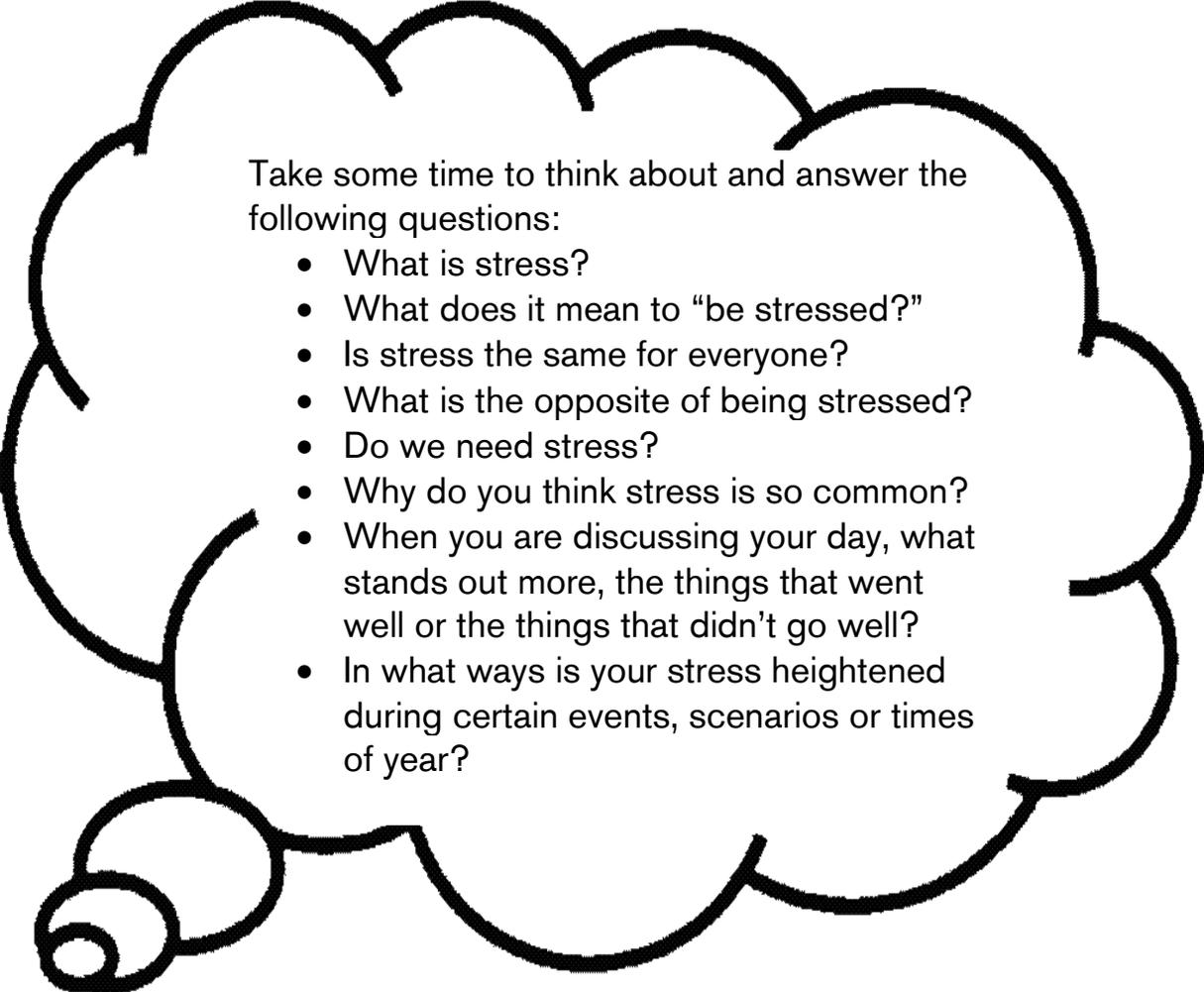


Creating Calmness in Stressful Times Virtual Module

HANDOUTS

Handout A: Defining Stress



Take some time to think about and answer the following questions:

- What is stress?
- What does it mean to “be stressed?”
- Is stress the same for everyone?
- What is the opposite of being stressed?
- Do we need stress?
- Why do you think stress is so common?
- When you are discussing your day, what stands out more, the things that went well or the things that didn’t go well?
- In what ways is your stress heightened during certain events, scenarios or times of year?

Handout B: Signs of Stress

These are examples of how stress can manifest itself.

