
Counselling for Caregivers

Unit 9:
Coping with Stress



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Unit 9: Coping with Stress

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Unit 9: Coping Strategies for Caregivers

Introduction

Some days in your life are fine days indeed. You get up in the morning feeling very refreshed and looking forward to a pleasant day. The sun is shining and there is a gentle breeze. You are looking forward to having one of your favourite meals. You feel eager to help children and enthusiastic about your work. Things are moving according to your plan and you are delighted. Wow! What a beautiful day! Yet, it is not always so. There can be many frustrations in the daily life of a caregiver. Right now, you may be making great efforts in trying to cope with the needs of children under your care. These demands may come from others and from yourself.



I've been a caregiver for 12 years. I have passed through thick and thin. In the process, I think, I've destroyed myself—and perhaps people and things I care about. I wish someone had talked to me about it long ago. I wish I had asked them for help.

The caregiver in the picture is Mr. Phiri. He is talking about a very serious matter: *stress*. This unit will help you so that you don't end up like him. He destroyed himself, but that is not all. No! His real regret is that he feels that he messed up everything for the people and the things that he really cared about. He feels sorry for the pain he caused his family, friends, work colleagues, and all those other people that were affected by his personal stress. This unit is written so that you will have the opportunity to learn from his mistakes. The unit will take you on a journey of personal stress management, one step at a time.

Each lesson covers a number of topics and provides various activities for you to complete. In Lesson 1, you will learn about what stress is and its effects on your health and behaviour. In the next lesson, you will learn to recognise signs and symptoms of stress. Lessons 3 will outline

the causes of stress, and Lessons 4 and 5 will discuss strategies for coping with stress for caregivers and for children, respectively. The unit also contains some important questions and activities, which can help you acquire understanding and knowledge that will enable you to develop positive, healthy ways of coping with stress in your life. You *can* complete this unit successfully. Enjoy your journey!

Objectives

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

1. Explain what stress is, and how and why it affects your physical health, mental abilities, emotional stability, and behaviour.
2. Describe physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural signs and symptoms of stress.
3. Explain the causal factors of stress, both at home and at work.
4. Select and practise proven techniques, devices, and strategies for coping effectively and healthily with stress in your life.
5. Recognise symptoms of stress in the children you work with and be able to help them cope with the stress they are experiencing.

Please note that many of the activities in this unit are adapted from:

Mills, S. (1995). *Stress management for the individual teacher*. London: Framework Press Educational Publishers.

Lesson One

Understanding Stress



What Is Stress?



I am not alright.
I am suffering
from stress. Listen
to my story.

Things are not good for me. I am suffering from stress. I know it and everyone knows it. Everyone is suffering because of me. I create problems for colleagues, children, parents, and everybody at the children's centre. All the people I affect feel unable to help me. They do not know what to do. I do not know what to do.

Previously I mentioned that I have been a caregiver for the past twelve years. I have not been miserable for all twelve years. The first five years or so were good years for me. I was happy and I was liked by workmates, my supervisors and family. In fact, on two occasions, I was voted the best caregiver. If you asked me when the sad movie started, I couldn't say because it did not start all at once. I became unhappy over time. I must have passed through different stages in the past twelve years.

Over the years, many people have tried to help me but I have not listened to their suggestions. One by one, they have stopped trying to help me. Today, many simply avoid me. I cannot blame them; I have ignored the warning signs of stress. I am out of touch with myself. As a result, I now face major problems concerning my physical health. Only last week I became very ill and was admitted at the local hospital. They discovered that I have a stomach ulcer. This was not all. They also found that I had problems with my mental ability. I lose concentration and constantly make mistakes. As a result of the various illnesses, my behaviour has changed for the worse and everybody at the children's centre and at home is affected by it. I lose my temper unnecessarily. Many times I have been depressed. I blame my mistakes on the fact that I am not sleeping enough. I blame my workmates for my failure to meet deadlines. I yell at children even when they have not done anything wrong. I blame everyone for not understanding my situation. I blame my superiors for the bad weather!!



Activity 1

After reading Mr. Phiri's story, what are your thoughts?

During the next activities, remember what you wrote above. Read Mr. Phiri's story again. Then answer the following questions.

Write three words or statements that describe the way you feel about Mr. Phiri.

How did Mr. Phiri change over the years? How do you think he got into such a state?

List three suggestions that could help Mr. Phiri cope with his situation.

(continued on next page)

State three actions you could take to ensure that you will cope better than Mr. Phiri. The first item is completed for you.

1. I am reading this unit and will learn from it.

How do you think other people would answer the previous question for you?

My family would say:

My colleagues would say:



How Much Do You Know about Stress?

After reading Mr. Phiri's story, you might say that you are not Mr. Phiri and such things will not happen to you. You may be right. But it is helpful to remember that stress can happen to anyone, though what is stressful for one person may not be for another. Stress is very personal.

You might also be thinking that Mr. Phiri's stress appeared suddenly. Actually, stress can appear gradually. Our bodies react to stress by triggering our "fight or flight" reaction. This is a physical reaction to a situation that we perceive to be threatening or stressful. The body takes time to return to its normal equilibrium (balance). Even several small "triggers" in a row will raise your stress level. You could compare this to a staircase. We go up a step when something is stressful, and down a step when we deal with the stress we are carrying.

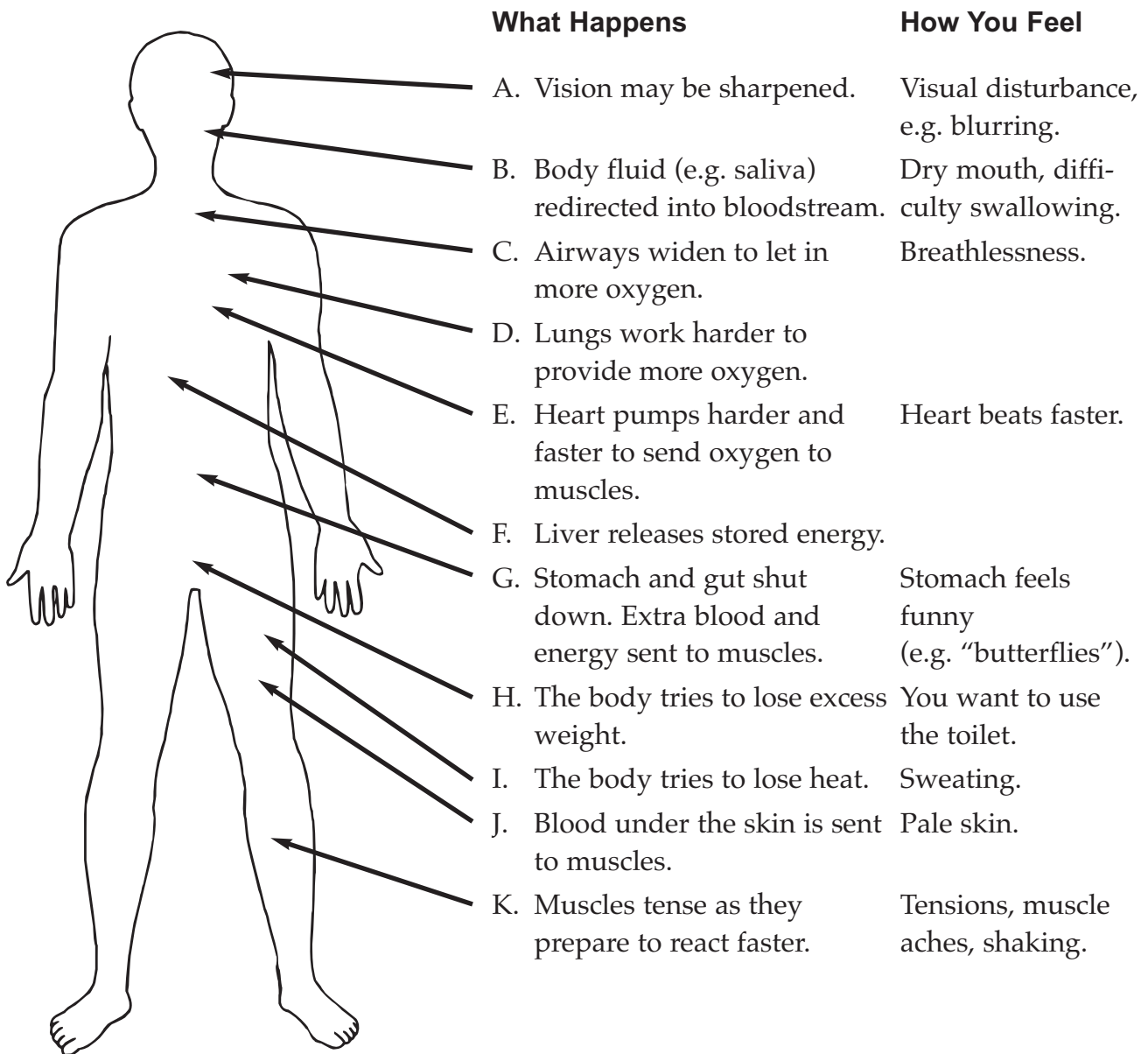
How Does Your Body Respond to Stress?

