

## Stress Busters

### **What actions can be taken when one feels a lack of control?**

Life and work can sometimes be overwhelming. This is a basic fact that cannot be avoided.

However, some may advise you to simply remain positive and continue. Fortunately, there are more effective methods for managing stress and relieving its symptoms.

Stress causes physical illness. Stress can cause a range of symptoms, from minor headaches and fatigue to more serious conditions like heart attacks, high blood pressure, and stroke. From a financial perspective, stress leads to significant losses in productivity for employers annually.

These facts provide strong reasons to develop strategies and techniques for managing stress when it occurs.

This session aims to provide you with specific tools to help you combat stress and encourage you to consider a long-term approach to managing stress in your life.

In this course, you will be introduced to three different approaches for managing stress, as well as specific tools and techniques for each approach. there are:

- Relaxation techniques can be helpful in situations where you have no control over the stress-causing situation.
- Time management reminders are helpful for gaining control over your schedule.
- Thinking-based interventions can be used to reduce stress by changing one's perspective.

By completing this, you will acquire beneficial techniques for handling the stressors in your life. You will also realize that managing stress is a lifelong commitment. By learning effective strategies to deal with stress and taking a proactive approach, you can significantly reduce the impact of unhealthy stress on your life.

### **Dealing with stress.**

To begin, let's clarify the true definition of stress. There are many definitions and explanations, but one commonly accepted explanation is credited to Richard S Lazarus. He defines stress as the condition or feeling that occurs when a person believes that the demands placed on them exceed their personal and social resources. This can be simplified by stating that "Stress is the result of feeling a lack of control."

One important issue to consider is perception. Different individuals may have varying perceptions of stress, and the level of stressfulness can also vary. Our reactions to situations we perceive as stressful can vary. Some people have extreme negative reactions, while others have minimal suffering. Physical, mental, and social factors, as well as personality traits and social support, play a role in mitigating the impact of stress.

Using a hierarchical approach can be effective for managing stress, regardless of the level of suffering. There are three types of overall strategies for managing stress :

- **Action-oriented strategies:** Action-oriented strategies involve taking steps to regain control over one's life. Engaging in actions now can improve your ability to cope with stress and reduce its negative impact in the future.
- **Acceptance-oriented strategies:** Acceptance-oriented strategies can provide temporary relief from stress symptoms when immediate control is not possible. When experiencing stress, these techniques can help you cope in the moment.
- **Emotionally-oriented strategies:** Emotionally oriented strategies are interventions that are based on psychological principles. They work by assisting in shifting negative thinking patterns and promoting a more positive outlook on the situation being encountered.

First, let's examine acceptance-oriented approaches for managing the stress you encounter in the present moment.

## Acceptance-Oriented Strategies

An acceptance-oriented approach to stress management acknowledges that stress is a normal aspect of life. They assist in managing stress responses that require control in the present moment.

In a situation of high stress, it is often necessary to take a break and relax in order to regain focus and concentration. This is where relaxation techniques should be utilized.

There are various relaxation techniques available, and as you explore different stress management tools, you can experiment to discover the ones that suit you best. Common approaches include:

- **Imagery** – involves visualizing a peaceful and relaxing place in your mind.
- **Meditation** – involves consciously relaxing the body and focusing thoughts on one thing for a sustained period.
- **Self-hypnosis** – involves incorporating positive statements and affirmations into your mind to enhance your confidence and stress management skills.
- **Physical relaxation** – can be achieved through deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises.
- **Yoga** – can improve your body's physical ability to handle the negative effects of stress.

You can try Deep Relaxation, a popular relaxation strategy that can be used daily to help combat the stress of life.

## Deep Relaxation Exercise

- Please find a comfortable position and loosen any tight clothing.
- Take a passive approach, concentrating on your physical body and disregarding other thoughts.
- Tense and relax each of your muscle groups for 5-10 seconds in the specified order:
  - Forehead – Raise your eyebrows as high as possible and hold.
  - Eyes and nose – Close your eyes tightly and wrinkle your nose simultaneously.
  - Lips, cheeks, and jaw – To create a wide grimace, bring the corners of your mouth back as far as they will go.
  - Hands – Clench your fists and maintain a firm grip.
  - Forearms – push against an invisible wall.
  - Upper arms – Bend your elbow and flex your biceps.
  - Shoulders – Raise your shoulders up to your ears.
  - Back – Arch your back forward, extending your stomach outward to its maximum extent.
  - Stomach – Lift your legs and tense your stomach muscles to hold.
  - Hips and bottom – Tighten hips, buttocks, and hold.
  - Thighs – Squeeze your legs together as tightly as possible.
  - Feet – Extend your ankles upwards towards your shins and maintain the position. Point your toes and hold for 5-10 more seconds.
  - Toes – Curl your toes tightly.
- If any muscles still appear tight, repeat as needed.
- To maintain focus, concentrate on your breathing and take deep and steady breaths. Complete 45 consecutive breaths.
- Notice the weight of your body. Allow it to be free and avoid trying to control it.
- Think of a simple object and hold it in your mind for approximately three minutes.
- Resume normal work activities. You may experience a sense of inner calm that can last until you choose to repeat this exercise or attempt another relaxation technique.

