STRESS MANAGEMENT

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In many organizations it is common to find large numbers of employees suffering from the adverse effects of stress. Left unmanaged, stress can lead to unproductive patterns and result in loss of focus and productivity at work. This workshop will help participants identify personal stress factors and introduce them to practical methods to successfully manage stress. Participants will create a plan for stress management that enables them to function at their best in the work environment.

Stress Management
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Stress – A Definition

Stress

There are many definitions of stress and as many theories about its causes. When we consider work and its role in contributing to stress, we are speaking of an individual’s perception or awareness that they are not able to manage the demands of their work. The result is a negative response and diminished productivity. Stressors are the situations, events or people that put pressure on an individual. The reaction to stressors is highly personalized and different people may react differently to the same stressor or stressors. In other words, what is a stress factor to one person may not be a stress factor for another.

Two Types of Stress

Acute Stress – This is an immediate, automatic coping response to an event. Similar in all mammals, a survival mechanism kicks in and causes nearly instantaneous changes to every body system. In many ways acute stress can be very useful. Acute stress can be a positive force and often provides the impetus to deal with situations, to prove ourselves capable and up to the challenge. This type of stress is short in duration.

- Energized in the moment
- Feeling activated at the time
- Wanting to succeed or survive
- Knowing we have the capacity to deal with the situation
- Moving towards a goal in a helpful manner

Chronic Stress – This is the long-term effect of on-going stress in our lives. It may be the result of a particular event or multiple events. When the pressures of home or work offer no reprieve and we have poor coping skills, the symptoms of chronic stress appear. With chronic stress, often we are not aware that we are manifesting symptoms. Our bodies, however, give us warning signs that we need to deal with the stress in our lives. They are alerting us that something is not right.

- Sleep problems
- Digestive problems
- Accelerated aging process
- Emotional agitation
- Social isolation
- Stiff muscles
- Many more
**PHASES OF STRESS**

When stress persists for an extended period of time or if the stress is severe in intensity, it is typical that a person may find herself or himself feeling stressed. Over-compensating in some areas or completely neglecting others are both common means by which the pressure of the stress causes a state of imbalance. Knowing the phases of stress can alert us to when we may be experiencing chronic stress.

**Phase 1: High Functioning**

In phase one, individuals are engaged and managing the pressures that come their way. Their motivation is high and they are engaged in both home and work life. If there is a stress at home, it is managed and does not affect work life, and vice versa.

- Committed to tasks
- High satisfaction
- Able to deal with stresses as they arise

**Phase 2: Becoming Disillusioned**

In this phase the individual begins to feel the pressures of home and/or work as seeming overwhelming at times. They often choose to disengage to try to refocus their energies.

- Begins to avoid certain people or tasks
- May have lapses of concentration
- Loss of satisfaction in a variety of areas

**Phase 3: Withdrawing**

In phase three, the person feels a general sense of dissatisfaction. The individual finds both home and work life draining. The flow of negativity between home and work is now open.

- Loss of enthusiasm for work, home, relationships, recreation
- Many people and tasks are now major irritants
- Issues at work affecting personal life and vice versa

**Phase 4: Complete Disengagement**

When an individual reaches phase 4 they are no longer able to cope with the demands of everyday life. There is complete disengagement from the expectations of both home life and work life.

- A complete disdain for many people and/or tasks
- Loss of all patience and sense of humour
- Lack of motivation and enthusiasm
**STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE**

The result of unmanaged stress is that we are simply not able to invest the physical, social or emotional energies necessary into our work, causing hampered productivity and a negative experience of work and/or home. The first step to managing stress is to identify some of the sources.

1. **Organizational Stressors**

These stressors are a result of poor planning on the part of employers or management. It may be the lack of role clarity, where employees are not sure who is responsible for what task. Or employees may lack the training to complete their roles properly. Organizational stressors also include systemic stresses such as a business not being viable in the market.

What organizational stressors are operating in your work environment?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. **Task Related Stressors**

These are stressors that are built into a particular role. They are the anticipated pressures of a profession. For example, an ER worker may have the combined stressors of shift work, dealing with individuals in crisis and the emotional toll of dealing with life and death situations.

What stressors can be anticipated in your line of work?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

3. **Workplace Stressors**

These stressors impede the ability of an employee to complete their tasks with excellence, but their cause is not inherent in the organization or the task. These are typically mismanaged issues, such as conflict in the workplace, being in an environment not conducive to an employee’s work style, or a disrespectful workplace.

What workplace stressors are you experiencing?

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______________________________________________________________________________
The stress cycle acts as a catalyst to perpetuate our unhealthy coping mechanisms. We become caught in a vortex of on-going demands. The demands seem relentless, and as pressure increases so does our unhealthy belief system that we are unable to cope. We come to think that we are at the mercy of our circumstances and become passive in the experience of our own lives, both personally and professionally. We respond with negative coping mechanisms, which further diminishes our productivity. This in turn increases the list of unmet demands, and the cycle begins again.
YOUR SITUATION

Take some time to think about your situation. It is important to honestly assess the pressures you face, and at the same time to be mindful and name the positives. Use the boxes below to jot any ideas that come to mind. You may use words, pictures or images. You will not be asked to share this information with anyone. This is for private reflection.

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<tr>
<th>Stressors/Demands at Home</th>
<th>Strengths/Positive at Home</th>
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STRESS TEST – ASSESSING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Following are life events that tend to cause a certain amount of stress. Check the descriptions that apply to you.

