

You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.

Boss, P. (2002). *Family stress management: A contextual approach*. Sage.

1. Family stress is pressure or tension in the family system – a disturbance in the steady state of the family. (16)
2. Family is a continuing system of interacting persons bound together by processes of shared rituals and rules even more than by shared biology. (18)
3. The external context is composed of components over which the family has no control. It includes the environment in which the family is embedded, also called the family's ecosystem. It consists of the constraints of development and genetics as well as economics, history, and culture – in other words, the “time” and “place” in which a particular family finds itself. The external context cannot be ignored when explaining family stress; it is outside the control of the family system and has tremendous influence on how the family perceives events and manages (or fails to manage) whatever stress is produced. (40)
 - a. Historical context: the time in history in which an event or situation occurs that affects the family or a family member. (42)
 - b. Economic context: the state of the economy influences how the family reacts to a stressful event. (42)
 - c. Developmental context: the stage in the life cycle of both family and individuals in which the stressful event occurs. (43)
 - d. Hereditary context: the family's heritable and genetic context affects the health and physical strength of the family members. (43)
 - e. Cultural context: it provides the canons and mores by which families define the way they live. (44)
4. The internal context is composed of elements that the family can change and control. Maintaining some control allows some choice about how and whether to change; thus, even highly stressed families can survive and even thrive. (44)
 - a. The structural context refers to the form and function of the family boundaries, role assignments, and rules regarding who is within and who is outside these boundaries. (44)
 - b. The psychological context refers to the family's perception, appraisal, definition, or assessment of a stressful event. I prefer the term perception because it embodies both cognitive and affective (feeling) processes. (44)
 - c. The philosophical context of the family refers to its values and beliefs at a microlevel. Although such family beliefs and values are influenced by the larger context, a family's internal synthesis of beliefs and values into its own philosophy directly influences the family's perception of a stressful event. The internal context, more than the external, is under a family's control. Thus, even within the same cultural context, families may differ in their private philosophies, and they are certain to differ in internal beliefs if the families have external contexts that espouse different cultural values. (46)
5. Hill's (1958) framework for family stress theory focuses on the following independent or intervening variables:

- a. A – the provoking event or stressor
 - b. B – the family’s resources or strengths at the time of the event
 - c. C – the meaning attached to the event by the family (individually and collectively)
6. A stressor event is an occurrence that is of significant magnitude to provoke change in the family system. When one is faced with a stressor event, either as a professional who works with stressed families or as a family member, it is important to identify the type of event before making an assessment of or a response to the situation because the type will influence the entire process: the family’s perception of the event, the degree of stress experienced by the family, and the managing strategies used or not used. (50)
7. The meaning of a stressful event to a family is called the family’s perception or appraisal, definition, or assessment of the event. The family’s perception of the event is important in explaining why, given the same event, some families can manage the resulting stress, whereas the event causes a crisis for other families. How the family perceives the event or situation that is happening to them is critical in determining the degree of stress experienced by the family and the outcome (i.e., crisis or coping). What seems stressful to one family may not be stressful to others. How the family views an event also determines how they cope or what alternative (if any) they see for resolving the problem.
8. Family stress is pressure on the family. It is a disturbance of the family’s steady state – that is, the system is upset, pressured, disturbed, and not at rest. Therefore, family stress is change in the family’s equilibrium. This is not necessarily bad. It becomes problematic when the degree of stress (pressure or change) in the family system reaches a level (either too low or too high) at which family members become dissatisfied or manifests physical or emotional symptoms, then the degree of family stress is not optimal for that family. (61)
9. A family crisis is (a) a disturbance in the equilibrium that is so overwhelming, (b) a pressure that is so severe, or (c) a change that is so acute that the family system is blocked, immobilized, and incapacitated. (62)
10. Whereas family stress is a state of disturbed equilibrium, family crisis is a point of acute disequilibrium. Therefore, family stress is a continuous variable (degrees of stress), whereas family crisis is a categorical variable. (67)
11. Richard Lazarus originally defined coping as a cognitive activity incorporating (a) an assessment of impending harm (primary appraisal) and (b) an assessment of the consequences of any coping action (secondary appraisal). Thus, the coping process, according to Lazarus, is the cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) of what is happening, whereas coping strategies or behaviors are the actual responses to this appraisal. Coping behaviors are defined by Lazarus as (a) direct action behaviors – an attack or escape from threat (fight or flight) – that are used to change a stressed relation with one’s physical or social environment and (b) intrapsychic forms of coping, which are defense mechanisms used to reduce emotional arousal rather than to change the situation. Both actions and thoughts may make people feel better, even though they cannot change the source of the stress. Lazarus called this emotion-focused coping. It is used when there is little one can do to change the stressor, whereas problem-focused coping is used to master or manage a stressor. (73)

12. The definition of family coping includes both individual and group indicators and aspects of both adaptation and maladaptation. The cognitive appraisal of a stressful situation or event, the emotional reaction to it, and the behavioral responses to both the appraisal and the reaction all occur within the individual family member, albeit within a systems context. I therefore define family coping as the process of managing a stressful event or situation by the family as a unit with no detrimental effects on any individual in that family. Family coping is a cognitive, affective, and behavioral process by which individuals and their family system as a whole manage, rather than eradicate, stressful events or situations. (78-9)
13. Crisis is not always negative, coping is not always positive, and resilience is not always the desired end. Caution is needed when using these terms so that we do not value stability more than change as we work with distressed families. The goal is to value both.