

99 Ways
to Fight Worry
and Stress



Elsa Kok Colopy

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Introduction

I wish I could say I handle stress and worry with ease. Two years ago I would have told you that I could handle most anything thrown my way. I'm strong. I work out. I eat oatmeal and pray nearly every day. What more does one need to face the hard times?

Then life came. I had a kidney go bad and required nine hours of surgery to get back on track. A few months later, I was in a bad car wreck. Then my husband lost his job, my daughter's appendix ruptured, and we moved across the country. Then there was the small stress of trying to sell a house in a pitiful economy, even as we moved into a two-bedroom apartment with what I'm certain was a rock band (and their roadies) living above us. Then just to keep things interesting, our adult son moved back in with us and is, as I write these words, in need of a kidney transplant. My husband will be the donor. I don't feel so invincible anymore.

I need more than oatmeal and exercise. I need tools. I

need day-to-day coping-with-life tools so I don't follow through on my temptation to move to the mountains with twenty pounds of chocolate, a few warm blankets, and an armload of romantic comedies.

I figure you understand my pain. You wouldn't have picked up this book if you didn't have your own litany of life stuff—things you never expected to happen—worries, fears, heartbreak, stress over finances, marriages, kids, illness.

So join me. Join me as I investigate healthy ways to handle the worry and productive ways to walk through the stress. And maybe together we can move forward, not into our hiding places of choice, but through this season into hope, with smiles on our faces.

1 Lean on Friends

A friend loves at all times.

—PROVERBS 17:17

I prefer to keep my worries private. It's my pride that gets in the way. It feels more comfortable to be little known and viewed as strong than to be exposed. And yet I face a difficult season ahead. Health concerns are at the forefront. Financial strain weighs heavy. Other worrisome circumstances litter the horizon, and I have come to one conclusion: I cannot do this alone. It will be tough to call a friend when I'm stressed, but I'll do it. I don't want to run to unhealthy hiding places, so I need the strong shoulders of safe friends more than ever.

You may identify. If so, read on. Here are some practical ways to build friendship and then lean on those you come to trust.



SCHEDULE TIME

If I don't set up a time to connect with my friends, it simply won't happen. The passing "Let's do lunch" usually means "Let's not do lunch, we're both too busy."

So I've learned a better way. My friend Jennifer is one of the strong shoulders I lean on. We have to set a weekly time to talk. Sure, we've fallen off the wagon and gone weeks without connecting, but we rearrange life to make it work. We've actually determined that the best way to stay in each other's worlds is to talk at 5:30 a.m. on Thursday mornings. My friend Lauriza meets me for lunch every other Monday. I meet with Michelle on alternating Tuesday mornings for coffee. I've found that I have to be strategic in building friendships—otherwise moments, heartaches, and celebrations are lost as I plow forward through my calendar.

Don't hesitate to get organized when it comes to connecting with friends. Creating a network of support requires effort.



MORE THAN ONE

My seventeen-year-old daughter, Sam, told me the other day, "I have only one best friend, Mom. She is all I need."

Not twenty-four hours later, her only best friend started going out with a boy. Suddenly, Sam had a wide-open gap in her social calendar and a busy signal when she wanted to talk. Life felt very lonely. The same thing can happen to us. We need more than one close friend.

It's healthy and appropriate to have a few different friends to lean on throughout the stressful seasons of our lives. My husband has a friend he meets with for coffee, another with whom he climbs mountains. He also has some e-mail prayer buddies and an accountability partner.

If you have only one friend as your sole support, take a moment to think of one other person you would enjoy spending time with. Pick up the phone and set up a lunch. It's that easy to begin building a network.



SNEAK AWAY

Is your calendar full over the next few months? Mine too. But if you pull it out right now, pick a weekend two months out, and plan in advance, you can set up a great girls' or guys' weekend getaway. Life will come at you either way, stressful situations will mount up, but if you have a time of refresh-

ment scheduled, you'll be that much better prepared to handle the hardships.

