

# STRESS

## The Basics

### What is stress?

Stress is an emotional/ bodily reaction to a physical, psychological or emotional demand

We all display stress in different ways

Some stress is good; it helps us motivate to turn in our paper work on time

Too much stress is not good and can have immediate and long term impact on our health

### What are some symptoms of stress?

Increased heart rate and blood pressure, feeling tense, irritable, fatigued, or depressed

Lack of interest, inability to concentrate, racing thoughts and excessive worry

Avoidance behaviors: excessive alcohol, cigarettes or drug use

### What are some causes of stress?

Expectations we place on ourselves

Expectations of others

Our physical environment—noise, room size, crowding

Our internal environment—work pressure, frustration, or not enough time

### What are ways to manage stress?

Practice Effective Communication: *State feelings in a clear way (for example: "I feel angry when you yell at me.")*

Establish "Me Time": *Develop and create time to enjoy hobbies*

Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques: *Learn relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation*

**COMING SOON** MORE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS...



# STRESS

## Thoughts Impact Behavior

**D**id you know that your thoughts can impact your behavior? Stress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful.

The experience of stress is cyclical and incorporates thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

Each component of stress impacts the other. If you can intervene at one of these points, you can stop the cycle of stress.



Sometimes, it is easier to start by changing your thoughts, and here is one way to try this:

### Practice "Thought Stopping"

- STEP 1:** Notice your thoughts. Are they positive and helpful? Or negative and unhelpful?
- STEP 2:** Use a trigger word to stop a negative and unhelpful thought
- STEP 3:** Replace with a more helpful thought

### This is what it might look like:

- 1. You:** "There is no point in trying"
- 2. You:** STOP!
- 3. You:** "This situation could be easier if I first talked with a friend, colleague, or other source of support"



# STRESS

## Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts

**S**tress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful. Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all have as well as ways you can think about challenging these thoughts.

### **All or Nothing Thinking:**

You see things in black-and-white categories. If your actions aren't perfect then they are seen as a failure.

*Challenge:* Instead of thinking in an "either-or" way, try to think in shades of gray. Evaluate the situation on a scale of 0-10. Think again about partial success and reevaluate, on a scale of 0-10.

### **Filtering out the Positive:**

You focus in on one thing that went wrong and filter out the positive events that occurred.

*Challenge:* Try to be as kind to yourself as you would be with a friend. Review the day's events and focus on all of the positive things that went right. For every negative thing you think of, try to also focus on one positive thing.

### **Overgeneralization:**

You see a single negative situation as never-ending and a "forever" pattern.

*Challenge:* Remind yourself that a single negative event (or even multiple occasions) doesn't mean it will truly last forever. Think of a specific time when a single negative experience did not have a long lasting outcome.

— BURNS, D.D. 1989



# STRESS

## Take a **B**reath

**B**elly breathing or “Deep Breathing Exercise” is a proven way to reduce stress. Try this technique standing or seated in a chair:

1. Place your arms and hands at your side, relaxed
2. Close your eyes
3. Focus on your belly, the lower part of the stomach. Imagine a small balloon inside
4. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, imagine the balloon inflating. Slowly, hold a few seconds
5. Slowly exhale through your mouth, imagine the balloon gently deflating. Blow out of your mouth as if you were blowing out a candle
6. Repeat at least 3 times

**TIP:** Place a hand over your belly to feel it go up and down, and make sure you’re not breathing with your chest

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car, or anywhere!



# STRESS

## The Ball is in Your Court

**S**tress can be related to the amount of control you feel over a situation, event, interaction, thought or feeling. Since we can't change the things that are out of our control, it is best to focus on what is in our control.

### Examples of areas outside of your control:

- How people respond to you
- Other people's feelings

### Focusing on areas outside of your control results in:

- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling STRESSED

### Examples of what is in your control:

- Your ability to prioritize work requirements and personal obligation
- Your reactions to events/people
- Your thoughts
- Your behavior

### Focusing on areas in your control results in:

- Feeling empowered
- Feeling relief



# STRESS

## Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts II

**S**tress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful. Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all have as well as ways you can think about challenging these thoughts.

### **Jumping to Conclusions:**

You make a negative interpretation even though you don't have all of the facts.

*Challenge:* Ask yourself, "Do I really know this to be true?" If no, focus on the things that you do know are true and which pieces of information you still need to make a realistic assessment.

**Catastrophizing:** You negatively exaggerate the importance of things.

*Challenge:* Try to take the event for what it is and do not let your mind go astray.

### **Emotional Reasoning:**

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. "I feel it, therefore it **MUST** be true."

*Challenge:* Seek out the opinions of trusted friends or family to evaluate whether your thoughts are accurate.

**Should Statements:** You try to motivate yourself by saying, "I should or shouldn't" do something.

*Challenge:* Think about the advantages and disadvantages of your thoughts, feelings and or

behaviors. Are you gaining anything from your thoughts or feelings? Discuss with a friend or family member to determine the accuracy of your thoughts.

**Personalization:** You see yourself as the cause of a negative event for which you were not entirely responsible.

*Challenge:* Carefully evaluate the situation to figure out if you really have any responsibility for the results. Identify other, outside factors that may be impacting the outcome.

