

Creating Calmness in Stressful

Times

A Virtual Stress-Management and

Relaxation Module

Version 2

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Acknowledgements

This virtual module was developed by a team of Resiliency volunteers and SAF staff

members to bring support to our military and veteran communities during the COVID-19 outbreak. This module is meant to be temporary and offers stress-management and relaxation techniques in connection with the pandemic. This module is an addendum to the SAF Reconnection Workshops Facilitator Manual, and all guidance for the Reconnection Workshops program applies to this module.

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Facilitator Notes for Virtual Creating Calmness Module

This module was developed as a second version to the COVID-19 Stress-Management and Relaxation module that was created to help participants cope during the 2020 global pandemic. Though the pandemic will have a longstanding impact on many people, discussing pandemic-specific topics can become overwhelming. This module is appropriate for anyone who is experiencing stress related to geographical and social separation, whether or not the stressor is directly connected to the pandemic.

This module is intended to be provided virtually and offers a chance for participants to connect, learn about stress and practice relaxation and mind-body techniques when they cannot attend an in-person workshop.

The module follows the same format as other Red Cross Resiliency workshops: 1) Introduction 2) Awareness 3) Discussion and Psychoeducation 4) Action 5) Application 6) Conclusion. The module is a combination of multiple modules and uses activities from various module topics that have been tested for a virtual platform. This module closely resembles the COVID-19 Stress-Management and Relaxation module with some updates to activities and more mind-body options.

The goals of this module are to bring people together and offer an example of a positive use of virtual technology, to give participants a chance to connect and discuss the stress they are experiencing, to teach effective methods of addressing stress and to guide participants through relaxation exercises.

Tips for Facilitating Virtual Sessions

• Aim for 10-12 participants. Know that fewer people will join than who sign up.

• Ask for all those who have a camera to turn it on, and model turning your camera on.

The groups will be more interactive and will feel safer if participants are on video and audio.

• Each workshop will have a technical host to set up the session, invite participants, keep track of attending participants and handle the technology. He/she will also have each handout ready on a Power Point slide to display on their screen as you facilitate. Facilitators should connect with each other and with the technical host ahead of time to plan out activities and test the technology.

• It is strongly suggested to have two facilitators on at a time. Decide whether you will co-facilitate and both monitor the chat or have one person facilitate and one person monitor chat the whole time. When two facilitators are not an option, one person can facilitate the workshop as long as he/she is comfortable doing so alone and there is another SAF staff member or volunteer present the entire time to help as the tech host.

• Plan to log into the meeting at least 15 minutes before the session start time to ensure the technology is working properly and to welcome participants as they join.

• Invite all participants to do a quick introduction to encourage everyone’s early participation. Introduce yourself, and write your name into the chat box. We are asking participants include the name of the facilitator(s) on the feedback forms, so it’s important that they know who you are. Be sure to also introduce the technology host as a staff member/volunteer with the Red Cross. State that he/she will be on the call to help ensure the session runs smoothly.

• Review how people should send questions, i.e. speak them aloud, type them into a chat for everyone to see, type them into a chat privately for the facilitator to see, etc.

• Have visuals and virtual handouts ready to go so you aren’t scrambling to find what you

need.

• Share with everyone at the beginning of every virtual workshop 1. The crisis hotline 1-

800-273-8255 and 2. The American Red Cross Hero Care Center line 1-877-272-

7337. The Hero Care Center can also be accessed by downloading the Hero Care

Application.

• If you have concerns about someone during the group, engage with him or her via the private chat. Try to get a sense of the nature of his or her concerns and determine whether you need to offer resources, refer him or her to the local Red Cross for additional support or contact emergency services to maintain his or her safety. This is when you should utilize having two facilitators in the session; one facilitator should connect with the participant in need and the other should continue to run the workshop. Decide before the session starts who will follow up with distressed participants if needed.

• Point out that, although resources and handouts may have been sent around prior to the workshop, they will also will be sent to each participant via email following the workshop (this will be done by the technology host). You may also introduce local resources that you know of as long as they are professional, non-political and do not advertise your business or the business of others you know.

*and is not intended to be shared with the participants. The text in regular type is a suggested format for conveying module content to the participants.*

Section 1: Introduction

1. Welcome participants to the *Reconnection Workshops* and to the *Creating Calmness for Better Health* module.

2. Briefly introduce yourself as the facilitator(s), and provide your personal background and military connection if applicable. In your words, authentically acknowledge participants for their sacrifices and service to our country, and normalize that this is a stressful time for everyone but especially for our service members, veterans and their families.

3. Have participants briefly introduce themselves, and ask them to identify, if they choose, what they want to get addressed during the module. Example: Where they live, how long they/their loved one has been or was in the service, if have deployed, how they found out about the module, etc.

