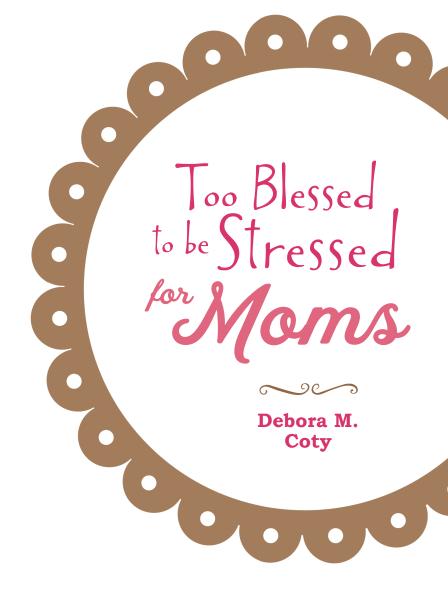


The Buzz about Too Blessed to be Stressed for Moms

- "Clever, entertaining, and filled with godly mom-tools. This book is just what a crazy-stressed mom needs."
- —Rhonda Rhea, TV personality, humor columnist, and author or coauthor of twelve books, including *Turtles in the Road* and *Fix-Her-Upper*
- "Debora Coty's done it again—she's hijacked the humor in motherhood. Don't miss this book!"
- —Deb DeArmond, speaker and award-winning author of marriage and family books, including *I Choose You Today* and *Don't Go to Bed Angry: Stay Up and Fight!*
- "The most difficult title I've ever held was that of Mom. Too Blessed to be Stressed for Moms is a must-read for every mom. Her understanding perspective will leave you feeling like you're sitting down with your best friend who 'gets it' and is in your mom corner. If you're a mom, you will love this book!"
- -Lucille Williams, author of From Me to We
- "Wow! Finally, a book that gets a mama's heart. You'll love this encouragement through the crazy-busy—and the sometimes crazy-messy—moments of momhood. You'll be blessed through the very last page."
- —Beth Duewel, writer, speaker, blogger, and coauthor of Fix-Her-Upper: Hope and Laughter through a God Renovated Life
- "Too Blessed to be Stressed is my kind of book. . .simple, funny, and straight to the point. I'm a mom; I don't have time to read anything except something that's going to help me and also make me laugh. If you're a mom needing either of those things, this book is for you! Grab a doughnut and settle in for a good read!"
- —Kerri Pomarolli, author of *Moms' Night Out* and *Other Things I Miss*, comedian, and actress appearing on The Tonight Show, Comedy Central, and ABC





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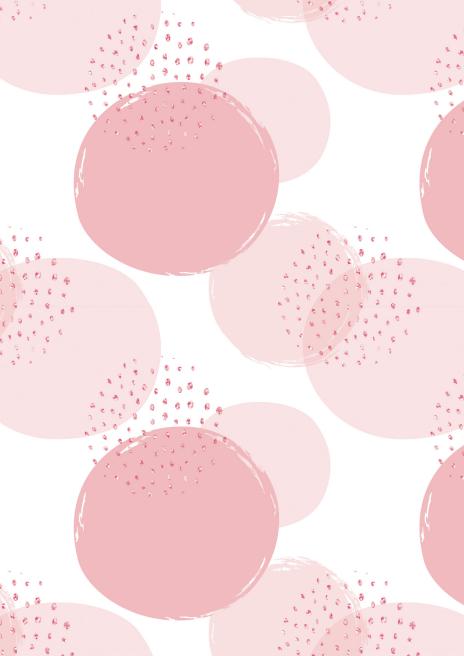
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Introduction

Geeling like you're totally Mom-Mom-Mom-Mom'ed out? Or so stressed, you're a ticking mom-bomb? As in. . . "Take cover, she's gonna blow!"

I so get that. It's only because you're an overworked, overtapped, over-sucked-out mother who's barely treading water in the stress-pool of life.

We moms constantly deal with unexpected disruptions, overflows, explosions, implosions, boo-boos, bodily fluids not our own, emergencies that aren't, emergencies that are, and uncharted potholes that careen us off our preferred path. It's all part of the job description.

To add insult to misery, the countless things we do for our families often go unnoticed and unappreciated. *Sigh*. What a comfort to know that the Creator of all things sees everything, no matter how small.

Our reward may not be Mother of the Year. It may not be hugs and kisses. It may not be here on earth at all. (I'm hoping it'll be a maid and cook for all eternity.) Whatever it is, we'll be thrilled because our loving heavenly Parent is pleased with us. "Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:4 NIV).

