

1 'Road Rage' out of control in high-stress U.S. society?

For the fourth year in a row, the death toll on America's highways has climbed and the main cause of the increase?....."road rage".

More than 41,000 have died in traffic accidents and the government says that two-thirds of those deaths were the result of road rage. Congress is so concerned with the apparently growing problem that it has called a special hearing to find out the causes behind it. Victim Robert Butler, whose truck was run off the road and smashed by a speeding car earlier this week, says it's all about respect or rather lack of it. "There's just not as much respect for fellow drivers as there should be," Butler said.

Maryland State Police officer Craig Miller, the man who rushed to Butler's wreck, has an explanation for the increase.

"More vehicles are on the road. More drivers. The stress that people experience at work causes them to drive in a way that they would never do in more normal situations," said Miller.

What can be done to reverse this trend?



2 I nearly cracked up

My parents have always had high hopes for me—maybe too high. I'd always tried hard at school, anyway. For as long as I can remember, I've always dreamt about working with animals—you know—working on a farm, at a zoo or in a stable. But I soon realised Mum and Dad expected a much higher standard from me—even becoming a vet.

It seemed I had to work twice as hard as my friends to get good grades and things got worse. Take maths! I was in the top class the year before, but after a couple of months I was really struggling. Some nights I had to spend up to three hours studying just to manage the homework. No problems, though, with History, English and Art; I passed those subjects easily!

When the maths exam came around, I was in a real state. I'd bitten my nails and drunk so much coffee the night before that when I finally got to bed, I tossed and turned for hours.

Later I found out I'd passed the maths exam by just three marks. I was exploding with joy! But when I broke the news to Mum and Dad, they weren't as happy as I'd imagined. I felt like a failure then. Hadn't they seen how hard I'd studied? I cried all night when I realised that I'd never be what they wanted me to be.

I don't think my parents are fair. Do you?

3 Heartache

My best friend, Carrie, knows I fancy Peter but still went off with him at a party, and we had a massive row over this.

Carrie has stopped speaking to me and has given me the silent treatment along with everyone else in our group. Lunch times have become unbearable and I often end up crying with frustration—nobody wants to listen to me!

One night I lay in bed unable to sleep at all. I realised THAT when daylight came and I was more than just tired—I was exhausted! I tried to get out of bed but I just didn't have the will to move and ended up just lying there, totally unable to do anything!

The next day I dragged myself into school. I was afraid that if I missed another day—because I have missed so many—I'd never catch up. But everything is bringing me down. What can I do???



4 No wonder John felt stressed

John, 36, married and a father of two children works in a factory, at an assembly line and thinks it is a good place to work. The noise levels are acceptable, the lighting is good and he gets on well with his fellow workers. BUT the job is a bit boring and he is paid only for what he produces so, because of this, he often feels sad, anxious and rather ill.

He smokes, drinks and eats too much and his wife worries about his bad sleeping, growing irritability and constant headaches.

New problems started a couple of months ago when John's employer laid off some 30% of his staff. At the same time he urged all workers to 'work harder' and, if necessary, longer hours.

The lay-offs caused uneasiness among the workers and fewer and fewer were prepared to help each other. Of course, all of these worries mean just one thing... 'stress'.

What should John do about his situation?

5 Managing a stressful family situation

A young woman, Margaret, went to the company doctor with a minor medical problem. For two months she had often taken sick leave and was herself worried that she really was not at all well. She often felt depressed and asked the doctor for a prescription.

The doctor asked her a few questions and found her problems to be related to the fact that her parents were newly separated. It was evident that both parents were using her to discuss their own problems and that Margaret was finding their conflicts difficult. She didn't want to side with one or the other.

As a result of the talk with the doctor, Margaret gained some insight into her problems. She now feels she has more understanding of why she feels so depressed and ill at times, but this isn't really helping her to get better. She has even thought of moving to a new town to get away from her parents but then she wonders if she should tell them face to face what she thinks.

The stress is still too much for Margaret, but what kind of help is there?



6 Always on call ...

Certainly our ancestors worked hard. They clocked in long hours on the railroad, in the factory or in the mine, but when they came home after working so hard all day, they could really relax and enjoy being home because there were no messages on the answering-machine, no cell phones or e-mail to interrupt them—simply because these things had not yet been invented!

Today, however, there is no escape—from work or from other people. We carry our phones with us all the time: to the gym, to the beach, to the bathroom. It means that a lot of people are working around the clock, seven days a week, even when they are not technically at work. It's a formula for stress and first-class exhaustion.

Is it possible to avoid this constant stress?