Check the descriptions that apply to you within the last year.

_______ Death of a partner
_______ Death of an immediate family member
_______ Divorce or break-up of significant other
_______ Major personal injury or illness
_______ Marriage
_______ Retirement or nearing retirement

Check the descriptions that apply to you within the last 6 months.

_______ Major injury or illness of immediate family member
_______ Birth of child
_______ Infertility
_______ Sexual difficulties
_______ Death of a close friend
_______ Trouble getting along with family member
_______ Disagreement with close friend
_______ Buying first house
_______ Major change in financial situation
_______ Starting a new job
_______ Children leaving home
_______ Change in living conditions
_______ Difficulties with supervisor
_______ Sleeping difficulties
_______ Subject to harassment (including bullying)
_______ Job termination
Following are behaviours that are often symptoms of stress. Check the behaviours that apply to you presently.

_______ Do you have frequent headaches?
_______ Is your appetite poor?
_______ Do you sleep badly?
_______ Do you feel nervous, tense or worried?
_______ Do you have poor digestion?
_______ Do you have trouble thinking clearly?
_______ Do you feel unhappy?
_______ Do you cry more than usual?
_______ Do you find it difficult to enjoy your daily activities?
_______ Do you find it difficult to make a decision?
_______ Is your daily work suffering?
_______ Are you unable to fulfill a certain obligation in your life?
_______ Have you lost interest in things?
_______ Do you feel that you are a worthless person?
_______ Has the thought of ending your life been in your mind?
_______ Do you feel tired all the time?
_______ Are you easily tired?

While no universally applicable cut-off score can be used under all circumstances, in most settings, 5-7 positive responses indicate significant psychological distress. The more severe the life stressor, the more life stressors experienced in a close time frame and the more behaviour symptoms present, the more likely one will have increased stress reactions.

**Questions to Consider**

Are you surprised by your level of stress?
What areas of life satisfaction are you content with?
What areas of life satisfaction would you like to improve?

______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________
**Red Flags – Your Cue to Pause**

**Red Flag Responses to Stress**

Stress may not always look stressful. When we are initially feeling overwhelmed we tend to respond in one of four ways. These red flag responses are warning signs that we need to find a means of dealing with the situation or we place our physical, emotional and social well-being at risk.

**Go-Go Response**: In this mode of operation it is full steam ahead. We are agitated, keyed up and have a hard time being still. To others we may look hyper-productive. Internally, we feel overwhelmed and our mind is racing and jumping from one idea to another.

**No-No Response**: In this mode of operation we shut down and remove ourselves from situations. We are depressed and show very little energy. We may look spaced out to those around us.

**No-Go Response**: In this mode of operation we externally freeze and are incapable of charting an action plan. However, internally we are extremely agitated and worked up.

**Go-No Response**: In this mode we externally are wound up and appear active, but our ability to think and plan well is immobilized.

Think of a stressful situation you encountered recently. How did you respond? What is your usual response in stressful situations? If you cannot think of a recent situation, pick one of the scenarios below and talk about what your typical reaction would be.

**Scenario 1**: You are in a restaurant; your food is undercooked and not edible. The friend you are with is encouraging you to complain and you know you should say something. Your friend is annoyed and speaking more loudly than you are comfortable with.

**Scenario 2**: Your boss has asked you to give a 5-minute presentation at work.

**Scenario 3**: You just found out that a project that you thought you had 2 weeks to complete is due in a few days. You are far from done. You know it will require extra hours at work. You also know that out of town guests are coming in 2 days and that there is a fair bit of preparation to be done at home.
When we are overwhelmed and lack coping skills, we tend to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour. Unmanaged stressors result in unhealthy symptoms. If the stressors are withdrawn and we are allowed to rest and recuperate, we may be rejuvenated and return to a level of acceptable productivity. However, if the stressors persist or we are not aware of means by which to rejuvenate, our ability to be productive and contribute is reduced.

**Social Withdrawal**
As stress increases we tend to withdraw from the people around us.

- Making excuses to not socialize
- Diminished leisure group activities

**Pleasure Seeking**
When under stress we crave pleasure and will find ways to add it to our lives.

- Food
- Video games
- Alcohol or drugs

**Avoidance**
When a situation exerts pressure beyond our perceived ability to cope, avoiding the issue may give us a sense of reprieve.

- Work harder
- Work less
- Distractions

**Emotional Discharge**
When we feel overwhelmed, venting our frustration in a strong emotional reaction provides quick release.

- Directed at self
- Directed at others

Are there any unhealthy coping mechanisms that you utilize or are prone to use when feeling stressed?
**THREE COMPONENTS OF STRESS**

There are separate parts to our experience of stress. When we are able to analyze and break apart our stressful experience and determine which areas are the source of stress, and which components we are able to influence, we are then able to chart a course of action.

---

**Threat Assessment**

Ask yourself:

- What is the task, issue, situation or person causing the stress?
- Can the stress be eliminated? What are the consequences? What can you do to help yourself?

Strategy: Modify your environment.

**Perception**

Ask yourself:

- How much control do I have in the situation?
- How am I perceiving the event?

Strategy: Alter your thinking patterns.

**Physical Responses**

Ask yourself:

- What are my physical responses?
- Am I taking care of myself physically?

Strategy: Take care of yourself and relax your body.
There are many ways to physically keep yourself ready to engage well with the stressors your workplace delivers. Here are a few strategies to help in the process.