## Action-Oriented Strategies

Now, we will examine stress management techniques focused on action. These strategies involve taking specific actions to reduce or eliminate the sources of stress in your life. Acting can help you gain control over stressful situations. Developing patterns of behavior can contribute to a less stressful lifestyle.

Managing your workload is highly important. In this section, we examine the required skills for this task.

## **Workload Management as an Action-Oriented Strategy**

One factor that often leads to stress is a lack of effective time management. A seemingly simple task can become extremely stressful when the pressure to finish it becomes uncontrollable, or when you feel overwhelmed by your workload. Effective workload management is important for addressing stress in a practical manner. There are some common patterns of behavior that many people experience and that contribute to increased time stress. They are:

### **Emotionally-Oriented Strategies**

There are various effective approaches to dealing with internal conflicts, including emotional strategies. By enhancing our emotional response to stress, we develop resilience and become less susceptible to the pressures that infiltrate our daily lives.

One effective approach for altering our emotional reaction to stress involves modifying our perception of the stressful situation. When you focus on the positive aspects of a stressful situation and remove negative emotions, the situation often becomes less threatening and harmful than you initially thought.

A specific technique for doing this is called Thought Awareness.

### **Thought Awareness Method**

Everyone experiences periods of stress due to their thoughts and self-talk. Sometimes, it is possible that we misinterpret someone's behavior as not liking us, when in reality they may just be in a bad mood. Additionally, we may feel scared or uneasy in situations that we do not fully comprehend, or we may simply focus on the negatives rather than the positives.

Thought awareness, rational thinking, and positive thinking can result in significant benefits.

By recognizing that it is your own perception of events that leads to stress, you can gain control over your thoughts and transform negative thinking into positive thinking. The negative thoughts in our minds can be harmful and should be replaced with more rational and positive thoughts about the situation.

By practicing Thought Awareness, individuals can consciously identify and record their negative thoughts, taking deliberate action to replace them with more appropriate patterns of thinking.

**Use the worksheet on page 11 to complete this exercise.**

**Step 1: Begin by creating a Thought Awareness worksheet.**

Action: Record your negative thoughts.

1. Consider a situation that is currently causing you stress.

- What is causing your stress?
- What is the cause of your anxiety in this situation?
- What is your belief regarding your ability to handle the situation?

2. Allow your mind to become open and aware of the thoughts that flow in. Here are some examples of negative thinking.

- I'm dumb.
- I'm in over my head.
- Everyone thinks I'll fail.

## **Step 2: Replace negative thoughts with rational ones.**

After becoming aware of the negative messages, you are sending yourself about the situation you find stressful, it is important for you replace those thoughts with positive ones.

The initial step in this process is to consider the situation from a logical standpoint. One should evaluate their perceptions and assess their reasonableness and accuracy.

Action: Turn your negative thoughts into rational ones.

1. Examine each thought on your Thought Awareness Worksheet and determine if it is reasonable. Please be objective in your assessment.
2. Consider another person's perspective and determine the rationality of the thought. Would the individuals in question agree with the thought?
3. When the thought is not rational, as is often the case, rewrite the thought to reflect the reality of the situation.

Examples from above turned into rational thoughts:

- I'm dumb >> I have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the task.
- I'm in over my head >> I have a challenging task ahead, but my boss believes in my ability to complete it successfully.
- Everyone thinks I'll fail >> My co-workers have a vested interest in my success and are dependent on me.

If you come across a negative thought that accurately reflects reality, this is your chance to address the underlying concerns and take necessary steps to resolve them. It is possible that you may not possess all the necessary skills. If that is the case, work with your boss to create a development plan to align your skills with their expectations.

Rational thinking can help alleviate stress by providing something tangible to focus on, regardless of the truth behind negative thoughts.

## **Step 3: Affirm your reality with positive thinking.**

Now that you are aware of the situation, you may benefit from some additional support to navigate the stressful circumstances. By practicing positive thinking and focusing on oneself, individuals can develop their confidence and self-esteem.

Having confidence in your skills to accomplish a job is comforting, while affirming that you will excel at the task is motivating. The practice of sending yourself positive messages can aid in the healing process of wounds caused by recurring negative thoughts about oneself and one's abilities.

When creating affirmation statements, it is recommended to be specific and state them in the present tense. Making an emotional connection with them can enhance your brain's ability to believe what you are telling it.

Action: Transform your rational thoughts into positive affirmations.

- Examine each rational thought and develop a statement that can be used to enhance confidence.
- Determine if rational thinking can create new opportunities that were not previously considered under your old negative thinking pattern.
- Record your affirmations and any opportunities you see on the Thought Awareness Worksheet.

Examples of positive affirmations:

- With my exceptional skills, I will masterfully conquer this project.
- I can do this assignment well.
- I need respect and support from my co-workers.