Thinking

- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor memory
- Increased worry
- Preoccupation about a situation or event
- Focusing on the negative

Spirituality

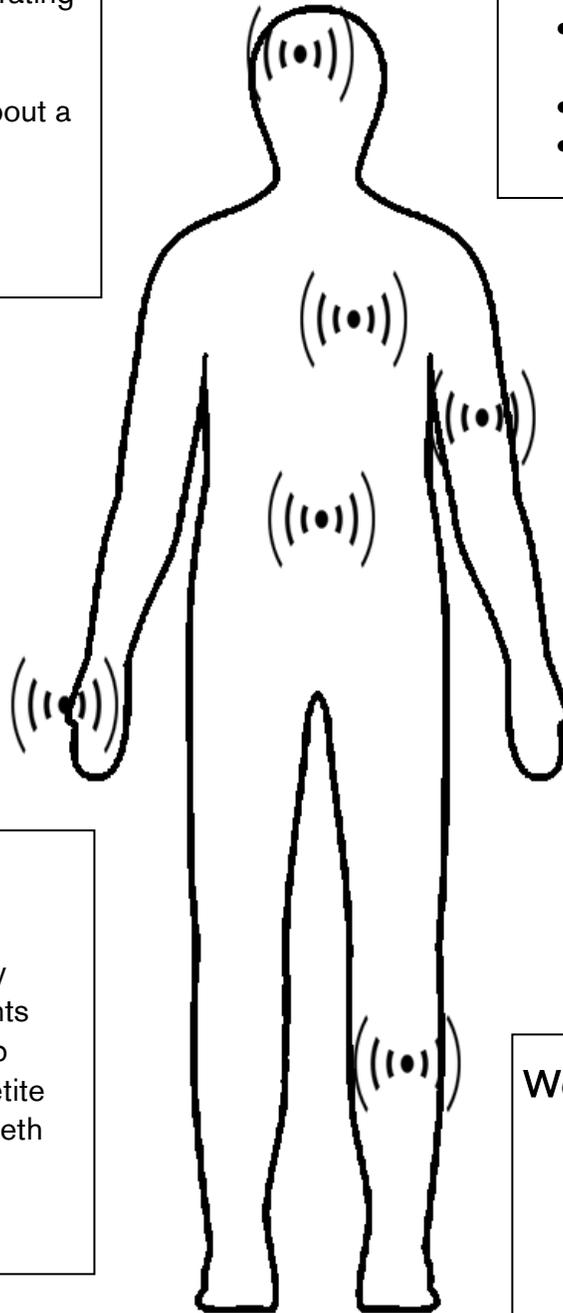
- Loss of purpose
- Questioning the meaning of life
- Loss of faith
- Questioning belief system

Emotions

- Anger
- Agitation
- Moodiness
- Depression
- Irritability

Relationships

- Reduced intimacy
- Increased conflicts and fighting
- Impatience
- Feeling Isolated or disconnected



Physical

- Headaches
- Stomach pain
- Tense muscles
- Digestive issues
- Fatigue

Behaviors

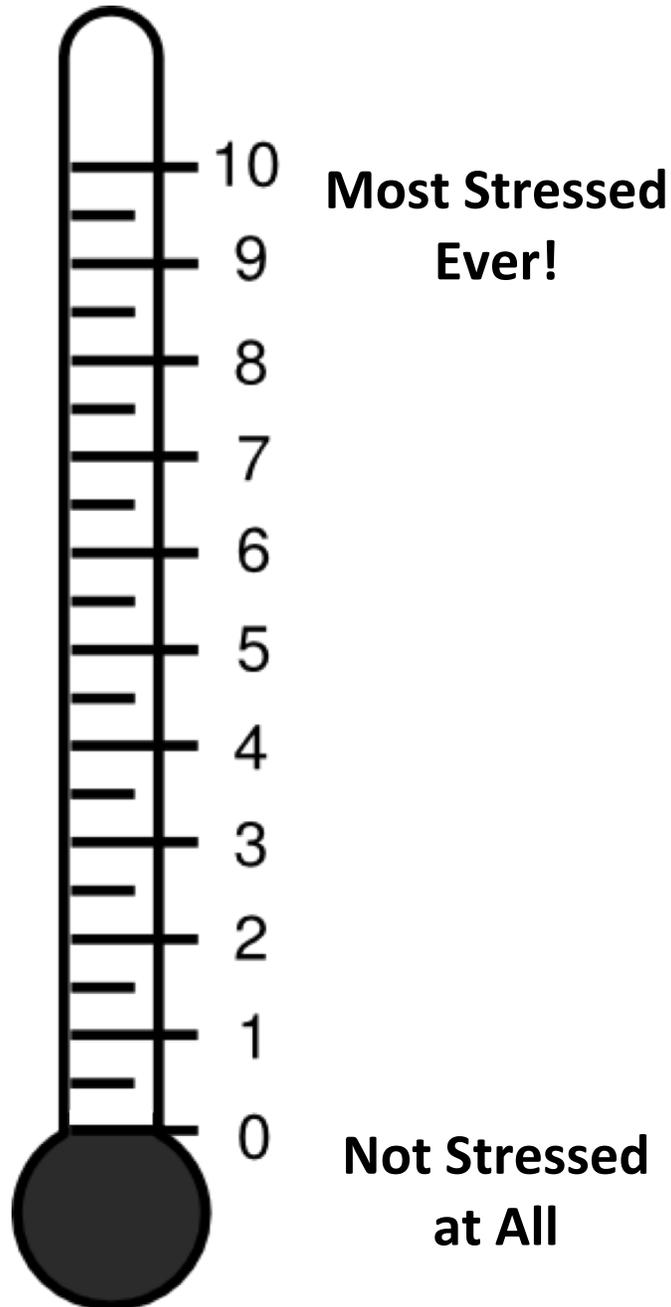
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Starting arguments
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Clenching jaw/teeth grinding
- Substance use