Stress is the tension or pressure we feel in our bodies as we respond to everyday events or events that make us feel uncomfortable. Stress is a natural part of living. It can be positive and motivating. But it can also produce an uneasy feeling. We have problems when we have too much stress (we feel tense) or too little (we feel bored and unmotivated).

• People experience stress in different ways. The rest of this lesson outlines how most people respond to stress that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.

• When a person perceives a threat, the brain will prepare the body to run away or fight. The brain sends a message to the adrenal glands, located above the kidneys. A chemical or hormone called adrenaline is released into the bloodstream and carried to every part of the body. When the adrenaline reaches your heart, lungs, muscles, and other organs, it makes changes to help them prepare your body to fight or run.

Your Body's Responses to a Threat



How Are These Physical Changes Useful?

The body's reactions to stress can help you deal with difficult situations. The reactions indicated in the diagram are further explained below.

- A. Visual disturbances may occur when you are under stress. Your body tenses and your vision is sharpened as well. If you can't use up all the adrenaline in your bloodstream, your vision may become blurred. Your vision will clear if you act or if you relax.
- B-D. When the body is under stress, it needs more oxygen. Your dry mouth enables more oxygen to enter the body with each breath. Shallow breathing or panting can pull in more oxygen than deep relaxed breathing.
- E-F. The heart beats faster to pump more blood through the body. The blood carries oxygen and the many different substances necessary for you to have the extra energy to respond to the cause of your stress.
- G. When tense, your stomach and gut stop working, because the body focuses on dealing with stress. As your stomach becomes less active, you may feel that your tummy is knotted or you may have "butterflies."
- H. You may feel sick and want to use a toilet. This is because your body tries to lose excess weight in order to be efficient and light—ready for action.
- I. Sweating is how the body controls its temperature. If you are tense, your body is ready for action. You may become hot. Sweating cools your body.
- J. As the blood leaves the surface of your skin and goes to your muscles, you may appear to be pale.
- K. Muscles ache because they are tense and ready to act. (Try clenching your fist and see how long it takes before it aches!)

Important note: Studies have shown that continuous stress can lead to high blood pressure, which can, in turn, be a major cause of serious medical problems such as strokes and heart attacks.

In addition to the reactions noted in the diagram, when you are under stress and producing adrenaline, the ability to stop bleeding is speeded up. If you get hurt while you are fighting or fleeing, the bleeding will quickly stop. Also, your body produces substances called endorphines. If you are injured, these will reduce the pain.

Stress is a potential enemy to your physical and mental well-being. It affects your performance. To ensure that you avoid stress and not end up like Mr. Phiri, you need to know how stress affects you.



Activity 2

For each of the four issues that are raised below, circle Yes or No and state the reasons for your answer. When you are finished, compare your answers with the suggestions that follow.

1. I should fear stress. Yes/No. Why or why not?

2. I should respect stress. Yes/No. Why or why not?

3. I should give in to stress. Yes/No. Why or why not?

4. Are we saying that stress is always a problem? That it is unhealthy and negative? Yes/No. Why or why not?



Did you answer like this?

1. Yes. It can destroy me, my home life, and my working life, if I let it.

2. Yes. It is a big force and can be an enemy in my efforts to have a healthy and happy life.
3. No. Even when confronted with high stress, there is always something to learn from coping with stress. Dealing with stress can help you prepare for the next difficult time.
4. No. Stress can be a powerful enemy, but it can only destroy us if we allow it to. Stress can also motivate us to act. For example, thinking about a drought can be stressful, but can also encourage us to act by conserving water. Our stress is reduced by knowing that we have saved some water.

You can manage stress. You can control it in most situations. You can use it for your personal benefit. Everyone has experienced at least one situation when stress has given them one or a combination of the following results:

- More energy
- More concentration
- More creativity
- More positive attitude
- More enthusiasm
- More self-belief
- More determination



Activity 3

Consider the positive side of stress and recall three occasions when the stress you were under actually helped you.



Read the following pieces of information about stress. Which information did you already know? Put a check mark next to items that you are already aware of and an "X" next to items that are new to you.

1. There are two types of stress. One is positive and good for me. The other is negative and bad for me.

2. Stress-related illness originates from the stress response. This is a physical response to stress. It is activated in my body when the mind detects a threat, or a challenge, or indeed any situation that requires extra energy.
3. 85% of all illness is considered to be stress-related.
4. Each year, stress costs my country large sums of money. Money is lost through absenteeism. People may stay home because of stress-related illness. They may use alcohol or drugs to deal with stress. Or they may make mistakes, cause accidents, and create disputes. All of the above may reduce people's performance in the workplace.
5. Some insurance companies are refusing to insure organisations for claims unless they can prove that they have an active stress management policy for their workforce.
6. The stress response in my body is activated solely by me. Nothing and no one can activate it for me.
7. Stress-related illness occurs as a result of adding together the effects of several stressful events.



Activity 4

Based on your responses above, how knowledgeable are you about stress? (Count the number of ticks.)

What new pieces of information are you surprised by and why?

Will any of these 7 pieces of information influence your future approach to the stress in your life? If so, how?



The Relationship between Stress and Performance

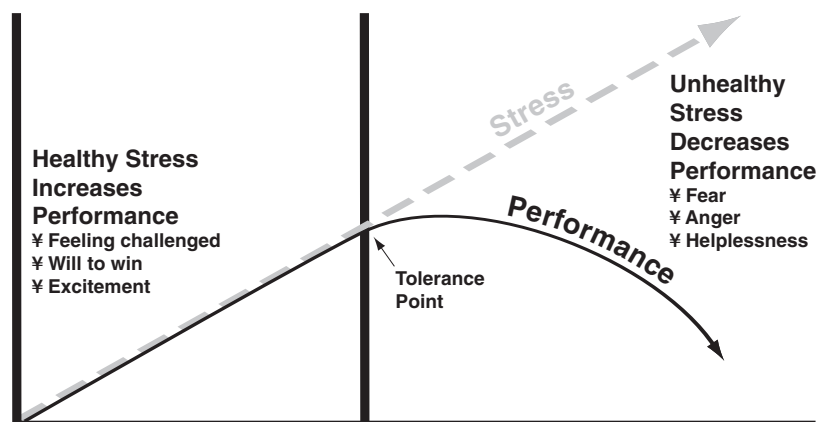
It is not possible to avoid stress. Stress is part of what helps us to do something well. Too much stress can impair a person's functioning, but

so can no stress at all. We must learn to manage stress and deal with its mental, physical, and emotional consequences.

Obviously, we are all individuals. Thus, part of stress management is to know ourselves and what is right for us as individuals. The principles of stress management can be applied to anyone.

The stress/performance relationship can be a bit difficult to understand at first. However, it is very important that you understand the relationship between stress and performance. Look at the diagram below.