Read through the list and note any of the physical symptoms of stress you may exhibit.

- Twitches
- Headaches
- Stiff neck
- Clenched jaw
- Tight shoulders
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Racing heart
- Loss of sex drive
- Sleeplessness

**Breathe**

Breathing is a simple and powerful way to release your tension. When we are stressed our breathing pattern changes. By consciously making use of a more relaxed breathing pattern, you will induce a more relaxed physical state. Avoid breathing from your chest. If your shoulders are rising and falling as you breathe, you need to change your breathing habit.

1. Breathing while sitting
2. Breathing while standing
3. Yawn

**Relax**

When under stress, our bodies contract and become tight. It is the way our body is preparing to physically manage the situation. It is the natural fight or flight response. When we feel our bodies reacting to stress, we can consciously make use of muscle relaxing techniques to create a more relaxed state.

1. The body scan
2. Progressive relaxing
3. Stretches
Physically Manage Your Stress at Work

Arrive at Work in a Calm State
- Go to bed earlier
- Get up earlier
- If you drive, listen to something you like

Regularly Unwind in the Day
- Walk when you can
- Engage in a few workplace stretches
- Take your breaks

Eat Well
- Eat breakfast before you go to work
- Watch how much coffee you drink
- Avoid pick-me-up snacks
- Eat lunch at work

Physically Manage Your Stress at Home

Watch Your Diet
- Plan ahead
- Have regular meals
- Eat healthy

Make Time for Leisure
- Find a hobby
- Join a club
- Do something fun

Make Time for Physical Activity
- Find a time that works for you
- Find a partner
- Make it happen

Get Enough Sleep
- Have routines
- Be comfortable
- No late night meals
- Turn off work
- Avoid alcohol or caffeine before bed

It is too difficult to make decisions all day. Our goal is to make repeated healthy choices that result in healthy habits.
COMMON UNHEALTHY THOUGHT PATTERNS

In stressful situations it is easy to succumb to thinking in extremes. We refer to these negative thought patterns as cognitive distortions. These unhealthy patterns of thinking tend to reinforce themselves. The more often we fall into them, the more quickly they surface in times of stress.

All or Nothing Thinking

This form of cognitive distortion fosters perfectionist thinking. We come to believe that we have to absolutely and entirely be on top of everything at all times, and when we encounter one small shortcoming, we deem ourselves incapable of managing.

Example: The individual who leaves one task undone and believes they are a complete failure.

Magnification

This form of cognitive distortion blows small events out of focus or hyper-fixates on a particular aspect that did not go well. A single negative detail becomes difficult to overlook and the incident is obsessed about, while at the same time positive feedback is ignored.

Example: An individual receives an offhand negative comment about the way a project was handled and obsesses about it for days.

Overgeneralization

This pattern of thought takes a single or isolated event and spins an all-inclusive belief of inability. We tend to use words like always and never when we fall prey to this cognitive distortion.

Example: The photocopier breaks and the individual thinks, “Things always break when I am using them.”

Emotional Reasoning

This belief system relies heavily on emotions. We come to believe that reality is determined by our feelings. This is a highly individualized form of construing reality and responses are very hard to anticipate.

Example: The individual feels intimidated by a colleague and believes they will never be “as good as them.”
Personalization and Blame

In this thinking mode, we falsely assume responsibility for events beyond our control. We hold ourselves accountable for situations that we are not ultimately responsible for and heap guilt and shame on ourselves.

Example: The employee who berates himself or herself for the boss’s inappropriate response: “If only I would have done something differently, he or she would have reacted differently.”

Should or Ought to

In this type of thinking, we believe our way of conceiving reality is the correct way. When things do not turn out the way we hope for we have a litany of “should do’s” that jump to mind. We try to motivate ourselves with the list of “ought to do’s.” We never quite live up to our list of expectations and then feel like we fall short.

Example: The individual who tries to motivate themselves to do more work by telling themselves they “should” be more motivated.

Depersonalization

In this mode of thinking, we refuse to accept responsibility for our actions. Everything is the result of other’s inabilities, and we act as if we are at the mercy of fate. We have a hard time believing in our ability to effect change or to influence a situation.

Example: The employee who blames their outbursts on rude customers.

Why is it difficult to engage with our stressors objectively?

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Journaling

Journaling involves writing your thoughts and ideas down. An actual journal may be anything from a spiral-bound notebook to a word processing document. People who find journaling helpful often talk about how the power of assigning words to thoughts provides insights and clarity to situations.

Sections in your journal may be about different things. You might categorize your journal into areas such as:

- Venting
- Reflecting
- Planning
- Visualizing
- Ruminating
- Recap of day
- Affirmation
- Gratitude

Reframing

Reframing is recasting your experiences in a positive manner. In order to actively manage stress, we need to be able to identify negative thought patterns attached to particular stressors and identify any positives that we may be overlooking.

**Step 1: Identify Your Stressors**

This requires us to be comfortable with our own areas of weakness and honest about how we are currently coping.

**Step 2: Create Positive Messages**

One key way to generate positive messages is to have a handful of messages at your disposal. They should be messages that create a sense of competency and reinforce your belief in your own abilities to cope well.

Example: “I know I can handle this.”
Step 3: Analyze the Situation

Give intentional thought to each of the stressors. Which of the belief systems may be clouding your thinking? Can you identify other unhelpful thinking patterns? Look for repeat patterns of unhealthy thoughts. Ask yourself what is happening internally before the stress response.