4. Review video session details, such as seeking a quiet place where interruptions can be minimized, using ear-buds or headphones where possible, turning on the camera, muting sound when not talking and ways to ask questions. Encourage full participation and asking questions verbally rather than in the chat.

5. Point out the length of time scheduled for the module and ask that participants try to stay on for the entire session.

6. Discuss issues related to privacy and confidentiality along with what might be appropriate boundaries for the group discussions. Request that all conversations be kept private, and point out that what is said cannot always be guaranteed to stay within the group as well as limitations to privacy of information shared. Emphasize that the American Red Cross does not share any of this information with the military. Ask participants to speak for only themselves. If a concern arises that would deem making

a report, one facilitator should either chat privately with that person or call the participant using the phone number collected during sign-up while the second facilitator continues to run the group. When talking to the individual participant, gather as much information as you can and contact both the local appropriate reporting entity (CPS, etc.) as well as the Red Cross Concerned Connection Line: (888) 309-9679 as warranted.

▪ Suggested language on limits to confidentiality: *While I am a (counselor/social worker/psychologist, etc.), I am here today as a volunteer with the Red Cross. As part of my role, I want you to know that I will keep everything we talk about in here private. The only limit to that would be if I had a concern about someone’s safety, at which point I would need to share my concern with the Red Cross. Also, while I do want you to take the skills and materials from today and share them with those in*

*with others. Can everyone agree to that?*

7. Emphasize that this module is educational, interactive and intended to build new skills to support coping to build better wellness. The module will clarify how aspects of this pandemic impact adults and children and will teach skills that improve interpersonal communication, stress management and general coping strategies during challenging times. This is not a support group, counseling or therapy.

Section 2: Awareness

*During the Awareness section, your task is to learn what information the participants may need in order to increase their confidence level in dealing with the uncertainty and stress of challenging times as well as to help them build a wellness plan that will serve them especially during times of increased stress.*

*Introduce the module topic by using one of the following quotes as a warm-up activity.*

Let’s start by discussing a quote:

“We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.” – Martin Luther

King Jr., American Christian minister and activist

“The greatest compassion is the prevention of human suffering through patience, alertness,

courage and kindness.” – Amit Ray, Author, Computer and AI Scientist and Yoga Master

“In every crisis, the true heroism is self-discipline, patience and strong determination.” – Amit

Ray, Indian author and spiritual master

“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.” – Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk, peace activist and founder of the Plum Village Tradition

“It is only in our darkest hours that we may discover the true strength of the brilliant light within ourselves that can never, ever, be dimmed.” – Doe Zantamata, American author, artist, and photographer

“In times of great stress or adversity, it’s always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and

your energy into something positive.” – Lee lacocca, American automobile executive

“Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass, it’s about learning how to dance in the rain.” –

Vivian Greene, American Singer and pianist

“Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day

saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.”- Mary Anne Radmacher, American write and artist

“When you have exhausted all possibilities, remember this: you haven’t.” – Thomas Edison, American businessman and inventor

*Ask participants to share with the group what the quote means to them.*

How does this quote relate to what you are experiencing either now or what you have experienced during a challenging time in your life?

*As they talk, listen for key aspects about social isolation, changes in routines, anxiousness, discomfort in uncertainty, etc. Participants may want to know more about finding new ways to communicate, coping and staying healthy that may be related to uncertain times, difficult challenges or unknowns about the future.*

Each of us is faced with challenging times through our lives. Some of these challenges may be related to military-connected responsibilities or with being a caregiver or veteran, and others may be personal, national or even global challenges. Regardless of the scenario, difficult times require us to draw from our energy reserves and work harder to get through each day. Can anyone give an example of a challenging situation that might take up more energy than usual?

*Allow participants to respond.*

Stressful situations can also bring out a variety of feelings, like fear and anxiety. Sometimes, these emotions can be overwhelming and cause strong reactions in both adults and children. Being able to cope with this stress will make you, the people you care about and your community stronger. What are some stress reactions you’ve noticed in yourself or others during very difficult times?

*If not mentioned, potential stress reactions include:*

• *Fear and worry about one’s own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others*

• *Changes in sleep or eating patterns*

• *Difficulty concentrating*

• *Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs*

*Common changes to watch for in children and teens:*

• *Excessive crying or irritation in younger children*

• *Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (i.e. toileting accidents, clinging behavior)*

• *Excessive worry or sadness*

• *Acting out behaviors in teens*

• *Schoolwork avoidance*

• *Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past*

• *Unexplained headaches or body pain*

*Source: (SAMHSA) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration*

One of the hardest things to do when under significant stress is maintain a sense of wellbeing and take care of yourself. It may feel as though you don’t have the time or energy to put into self-care, but it’s during times of stress when these actions are most important and impactful. The more time you spend getting to know the things that work for you and practicing them,

the easier it will be to put them to use when things are difficult. Does anyone want to share

some ideas about how you can do this?