Stress/Performance Curve



Here is an explanation of the Stress/Performance Curve:

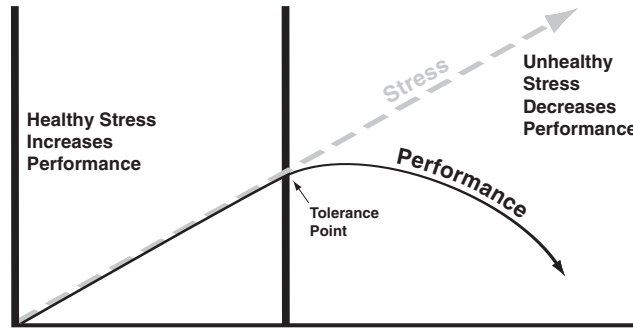
- The straight, dashed line represents the amount of stress you are feeling. Don't confuse this with the amount of work you do.
- The curved line shows your performance, reflecting your physical health, mental ability, emotional stability, and behaviour.
- The two lines run together on the left-hand side of the diagram. This is because the left-hand side of the curve is positive and healthy. You are using the stress response to increase your energy, concentration, and brainpower. You feel challenged. You achieve success for your efforts.
- Look at where the two lines separate. This is your tolerance point. You must be able to recognise when you have reached it. If you don't, you move into the right-hand side of the diagram, where you feel threatened, afraid, frustrated, or annoyed. In this state, your health and well-being will deteriorate, as Mr. Phiri's did. Mr. Phiri ignored the warning signs

that appeared near the tolerance point. Remember what happened to him!



Activity 5

The Stress/Performance Curve helps you understand stress and its effect upon your life. However, what you have learned is useless unless you can relate it to your own life. On the diagram below, place an "X" where you feel you are now.



Why have you placed your "X" at that particular point?

If your "X" is on the RIGHT, how do you cope? What do you do to make yourself feel better?

In what situations would your "X" have been on the LEFT?

Consider the ways you cope with unhealthy stress. Do they work? Explain your answer.



Some Factors That Influence Your Perceptions of Stress

The amount of stress created is influenced by a variety of factors, including:

- Whether you perceive the situation to be a threat or a challenge.
- Whether you perceive that you have or could get the resources or skills to cope.
- Whether you perceive that stress is caused solely by the problems you face.
- Whether it is a one-time situation or an ongoing situation.
- Where you are on the stress/performance curve, relative to the point at which stress becomes negative.

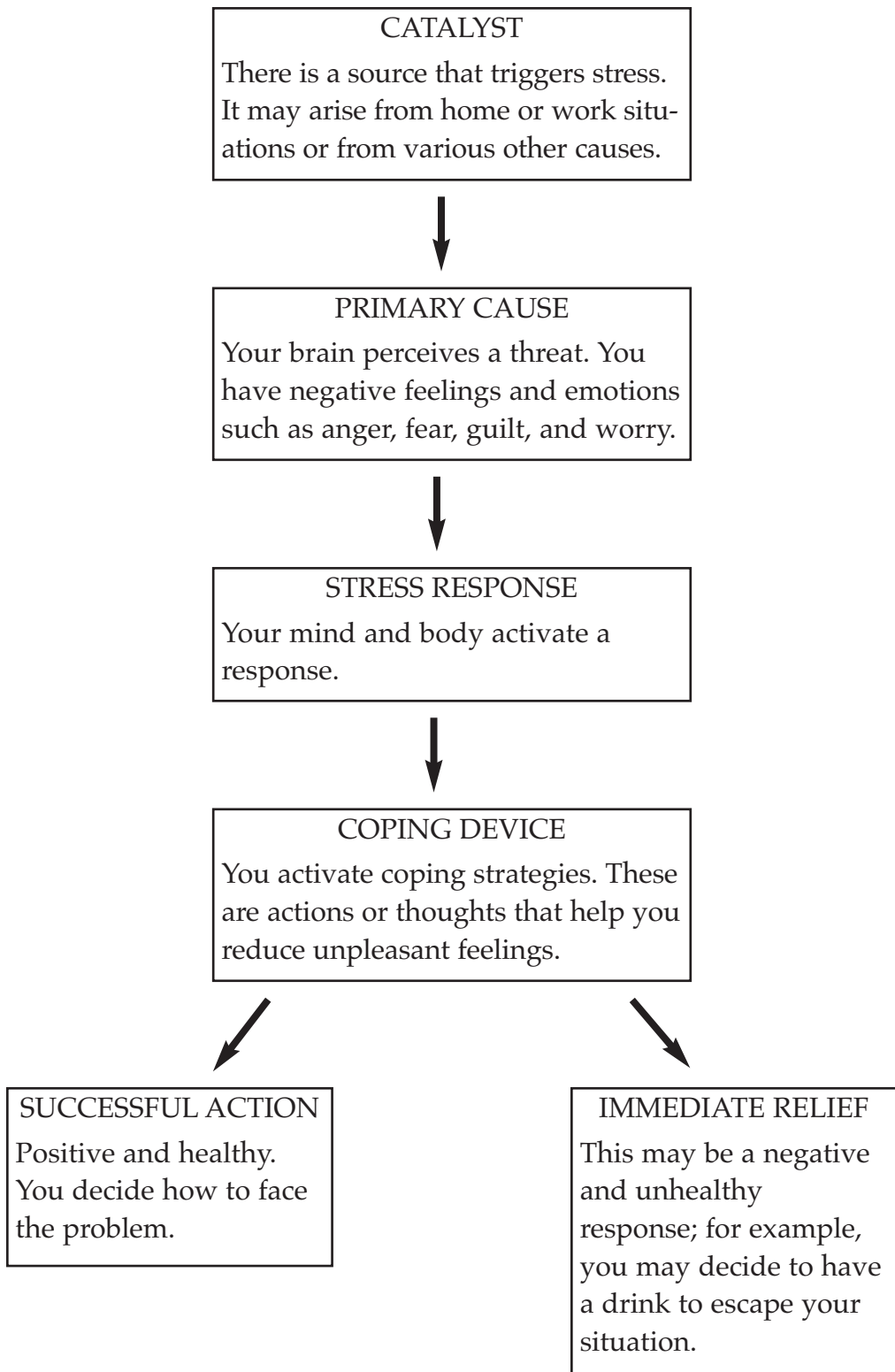
There are also “buffers,” or means which help us deal with stress. These include:

- Our social network.
- Physical exercise.
- Our individual “hardiness.” For example, we are more likely to overcome stress that may be associated with a situation if we are committed to an action, have control over the situation, and see it as a challenge.

The following terms are important to understand.

- *Commitment* is a sense of purpose, which allows a person to find meaning in what he or she is doing.
- *Control* is the perception of oneself as having influence on events, through skill, knowledge, and choice.
- *Challenge* is the belief that change is an opportunity for growth, rather than a threat to security.

The Process of Stress





Activity 6

When you are under stress, what negative and unhealthy coping devices do you use?

What positive and healthy coping devices do you use when you feel stressed?

Are you able to recognise your tolerance point, and hence the need to use positive and healthy coping devices?



We hope that this lesson has helped you to analyse your life for stress. Perhaps you are better able to identify what you have done well and what you need to improve. At this point, you should be able to explain the following major points of this lesson.

1. Stress does not just affect those we perceive as being weak. All human beings experience stress.
2. Stress is to be respected and sometimes endured, but you should never surrender and become a victim of it.
3. Most stress can be dealt with, as long as you have a positive attitude and use good coping strategies.
4. Experiencing emotions such as challenge, achievement, pride, and determination means that you are using stress positively. Stress can be good.
5. Experiencing negative emotions such as anger, fear, helplessness, and worry means that you are on the right-hand side of the Stress/Performance Curve and therefore possibly doing yourself harm.
6. The tolerance point is the point at which positive and healthy emotions switch to negative and unhealthy feelings. Passing

• this tolerance point tells you that you are moving into the danger zone.

- 7. There are two types of coping devices: those that are positive and healthy; and, those that are negative and unhealthy.
- 8. People move from negative stress to positive stress by using coping devices.

• If you feel uncertain about any of the points above, please review relevant sections of Lesson 1.

Lesson Two : The Signs and Symptoms of Stress



The Warning Signs



I had dozens of warning signs, but I chose to ignore them. I buried my head in the sand.

Do you still remember Mr. Phiri? He told us that he has been a caregiver for the past twelve years. He also said that he is in a mess now. Now he confesses that there were dozens of warning signs, but he ignored them.