- Think of people and situations that do not align with your thoughts.
- Stand back and ask yourself, “How important is this?”
- Is it a realistic fear? Do other people stress about similar things?
- What is the worst case scenario?
- Is any part of your stress self-imposed – what can you do about it?
- How much influence do you have?

Step 4: Reframe the Experience

Reframing includes identifying the situation from realistic and positive perspectives, naming what you can do to influence the situation and taking personal responsibility for your situation.

Example: It is a very busy time at work and you are overwhelmed. You reframe the situation and tell yourself that you will do your best, work efficiently and feel good about what you do accomplish, rather than focusing on what is not done.

Step 5: Make a Plan to Address the Issue or Situation

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GENERATING POSITIVE THINKING

1a. Identify Your Stressors

Create a list of all the things that cause you to stress or worry. Write in free form. Do not filter them, simply write them down as they come into your mind. You may draw pictures, jot down icons or use words to name your stressors.

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1b. Create a “Stress Ladder”

Using your responses, create a list of the top 10 things that cause you to feel stressed. Have 1 be what causes you the most stress and 10 be what causes less stress.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________
6. ____________________________
7. ____________________________
8. ____________________________
9. ____________________________
10. ____________________________

2. Create Positive Messages

Choose one pressing stressor from the above stress ladder to continue this activity. Generate both general positive messages and a specific positive message.

General example: “I know I can handle this.”

Specific example: “John must be having a bad day; I am doing a good job and will not beat myself about his rants. I will remain positive even when he yells at me.”

General positive message:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Specific positive message:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
3. Analyze the Situation

Think about your thinking around the stressors. Which of the belief systems may be clouding your thinking? Can you identify with other unhelpful thinking patterns?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________

Stand back and ask yourself, “How important is this?”
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Is it a realistic fear? Do other people stress about similar things?
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What is the worst case scenario?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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Is any part of your stress self-imposed? If so, what can you do about it?
______________________________________________________________________________
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4. Reframe

Recast the stressor and frame it from a positive perspective. Think about what skills you are learning, what you are learning about yourself and what you are learning about others. Find the positive in the situation.

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5. Create a Plan

Today you have time to think about how you might respond. Is reframing enough? Do you need to add other strategies to help yourself cope? Reframing is often the first step in helping us move forward. But often we need to use reframing in conjunction with other strategies. What you note down today can be a starting place. You may want to add strategies as the training continues today and in the days to come. For now, just jot down any ideas that come to mind. You may consider journaling as a helpful response to keep you in a positive frame of mind.

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Healthy Coping Strategies: Decision Making

Our personality influences how we view and tackle decision making. Some people dive right in and face a decision directly; others may pretend there is no decision to be made and simply choose to ignore the reality in front of them for as long as possible. Regardless of what our natural response to decision making is, taking a thoughtful approach ensures the best results. Instead of waiting for things to change, it is important to become proactive in thinking about what needs to be done, what options we have and then making a plan for change.

Often when we are under stress we are limited in our ability to see what the possible results of a decision might be. Sometimes it is helpful to imagine giving ourselves advice.

1. Pose the Issue/Decision

What is the issue? _________________________________________________

2. Look at Options

What are the options?

Option 1: _____________________________________________________________________

Option 2: _____________________________________________________________________

Option 3: _____________________________________________________________________

3. Generate a List of Pros and Cons

Without even knowing it, most of us use the method of weighing pros and cons of a situation. The key is to make the exercise more conscious. For every choice you need to make, weigh the upsides and downsides of the various options. In most cases, whichever option has the most pros wins – although there are times when one pro or con is so weighty in its implications that it outweighs the others.

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Option 2

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Option 3

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4. Best Option = Take Action!

Given the above activity, what option is suggested by the activity? Make sure to have carefully considered the outcomes that would result.

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Healthy Coping Strategies:

Setting Boundaries

Some pressures are a result of allowing other people to take advantage of us. In these situations, it is helpful to direct our energy to communicating our needs and boundaries. Practicing what you will say and mentally rehearsing the interaction are two ways to set yourself up for success.

- Learn to say no
- Avoid people who make you feel stressed
- Avoid topics that create tension

Are there people in your life who take advantage or ask too much of your resources and energy? Who are they? How do you usually respond to them? How could you clearly communicate your boundaries? What would you say?

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Are there areas where you take on too much? Or things you do to “self-inflict” stress? Decide on a new course of action.

- Take control of your environment
- Have realistic expectations of yourself

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**Healthy Coping Strategies: Social Support**

We often have supports around us that are left untapped. Friends, family and colleagues can offer practical help when we feel overwhelmed. Create a list of individuals who are already in your support systems whom you could draw on in times of need. At times, this might require us to delegate certain tasks.

Who are the people already in your support system whom you could ask for help when needed? You may want to associate different people with different resources they could provide. Are there tasks that you could delegate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical Support Needed</th>
<th>Individuals to Help Out/Delegate</th>
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HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES: GET ORGANIZED

Often times we create chaotic environments that perpetuate our stress levels and contribute to the stress levels of others. Often a bit of planning and preparation can alleviate a fair amount of stress.

1. What are some areas in your home and work life that may be improved with some attention to organization?

______________________________________________________________________________
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2. What are some things you do or could do to organize your work environment?

