratitude journal is valuable in many ways – and you may want to keep one forever in order to understand that you are blessed. Keeping a stress journal and a gratitude journal – even if they are in the same notebook – provides you with an understanding of what's happening in your life – the good and the not so good. It helps you to understand your challenges and your resulting emotional growth.

Share your experiences with other members at next week's meeting regarding changing the way you “choose” your emotional level and how counting blessings has impacted you this week.

Be thankful for small things.

Have an attitude of gratitude.