Can you guess what signs warned Mr. Phiri that stress was about to strike? He had headaches, constant colds, and other minor infections. He also had sleep disturbances and outbursts of temper. But he ignored them, so they became worse. He then experienced stomachaches and recurring throat infections. His headaches became more serious. He also started making silly mistakes and became forgetful. His errors began to affect his work and other people. The signs of stress come from your mind and body, and they tell you that things are not right. At first these signs are mild but if you do not take action, they will become more severe.

Instead of listening to the warning messages, Mr. Phiri chose the easy way and “buried his head in the sand,” as he says above. What does he mean by “burying his head in the sand?” Instead of acting on the warning signs, he chose to endure them. He explained and justified them, making silly excuses for them to himself and to those around him. He avoided dealing with them and looking for their cause.

Was Mr. Phiri a fool (because he ignored the warning signs until things turned so bad for him)? Well, he could be. But how many of us ignore simple warning signs? Do you know what your warning signs are? You probably don’t know all of them. In fact, you probably receive some warning signs that you may think are not related to stress at all.



The Three Major Categories of Warning Signs

From the last activities, you will have guessed that warning signs and symptoms of stress fall into three main categories. These are:

1. Your physical signs and symptoms (anything that happens to your body as a result of stress).
2. Your psychological (or mental) and emotional signs and symptoms (anything relating to your ability to use your brain and anything relating to the way you feel emotionally).
3. Your behavioural signs and symptoms (anything relating to the way you conduct yourself, including what you do, how you do it, what you say, and how you say it).

The following are some of the most common physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioural warning signs of stress. As you review the list, think about which of these symptoms you have experienced. Which do you experience most frequently?

Some of these symptoms may come from causes other than stress; however, if several are present then stress is probably a major factor in their origin and in your life.

1. Physical symptoms

- Lack of appetite
- Craving for food
- Frequent indigestion or heartburn
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Insomnia
- Constant tiredness
- Tendency to sweat for no good reason
- Headaches
- Cramps and muscle spasms
- Stomach upsets and nausea
- Breathlessness without physical activity
- Frequent crying or the desire to cry
- Lack of sexual drive
- High blood pressure
- Inability to sit still without fidgeting

2. Emotional Symptoms

- Anger or rage
- Anxiety or fear
- Panic
- Guilt, shame, humiliation
- Frustration
- Jealousy
- Insecurity
- Hopelessness
- Worry
- Upset
- Embarrassment

3. Behavioural Symptoms

- Tense, aching muscles
- Dry mouth
- Running to the toilet
- Feeling faint
- Feel like running away
- Poor concentration
- Can't sit still
- Can't carry out daily activities
- Experience unpleasant thoughts
- Withdrawal from people

4. Psychological Symptoms

- Constant irritability with people
- Feeling unable to cope
- Lack of interest in life
- Constant or recurrent fear of disease
- A feeling of being a failure
- A feeling of dislike for yourself
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Loss of interest in other people
- Awareness of suppressed anger
- Impaired sense of humour
- A feeling of being the target of other people's animosity
- Feeling neglected
- Dread of the future
- Feeling of having failed as a partner or parent
- Feeling of having no one to confide in
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Inability to finish one task before rushing on to the next
- Intense fear of open or enclosed space, or of being alone



Activity 7

How knowledgeable are you about how stress affects you? Rate yourself by circling one of the numbers following each statement (0 is Poor; 1 Not good; 2 Satisfactory; 3 Good; 4 Very good; and 5 Excellent).

- I know my physical warning signs of stress, watch for them, and take note of them. 0 1 2 3 4 5
- I know my psychological and emotional warning signs of stress, watch for them, and take note of them. 0 1 2 3 4 5
- I know my behavioural warning signs of stress, watch for them, and take note of them. 0 1 2 3 4 5
- I can recognise warning signs of stress shown by my family.
0 1 2 3 4 5
- I can recognise warning signs shown by my colleagues.
0 1 2 3 4 5



Activity 8

Record your three most frequent signs of stress for each category.

Physical

Emotional

Behavioural

Psychological



Before moving on to Lesson 3, check that you can list warning signs of stress for yourself and others in each of the categories listed in this lesson. Note that each of us have a different combination of warning signs. It will be helpful in dealing with stress if you take into account all the warning signs that you recognise in yourself and ask your family, friends, and colleagues to tell you when they see you displaying these signs.

Lesson Three



The Causes of Stress

Catalysts and Primary Causes



Most of my stress was created by myself. It sounds crazy, doesn't it?

You must be wondering how Mr. Phiri created stress for himself. Well, Mr. Phiri explains that what really stressed him out happens on Wednesdays. He has to take 45 children to the primary school nearest the centre. It is a trip of six hundred metres. Getting the children to the school is a nightmare. The last time, some fought on the way. Some refused to walk fast. Others played when they were suppose to walk. He would scream at them. It took 30 minutes to cover the short distance. By the time they reached the school, Mr. Phiri was exhausted. After three hours, he returned with the children to the centre. You can imagine the state Mr. Phiri was in at the close of the day. He truly hated Wednesdays. He began dreading Wednesday on Monday, and he remained angry until Friday.

From the story told by Mr. Phiri, is it easy to conclude, as he does, that most of his stress was created by himself? In trying to answer this question, let's try to identify the catalysts and primary causes of Mr. Phiri's stress. In this way, we might also understand the difference between catalysts and primary causes of stress. In Mr. Phiri's case, the catalyst was the six hundred metre trip to the primary school with 45 uncooperative children. The primary causes of his stress were anger (at the task he had to perform), frustration (with the troublesome children), and loss of control (over his day).

You may recall what we said about stress response. We noted that stress management means finding ways of controlling stress so that it doesn't do us harm. Well, unruly children and undertaking trips (catalysts) cannot switch that stress response on. It can only be activated by you, through the negative emotions you are experiencing. Now do you understand why Mr. Phiri thinks he created his own stress?

Consider the following emotions:

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Joy | Sadness | Sense of achievement |
| Anger | Anxiety | Contentment |
| Despondency | Loss | Helplessness |
| Elation | Insecurity | Satisfaction |
| Inadequacy | Despair | Happiness |
| Hopelessness | Annoyance | Pride |
| Frustration | Fear of failure | Guilt |
| Disappointment | Determination | Grief |



Activity 9

Place the words listed above into the two categories below.

Category 1 —Pleasant feelings (such as happiness)

Category 2 —Unpleasant feelings (such as fear of failure)

Which category of emotions do you experience the most?

What three emotions in Category 2 do you experience the most?

Use your results from the previous activity to do the following. For each catalyst, state what you think is the primary cause of stress that results from the catalyst. You are given three choices. Although all three may apply, one is the real primary cause for you. Circle the one you feel is correct.

Catalyst: Problems with colleagues where you work

Primary cause of stress: a. Anger; b. Fear of failure; c. Anxiety

Catalyst: Problems with higher management in your workplace.

Primary cause of stress: a. Disappointment; b. Guilt; c. Frustration

Catalyst: Unruly and disruptive children.

Primary cause of stress: a. Annoyance; b. Helplessness; c. Despair



Activity 10

In this activity, use what you have learned about catalysts and primary causes from the previous activities to complete the chart below.

Category	What happens? (Catalyst)	How does this make you feel? (Primary Cause)
Relationship with partner		
Relationship with children		
Relationship with wider family		
Relationship with friends		
The home (size, area, condition, etc.)		
Financial status		
Relationship with neighbours		
Relationship with colleagues at work		



• Before completing this lesson, check that you are fully aware of the negative emotions and feelings you experience at work and at home, and the catalysts that provoke them. Be sure that you have thought about how you can try to change them into positive emotions. Have you decided which aspects of your behaviour to work on, to reduce self-induced negative stress? You must be honest with yourself to make progress.

Lesson Four



Coping Strategies

Looking at Yourself



Oh, if I could do it all again!
I'd be a positive thinker!
I'd take lots of exercise!
I'd eat a balanced diet!
I'd enjoy my hobbies!
I'd leave work problems at work!
I'd get priorities right!
I'd avoid stress because I would plan,
prepare, and be organised.