   • Organize your space
   • Manage phone and email use
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________

3. What are some things you do or could do to organize your home environment?

   • Assess your TV and computer time
   • Be proactive with food preparation
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________
   • __________________________________________________________________________
HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES: PLAN AHEAD

The best way to deal with stress is to plan ahead and prevent stressful situations. There are certain circumstances that one can anticipate and take time to plan an avoidance route. If the situation is unavoidable or comes as a surprise, being prepared could take the form of coping strategies that are rehearsed. Be proactive!

Do you anticipate any stressful situations in the future? Are there things you could put in place to help you deal with them when they arrive?

Today:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

This week:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

In the next few months:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

In the next year:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

In the years to come:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
**PERSONAL PLAN**

**Motivation**

Motivation is personal. Motivation is enhanced with the knowledge of why you are doing what you are doing and the will to do what it takes to meet your goals. If you want success you must understand what your motivators are. What will keep you committed to reducing your experience of stress? Do you need rewards? Someone to keep you accountable? New habits? Motivators may include the negative effects you want to remove, and especially your values and priorities.

**Potential Obstacles**

You need to consider potential problems or obstacles that might hinder you. Use your own problem solving skills and include a set of actions you will commit to when you encounter the anticipated difficulties. Consider also the particular circumstances or people that may trigger old patterns or make it difficult to stick to the new course of action. Anticipate setbacks and realize that negative patterns of behaviour have been linked to your survival. Setbacks are natural; when they occur, you need to get back on track and take the opportunity to learn from the situation and get on with the task of healthy living.

**Personal Motivators**

Take some time to think about and name your personal motivators. What are your work-life values? Why do you want to improve your ability to manage your stress? What is the personal pay-off?

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The responses above will help you stick to your plan when things get tough. You may need to remind yourself of them often.
Home Plan

What is one pressing issue you need to address at home? Pick just one to start with. How will you do this?

Issue

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______________________________________________________________________________

Plan

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Possible Obstacles

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What Will I Do to Overcome These Anticipated Obstacles?

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Work Plan

What is one pressing issue you need to address at work? How will you do this?

Issue

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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Plan

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Possible Obstacles

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______________________________________________________________________________
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What Will I Do to Overcome These Anticipated Obstacles?

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______________________________________________________________________________
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Work and Home Plan

This page has you consider those aspects of your life to have filled with positive activities, situations and people, in order to manage stress. Some may already be providing support. However, if you notice gaps, you should consider these. Remember, stress cannot take over life if life is already filled with the positive.

What are the things I want to add to or return to in my life?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

For emotional well-being I will or will continue to...
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______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________

For social well-being I will or will continue to...
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For mental well-being I will or will continue to...
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Optional – For spiritual well-being I will or will continue to...
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ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STRESS MANAGEMENT

Employee Assistance Programs
Many workplaces offer assistance to individuals who find themselves in on-going stressful situations or crisis, whether that be substance abuse, family issues or other problems. These programs provide an outside and anonymous source for employees to access support when they need it most.

Workplace Training in Stress Management
More places of employment are realizing the benefits of regular training in stress management, time management and team building. These programs have long range payoffs in employee productivity and staff morale.

Community Building
Creating a cohesive work environment encourages employees to come to work with a positive attitude and enjoy their time at work. Allowing employees time to share concerns about family, work and helpful ways they have found to manage the pressures of home and their profession can be a big step in stress management. This includes welcoming staff rooms, social functions and an atmosphere in which conflict is dealt with well.

In-House Reporting System of Stressors
Employees are often key in identifying stressors that, if addressed, would reduce stress and increase productivity. Common complaints that employees experience as additional burdens are long meetings, ineffective, time-wasting procedures and artificial deadlines.

Deal with Unnecessary Physical Stressors
When possible, reduce extraneous noise and commotion. Healthy air flow and natural lighting can also have a dramatic impact on how individuals perceive and experience their work environments.

Provide Physical Outlets
Some organizations offer to pay partial gym fees, offer gym memberships to their employees as Christmas gifts or bonuses, or come up with alternative ways to get their employees moving during the work day. Noon hour walking or biking clubs are examples of simple ways organizations can bring in healthy lifestyle activities.
Create a Green Space

Having plants in the office, a welcoming entrance with greenery, pictures of nature or beautiful artwork, natural light and space all contribute to well-being at work. Whatever your workspace, think of simple ways to make it functional and appealing.

Pets at the Office

This might not be for every workplace or every group of employees, but many work environments have found that allowing pets adds a positive dimension to the workplace.

Art Time

Some workplaces have art supplies available in the staff room for employees to utilize during breaks or lunch hours. The creativity has a spill-over effect from off time to work time.

What are some ways your workplace supports stress management?

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The Role of Resiliency

Resilience is the quality that allows individuals to be knocked down by life circumstances and come back more resolutely than ever. Rather than letting failure overwhelm them and deplete their resolve, they find a way to move forward in a positive manner.

There are some identifiable characteristics that make some people more resilient. If we do not currently display these characteristics, we can strive to implement them as part of our strategy to manage stress. Resilient individuals have the following characteristics:

- Emotional control
- Optimism
- Positive attitude
- Strong decision making skills

An individual’s ability to manage incoming demands and to keep a positive attitude and maintain productivity are the key indicators of resilience. Resilience is a person’s ability to cope with stressors as they present themselves and to keep at bay the detrimental effects of stress.

Set Yourself Up for Success

Accept Your Situation
Setbacks happen to everyone. You may never know why or exactly what happened, but you need to acknowledge your ability to choose your response.

Face Your Fears
It is normal to feel insecure at times, but don’t cower and avoid uncertainty.

