Much research exists on the effects of stress both positive and negative, on our body, family and communities. Negative stress can cause physical and mental damage over a lifetime, while positive stress can provide a flood of energy to face a challenge. Negative stress impedes and can even retard growth while positive stress promotes it. However, which reaction occurs is extremely personal and dependent on the context in which it happens. Our goal with this review is not to look at particular stressor but the unique and highly individual conditions under which those stressors can be harmful or helpful, and what prompts them to change. Ultimately this research will lead to a new understanding of stressors and their relationship to individuals in our community and ways to mitigate the transition which allows a positive stressor to begin to be harmful or to transform a negative into a positive.

By examining the transition conditions in which a stressor changes from helpful to harmful we can begin to think about and find ways to recognize the conditions in which stressors morph. The goal of Shanker Self-Reg™ is about understanding stress and managing tension and energy. Identifying transition conditions between positive and negative stressors allows for us to identify how to best approach stressors which can come in any of the 5 Domains. Identifying these transition conditions can give parents, teachers and professionals an insight into how a stressor can change so that they can predict energy loss and support ways of restoring energy and reducing tension.
What Makes a Stressor Change

To address the question of what makes a stressor change from positive to negative, and vice versa, we are delving extensively into existing research about stress as well as clinical writings and even literary works to look at how theorists and thinkers have addressed positive and negative stress. Much work has been done that identifies a need to change one’s outlook on stress – to see it as a fuel for a challenge, or to rewrite the assumptions of the effects of stress. What does this writing tell us about how a stressor has different effects depending on the individual and context? We have started by thoughtfully and thoroughly defining positive and negative stress in all 5 Domains of Self-Reg, with an aim to take this information and begin diving into personal and situational differences which can influence how one may change from a positive to a negative stressor.

A Self-Reg Perspective

By looking at this research from a Self-Reg perspective we can begin to see that what we have considered negative or positive stressors are highly individual and contextual. Furthermore, our research is showing that being a stress detective is also about being a stress context detective. This research takes the emphasis off of the individual as being required to better cope with their situation but rather shows how to be aware of and work to create contexts for each individual that allows stressors to remain or become helpful.

Defining Positive and Negative Stress

Defining positive and negative stress and identifying conditions which may cause a stressor to “tip you over the edge” lays the groundwork for later research to fine-tune these change-points. We will know from this work what may cause a change, allowing later research to manipulate the conditions to identify the exact turning points for a positive stressor to change to a negative stressor, and vice versa.