Mr. Phiri has realised that he would have coped with stress better had he looked at himself more critically. Hopefully, he will be given a chance to start over. What lessons can you learn from Mr. Phiri?

From his experiences, you could learn that when things in our lives change, we need to adapt. This takes physical, mental, and emotional energy and resources. You should therefore:

- Acknowledge that you cannot perceive your stress only in the context of work. Every aspect of your life contributes to the cumulative effects of unhealthy stress.
- Look back on your recent past and appreciate the impact that life events have had on you. Then decide whether you need a respite to replenish spent resources.
- Be prepared to plan your year ahead and alter your original plans if necessary.

Before we look at various coping strategies, examine your work and home, and look at yourself. The amount of stress you experience is influenced by the type of person you are, the relationships you form, and the way you perceive yourself and the world around you.



Activity 11

Now that you have looked at yourself, try to answer the questions below. Collect perceptions of yourself from other people as much as possible.

How do you cope when you are under stress at work?

What aspects of your answer to the question above do you think are positive and healthy for you?

What aspects do you think are negative and unhealthy for you?

How do your coping strategies at work affect other people?

Positively:

Negatively:

How do you cope when you are under stress at home?

What aspects of your answer to the previous question do you think are positive and healthy for you?

(continued on next page)

What aspects do you think are negative and unhealthy for you?

How do your coping strategies at home affect other people?

Positively:

Negatively:

What should you do more often?

What should you do less often?



Coping Strategies for Your Body

During the discussion of previous topics, we've drawn your attention to how stress takes its toll on your body, due to the constant impact of the stress response. The effects of stress can do damage to your body. Coping strategies are designed to dilute the effects of this attack on your physical well-being. They are also meant to make you fitter for the times you have to face unavoidable stress. There are seven areas for you to consider:

1. Diet
2. Exercise
3. Smoking
4. Alcohol
5. Sleep
6. Drugs
7. Body Maintenance Assistance

First, measure how well you are doing at present, and then decide on what you are going to do to improve your coping skills. Be as honest as you can possibly be when completing the following activity.



Activity 12

Diet

Which aspects of your overall diet (food intake) are healthy and help you to maintain a healthy body?

Which are unhealthy and detract from maintaining a healthy body?

Exercise

Which aspects of your overall exercise programme help you to maintain a healthy body?

Which aspects detract from maintaining a healthy body?

Smoking

If you smoke, what problems does it causes for you?

Alcohol

The positive side to my drinking is:

(continued on next page)

The negative side to my drinking is:

Sleep

I take sleep seriously because:

I experience sleep disturbances because:

Drugs

I use “hard” or “soft” drugs, medicines, or tablets frequently because:

I avoid excessive use of drugs because:

Body Maintenance Assistance

I use the assistance of professionals to help me maintain the well-being of my body. Please tick the items below that apply to your situation.

- Visits to health professionals when something does not seem right.
- Regular visits to clinics for skin, feet, teeth, eyes, and so forth.
- Visits to traditional healers.
- Annual medical check-ups.

Appendix A contains a self-assessment checklist designed to help identify areas where you think you could improve your lifestyle.



Coping Strategies for Your Mind

To cope positively with stress, Mr. Phiri now employs a number of mental strategies, including:

1. Inner dialogue. The purpose of inner dialogue is to keep calm in crisis situations. When Mr. Phiri realises that he has set up a stress response or is about to do so, he switches his negative emotions and feelings to positive ones. He does this to control his stress response, knowing it is potentially dangerous to his personal well-being. Since stress can have cumulative effects, he tries to address each stressful situation as it arises.
2. Relaxation. The purpose of relaxation is to help him feel calm and to recharge his batteries. Relaxation helps him maintain his inner dialogue.
3. Home and work boundaries. The purpose of home and work boundaries is to ensure that work does not invade or take over his home life, social life, and hobbies, thereby disrupting his life priorities. As much as possible, he should leave his work-related problems at work. To ensure that he is ready for work the next day and that he is physically and mentally refreshed, he must set boundaries between home and work.
4. Support systems. The purpose of support systems is to ensure a positive attitude towards life, and to plan and prepare for stressful times. Support systems provide a check on the perceptions of other people.

If inner dialogue is to be successful, there are difficult questions that must be addressed. Mr. Phiri knew he had to find answers to such questions as:

- “How can I stop myself from getting angry when I face unpleasant situations?”
- “How can I stop the resentment I feel when I escort children?”
- “How can I stop the dread I feel as I go to work, thinking of the awful day ahead of me?”
- “How can I stop the frustration I feel on the way home after a bad day at work?”

- “How can I stop worrying about upcoming deadlines that I might not be able to meet?”

Remember that it is important to deal, head on, with your stress response *as it occurs*. Inner dialogue (what we say to ourselves, how we reason with ourselves, and how we put things into perspective mentally) plays a vital role in changing our perception of stressful situations.

Appendix B contains several coping strategies which you should try in order to reduce your stress. You can rate their effectiveness. The ideas include:

- Staying calm
- Reasoning with yourself
- Removing yourself mentally
- Using humour
- Taking action



Activity 13

This activity will help you determine how relaxation strategies work for you. Circle the word (Good/Average/Poor) that best reflects your use of (and ability to use) strategies to cope with stress.

Coping Strategies:

1. Releasing my tension on the way home from work.
Good/Average/Poor
2. Relaxing before a difficult class or situation.
Good/Average/Poor
3. Relaxing before a difficult meeting. Good/Average/Poor
4. Relaxing after a difficult class. Good/Average/Poor
5. Relaxing before a presentation. Good/Average/Poor
6. Switching off my stress response before going to sleep.
Good/Average/Poor

Describe the relaxation and tension control techniques that you use.

(continued on next page)

Activity 13 (continued)

In what situations would you like to be able to use these techniques? Explain why.

Hobbies

How important are hobbies to relaxation? Give reasons.

What hobbies and activities do you participate in during the evening? How many weekday evenings, on average, are you involved in hobbies or similar activities?

What hobbies/activities do you participate in during the weekend?

Could you increase the time you spend on hobbies and activities?

What hobbies and activities have you stopped doing? Why?

What hobbies and activities would you like to try?

Should you be more actively involved in your hobbies? What improvements can you make in the future?

(continued on next page)

Socialising

For each statement below, circle the word (Good / Average / Poor) that best describes your use of socialising to cope with stress.

I have lots of friends. Good / Average / Poor

I like to meet new people. Good / Average / Poor

I have an active social life. Good / Average / Poor

I maintain my friendships. Good / Average / Poor

In an average month, describe the type and amount of socialising you do. Are you happy with the amount and quality of socialising?



Short-term Strategies

Short-term strategies are the ongoing monitoring part of stress management. They look at dealing with stress on a daily basis. They also help you to choose longer-term strategies. You need to pay attention to the following:

- What triggers you personally? How do these triggers affect your behaviour, thoughts, and feelings, as well as your body?
- What helps you, personally, to reduce or deal with these consequences of stress?
- Under what conditions do you feel comfortable with stress? When is stress uncomfortable for you?

Once you have identified your signs of stress and the conditions under which stress is uncomfortable for you, you need to act:

- In advance, to support yourself, if you know something is going to be stressful.
- In the present moment, by stepping back from the situation and looking at it with “new” eyes.
- At the next available opportunity, by taking five minutes or

half an hour to calm down, taking a step back from what is stressful, clearing your mind, and making a decision about what you need to do. Do you need to make some tea or take a lunch break out of the building? Do you need to remember to link your current short-term strategy with your longer term strategy?

It is helpful to link what you choose to do with how you are being affected. For example:

- If your adrenaline levels are high, then you need to do something physical.
- If you cannot concentrate, then you need to do something that clears your mind.

Long-term Strategies

When you apply long-term strategies to manage stress, you must think more strategically. You must decide what activities you could build into your week, or what changes you need to make over the long term. You need to consider more than just your reaction to an individual trigger.