— BURNS, D.D. 1989



# STRESS

## From Head to Toe

Deep muscle relaxation or “Progressive Relaxation” is a proven way to reduce stress.

Progressive Relaxation helps you relax by tightening and releasing different muscle groups in your body. Below is an example using your feet.

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Flex your toes towards your head.
3. Feel the tension that occurs in your feet, ankles, and lower legs.
4. Pay close attention to the feelings of tightness and tension. Hold for 10 seconds.
5. Now relax your feet, let them return to their normal position.
6. Feel the difference in your feet, ankles, and lower legs; where it was tense, there is now a feeling of relaxation.

**TIP:** You can do your entire body, making your way from your feet all the way up to your head.

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car, or anywhere!



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# Are You Really Listening?



**Sometimes you only hear the content of the conversation.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**Colleague:** "I finally finished all of my paperwork!"

**You:** "Oh good, now you can help clean up the water table."

**Active listening occurs when you also listen for the message or feelings behind the content.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**Colleague:** "I finally finished all of my paperwork!"

**You:** "You must feel relieved, that was a lot of work!"

Active listening facilitates relationships and can transform your work environment into a good or GREAT one.

**Active listening also takes place when you "listen" to or observe the non-verbal cues.**

Not all communication is verbal. The words used are only part of the message. Non-verbal communication includes:

- Pauses or hesitation in speech
- Tone of voice
- How fast or slow an individual speaks
- Facial expressions, body posture, eye movements and hand movements

**Active Listening is communication. It communicates to the listener that you are present and respect the individual's thoughts and experiences.**



# STRESS

## A Strategy a Day will Keep the Doctor Away!

**H**ere are some daily strategies to reduce stress. You will be surprised by how effective even the smallest change can make!

### Create a Consistent Routine

- Eat a well-balanced diet with fluids low in calories/caffeine. Plan out some healthy snacks and lunches
- Maintain a regular bed time, shut off all "screens" two hours prior to sleeping

### Express Feelings

- Talk with friends and peers; avoid gossip and hurtful conversations
- Write in a journal

### Establish "Me Time"

- Create time each day to relax
- Treat yourself to a guilty pleasure
- Pair enjoyable activities or tasks with less enjoyable activities or tasks

### Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques

- Focus on what is in your control and recognize that you can't change what is out of your control
- Decrease negative self talk. FOR EXAMPLE: instead of thinking "My paperwork will never get turned in," say to yourself "I may not be keeping up now, but my paperwork will get turned in if I can set aside 15 minutes of time a day."



# STRESS

## Imagine!

**V**isual imagery is a proven way to help reduce stress. It helps you to relax by focusing on a place or picture that brings you comfort; and it also allows you to slow down and breathe.

### It's Easy!

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably.

**Step 2:** Close your eyes and "see" in your "mind's eye" a beautiful beach, country side, favorite childhood memory or place.

**Step 3:** Imagine the sounds, textures, smells, tastes and physical details. Try to see the colors, placement of trees or buildings, who you are with, what you are doing, the sound of voices, the feeling of the sand or sidewalk under your feet, etc.

**Step 4:** Take a minute to rest in your comforting place, take a few deep breaths and blow them out slowly. Stay here for as long as you would like.

**TIP:** Sometimes it is helpful to participate in a "guided" visual imagery tour. You can find an audio recording of a guided imagery on [www.echmc.org](http://www.echmc.org)

# STRESS

## Effective Communication Strategies

### **Make a praise sandwich.**

When you need to give someone feedback on his/her behavior, start with an observation of what he/she is doing well. Describe the changes you would like the person to make as "Next Steps" rather than as a critique. And then end with a compliment about something he/she did well.

**Praise:** Nice job speaking right at eye level with Jacey.

**Next Steps:** Next time you might think about using a softer voice.

**Praise:** I really liked how you gave her a high five at the end.

### **Practice active listening skills:**

Listen to the message, reflect feelings, notice non-verbal communication cues

### **Repeat back to the listener what you think you have just heard to make sure you are correct.**

**Speak about yourself rather than the other person.** "I felt sad" versus "You let me down."

### **Describe the facts rather than place blame.**

"Drop off is at 9:00, it is now 11:30." Rather than, "You are more than two hours late!"



# STRESS

## A **Strategy** a Day will Keep the Doctor **Away!**

**H**ere are some daily strategies to reduce stress. You will be surprised by how effective even the smallest change can make!

### **Create a Consistent Routine**

- Daily exercise: any physical activity that you find enjoyable
- Introduce soothing music into your daily commute

### **Practice Effective Communication**

- State feelings in a clear way. FOR EXAMPLE: "I feel angry when you yell at me."
- Offer factual descriptions of what upsets you, rather than labels or judgments

### **Establish "Me Time"**

- Develop and create time to maintain hobbies
- Have a spa night at home
- Reward yourself for a job well done

### **Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques**

- Learn relaxation techniques, such as: deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation
- Introduce positive statements into your day and in reaction to negative or unhelpful thoughts. FOR EXAMPLE: I always try my best. **Or instead of** "I need to be perfect or I fail." **Replace with:** "I did a great job learning this new curriculum."