You don't have to spend a lot of money either—lots of churches and retreat centers offer discounted rooms for those in the midst of a difficult season. Head off into the hills with someone you trust, take a hike, journal your thoughts, engage in conversation. Do something that will take you out of your current environment and place you in an out-of-the-way spot where you can focus on one of the great delights of life—friendship.



4 ASK FOR HELP

Since I've written the introduction to this book, we've moved. We moved from a two-bedroom to a three-bedroom apartment to accommodate our adult son moving in with us. It was a short-notice move, and I was embarrassed to invite friends over to help. I didn't want them to see the dust behind the television or the four boxes of half-used open spaghetti boxes in my cupboard. I'd had friends help me move before, but only after everything was boxed and tidy.

But I needed help.

Seven folks showed up, including spouses of friends. In other words, a few people I didn't even know! I was mortified by the dust bunnies and sticky refrigerator door...but they were not. They pitched in with smiles, loading boxes and food, cleaning out the old place and setting up the new one. It made the job a thousand times easier, and shockingly, not one of them shunned me for my frivolous spaghetti usage or my dust-bunny village.

You'd be surprised how much people want to help and how little they care about the things we worry about.

Ask. Think of one thing you need help with, and ask.



5 VENT

Pour it all out. Vent. I can “let it all hang out” with two of my friends. They know my heart, they know my longings, and with them, I am safe to simply speak the fears, worries, anger, and frustration that I may hide from other people. I have a few friends who do the same with me. I can usually hear it in Jennifer's voice when she just needs an ear. In those moments, she doesn't want or need advice; she

just wants to get out the emotion so she can see things clearly.

We need that. Sometimes there is so much stuff cluttering our brains that a good venting session can help us sort through to the heart of it.

Do you have a safe friend in your life? This is definitely one of those therapeutic outpourings best reserved for someone you can trust. If you don't have a friend like that, I encourage you to keep reaching out, keep scheduling lunch and coffee dates, keep building until you get there.



6 LISTEN

My jaw dropped as my friend shared the most recent news in her family saga. “You’re kidding!” I said. “She said that?” She went on to share the latest in a series of tough conversations with members of her extended family. Tears came to her eyes as she talked of the hurt and heartache...and somehow, in the midst of hearing her story, I completely forgot my own troubles.

Being there for our friends makes a difference. Not only do we get to hear what is going on in the life of someone

we care about, but we can be the shoulder to lean on in the hurt. With that comes a sense of value and purpose that stewing over our own problems just doesn't offer. While it's good to do the talking, also take some time to ask about and listen to the lives of your friends. Focus on what they might need in that moment. Truly listen. As you listen, you'll find your own issues, worries, and fears fading into the background.



SHARE A MEAL

I put way too much pressure on myself when having friends over. I like the house to be perfect and the food to be top-notch—which explains why we don't have friends over near enough. Yet a shared meal is a wonderful way to forget about the pressures of the day and celebrate relationships. Don't worry about crafting the perfect meal, just order some pizzas on a Friday night and invite a few friends over. Linger around the table, visit about one another's week, find out where your friends grew up or what their funniest childhood memories are. After dinner, watch a movie together, play a card game, or pull out the Monopoly board.

For many of us, our tendency when we face stress is to

hunker down and stop hanging out with friends. In all reality, this is a time when we need friends the most.



8 CHOOSE WISELY

I've had a variety of friends over the years. In one season of my life, it seemed like all my friends were a little rough around the edges. Instead of encouraging me to do good things, they would say stuff like, "Hey, forget about it! Let's go get drunk tonight." Mmm. Don't think so. Even today, though my life is in a far different place, there are those who encourage the negative in me and those who bring out the positive. I try to stay away from people who encourage me to gossip or who point out all the worst-case scenarios.

On the flip side, I also stay away from those who give me quick solutions and spout spiritual niceties. Instead, I try to surround myself with authentic people of faith who listen to my heart and meet me where I am—with neither broken solutions nor religious clichés.