You must take time to:

1. Identify and think about patterns in what causes you stress, and how these affect you personally.
2. Know what your “baseline” of tension is, in order to feel comfortable and function effectively. You need to recognise when you have gone beyond your baseline and are feeling uncomfortable.
3. Identify ways of reducing stress that work for you personally. Depending on what has triggered your stress response, you may need to employ a short or long-term strategy. Try some of these stress reduction methods:
 - Build things into your week, on an ongoing basis, that relax you and lower your overall stress levels. For example, you might want to take more time for yourself. You might want to take a long bath, become more active in sports, or spend more time with friends and colleagues.
 - Think about what you could do to give yourself a greater

sense of control. Do you need more information about taking control, or do you need to learn any new skills?

- Practise “relaxing while you are active.”
- Take up yoga, meditation, or similar activities/techniques that can help manage stress.

Lifestyle

This part of stress management addresses the kind of lifestyle we choose to lead and our attitudes about what is important to us. Also included are the roles we have and the goals, aims, and ambitions we set ourselves.

When we review our lifestyle, we may be able to identify a particular part of our lifestyle that we could change or adapt, in order to reduce or manage stress better. This may not be a very easy task!



Activity 14

The part of my lifestyle I want to change to manage stress better is

The part of my lifestyle I want to adapt to reduce stress is

The difficulties I may encounter in putting this into practise are

I intend to resolve any difficulties by



Relaxing While Active

What does it mean? With careful observation, you can see excess tension in people around you every day. There are those who wave their

arms around unnecessarily, frown too often, or move about in a way that is obviously “full of tension.” To relax while being active requires the individual to use the minimum of tension in the muscles required for carrying out any task. All other muscles not required for that task should be relaxed.

A person who remains excited during daily activities will not readily relax, so tension will build up over time. Learning to relax in stressful situations can also improve your performance and increase your confidence. You should learn to relax when active as well as when lying down.

In order to learn more about relaxing while being active, you need to learn to distinguish between primary and secondary activity. Consider the following situation: You are holding a pen in one hand and keeping the paper still with the other. You are perched on the edge of your chair and hunched over the coffee table. Your legs are crossed. In this scenario you can find examples of primary and secondary activity.

- *Primary activity* is essential to a task. In the example, the primary activities are the muscles that contract to hold the pen and the hand that steadies the paper.
- *Secondary activities* are the extra activities; they are not necessary. We tend to do them to dispel excess tension, but they also create tension in themselves. They do not help you do the job any better, will use up your energy, and cause you unnecessary tension. In this case, your hunched back and crossed legs are good examples.

If you want to relax while being active, use the minimum number of muscles required to do any job. You should:

- Check that you are doing primary activities only as much as necessary. For example, are you holding your pen too tightly? Could you use a taller table than a coffee table?
- Note all your secondary activities, such as smoking, crossing legs, clenching your teeth, or fiddling with your hair. When are they triggered? Why are you doing any of these things? What are you thinking as you do them? Try to reduce the number of secondary activities that you do.

Below are two ways of focusing on relaxing while active. You may want to try them.

- Pick an activity that you do regularly such as walking the dog, washing dishes, or watching television. Work out the primary activity necessary to do the job and the secondary activities that you do as well. Each time you do that activity, concentrate on doing it in the most relaxed way possible. Eliminate all the secondary activities. For example, don't allow yourself to plan tomorrow's meals while you're walking the dog. Enjoy being out with your dog. Enjoy the moment. Once you have managed to focus on one primary activity, learn to focus on another activity.
- Pick your most peaceful hour of the day. Perhaps it's after supper when the children are in bed. Within that hour, do everything in the most relaxed way possible. Do one task at a time. Do not perform any secondary activities. Once you have managed to do this for an hour, try to do the same during a more pressured hour, and so on.

Once you begin to consciously apply these principles in your daily life, you will find yourself breaking old habits and feeling less fatigued.

Lesson Five : Coping Strategies for Children



Stressors for Children

It is likely that pressures of modern life are forcing children to grow up too soon and making their childhoods too stressful. Many of today's children are expected to succeed in school, to compete in sports, and to meet parents' emotional needs. They are pressured by adults and peers to act in certain ways. Children are exposed to many adult problems on television and in real life, before they have mastered the problems of childhood. They know about sex and violence, and they often must shoulder adult responsibilities (refer to Unit 7). Many children move frequently and have to change homes and schools as a result. They leave old friends behind. The tightly scheduled pace of life can also be stressful. Yet children are not adults. They feel and think like children, and they need the years of childhood for healthy development. This is why you must help them.



Activity 15

Identify stressors or situations that cause stress in most children under your care.

How can you help children to identify stress in their lives?



Coping Strategies for Children

Some strategies mentioned in this unit can be used to teach children how to manage stressful events. In children, stress is a response to the physical and psychological demands upon them. Stressful events, or stressors, are part of childhood, and most young people learn to cope.

As is the case for adults, stress that becomes overwhelming can lead to psychological problems. Experiences such as being abused or watching your parents die of HIV/AIDS are likely to have long-term effects on children's physical and psychological well-being.

In order to help children cope with stress, you can provide individual counselling in which you meet with a child one-on-one to help the child gain insights into his or her personality and relationships. You begin by trying to interpret the child's feelings and behaviour. Such treatment may be helpful at a time of stress, such as experiencing the loss of a pet, death of a parent, or parental divorce. Even when a child has not shown signs of stress, counselling may be helpful. Child counselling is usually more effective when combined with counselling for the parents or guardians.

In family counselling, you see the whole family together, or it might be a child with his or her guardian. You are able to see how family members interact, and point out both growth-producing and growth-inhibiting or destructive patterns of family functioning. Sometimes the child whose problem brings the family into a counselling session is actually the healthiest member of the family. This child is responding openly to a troubled family situation. Counselling can help parents or guardians confront their own conflicts and begin to resolve them. This is often the first step toward resolving the child's problems as well.

When children have limited verbal and conceptual skills, or have suffered emotional trauma, you may need to use the art, drama, play and writing counselling techniques that you learned in Units 1 and 3.



Activity 16

What are your experiences with conducting individual and family counselling related to behaviour caused by stress? What were the difficulties and successes?



How Caregivers Can Help Children Cope with Stress

After you have helped children identify signs of stress in their lives, you can:

- Encourage children to share their concerns with peers and adults they feel close to.
- Teach assertiveness skills, such as saying “No” and using “I” messages (refer to Unit 2).
- Encourage children to talk with their caregivers about worries they have.
- Teach children the importance of a healthy diet and adequate sleep.
- Emphasise the need to avoid abusing drugs, such as alcohol, tobacco, or coffee.
- Promote regular exercise.
- Teach the importance of managing time efficiently.
- Teach the use of effective work habits and study skills.
- Help children understand and learn how to function effectively in their home situations.
- Encourage children to cooperate with their peers, in order to learn most effectively.

We encourage you to use the knowledge, skills, and strategies you have learned while working on this unit to:

- Influence members within your centre or group home to develop a policy on stress management for children.
- Design a programme to teach children stress management strategies.
- Design an evaluation form, which you can use when monitoring and evaluating how children manage their stress.



Summary



If I were exposed to the information on stress in this unit, I would not have suffered as I did. Of course, having information on stress is not very helpful unless it's applied.

Mr. Phiri summarises this unit very well in the above picture. We hope you are encouraged to help yourself and the children under your care deal effectively with stress. You are too valuable a resource to your community to lose your soul and mind to the effects of stress. In this unit, we provided you with tools that will help you manage your personal and professional levels of stress. If you handle stress effectively, not only will you benefit, but those around you will also benefit. You are encouraged to pass on basic stress management techniques to children under your care.



Self-Assessment Exercise

How could you use what you have learned about stress management in each of the situations below? (Don't hesitate to look back through the unit to find the best answers.)

Question 1

Your friend hears about research that suggests a high stress level increases the risk of heart attacks and diabetes. Because he knows you are taking this course, your friend asks you to tell him about the connection between stress and the body. What would you tell him?

Question 2

Wanjiru has been looking very tired for the last few days. You know that she has been staying up late to study for exams. When you suggest to her that she try to get more sleep, she says that even when she goes to bed, she lies awake worrying about her exams. What could you suggest to help her?

• Question 3

• Lately your co-worker has been impatient and forgetful at work. One
• day she confides that her sister is dying and her husband has lost his
• job. What could you suggest and/or do to help her look after herself
• in this difficult time?

