

PREDICAMENT-PROBLEM CONTINUUM*

1. Please list your eight-ten major stressors you are currently experiencing or anticipate experiencing within the next month. A stressor is a life event of sufficient magnitude to bring about change in an individual or family.

Stressor	Rank	%
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2. Would you select the top four you would like to do something about in the next 30 days and rank order them?

3. Many of us sometimes find ourselves getting stressed out and worried about things outside our control. In the third column beside your stressors and their rank orderings, please indicate the percentage of control you have over each of your ten stressors—from 0% control to 100% control....

4. Do you already know the difference between a predicament and a problem? A predicament is something over which we have no control. A problem is something over which we have control.

5. Would you please create your own personal "Predicament Problem Continuum"? On the continuum below, please write each of your top four stressors at the point on the continuum representing your level of control over it For example, if the weather is a stressor on your short list and if you have no control over it, then write it toward the left end near 0% control. If lying awake worrying is a stressor, since the amount of time you spend worrying is largely within your control, write worrying toward the right end of the continuum near 100% control. Most parents have 80-90% control over their two-year-old and less as she or he grows up to be 10, 15, and 18 years old.

Predicament-Problem Continuum

PREDICAMENT
0% Control

PROBLEM
100% Control

6. How do you handle the predicaments in your life? ... If your number one stressor that you wanted to do something about in the next 30 days is a predicament over which you have no control, e.g. mother's dying of cancer, would you start today to practice letting it go? Sometimes when we think about it, we discover that we have precious little control over how a spouse acts and even less over what a neighbor thinks or does. Practice letting go of any stressors you experience that are predicaments. How? By accepting them. Some people find it helpful to remember Reinold Niebuhr's prayer: "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change (predicaments), the courage to change the things I can (problems), and the wisdom to know the difference." When we accept the predicaments in our lives, we free up energy to solve the problems within our control.

7. From the list of stressors in item #1 above, write down the top stressor problem (over which you have 50-100% control) that you'd like to do something about in the next 30 days. _____

8. What meaning/belief do you currently hold about that stressor problem? One person's belief was, "This crisis is terrible; I can't cope." Another's was, "Boy, I've got a challenge on my hands; I wonder what I can learn from it." _____

9. Brainstorm two or three more positive ways you could reframe or reinterpret your stressor problem.

10. What personal inner strengths/resources could you use to increase your control over your responses to this stressor problem (e.g. your sense of determination, your experience with previous crises)?

11. What family resources could you use to increase your control over your responses to this stressor problem (e.g. your spouse's flexibility, family's flexibility, family's sense of humor)?

12. What community resources could you use to increase your control over your responses to this stressor problem (e.g. couple's group to share similar problems and solutions, baby-sitting co-op among friends, marriage and family therapist)?

13. Now would you mark on your calendar to review in a month how well you are responding to the top stressor problem identified in item #7 above? Would you also write on your calendar the steps you will take to reframe that problem in more positive ways and to use those resources that would be most beneficial to you? Thank you! You and your family will be glad you did!

*By Robert J. Fetsch, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Human Development & Family Studies. (Predicament-Problem Continuum, Rev. 8.3112). Fetsch, R. J. (1992). The predicament-problem continuum: Dealing with stressors outside our control. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 71(2), 192-193.