Be Patient
Reflect and think about what you plan to do, trust that things are going to get better, and if they don’t, believe in your ability to cope no matter what comes.

Take Risks
If you have a dream, if you want certain things in life and relationships – take a step in the direction of your hopes. Doing so will build your self-esteem and resilience.

Find Social Supports
Find someone at work you look up to, watch, listen and learn from them. Talk to a friend, a counselor or a family member.
Know What You Want
If you have goals, it is easier to make plans and move forward. Don’t be the victim; instead decide what your next step is and think and act proactively.

One Step at a Time
Sometimes the pressures of life and work feel heavy and overwhelming. Begin by moving forward one step at a time. Set your sights on the first step, not the whole undertaking.

Be Nice to Yourself
Do something you enjoy; give yourself positive messages; know your abilities and know your limits.
When Stress Becomes More Serious

Depression

Problems and misfortunes are a part of life. Everyone experiences situations that cause a brief time of unhappiness and sometimes even feelings of worthlessness and self-blame. Most of the time, most people return to a balanced state. However, depression becomes an illness when these feelings last several weeks and interfere with the normal functioning of life. Depression can be classified as mild, moderate or severe.

Symptoms of Depression

- Feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Eating more or less than usual
- Having difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Loss of interest in taking part in activities
- Decreased sex drive
- Overwhelming feelings of sadness or grief
- Feeling unreasonably guilty
- Loss of energy, feeling very tired
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Experiencing symptoms of psychosis
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches

Diagnosis

In addition to a noted change in a person’s previous functioning, five or more of the following symptoms need to be present during a two-week period:

- Depressed mood for most of the day
- Loss of interest in activities
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Insomnia
- Feelings of restlessness or being slowed down
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Indecisiveness or difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide
Generalized Anxiety Disorder

During or after certain situations, most people experience some form of anxiety. With time or after implementing coping strategies, most people return to a state of balance. However, if a person continues to worry, or if the feelings cause them to avoid everyday activities, it is possible they have an anxiety disorder.

Symptoms

Chronic, exaggerated worry, tension and irritability that appears to have no cause or are more intense than the situation warrants. Physical signs can include restlessness, trouble falling or staying asleep, headaches, trembling, twitching, muscle tension or sweating. These symptoms interfere with normal daily functioning.

Diagnosis

Someone may meet the criteria for generalized anxiety disorder if they spend at least six months worrying excessively about everyday problems.

You May Need More Help if...

- You have trouble functioning normally after a period of time
- You feel overwhelmed or out of control
- You are not taking care of yourself

If you need more help, consider:

- **Calling a counsellor for help.**
  Sometimes trauma symptoms worsen and ordinary efforts at coping don't seem to work very well. A counsellor can help you process the event and help you return to your normal functioning.

- **Talking to a doctor about the incident.**
  A doctor can take better care of your physical health if he or she knows about your trauma symptoms, and doctors can often refer you to more specialized and expert care.

- **Taking prescribed medications.**
  If trauma symptoms worsen, you may want to consult your doctor about taking medications that are able to improve your sleep or reduce anxiety or depression.
**Positive Self-Talk**

One of the most powerful influences on your attitude is what you say to yourself. How you respond internally to what happens to you will greatly influence your thoughts and feelings. By using your inner dialogue or self-talk you will begin to see things positively and look for the good in each situation. In the following statements put an X by the statement that is positive self-talk.

____ If I do the thing I fear, the fear is sure to die.
____ I can’t be afraid or I’ll fail again.

____ I’ll just pause, I can handle it.
____ Don’t slow down, I’ve just got to push on.

____ I should not be afraid.
____ It’s OK to feel some fear.

____ I can manage my fear.
____ I’ve got to stop being afraid.

____ I have to do it.
____ I choose to do it.

____ I think I can handle it.
____ I know ways to deal with this.

____ One step at a time, I can handle the situation.
____ I can’t handle it unless I take one step at a time.

____ Don’t get nervous. I am in control.
____ I’m in control. Relax and take a deep breath.

____ I have succeeded in some ways.
____ I wasn’t a total success.

Think of a situation right now that you feel unsure of or have anxiety over. Practice self-talk in that area... Write it down.

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What is a time or situation when you felt proud of yourself?
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What is one thing you do exceptionally well?
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What is a role or responsibility that you feel positive about?
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What is a characteristic you like best about yourself?
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What is a good thing you do to cope with stress?
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What is one thing you do to help yourself stay positive?
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Self-Soothing Techniques

With Vision
Buy one beautiful flower; make one space in a room pretty; light a candle and watch the flame. Set a nice place at the table for a meal using your best things. Go to a museum with beautiful art. Go sit in the lobby of a striking old hotel. Look at nature around you. Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars. Walk in a nice part of town. Fix your nails so they look pretty. Look at beautiful pictures in a book. Go to a ballet or other dance performance.

With Hearing
Listen to beautiful, soothing music or to invigorating and exciting music. Pay attention to the sound of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling). Sing your favourite songs. Hum a soothing tune. Learn to play an instrument. Be mindful of any sounds that come your way.

With Smell
Use your favourite perfume or lotions, or try them on in a store; spray fragrance in the air; light a scented candle. Put lemon oil on your furniture. Put potpourri in a bowl in your room. Boil cinnamon, bake cookies, cake or bread. Smell the roses. Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.