• Question 4

• If you could give someone just three pieces of advice about managing
• stress in his/her life, what would the advice be?



Suggested Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Question 1

When a person feels threatened (stressed), the brain prepares his/her body to fight or run away. The brain sends a message to the adrenal glands, which release adrenaline into the bloodstream. When the adrenaline reaches the heart, lungs, muscles, and other organs, it makes changes to help them prepare your body to run or fight. These changes may produce symptoms such as:

- Visual disturbances
- Dry mouth, shallow breathing
- Faster heartbeat
- Unsettled stomach
- Need to go to the toilet
- Sweating
- Pale skin
- Muscle aches, shaking, “pins and needles” sensation

Question 2

There are a number of things that might help Wanjiru to sleep. Talking with you about her problem may be helpful. Making sure that she eats healthily and getting enough exercise will also help. She may need assistance in setting up a study schedule and reviewing her lessons so that she feels as well prepared as possible. Relaxation techniques can also be useful.

Question 3

Your co-worker is dealing with two very difficult situations. Being able to talk about her worries—to you or to a counsellor—will be helpful. Taking time to exercise, eat healthily, get enough sleep, and relax (listen to music or read a book) are things that she might find difficult under the circumstances but which will help her cope.

• Question 4

• Your advice could include:

- Learn to recognise signs of stress.
- Build a network of supportive friends and family members.
- Engage in regular physical exercise.
- Get enough sleep.
- Don't use drugs or alcohol to try to cope with stress.



References

Mills, S. (1995). *Stress management for the individual teacher*. London: Framework Press.

Additional Sources of Information

In addition to this unit, you are advised to consult widely on stress management. You may find individuals and agencies in your community who would be good sources of information. The following references are also useful.

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Lutomia, G.A. & Sikolia, L.W. (1999). *Guiding and counselling in schools and colleges*. Nairobi: Uzima Press.

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Glossary

Adrenal glands: Two glands above the kidneys which secrete adrenaline.

Adrenaline: A hormone produced by the adrenal glands, affecting circulation and muscular action and causing excitement and stimulation.

Behavioural: Relating to the way we conduct ourselves, including what we do and say and how we do and say things.

Coping strategies: Actions or thoughts that help one to reduce unpleasant feelings and manage stress.

Endorphines: A group of peptide neurotransmitters occurring naturally in the brain and having pain-relieving properties.

Inner dialogue: The things that we say to ourselves in our minds.

Psychological: Having to do with mental characteristics or attitude.

Stress: The tension or pressure we feel in our bodies as we respond to everyday events or events that make us feel uncomfortable.

Appendix: Improving Your Lifestyle

A



Select areas where you think you need help. Tick items below that you will try in order to make improvements in your lifestyle. Note that this appendix includes statements about diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, sleep, drugs, and body maintenance assistance.

Diet

- I will list all that I eat each day for one week. At the end of the week, I will see how balanced my diet is.
- For one week, I will record when, and why, I eat sweet foods and snacks. These foods are nice to have, but they are not good for me. I will substitute healthier snacks at least 50% of the time.
- I will eat less fatty foods and more fruit and vegetables.
- I will grill more foods, rather than fry them.
- I will cut down on salt, as this is bad for my blood pressure.
- I will reduce the use of sugar in drinks.
- I will reduce my intake of caffeine. I will substitute at least 25% of my intake of tea and coffee with hot water or herbal/fruit teas.
- I will eat more fish and white meat, rather than red meat.
- I will drink eight glasses of water per day to improve my digestion.
- I will discuss issues of diet with my family, as it is a vital lifestyle issue.
- I will make an action plan to improve my diet.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Exercise

- I know that I do not exercise enough. I am determined to change this situation.
- I have enjoyed activities in my past. However, due to work, age, or lack of fitness, I have stopped exercising. I will exercise more.

- Once I get home, I don't want to go out again. I could arrange to do regular exercise after work and before I return home.
- I find it difficult to motivate myself to exercise. I could exercise with other people. They would notice if I am missing and encourage me to attend.
- I am very unfit and accept that I must build up my fitness slowly.
- I am not very sporty. But I could take brisk walks because they are good exercise.
- I need not go outside for regular exercise. I could design a fitness programme in my home. I don't need expensive equipment to work out.
- I can exercise more at work by using stairs instead of lifts, walking to see someone instead of phoning, and by taking a walk at breaks and lunchtimes.
- I will use exercise as a way of giving me energy, rather than seeing it as a drain on my energy. Instead of talking about exercise, I will do it.
- I will make an action plan to keep active.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Smoking

- I am determined to stop smoking because I know I would feel, look, and smell better. I would get more work done as I wouldn't need to take long breaks.
- I will set a date within the next two weeks to give up smoking. I will tell everyone that I am going to give up and ask them for their support.
- I will take advantage of devices that can help me to stop smoking. For example, I could use nicotine patches, chewing gums and tablets, hypnosis, or acupuncture.
- When I no longer smoke, I will continue to "spend" cigarette money on a daily basis by placing it in a "well done" kitty for one month. I will then treat myself to a personal reward, such as a piece of furniture, new clothes, or some other personal reward that I will look at and say, "I deserved that!"

- I intend to give up smoking but feel that my life is too stressful. Yet I want to do something positive. Therefore, I will aim to give up slowly and by degrees. I will record, on paper, the number of cigarettes I smoke and when, every day for a week. I will make these charts visible. Each week, I will target a lower daily figure. For example:
 - Week 1, 25 per day
 - Week 2, 20 per day
- You might want to consider the following guidelines, if you decide to give up smoking gradually:
 - Reduce by five each week, if the total is high, and two each week, if the total is fairly low.
 - Never “borrow” from the next day. Instead, look forward to the next “legal” cigarette.
 - Never use “spares” from previous days!
- I will make an action plan to reduce my smoking.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Alcohol

- I know I drink more alcohol than I should. I am determined to address this situation.
- My favourite alcoholic drink is wine. I will restrict my intake to 10 glasses per week.
- My favourite alcoholic drink is spirits. I will restrict my intake to 10 single measures per week.
- My favourite alcoholic drink is beer. I will restrict my intake to 5 litres per week.
- I will discuss the issue of alcohol intake with my family.
- My excessive drinking causes problems in my home. I am determined to change this situation.
- My excessive drinking causes problems at work. I am determined to change this situation.
- I need further help with my excessive drinking, and will talk to a doctor or nurse about it.
- I will make an action plan to reduce my drinking.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Sleep

- I recognise that sleep is an important part of stress management. I know that quality of sleep is more important than quantity.
- I have a bed that is big and comfortable enough for my partner and me.
- I do not “clock watch”. If I cannot sleep, I get up. I read, listen to music, talk, or walk to ensure that I am ready to sleep.
- I try not to exercise just before bedtime.
- I avoid coffee and food near bedtime. If I eat or drink, my stomach will have to work and this will keep me awake.
- Before I go to bed, I do something relaxing. I never embark on work activities just before going to bed.
- I have learned and mastered some relaxation activities that will help me to switch off my overly active mind.
- I will make an action plan to sleep better.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Drugs

- “Hard” drugs destroy my mind as well as my body. I will seek professional help because I do not want to become a drug addict.
- “Soft” drugs are very useful in alleviating my stress. However, I may soon need to use hard drugs to achieve the same effect soft drugs once produced. I will seek professional help to avoid this move to hard drugs.
- I am becoming dependent on medicines and tablets from my doctor for what I now know are stress-related ailments. I will talk to my doctor about my stress, rather than my ailments.
- I plan to reduce the amount of drugs and chemicals that I feed my body. I will talk to my doctor or nurse about stress and my constant visits to him/her for alleviation of my stress-related illnesses.

Note that you should not, under ANY circumstances, refrain from medical treatment without discussing it first with your doctor.

- I will make an action plan to reduce my use of drugs.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Body Maintenance Assistance

- I have an annual physical check-up. This keeps my doctor and me aware of my physical health and highlights problems at an early stage.
- I attend clinics regularly to test for early warning signs of physical problems. Thus, I am able to respond quickly to changes in my body.
- I have a regular massage from a masseur or remedial therapist to relax me and help rid my bloodstream and muscles of toxins created by the stress response.
- I am prepared to spend time, effort, and money, if necessary, to achieve healthy body maintenance.
- I will make an action plan to get the assistance I need with body maintenance.
- I will identify sources of help and support in this area.

