

Situation Solutions

Ways to conquer 10 of life's most stressful dilemmas

By [Laurie Pawlik-Kienlen](#) Posted August 25, 2008 from [WomansDay.com](#)



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Are financial problems, family fights or work pressures weighing you down? Unfortunately, you can't completely eliminate those problems from your life—but there is good news. With a little courage—and some shifts in perception—you can turn life's difficult situations into opportunities for success. We've talked to real women who have not only survived the pitfalls of life, but emerged with improved self-confidence, strengthened relationships and renewed ability to cope with demanding situations. Read on for their inspirational stories, plus expert tips for becoming empowered through your own struggles.

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Solving a financial crisis

After an accident, Mary's husband ended up on disability and only received a small monthly stipend. Mary was consumed with worry about not being able to pay the mortgage and losing the house. She lost sleep, and struggled to care for her two young children. How did she cope? Mary's psychologist, [Bruce Eimer, PhD](#), says, "We brainstormed together, and she developed an idea for a business. She loves to cook, so she started a home-based catering business, preparing dinners for busy people. Within six months, she had to hire several part-time employees to help her." Being proactive about a serious money problem can not only increase your cash flow, it can take your life in a new, exciting direction!

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Managing marital conflict

It's a tough reality that all relationships go through rocky times. Psychologist [Nancy O'Reilly, PsyD](#), says, "If your marriage hits a bump in the road, take the time to communicate what isn't working to your spouse. A relationship blossoms when a couple 'troubleshoots' their issues together." It's hard work developing good communication skills and defining your roles at home—but in the long run, it's the best thing you can do for your marriage. Problems can help couples build a strong foundation and grow closer. Says Dr. O'Reilly, "Instead of seeing conflict as 'another fight,' use it as an opportunity to talk it through and grow closer."

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Re-evaluating intimate relationships

Margot, a 49-year-old from Fresno, California, struggled with a troubled marriage for years. When she finally decided that she couldn't continue to live in misery, she confided in her closest friends and accepted their help. "Though stressful, getting a divorce or separation can put you on a journey of self-discovery," says [Christine Hohlbaum](#), communications specialist and author of *The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World*. "Deep down, we usually know what we need to do to take care of stressful situations, but we procrastinate, ignore problems or become paralyzed by indecision—which leads to even more stress." Breaking up is hard to do, but it can lead you to reconnect with friends and discover a new, stronger, more self-confident side of yourself.

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Diffusing the "I wants"

When you're shopping and your child asks for the latest Wii game, "don't say, 'No, we don't have the money' or 'We can't afford it,'" says Lori Mackey, founder of [Prosperity4Kids](#). "Instead, say, 'It's not in the budget, but let's figure out how you can earn the money yourself.'" Teaching your child how to be resourceful takes patience and effort, but it's also healthy and productive. He's learning a skill that he'll use for the rest of his life. In the long run, teaching life skills will benefit both you *and* your kids.

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Coping with gridlock

Being stuck in traffic can trigger feelings of frustration, anger and helplessness. Instead of wallowing in those physically and emotionally draining responses, try shifting your perspective and think of your daily commute as “me” time. Listen to books-on-tape, visualize your next vacation or simply use the rare time alone to daydream.

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Facing a fear of public speaking

Fear, anxiety and insecurity are common reactions to public speaking. “Our members often face an internal demon that paralyzes them with fear,” says veteran Toastmaster Michael Landrum. “But when the fear is faced and conquered, we are propelled into a life with larger ambitions.” How do you face your fear and give a great speech? Focus on the message and the audience, not your anxieties. Visualize yourself making the speech successfully, speaking clearly and confidently, and hearing the sound of the audience clapping. “Realize that people want you to succeed,” say the Toastmasters experts. “They’re rooting for you!”

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Dealing with an impending surgery

Sherri was suffering from severe panic attacks about an upcoming exploratory surgery. “She was terrified of never waking up from the anesthesia, losing major organs and being diagnosed with cancer,” says Dr. Eimer. How did she turn it around? “We addressed each fear separately, and Sherri learned to divide and conquer.” They planned three ways for her to take control: educating herself about anesthesia, requesting an experienced anesthesiologist and discussing the possibility of cancer with the surgeon. “By obtaining factual information, her fears—which were distorted views of reality—were corrected,” says Dr. Eimer.

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Struggling with unexpected visitors

Do your in-laws (or friends or neighbors) drop in unexpectedly and stay for hours—driving you crazy? Next time this happens, “use it as opportunity to create a new policy for the future,” says [Laurie Puhn](#), an attorney and mediator. “Explain how you love spending time with them, but you would appreciate it if they called you in advance.” Asserting your preferences may seem like a difficult and awkward feat in the short term, but trying it is sure to leave you feeling in control and free you of more stressful situations in the future.

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Tackling impossible demands at work

Do you work under a boss who makes impossible demands? Christine Hohlbaum finds it extremely powerful to acknowledge people who make unreasonable requests. Hohlbaum says, "First, acknowledge your boss's desire to get it all done now. Then, lay out a plan for him describing how you will tackle each step." Instead of becoming angry or frustrated, view your boss's demands as an opportunity to develop better relationships with colleagues by asking for assistance, brainstorming new ideas with your coworkers and thinking outside the box.

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Admitting you can't do it all!

Marianne was overwhelmed with work deadlines, chores at home, and childcare and pet responsibilities. She was raised to believe in hard work and independence, but her life had reached the breaking point. [Joseph Weiner, MD, PhD](#), says, "Painful stress indicates that something isn't working in your life." When he asked Marianne to pinpoint what wasn't working, she said, 'I can't do it all myself, and I shouldn't have to!' " This insight prompted her to hire a housekeeper, arrange carpooling for her kids, and find a grocery store that delivers. While her life still isn't stress-free, these positive changes helped Marianne feel more balanced and productive.

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