Dearest sister-mom, if you're a stress mess, this one's for you.

My books aren't written for the have-it-all-together, but for the scattered and tattered, scarred and scared. We'll tackle topics like mom-guilt, worry, time management, emotional damage control, finding room to breathe, and simply being enough.

I pray that my crazy mom stories, encouragement from Papa God ("Abba" in biblical Aramaic), and a whole heap of LOLs within these pages will bring you hope, even if it's the size of a brownie crumb.

It'll be enough for you to take the next bold plunge toward honest-to-goodness joy.

Stress Test for Moms

hether you're reading this book individually or with girlfriends (the discussion questions at the end of each chapter make it perfect for small group Bible studies), this little stress test will help you discover your stress level starting point.

\Box T \Box F	The voice in my head is usually screaming.
□Т□Г	The running of my household primarily falls to me.
□Т□Г	During an average twenty-four-hour day, I sleep less than six hours.
□Т□Г	I can't remember the last time I saw my car floorboards.
□Т□Г	The drive-through guy at our fave fast-food place knows me by name.

\Box T \Box F	My idea of a good time is a whole hour by myself.
□Т□Г	I am better described by the word <i>frazzled</i> than dazzled.
□Т□Г	After 9:00 p.m., I am usually too exhausted to even think about romance.
□Т□Г	My forgot-to-do list is almost as long as my to-do list.
□Т□Г	If worry were an Olympic event, I'd be a gold medalist.

Now count the answers you marked "true" and check out your status:

- 1-4: Yellow Alert! You are at risk of becoming stressed out.
- 5-7: Orange Alert! Look out—you're at toxic stress levels.
- 8–10: Red Alert! The siren is blaring and you need immediate stress intervention!



Moms Wearing Training Pants

Parenting Styles

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6 NIV



hud. Thud. Screech! I stood outside my almost-three-year-old daughter's room, gripping the doorknob, tears dripping down my face.

There it was again: *Thud. Thud. Screech!* It felt like my heart ramming into my rib cage. But no. It was my strong-willed child slamming her head against the closed door then screaming in pain.

This was supposed to be her time-out, her punishment for willfully disobeying. She was supposed to be sitting in the tiny red chair, isolated for five minutes in her room, reflecting on the consequences of naughtiness. She was supposed to be Too Blessed to be Stressed for Moms Sampler

concluding that it was a better idea to obey Mommy than to run with forbidden scissors and hack off a hunk of her own hair.

But she wasn't.

Thud. Thud. Screech! Her little blond head indented the wood as she vented her outrage. I felt like a complete mom-failure. This whole mess had played out like a nightmare.

After the sixth time Mommy chased her through the house to repark her diapered derriere in the time-out chair, Mommy, by now immersed in her own irate snit, resorted to manually holding the doorknob. If the little urchin wouldn't stay in the chair, at least she'd stay in the room. But when her escape route was blocked, the wee darlin' began using her head as a wrecking ball.

Sigh. What's a mom to do? It's no wonder mother guppies devour their young.

According to scripture, discipline is directly related to our peace of mind as mothers: "Discipline your children, and they will give you happiness and peace of mind" (Proverbs 29:17 NLT). Right. It just doesn't say how long or hard or what kind of discipline to use until that elusive peace shows up.

The challenge is in finding what type of discipline works for each child, whose personality, intelligence, and level of sensitivity dictate how they individually respond. Even children in the same family don't respond the same.

The scenario above never would've happened with my son. Firstborn, compliant, and eager to please, Matthew generally responded immediately and favorably to "No!" or the look. You know. The one that can melt a Plymouth. That, combined with the time-out chair and an occasional glimpse at the ominous

wooden spoon, was all he needed to mend his errant ways. (Reckon conformity has anything to do with a cat sleeping across your face in infancy?

Not my daughter, no, nope, no ma'am. Disciplining Cricket was like taming a baby tiger—she was hardheaded, fearless, and defiant, eager to explore the world on her own terms and rarely deterred by punishment. By the way, if you have one of these, take heart; their younger selves are nothing like the adults they'll become. Cricket grew into a smart, loving, sensitive woman—now my best friend—with a couple of baby tigers of her own to tame [wicked snicker].

In fact—a little side story here—Cricket was so timid in high school (the exact opposite of her elementary self that when I called her during the prom and asked how it was going, she replied, "I've been sitting at a table the whole time, Mom. It's going that way." So I did what any sincerely concerned, excellent-advice-offering mama would do. I belted out Lee Ann Womack's "I Hope You Dance" over the phone. And honey, I totally infused all the soulful passion I could muster into the last line: "And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you'll dance!"