Work

- Decreased motivation
- Task avoidance
- Low morale
- Frustration
- Burnout

Handout C: How Stressed Am I?

Take a minute to rate your current level of stress. What is the highest that it got during the last week? The lowest?



Handout D: General Points to Consider for Effective Communication

Choose content carefully. Think about what you want to say and the topics you can handle before engaging in a conversation. When dealing with a stressful situation, you can be more easily triggered by what is discussed. Be clear about your limits and pay attention to signs your body gives you that a conversation is more than you can handle at that time. *How can you balance uplifting conversation topics with things that add to your stress?*

Be respectful and calm. Stop what you are doing, and pay full attention to the other person. Talk about emotional issues when you are calm, remembering that you may be more stressed than usual in certain situations. If efforts to resolve a conflict are not working, take a break and set a time to revisit the issue when both of you have cooled down a bit. *What are some specific challenges you are having around communication in your house and with others?*

Listen. Communication is a two-way process. You'll get your message across better if you understand the other person. That understanding comes from listening. *How easy or difficult is it to listen to others when facing a stressful situation? What might be some reasons?*

Be aware of your non-verbal cues. Attend to facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye contact, etc. *What are some non-verbal cues you've received from others? When you noticed these cues, did you verify that your interpretation was correct? Do you notice any changes in your or others' body language when stressed?*

Be alert to your tone of voice. How you say something is important; this includes the volume, your tone and the rate of speech. Select your words carefully. Avoid using words that can increase conflict, such as "always" and "never." *Is it easier, or more difficult, for you to monitor your tone of voice? Does anyone have any suggestions for maintaining a positive tone?*

Be kind. Avoid sarcasm and contempt. These have a very negative effect on communication and relationships. Would you want your sarcastic comments to be heard by someone you admire? Include something positive that focuses on a solution. *What are some positive things about the members of your household and those around you? Have you shared those things with them? What are some other ways you can be kind in your communication?*

Silence can be golden. Silence can often be an appropriate response. This is not the same as "the silent treatment," where one person completely ignores the other person. *Is it difficult or uncomfortable for you to sit in silence with someone? How can you create space for each household member to get some quiet, non-discussion time?*

Use Communication Basics. Use "I" statements: "When you _____ (an observation), I feel/think _____ (your reaction)". Avoid "you" statements that describe what you believe or imagine the other person is experiencing, i.e. "You're so negative all the time!"

Listen carefully and pay attention to others. Seek Clarification. If you are unsure about what is being said or asked of you, ask for clarification. Try to maintain a respectful sense of humor.

Handout E: Quick Relaxation Exercises

Exercise 1: Deep Breathing

When we become stressed, our breathing naturally becomes shallow. Making a conscious effort to take slow deep breaths will bring calmness to your body and mind.

Start this exercise by breathing out first. Force all of your air out as you draw your belly in toward your spine. Then, when you have breathed out all of your air, slowly breathe in, focusing on expanding your belly with air rather than puffing your chest upward. Doing this will help you take a deeper breath.

Do this again several more times at your own pace. It may help to place a hand on your belly to feel your stomach expand and contract.

Exercise 2: Hand Trace

Start by holding out your left hand, palm up. Now, take your right index finger and run it along each finger on your left hand. Inhale slowly and smoothly as you move toward the tip of each finger. Hold your breath for a second or two at the top of each finger, and then exhale as you move back down toward your palm. Switch hands, and repeat the exercise.