Practicing thought awareness and positive thinking contribute to the development of emotional resilience. Another effective approach involves strengthening resilience and adopting a healthy lifestyle. The name of it is Building Defences.

## **Building Defences Method**

There are multiple techniques available to strengthen your defences against stress. All of them are designed to assist in living a life that protects you from the impact of stress.

We have already discussed relaxation. This approach for managing stress in the present moment can be effective when practiced regularly and supplemented with sufficient rest and sleep, helping to prevent future stress.

Exercise is a method of strengthening one's defences. Individuals who engage in regular exercise experience improved physical health and are better equipped to manage the physical manifestations of stress. Exercise can improve your physical resilience, particularly when you prioritize cardiovascular training and watch your diet.

Building a network of support can be an effective defence against stress. Social relationships can help mitigate the negative impacts of stress. Research suggests that having a strong

social network of friends, family, and coworkers can help reduce the likelihood of experiencing stress and improve your ability to cope with it.

With a well-developed system of support, individuals can receive the necessary assistance in a timely manner. There is always someone available for you to reach out to and have conversations with, whether it be to express your emotions, recenter your thoughts, or collaborate on finding solutions.

Your network may include a diverse range of individuals, including:

- Friends
- Family
- Co-workers
- Managers
- Team members
- Mentors

Building your network with friends and family may seem like the easiest option, but it is important to also form meaningful relationships with people at work. These individuals can offer more specific help when your stress is related to work.

There are various methods to establish supportive relationships in the workplace.

- **Mentoring** – Mentoring offers a valuable opportunity to acquire new skills and enhance one's self-worth. Both parties must put in effort to ensure a balanced relationship. Please be ready to provide information to your mentor and actively participate in the problem-solving process.
- **Teamwork** – Teamwork involves collaborating with others on a specific task or project, which can lead to the development of strong, supportive relationships. The relationship starts out as necessary for getting the work done, but when properly managed, it can develop into one of mutual support and assistance.

Working closely to solve problems fosters trust. This can be expanded to facilitate discussions about the causes of stress and generating ideas for improving the conditions that lead to stress.

**Action: Build your support network**

1. Take a moment to consider the individuals who you consider to be a part of your support network. Use the table below to write down the names of four individuals you can seek help from when you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Additionally, consider the nature of your relationship with them, whether they are friends, family, your boss, or colleagues. Ideally, you will have a diverse group of people you can rely on.

2. Consider the reasons why these individuals are part of your support network.

- Has support been provided in the past?

- Do you provide support to each other?
- Document the historical record of support for each of these individuals.

3. Search for indications of one-way relationships. Please document the actions you will take promptly to enhance your contribution to the support. Create a plan and execute it.

| Current Support Network |              |                                 |                        |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Name                    | Relationship | Support Provided                | One-Way or Reciprocal? |
|                         |              | By Them:<br><br><br><br>By You: |                        |
|                         |              | By Them:<br><br><br><br>By You: |                        |
|                         |              | By Them:<br><br><br><br>By You: |                        |
|                         |              | By Them:<br><br><br><br>By You: |                        |

Consider identifying a person with whom you can cultivate a mentoring relationship. This person may be familiar in your industry, such as a professor, senior manager, or someone with more experience in the company or profession than you.

1. Develop a clear goal statement outlining your desired outcomes for this relationship over the next six months.
2. Outline a set of specific actions you intend to take to achieve this goal.
3. Consider strategies to ensure that this relationship remains mutually beneficial, both in formulating your initial request and in maintaining a positive connection once established.
4. Remain humble in your approach, acknowledging that people may not always operate in strictly transactional ways, and respect the possibility that their motivations may include positive reasons you may not foresee.

## Developing a Mentoring Relationship

Name of potential mentor

Goal Statement:

Action Plan:

Reciprocal Activities:

## Key Learning Points

In this session, you have learned about tools that enable you to implement three specific stress-relieving approaches.

- Relaxation
- Time Management
- Positive Thinking-Based Interventions

Since everyone's response to stress varies, the tools and techniques one may prefer to utilize may differ from those utilized by others. Having knowledge of different tools is important for effectively managing stress and reducing its occurrence in the long term.

Answer the questions in the table below to assist in planning what to include in your personal Stress Busting Kit. Please keep this "kit" with you and use the stress busters when necessary. Remember to continue improving your stress management skills to the best of your ability.

| Question                                                                                                                                               | Stress Buster |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Which specific relaxation techniques will be used to combat stress experienced "in the moment"?                                                     |               |
| 2. How can you incorporate relaxation into your daily routine and use it as a proactive strategy for reducing stress?                                  |               |
| 3. What are your three main challenges regarding time management? Which tools can be used to reduce stress caused by time pressures?                   |               |
| 4. What thinking strategies can be used to mitigate the impact of stress? What impact will this strategy have on your ability to handle stress?        |               |
| 5. What actions will you take today to strengthen your defences against stress? How will these steps enhance your ability to cope with stress factors? |               |

Thought Awareness Worksheet

| Negative Thought | Rational Thought | Positive Thought or Opportunity |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
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