The thing I didn't know was that Cricket had put me on speaker and moved me to the center of the table. I was entertaining a dozen amused, overdressed, cynical teenagers. I caught on when they burst into hoots and applause at the end. At least my kid's friends have good musical taste.

Well, awkward impromptu concerts may not be your parenting groove. And that's cool. We all experience different styles of parenting and discipline (or lack thereof) while growing

Too Blessed to be Stressed for Moms Sampler

up, and we've chosen to raise our children by either mirroring our own parents' child-raising techniques or scrambling to do the exact opposite (more about this in chapter 9).

Behavior scientists have identified four basic parenting styles, although there are numerous variations and combinations of characteristics related to our personalities. I find it easier to think of these styles in terms of animals, so the animal analogies are mine. Do you recognize yourself in any of these?

1. Polar Bears (psychologists call this style "Authoritative")

Daddy Polar Bear is outta there after a one-night stand, while knocked-up Mama Bear puts on an average of four hundred pounds during her pregnancy (just like me!). Newborns are blind and toothless—totally helpless. They stay by Mama Bear's side for two years before lumbering off on their own, during which time the cubs are swaddled in bear hugs (where did you think that term came from?) and nurtured with attentive but strict motherly love.

Human parents following the Polar Bear technique (assuming human Dad sticks around) generally have high expectations of their cubs, er, kids. There are household rules and enforced consequences for disobedience. The child's day is generally structured, and good behavior is expected and rewarded. Lines of communication between kid and parent are open, with lots of give-and-take. Parents explain the reasons for their expectations, and the child is raised to understand that she can speak to her parents without fear of harsh judgment or reprimand.

2. Harp Seals (dubbed "Neglectful" by psychologists)

Following an eleven-month pregnancy, Ma Harp Seal is a fairly dedicated parent for the first twelve days after birth. Then she pumps a flipper in the air, barks, "Okay, I'm done!" and finds better things to do, such as trolling singles bars for another mate. Ma Seal then leaves her baby stranded on the ice, where he learns to swim and hunt for food on his own. Or not. Thirty percent of harp seal pups die during their first year.

The human Harp Seal version of parenting produces children with a poor trust foundation because the parents take little interest in what's going on in their child's life and therefore don't meet the child's emotional, spiritual, and sometimes even physical needs. The home doesn't feel like a safe place for the child to share her life experiences and receive nurturing feedback, so she finds reasons to spend longer and longer periods of time away. The offspring of human Harp Seals often have a hard time forming relationships with other people and struggle with abandonment issues.

3. Black Eagles ("Permissive")

After the eggs hatch, Mom Black Eagle covers the basics, making sure the babies are fed and housed, but that's about all. She avoids confrontation and lacks the backbone to make and enforce rules in her own nest. She refuses to intervene in squabbles among her offspring and often just watches as her babies fight to the death. Can you say sibling rivalry on steroids?

Mom Black Eagle's human counterpart has difficulty setting limits for her children; she often compromises rules to avoid conflict. She may resort to bribery to entice her children to cooperate and would rather be her child's friend than parent. The child often ends up as an insecure, undisciplined, self-centered mini diva with poor social skills and a lack of motivation to improve.

We all know them, don't we? The out-of-control kid whom other mothers avoid inviting over to play because she systematically destroys all toys and property within her reach, while her own mom croons, "Oh, honey, you really shouldn't have ripped the head off Janie's new doll," or "Oops—was that a good choice, sweetie? You've ruined Miss Debbie's couch."

4. Orangutans ("Authoritarian" or "Obsessive")

Big Mama never lets her babies out of her sight. The original "helicopter mother," she obstinately hovers, supervising every move they make. She nurses them for six to seven years (fostering the longest dependency of any animal on earth). When the well dries up, males venture out on their own, but females stick with Big Mama for *ten years*, learning to use tools, build a sleeping nest, avoid predators, and everything else they need to know for homemaking and child-raising. Even after they're independent and leave the original family unit, girls frequently return to visit Big Mama. Those apron strings are springs forged from galvanized steel.

Actually, the hairy Big Mama (orangutan) is often more nurturing and compassionate than the traditional human "Authoritarian" hover-mom model. Although both Big Mamas lean toward obsession, the human version tends to coldly rely on punishment to enforce obedience to a list of strict rules. This Big Mama (or

Big Daddy) gives the child limited choices (if any), sees only black and white, and tends to resort to the can't-touch-this reason, "Because I said so!"

