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Title: Unraveling the Source of Stress: It's Not the Situation, but the Thoughts

Ms. X, a dedicated stay-at-home mother of two young children, reached out to me with concerns about her exhaustion and the waning effectiveness of her antidepressant. Together, we delved into her stresses, and she revealed that her mother-in-law had initially promised to care for the children, allowing her to return to work. However, due to her sister's hospice care needs, the promise was retracted. She expressed feelings of anger, betrayal, and being trapped, as she had given up the opportunity to live in her desired location for the sake of her mother-in-law's support. Feeling at a loss, she sought guidance on coping with the present situation. It became clear that she had neglected self-care and needed to reintegrate exercise and meditation into her routine.

As our exploration continued, Ms. X realized that giving up her date nights with her husband had further depleted her energy reserves. The hesitation stemmed from her concerns about her children staying at her in-laws' house, as her father-in-law had a drinking habit. We began to brainstorm potential solutions. I suggested she have an open conversation with her father-in-law, expressing her needs without judgment or confrontation. By kindly requesting that he refrain from drinking while caring for the grandchildren, she could emphasize the importance of setting a positive example for them. Ms. X agreed that her father-in-law often expressed his desire not to expose the children to using alcohol as a coping mechanism. With this new perspective, she felt more at ease and resolved to have the conversation.

Through our discussions, Ms. X came to understand that it's not the situation itself, but rather her thoughts about the situation that were causing her stress. We explored how stress tends to narrow our perspectives and limit our options, creating a sense of being trapped. In contrast, a relaxed mind enables clarity and reveals possibilities, alternatives, and opportunities. I encouraged her to step outside, gaze at the expansive sky, and embody the vastness of it – reminding her to be the big sky that encompasses all experiences.

During our session, we collaboratively problem-solved, considering various options to alleviate her current challenges. We discussed the possibility of hiring a caregiver, exploring daycare services, or joining a supportive mother's group, allowing her to pursue part-time work. Additionally, maintaining the status quo for another year became an option as her older daughter would soon start elementary school, relieving some of her responsibilities.

By recognizing that the source of her stress lay not solely in the external circumstances, but rather in her thoughts and perceptions, Ms. X embarked on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. She embraced the understanding that she had the power to choose her perspective, expand her options, and make decisions aligned with her well-being.

Remember, it's not the situation that determines our experience; it's how we choose to perceive and respond to it. By cultivating a mindful approach and opening ourselves to new possibilities, we can navigate the challenges of life with greater clarity and resilience.