Handout F: Things I Can Try to Reduce My Stress

Choose any of the below actions that would help you feel relaxed and try one out the next time you feel stressed.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breathe in slowly for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7, release for a count of 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Daydream |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer or meditation | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a bucket list |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Massage your face, head or shoulders | <input type="checkbox"/> Dance, sing, act |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Call or text someone who makes you feel good or laugh | <input type="checkbox"/> Make someone laugh |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a hot shower or soak in the tub | <input type="checkbox"/> Hold a virtual coffee chat with friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music | <input type="checkbox"/> Play a game alone, with your family or virtually – try a social game app |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watch a clip of a comedian you like | <input type="checkbox"/> Do a quick stretch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read a magazine or book | <input type="checkbox"/> Look at photos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Think of a pleasant or funny memory | <input type="checkbox"/> Do a jigsaw puzzle, sudoku or crossword puzzle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repair or tinker with things around the house | <input type="checkbox"/> Google something uplifting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make something new out of something old | <input type="checkbox"/> Savor a warm drink |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organize or clean something | <input type="checkbox"/> Find volunteer opportunities (volunteermatch.org) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Start a new hobby | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a continuing education course |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Draw, paint or doodle | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a “Top Ten” list of your favorite things (Ex: Favorite movies) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn something new | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knit, crochet or needle point | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something nice for someone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change the linens on your bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Join a discussion group or book club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rearrange a room | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play an instrument | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do a craft project | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cook a new recipe | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organize the “junk drawer” | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watch a movie, concert or sport event | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mail someone a card or letter | |

Handout G: Getting a Good Night's Rest: How to Become a Better Sleeper

SET YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

- Go to bed at the same time each night, and get up at the same time each morning. Try to stick to it, even on weekends and when schedules change. Your goal is to re-establish a restful sleep pattern. When things are uncertain or constantly changing, a regular schedule is even more important.

MONITOR YOUR USE OF SCREENS

- Turn off all screens one hour before bed, or turn on settings that reduce or block the effects from harmful lights. It may be tempting to “relax” in bed with your phone, but doing so can stimulate your brain and make it harder to fall asleep.

CREATE A SOOTHING SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

- Keep your room dark and quiet. Your body has its own natural sleeping and waking clock. It wants to be active when it's light and at rest when it's dark. Try a sleep mask or room-darkening shades to block outside light.
- Find a comfortable temperature, as extremes can disrupt your chances for good sleep. Cooler temperatures tend to be better.
- Make sure you have a “good” bed and pillow, ones that are right for you.
- Develop and practice a relaxing routine before bedtime. A warm bath, light stretching, listening to soothing music and reading are all activities that can help you find your “off switch.” It is best to save intensive workouts for at least three hours before sleep, as it can energize your body and awaken your brain.
- Avoid using your bed and bedroom for watching TV, laptop use, cell phone use, eating, etc.
- Don't make bedtime the time to solve your problems. Make a “to-do” list for the next day, and then try to clear your mind. Sometimes, a phrase or short poem that you can recite to yourself may help clear your mind. For example: “Don't fight with the pillow, but lay down your head, and kick every worry out of the bed.”
- Take a couple slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU EAT AND DRINK

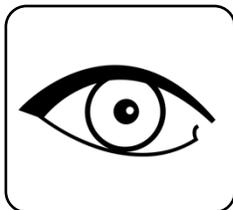
- Avoid drinking alcohol close to bedtime, since it keeps your brain in light sleep and interferes with getting to deeper, restorative sleep. You then end up sleeping in fragments and waking often.

-
- In the late afternoon and evening, avoid caffeinated drinks. Caffeine can remain in your system for up to 14 hours and increase nighttime awakenings.
 - Avoid big meals right before bedtime, but don't go to bed hungry. Try to drink fluids at least two hours before bedtime, as a full bladder can interfere with sleep.

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU TOSS AND TURN

- If you can't fall asleep within 30 minutes, go to another room and do something restful until you feel sleepy again. Don't read in bed. If you want to read, get out of bed, and sit in a chair. Try not to expose yourself to bright, intense light, such as electronic devices, since that can "reset" your internal clock and keep you up.
- Don't have a visible bedroom clock. "Clock watching" tends to intensify the misery of sleeplessness.
- Avoid naps during the day if you are having trouble sleeping at night.
- Try progressive muscle relaxation. Get into a comfortable position and move through each muscle group, tensing and relaxing the muscles as you go. After, take several deep breaths.
- Try listening to a guided visualization meant to relax your body and mind.

Handout H: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses



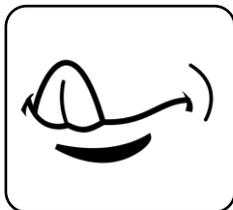
Things I Like to See

- Trees and flowers
- Art
- Family pictures



Things I Like to Hear

- My favorite playlist
- Birds chirping
- My favorite comedian



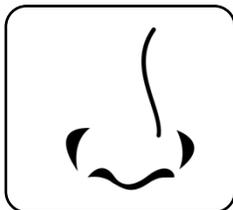
Things I Like to Taste

- Home baked cookies
- Hot cocoa
- Mint gum



Things I Like to Touch

- Hot shower
- Sun on my face
- Grass under my feet



Things I Like to Smell

- New rain
- Clean laundry
- Bonfire

Handout I: Taking a New Perspective

