

Stress

What is Stress?

- A stressor is any demand on mind and body. It is our response to anxiety provoking events.
- Stress is arousal of mind and body in response to demands made upon the individual.
- Positive mental stress arousal that contributes to health, satisfaction and productivity.

What is Distress?

- A distressor is any demand on mind and or body resulting in too much or too little arousal.
- Distress is too much or too little arousal resulting in harm to the body or mind
- Distress results in the “fight, flight or freeze” response.

Zone of Positive Stress

- We need a certain amount of stress in our lives.
- Stress keeps us sharply focused, motivated, energized, aware of options, helps us meet deadlines, obtain goals and feel accomplished when we achieve something difficult.
- Zone of positive stress: the tolerance range of stress within which the person is healthy, productive and satisfied.

Recent History

- Three important changes have occurred over time.
 - I. The faster pace of life has increased the number of stressors we face.
 - II. Most stressors today are psychological and social, rather than physical.
 - III. We have become more sedentary, resulting in less release of energy build up.
- The build up of “bound” energy increases the amount of physical and mental tension that we feel.

Feelings, Thoughts & Actions in the Stress Response

- Mental and physical arousal often are expressed in behavior.
- Behavior such as exercise and self disclosure can help protect against out-of-control stress responses.
- Behavior is used to cope or interact with stress triggers.
- Behavior is used to react to distress, either constructively or destructively.

Stress Related Illness

- Long term wear and tear from excessive stress makes the body more **susceptible** to breakdown:
 1. Peptic ulcers
 2. Colitis
 3. Cancer
 4. Migraines
 5. High blood pressure
 6. Depression
 7. Anxiety (and other illnesses)

Stress Related Illness

- An acute episode of intense emotional stress can directly **precipitate** a physical ailment:
 1. Heart attack
 2. Tension headache
 3. Muscle spasm
 4. Psychotic breakdown

Stress Related Illness

- High stress, chronic or acute, can **aggravate** existing illness:
 1. Angina
 2. Arthritis
 3. Hypertension
 4. Mood disorders (e.g. depression)
 5. Thought disorders (e.g. schizophrenia)

Neurobiology

- When stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol are produced and released in the blood, they course their way slowly toward all major organs.
- If the individual is healthy, they will probably be initially unaware that excess stress hormones are being carried throughout their body via the bloodstream

Neurobiology

- Once the hormones reach the brain they interact with the neurotransmitters (i.e. chemicals) that moderate our mood and thoughts.
- Some of the neurotransmitters are serotonin, nor epinephrine, and dopamine.
- Stress hormones will deplete the neurotransmitter levels.

Neurobiology

- As the neurotransmitter levels drop, certain symptoms may be present: Fatigue
 1. Change in eating patterns
 2. Change in sleeping patterns
 3. Lack of focus concentration
 4. Loss of interest in activities that normally interest the person
 5. Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
 6. Irritability/anger
 7. Anxiety/worry
 8. Sadness
 9. Hopelessness
 10. Pessimism
 11. Suicidal/homicidal ideation(five of these symptoms, for two weeks, will result in a diagnosis of depression)

Secondary Gains From Distress

- Negative
 1. Fulfills life script of self
 2. Opportunity to be excused
 3. Results in attention, caring and nurturing
 4. Opportunity not to live up to another's expectations
 5. Way of proving you are not responsible or capable
- Positive
 1. Ulcer
 2. Heart attack
 3. Pain of divorce
 4. Major illness
 5. Depression
 6. Fear

How Does Our Belief System Play into Stress?

- Thoughts drive emotional reactions
- What may be stressful for one may not be for another
- Examples of stress inducing thoughts
 - I must always be productive
 - The only thing that matters is getting ahead
 - I cannot delegate because no one can do it as well as I can
 - I will be able to enjoy myself after I catch up with everything

How Does Our Belief System Play into Stress?

- Examples of stress inducing thought
 - It is imperative that I get the most done in the least time
 - I must always hurry to get everything done
 - If I spend time relaxing, resting or exercising, I will fall behind
 - I have no choice but to be upset or anxious when a task is incomplete
 - I have no control over the constant overload in my life
 - There is no way I can be happy if I am overloaded
 - I must be all things to all people

Benefits of Effective Stress Management

- Good health
- Life satisfaction
- Productivity
- Self-determination/development

General Guidelines for Managing Stressors

- Awareness
- Take responsibility for your pace of life
- Know your comfort zone
- Find a good fit between your needs, your comfort zone, and the demands of the environment
- Let go of what can't be controlled
- Know how rapidly and to what degree your comfort zone can change

General Guidelines for Managing Stressors

- Anticipate the probable stressor of major life changes—plan solutions
- Avoid clustering too many major life changes
- Manage daily life
- Establish clear priorities
- Focus on being centered and mindful

General Guidelines for Managing Stressors

- Select activities and challenges that are meaningful to you
- Avoid meaningless activities and challenges
- Be assertive. Learn to say “No”
- Know your accomplishments
- Recognize what you are grateful for

Life Style Buffers— Good Coping Tools

- Regular aerobic exercise
- Daily deep relaxation
- Good Nutrition
- Social Supports
- Personal Anchors

Transforming Negative Self Talk Into Positive Self Talk

- Negative thoughts produce stress
- Positive thoughts encourage well being...
- Management of self talk is critical
- An exercise for better management:
 - Recognize negative self talk
 - Challenge negative self talk
 - Change negative self talk

Transforming Negative Self Talk Into Positive Self Talk

- Sometimes it is helpful to hold life changing beliefs, such as:
 - Believe you can win vs. self limiting beliefs
 - You are responsible for your life and yourself
 - You have the ability and capacity to objectively evaluate all situations
 - Challenge can become opportunities
 - Attitude is everything
 - Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% perception

Active Listening and Disclosure in Real Life

- Maslow
 - The inability to be honest and revealing to at least a few others blocks growth and prevents fulfillment of potential. "When in doubt be honest"
- Research Shows
 - Self-disclosure begets self-disclosure
 - Distance begets distance
 - Be open whenever possible
 - This promotes well-being in one's self and others

Adaptive Reactions to Distress— Management Strategies

- Pace yourself
- Space life changes
- Increase stress level if bored
- Seek to change a specific situation (i.e. set boundaries)
- Change a physical stressor

Adaptive Reactions to Distress— Management Strategies

- Organize time more efficiently
- Temper perfection or hurry sickness
- Diffuse stress by giving compliments
- Act, don't react
- Take control, be assertive, ask for input
- Use good communication skills (e.g. listen, speak with clarity, be empathic)

Ways to Adapt to the Stressor

- Change your perception of the stressor
- Use new and better methods of controlling emotional and physical responses
- Feel Valued
- Know what you like about your life
- Maintain a better lifestyle buffer to add to your ongoing protection
- Be careful to avoid destructive ways of handling stress

Internal Control and Self-Transcendence

- “Control Theory” by William Glasser
- “If I believe that the motivation for all I do, good or bad, comes from within me, not from the outside world, then, when I am miserable, I cannot claim that my misery is caused by uncaring parents, a boorish partner, an ungrateful child or a miserable job. If I were a machine, this claim might be valid. I could be programmed to feel good only if those I needed treated me well. But I am not a machine, and although I strongly desire good treatment from everyone in my life, if I don't get what I want, it is my choice whether or not to be miserable”.