With Taste
Have a good meal; have a favourite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate; treat yourself to a dessert. Put whipped cream on your coffee. Sample flavours in an ice cream store. Suck on a piece of peppermint candy. Chew your favourite gum. Get a little bit of a special food you don’t usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice. Really taste the food you eat; eat one thing mindfully.

With Touch
Take a bubble bath; put clean sheets on the bed. Pet your dog or cat. Have a massage; soak your feet. Put creamy lotion on your whole body. Put a cold compress on your forehead. Sink into a really comfortable chair in your home or find one in a luxurious hotel lobby. Put on a silky blouse, dress or scarf. Try on fur-lined gloves or fur coats in a department store. Brush your hair for a long time. Hug someone. Experience whatever you are touching; notice touch that is soothing.

Breathing Exercise

Deep breathing exercises are very effective for relieving stress. Breathing exercises release tension from the body and clear the mind, improving both physical and mental wellness. We tend to breathe shallowly or even hold our breath when we are feeling stressed or anxious. Shallow breathing limits your oxygen intake and adds further stress to your body.

Need a Few Minutes to Relax?

Get comfortable in your chair. Loosen any tight, uncomfortable clothing. Let your arms rest loosely at your side. Allow yourself a few moments to relax (pause).

If your thoughts wander, just let them, while gently moving your attention back to the relaxation.

Take time to notice your breathing, gradually slowing down the rate of inhaling and exhaling as you become more comfortable (pause).

Now relax and enjoy the feeling (pause).

Close your mouth and relax your shoulders, releasing any tension that has built up (pause).

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Let the air you breathe in push your stomach out. Hold your breath in as you slowly count to four.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you continue counting up to six.

Breathe in (three, four, five, six).

Hold (two, three, four).

Breathe out (three, four, five, six).

Breathe in (three, four, five, six).

Hold (two, three and four).

Breathe out (three, four, five, six).

Breathe in (three, four, five, six).

Hold (two, three, four).

Breathe out (three, four, five, six).

Breathe in (three, four, five, six).

Hold (two, three, four).
Breathing Exercise – continued

Breathe out (three, four, five, six).
Breathe in (three, four, five, six).
Hold (two, three, four).
Breathe out (three, four, five, six).
Continue breathing in (four, five, six).
Hold (two, three, four).
And out (three, four, five, six).
Remember, if stray thoughts enter your mind, gently return your attention to the relaxation (pause).
Now, as you breathe out, silently and calmly repeat to yourself:
My breathing is smooth and rhythmic (pause).
My breathing is smooth and rhythmic (pause).
My breathing is easy and calm (pause).
My breathing is easy and calm (pause).
It feels very pleasant (pause).
If you would like, you may close your eyes now (pause).
Continue to repeat to yourself:
My breathing is smooth and rhythmic (pause).
My breathing is smooth and rhythmic (pause).
I am peaceful and calm (pause).
I am peaceful and calm (pause).
Continue to take deep, rhythmic breaths. Let the tension fade away each time you breathe out (pause).
If you have closed your eyes, gently open them (pause).
Return to your day peaceful, more focused and relaxed.
Visualization Exercise

We use visualization every day. Before you head off to the park or beach, you may have an image in your mind of the place. You may daydream about a beautiful place you want to go for vacation. These images usually put us in a positive mood and create feelings of relaxation. Visualization exercises can have the same effect.

Find a quiet place to sit…
Take some time to feel settled…
Take a deep breath…

Close your eyes…
Let your body relax…
Take another deep breath…

Allow yourself to let go of stress,
any stress… Relax…

Take another deep breath…
And keep moving deeper inside yourself…
Don’t force anything…
Just be still…
Remember to breathe…
And to relax…

Keep your focus within yourself…
Moving deeper inside…

And let any thoughts just
drift away like clouds in the sky.
When you catch yourself engaged in a thought,
just take a deep breath…
And allow yourself to come back to your center…

Now, see a path in front of you and follow the path…
Take your time and notice what is around you…
Take a deep breath and smell the air…
Look at the flowers and listen to the birds…
Look up at the sky and notice the clouds
Visualization Exercise – continued

In a little while, you will see a beautiful waterfall…
Watch the rainbows bouncing off the water…
Bend down at the edge of the water…
Trail your hand through it …
Feel the Earth under you…

This is your special place…
No one else can come here without your permission…
Make this place your very own place…
Make this place the most peaceful, safe place you want to be in…
Whenever you need to be quiet and alone…

You can come back to this place any time you want…
Any time you need to be quiet and alone…

When you are ready, and there is no rush,
say goodbye for now to your sacred place…

Begin coming back up the path…
Take your time and notice what is around you…
Take a deep breath and smell the air…
Say farewell to the flowers and birds…
Look up at the sky and notice the clouds…

Take your time coming back to the room you are in…
Enter very slowly and very gently…
Feeling completely refreshed…
And totally relaxed…
Visualization Exercise

Imagine a caterpillar. You can watch it crawling about on the tree where it lives. Attaching itself to a branch of the tree, the caterpillar starts to form its cocoon. Gradually it surrounds itself with golden, silken threads until it is totally hidden. Observe the cocoon for a few moments.

Now be inside the cocoon... Surrounded by the softness of silk... you rest in the warmth of the golden darkness... You are only dimly aware, so you do not know exactly what is happening to you, but you sense that in this apparent stillness a hidden, transforming intelligence is at work...

At last the cocoon breaks open, and a ray of light penetrates through a chink... As the light touches you, you feel a sudden surge of vitality and realize that you can shed the cocoon.