Big Mama's kids are prone to developing low selfesteem, hiding behind shyness, and exhibiting social ineptness. They often have difficulty thinking for themselves, harbor underlying resentment, and equate obedience with love. For example, I heard of one Big Mama household where faux presents bearing each child's name were placed underneath the Christmas tree. The kids thought they were real. Every time a kid misbehaved, Big Mama would toss one of their fake presents into the burning fireplace. You can bet those kids toed the line, but at what cost?

Please don't misunderstand—I'm not trying to condemn or advocate one type of parenting over another, just pointing out the differences. Your parenting style and choice of discipline are between you and Papa God. I only want to encourage you to prayerfully do your best to honor biblical principles and demonstrate to your children who is Lord of your life.

Listen, dear sister, if you take a long, hard, objective look at yourself and at your relationship with your child and don't like what you see, remember, it's not too late to make a change. It may take time. In point of fact, it *will* take time. . .but with diligence and Papa's strength infusing your own, it's entirely possible. Trust me, I know. I did it. (More about how to make simple but significant changes in the next chapter.

I'm convinced that one of the keys to seeing discipline through to its positive end result is patience—something most mothers find in short supply because we've drained it searching for the sock mates that are somehow transported to the parallel universe where alien pogo children hop around on one foot. And discovering on the drive to school that Junior is responsible for two dozen cupcakes for the party *today*.

I have one word for you, girl: guppies.

Patience is something we do. We may not always *feel* patient, but we must *act* with patience. Surprisingly, the more patiently we respond to our children, the more patient we'll actually become. Even if we have to fake it at first. Like when we gather three barrels of clothes from the floor to wash, sort, and fold, only to find them again strewn on the floor the very next hour.

Now how did that slip through despite our "Train up a child in the way he should go" mantra? Who's training whom? Sometimes we're the ones wearing training pants.

So when patience is running low, fake it. Yes. Fake it. Pretend you're Noah's wife and you've just been sequestered on an ark with a gazillion animals and a shovel.

If all else fails, remember the countless times your heavenly Father has been patient with you. Emulate Him, so that one day your children will emulate Him too.

Call them rules or call them limits. . . they are an expression of loving concern.

-Mr. Rogers

Navigating the 'Hood

- 1. When was the last time you felt like a complete momfailure? (If it was more than three hours ago, you get a tiara!)
- 2. Rarely do we fit completely into one single parenting style; we usually combine characteristics of several. For example, I'm an Orangupolartan (combination of Polar Bear and Orangutan). Which would you say you are and why?
- 3. Are you satisfied with the way your children are responding to your parenting techniques? Is there anything you feel led to change?
- 4. Patience is generally not the strong suit of *any* of us; we could all stand improvement. What are three practical things you can do to extend more patience toward your children?

Meet the Author

Debora M. Coty is a popular speaker, columnist, Bible student, and award-winning author of numerous inspirational books, including her bestselling Too Blessed to be Stressed series.

Debbie loves swatting a little ball around a tennis court, experimenting with recipes, raising ruckus with girlfriends, playing with her grandbuddies, and hiking Smoky Mountain trails with her desperately wicked pooch, Fenway.

Visit Debora at www.DeboraCoty.com to say hi or share a funny story, book Deb for a speaking event, sign up for her free e-newsletter, catch the latest craziness by subscribing to her *Too Blessed to be Stressed* blog, or join Deb's BFF (Blessed Friends Forever) Club, a community of fun-loving gals who adore chocolate, laughing, and Jesus!

And while you're at her <u>newly renovated</u> <u>website</u>, be sure to check out all of Debora's Too Blessed to be Stressed books:

<u>Too Blessed to be Stressed</u> (the original "mama" book that gave birth to the other "babies"; also available in Spanish)

Too Blessed to be Stressed Cookbook

(over 100 stress-free recipes, each requiring less than 20 minutes' hands-on prep)

<u>Too Blessed to be Stressed Coloring Book (helps</u> you decom-stress by coloring your way to calm)

<u>Too Blessed to be Stressed: 3-Minute Devotions for Women</u> (over 200,000 copies sold!)

<u>Too Blessed to be Stressed Planner</u> (lovely and popular purse-sized planner, updated yearly)

<u>Too Blessed to be Stressed: Inspiration for Every Day</u> (beautiful 365-day devotional)

<u>My Prayer Journal: Too Blessed to be Stressed</u> (creatively brings more depth to your prayer time)

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