Summary

Looking back through all seven key areas, select five things that you are going to do, starting today.

Appendix: B



Coping Strategies

Each of the ideas noted on the next few pages has been used successfully. Read each idea and rate its usefulness (to you) by placing a circle around the appropriate score. Use the following scoring guideline.

3: Very useful—I will definitely use this device.

2: Quite useful—I will consider using this.

1: Not useful—I would find this device difficult to learn and use and therefore will not try to use this suggestion.

Stay Calm

- Repeat to yourself, “calm down, calm down.” At the same time, make a conscious effort to relax your muscles, especially those around your eyes and mouth. 3 2 1
- Count backwards from 10 to 1, telling yourself that at each number, you will be calmer and more relaxed. 3 2 1
- Ask yourself, “Why am I getting so upset? Do I enjoy feeling like this? I’d feel better if I remained calm and in control.” 3 2 1
- Breathe in deeply and say to yourself, “Peace and calm in.” Breathe out deeply and say to yourself, “Problems and tension gone.” 3 2 1
- Say to yourself, “People who lose their cool look stupid and regret it afterward. I’m not going to do that; I have my pride to think about.” 3 2 1
- Say to yourself, “This is my job. Dealing with this situation effectively is what I am paid to do. I must do the right thing rather than what I would like to do. So, stay calm and *do it well.*” 3 2 1

Reason with Yourself

- Tell yourself that this is not the life crisis you are making it out to be. It is temporary and it is minor, compared to what could happen. 3 2 1

- Imagine that you have 100 stress responses left. Ask yourself, “Is it worth it to spend a stress response on this person, situation, or emotion?” 3 2 1
- Remember that the person who really suffers when you feel a negative emotion is *you*. Ask yourself, “Am I going to let this person or situation cause *me* harm?” 3 2 1
- Look at the person/people causing your negative feeling. Ask yourself, “Who’s got the problem? Me, or him/her/them? Why should I pay for their behavioural problem?” 3 2 1
- Change your anger to compassion or gratitude by saying to yourself, “Thank goodness I’m not like him/her/them. It must be awful to be like them.” 3 2 1
- Be tough on yourself. Tell yourself to snap out of this feeling. It’s doing you harm, and you’re almost guaranteeing that you’ll handle the situation badly because you are not in full control. 3 2 1
- Take pride in your ability to stay in control of your own mind. Move your concentration away from your own feelings and toward the person or situation. Look for reasons by asking yourself, “*Why* is he/she/them acting this way? *Why* is this happening?” Concentrate on their stress, not yours. Try to solve the problem rather than letting it continue. 3 2 1
- Say to yourself, “Life’s short and I’ll be a long time dead. Do I want to spend my life feeling like this?” 3 2 1
- Say to yourself, “The life I’m living now is not a rehearsal. This is it! So, make the most of it. Do it right and don’t let these hiccups distract me from the priorities in my life.” 3 2 1

Remove Yourself Mentally

- Mentally step outside a circle, leaving the problem and the people inside. Look at it all from a distance and look at your own participation in it. Ask yourself, “Am I handling it well? How do I look? What must they think of me? Do I like/respect myself?” 3 2 1
- When a problem worries you but you can’t immediately solve it, mentally place the problem in a box. Close the lid and walk away. Promise yourself that you will return to this problem when you can do something about it. 3 2 1

- Create a mental “worry room.” Place all worries in this room. Set aside some time in your day to “visit” this room and see what you can do about any of your worries. Your visit must be short and very positive. 3 2 1
- Give your mind a brief respite from the problem by focusing on the nicer parts of your life. Ask yourself, “What am I going to do tonight/this weekend? What preparations do I need to make for dinner/decorating/shopping/gardening?” 3 2 1
- Visualise a place where you would love to be. Imagine yourself there, and experience the enjoyment. Ask yourself, “What would I do? What would I feel? How would I rate the situation I’m in now?” 3 2 1
- Mentally “visit” other people: family members, friends, or colleagues. What are they doing now? What would they think about this situation? 3 2 1
- Imagine yourself as an actor in a play. Ask yourself, “How would X (a famous actor) play this part?” 3 2 1

Use Humour

- Talk seriously, but wear a grin. Say, “If you don’t stop doing that, I’ll pull your ears off.” 3 2 1
- Say to yourself, “I could have been a brain surgeon/a diplomat in the Seychelles. Why did I choose this job?” 3 2 1
- Revert to childish behaviour. Pull faces, make silly noises, etc., but make sure there are no witnesses. 3 2 1
- Imagine something ridiculous happening to the person/room/desk/object/building that is causing you a problem; for example, blowing up, turning a different colour, or disappearing into the floor. 3 2 1

Take Action

- When you realise that you are losing control of your feelings, plan to address the problem later. Suggest to the other person that you both “take a break,” and resume the conversation later. Meanwhile, use the time to calm down and prepare yourself to handle the situation effectively. 3 2 1

- Feign pain when you think an injection of humour might relieve the increasing tension. Appear to be deeply hurt by a remark or someone's behaviour. Hold your hand to your brow and say, "Susan/Barry/Mr. X, I'm devastated by that remark!" 3 2 1
- Be assertive when you think humour will not be received well. Say, "Mr. X, I do appreciate/understand/sympathise with how you are feeling/must feel/why you are doing this. However, it's not solving the problem. Can we discuss this and solve the problem that obviously exists?" 3 2 1
- Before you say or do anything, picture the following two words in your mind and decide which one is the best choice for managing your stress positively and healthily:
 1. *React*—This is spontaneous, and involves no rational thought or concern for consequences and outcomes. It is a typical and widely used negative coping device, because it vents our tension and makes us feel better in the short term.
 2. *Respond*—This practise allows you a chance to pause for thought—to engage your brain before putting your mouth into action. Ask yourself, "What do I want the outcome to be here? What do I want to achieve here? What should I say/do? Never mind what I *want* to say/do. What *must* I say/do to solve the problem?" 3 2 1
- Take your worries for a walk. Exercise (which removes stress chemicals from your body), fresh air, and a change of scenery will help you to cope with the problem(s) on your mind. This can be done at home or work, even if it is only for five minutes at a time. 3 2 1
- Use the "D/S/W" technique. This has been widely used in the field of psychology and involves three personal requests:
 1. *Determination*—Let me have the determination to work toward changing things that are wrong and that can be changed for the better with effort.
 2. *Serenity*—Let me have the serenity to accept those things that are wrong but cannot be changed, no matter how hard I might try.
 3. *Wisdom*—Let me have the wisdom to know the difference between the two. 3 2 1

- Consider the “Perfection/Excellence” technique. *Perfection* is rarely achievable. There is always something that could be improved upon by doing it better, more neatly, more quickly, with less waste, etc. Those who strive for perfection are constantly in a “failure” situation, which causes further stress. Ask yourself, “Why struggle for *perfection*, when *excellence* will do?” 3 2 1
- Never get locked into disagreements. They have a tendency to spiral and draw you into arguments unrelated to the problem at hand. We get side-tracked, drawn down back alleys and taken off on tangents. Say to yourself and the other person, “That’s a fair comment. However, it’s not the issue here. Let’s get back to the real issue here, which is.../Let’s not lose sight of the real issue which is...” 3 2 1
- A Hindu remedy for dwelling, worry, grief, and other similar feelings is to accept them as “Karma” —a little bit like saying “That’s life,” but deeper. Say to yourself, “Can I alter what has happened? Can I put the clock back? What’s the point of feeling like this?” Say to yourself, “I must accept it because I cannot change it.” 3 2 1
- When you begin to feel a negative emotion, imagine it as a monster creeping up on you, determined to do you harm. Say to yourself, “Ooh no, I’m not joining you yet, Trimble! I know all about stress and the damage it can cause. But I also know that the inner dialogue I am using now will put you off for a little longer. Go away, Trimble! I have a life to live and enjoy!” 3 2 1