Choose wisely who you let into the inner places of your heart. You want to walk with people who will lovingly listen, let you vent, and then gently turn you toward truth.



CHEER 'EM ON

Once you've built a network of friends, be intentional about cheering each other on. Sometimes we focus so much on what is stressful or worrisome that we don't dedicate enough time to celebrating. Throw a party when someone gets a job. Sing for your friend when she gets the house cleaned. Buy lunch for your buddy when he climbs that mountain he's dreamed of conquering. Celebrate the big and little moments of success in one another's lives.

I made it through the day without chocolate the other day—my friend did the no-chocolate dance for me. She wiggled and grooved—and I laughed out loud. Celebration cultivates joy, and joy gives us the strength to face the reality of hardship ahead.



USE EVERY MEANS

Spending time with friends is a wonderful way to offset stress and worry. Being real, engaging in each other's lives—all are worthwhile objectives. Another way to build those friendships is to utilize the social technology available. You can update friends on Facebook or send out prayer requests

via e-mail. If you are battling an illness, there are Web pages designed to send out updates to friends and family (check with your local hospital or doctor to find out more). Sending out a 911 text message to prayer partners is another quick way to connect with help whenever you need it. Some avoid social technology because they prefer face-to-face contact. That's great—I fully agree—but don't be afraid to use what's available to enhance your relationships.

11 SEEK COUNSEL

I'm not very good at asking for advice. It's that pride thing. I feel that asking for advice makes me look like I don't know what I'm doing. And since I want people to think I know what I'm doing...you see my dilemma. Sure, I'm growing out of it as I realize how little I actually do know and how little that matters, but it's been a process.

One huge benefit of good friends is to be able to ask their advice. Stress can cloud your vision. Before making any decision, ask your friends and others you trust and see what they say. Proverbs 15:22 says that many counselors make for successful decision making. That's a truth we can lean into.



RALLY A PRAYER TEAM

I recently received an e-mail from a dear friend who is dealing with huge stress in her world. She invited me to be part of her prayer team. She made it guilt-free; giving all her friends the freedom to say no if they were too busy. For those who answered yes, she now sends out a daily e-mail letting us know how we can pray on that day.

We can do the same. Reach out to your friends and invite them to stand with you in prayer. If they can't, be understanding. We can't all do everything. For those who can participate, take advantage of their kindness and invite their prayers as you need them. You'll not only have that prayer covering, but you'll also have the incredible sweet sense that you are not alone.



FREEDOM TO BE

One of my dear friends, Carol, lives seven hundred miles away. What I especially love about her is that I don't have to say a word, and it's just fine. Carol and I can enjoy a comfortable silence that nurtures my heart. I don't have to talk

deep things, crack funny jokes, or ask questions to start a conversation. I can just be.

Just this week I scheduled a girls' overnight with Carol. We'll meet somewhere in the middle of our seven hundred miles and hang out. Just be. I can't wait.

Do you have a friend with whom you can be completely still? And be okay? If not, I encourage you, once again, to continue building that network of relationships until that just-be friend finds her way into your world.



14 TRY AGAIN

One final thought on friendship: it could be that you've been burned by a good friend. Maybe someone betrayed, rejected, or abandoned you. The thought of building friendships adds a whole new layer of stress to your world. Can I encourage you to take that hurt to God? Pour it out to him. Vent your anger. Lay it at his feet...and then, try again. Friendship is too vital, too important to toss aside. Yes, some people will hurt you, and some will walk away. But others will not. There are those who will stand with you through thick or thin. Don't miss those treasured companions because of a bad experience. It is a risk to trust others, but it is a risk worth taking.

SUMMARY

No one is meant to walk alone through life. This painful journey is best walked in the company of good friends—people who will laugh, cry, vent, and grow with you through life’s adventures. I encourage you to invest time in these critical lifelines. Follow through on that lunch date, make the phone call, plan a weekend away, or rally your prayer team. Flip back through the last few pages. What is one action step you can take to build your friendship base? Don’t delay—take that step today.



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