As you feel the cocoon falling away, you discover that with it you have shed the defences and supports of your safety and your past... You are now freer than you ever dreamed you could be; you are a beautiful, multicoloured butterfly... You soon realize that your boundaries have extended infinitely... You can fly... You find yourself dwelling in a totally new realm of colors, of sounds, of open space... You experience yourself flying... being supported by the air, being gently borne up by the breeze, gliding down, flying up again...

Below, you see an immense meadow full of flowers of every kind and color... You settle on one... then on another... then on another still, so gently that the petals are not even disturbed. You experience each flower as a different being with its own color and perfume... its own particular life and quality. Take your time in experiencing the many aspects of your expansion, your freedom and your lightness.

Your Own Visualization

Write your own visualization. Think of a place that brings you comfort. What would you see? What would you hear? What might you smell? What would you feel? What would you be thinking about?

Or... Draw a picture of place that would give you a sense of peace and comfort. What would be in this place? Who would be there? What might they say to you?
**Muscle Relaxation Exercise**

The body responds to stress with muscle tension, which can cause pain or discomfort. Progressive muscle relaxation reduces muscle tension and general mental anxiety.

**Directions**

Inhale and tense each muscle group (hard but not to the point of cramping) for four to ten seconds, then exhale and suddenly and completely relax the muscle group (do not relax it gradually). Give yourself 10 to 20 seconds to relax.

**Muscle Groups and How to Tense Them**

- Hands: Clench them.
- Wrists and forearms: Extend them and bend your hands back at the wrist.
- Biceps and upper arms: Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the elbows and flex your biceps.
- Shoulders: Shrug them.
- Forehead: Wrinkle it into a deep frown.
- Around the eyes and bridge of the nose: Close your eyes as tightly as possible. (Remove contact lenses before beginning the exercise.)
- Cheeks and jaws: Smile as widely as you can.
- Around the mouth: Press your lips together tightly. (Check your facial area for tension.)
- Back of the neck: Gently stretch your head back.
- Front of the neck: Touch your chin to your chest. (Check your neck and head for tension.)
- Chest: Take a deep breath and hold it, then exhale.
- Back: Arch your back backwards.
- Stomach: Suck it into a tight knot. (Check your chest and stomach for tension.)
- Hips and buttocks: Press the buttocks together tightly.
- Thighs: Clench them hard.
- Lower legs: Raise each foot and point and curl it down.
RESOURCES


Websites

http://www.helpguide.org/

http://www.humanstress.ca/

http://www.stress.org/

http://www.morethanmedication.ca/

http://www.mindcheck.ca/
ACHIEVE SERVICES

Training
Our training is available in public, on-site and webinar formats. Below is a sample of the workshops we offer.

Leadership Development Workshops
Coaching Strategies for Leaders – Conflict, Performance, Change
Change Management – A Leader’s Guide
Leadership – The Essential Competencies
Leading Meetings – How to Make Meetings Great

Management Development Workshops
Management and Supervision – The Crucial Skills
Performance Reviews – How to Get the Best from People
Mediation – Facilitating Difficult Conversations
Motivating Change – Coaching Through Resistance

Conflict and Communication Workshops
Bullying in the Workplace
Conflict Resolution Skills
Dealing with Difficult People
Assertive Communication
Difficult Conversations

Workplace Culture Workshops
Diversity and Culture – Strategies for Working with Differences
Generations – Working with Differences
Personal Work Styles – Working with Differences
Respectful Workplace – Strategies for a Healthy Environment

Performance Workshops
Change Management – An Employee’s Guide
Emotional Intelligence – Expanding Influence
Mental Health in the Workplace
Stress Management
Team Development – Creating Functional Teams
Time Management

Safety and Violence Prevention Workshops
De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations
Emergency Preparedness Planning
Safety at Work – Mindfulness-Based Strategies
Workplace Violence Prevention

For a complete list of the training we offer, please visit www.achievecentre.com
Member Plan
ACHIEVE offers a membership plan that provides the member with unlimited access to our pre-recorded webinars.

Member Benefits

- Unlimited access to all pre-recorded webinars whenever and however often you want. New content added throughout the year.
- Ability to download useful PDF handouts and workshops, exclusive to members.
- Notification of special discounts and promotions on products and public workshops only available to members.

Assessment Tools
ACHIEVE Assessment Tools help leaders and organizations have thoughtful and proactive discussions related to a variety of topics and issues. Each Assessment Tool Package includes one Facilitator’s Guide and 25 copies of the Assessment Tool questionnaire.

- Employee Engagement Assessment Tool
- Organization Health Assessment Tool
- Personality Dimensions at Work Assessment Tool
- Respectful Workplace Assessment Tool
- Strengths and Weaknesses Assessment Tool
- Workplace Violence Assessment Tool

Consulting Services
Our consulting services assist organizations and individuals to manage issues related to planning, change, conflict, and stress. To explore how to connect with one of our consultants, please contact us to discuss your needs in more detail.

- Coaching
- Group Facilitation
- Incident Management
- Mediation – Conflict Resolution
- Organizational Assessment – Conflict
- Team Development
- Workplace Violence Risk Assessment

Lunch & Learn, Keynote Addresses, Mini-Workshops
Sometimes you don’t have the need for a traditional workshop. The next time you require a shorter presentation, consider using an ACHIEVE Centre speaker. Our speakers provide engaging inspirational and humorous 30-90 minute presentations on topics related to leadership and organizational performance.