*Allow time for responses.*

Thank you for sharing. As we continue our discussion today, we’ll talk more about what everyone is experiencing as well as learn and practice skills and techniques to help yourself and others effectively cope with stress.

Section 3: Action

Activity 1: Defining Stress

*Display the questions from Handout A on the screen. Discuss them as a group using the following information:*

• *Stress is a natural part of our lives. Our bodies have ways of responding to stress in an effort to protect us. Our stress responses are useful when we face challenges or threats and are part of our body’s natural defense systems.*

• *When we have too little stress, we tend to lack motivation, and with too much stress, we feel overwhelmed and become ineffective.*

• *Stress is common, and symptoms include feeling nervous, anxious, irritable, angry and fatigued. Stress can also significantly impact sleep. This is especially true when we face highly stressful events. At times like these, it’s even more vital that we recognize and manage our stress, because stress can affect our immune system and health.*

• *Ideally, when we are faced with a stressful situation and the situation is over, our bodies return to a normal, calm state. However, in some situations, it may feel that there is no end in sight, which keeps us in a prolonged state of heightened stress that we never come down from. This is why we must work even harder to take care of ourselves.*

• *We are programmed to repetitively think about the negative. We have a natural negativity bias, and bad stuff sticks for a reason. Our brains are built to keep remembering what went wrong, so we can avoid the situation in the future.*

Take a look at the questions up on the screen. Let’s go through them one at a time.

Handout A: Defining Stress

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

• What is stress?

• What does it mean to “be stressed?”

• Is stress the same for everyone?

• What is the opposite of being stressed?

• Do we need stress?

• Why do you think stress is so common?

• When you are discussing your day, what stands out more, the things that went well or

the things that didn’t go well?

• In what ways is your stress heightened during certain events, scenarios or times of year?

Activity 2: Signs of Stress

Stress causes changes in our brains and bodies. It may vary in intensity, frequency and duration, but our bodies are built to react quickly to deal with stress. Our “emergency system” can be triggered by a real threat or by our own thoughts that are sometimes brought on by things we see in the media (i.e. during disasters) or hear from others. Your body’s stress response takes only seconds and responds the same way whether you have encountered a bear, gotten a stressful email from someone or are trying to cope with something significant. This rapid, fight-flight-or-freeze response prepares our bodies for immediate danger by allowing us to be efficient and use the systems that help us survive – like blood sugar, oxygen and increased heart rate. However, when repeatedly triggered, these continuous hormones can cause health problems. Viewing stress as normal and helpful can buffer the negative health impact.

What do you think happens to the body and mind when someone undergoes consistent, long- term stress?

*Refer to the following examples as needed:*

• *Cognitive: memory issues, decreased concentration, clarity of thought, loss of perspective/objectivity (tunnel vision), increased worry, racing thoughts, focusing on the negative, poor judgment*

• *Emotional: moodiness, agitation, restlessness, anger, impatience, loneliness or isolation, depression, feeling overwhelmed, relationship issues*

• *Behavioral: changes in eating, changes in sleep, withdrawing from others, procrastination, neglecting responsibilities, increase in alcohol, substances – including tobacco, overdoing activities (shopping, exercise), clenching your jaws or grinding your teeth*

• *Physical: headaches, backaches, muscle pain or tension or stiffness, chest pain, pounding heartbeat or rapid heartbeat, heartburn or acid reflux, “knots or butterflies” in the stomach, diarrhea, constipation, weight gain/loss, loss of sex drive, insomnia, increased illnesses (such as colds), skin problems, increased blood sugar (resulting in increased thirst, fatigue, blurry vision)*

Long periods of stress without time to recover have been linked to many illnesses. Therefore, managing stress is extremely important to overall physical and mental health. Getting better at knowing how you experience stress will help you manage it more effectively.

*Display Handout B, and generate discussion with participants about how they experience*

*stress. Solicit examples and questions, and be sure to discuss any points that participants show interest in exploring.*

Handout B: Signs of Stress

Handout B lists several signs of stress. Which of these have you experienced yourself or observed in someone else? Have any of these come and gone depending on the situation you

were facing at the time, such as deployment, permanent move, leaving the service, health concerns, etc.?

As you look at the diagram, do you notice how stress is depicted as physical on the body? Why do you think this is? Our physical and mental selves are connected. Thus, when we feel stressed mentally or emotionally, we also feel it physically. Sometimes, we might be able to tell we are stressed based on how our body is feeling. Has anyone experienced this?

Thinking

• Difficulty concentrating

• Poor memory

• Increased worry

• Preoccupation about a situation or event

• Focusing on the negative

Spirituality

• Loss of purpose

• Questioning the meaning of life

• Loss of faith

• Questioning belief system

Emotions

• Anger

• Agitation

• Moodiness

• Depression

• Irritability

Relationships

• Reduced intimacy

• Increased conflicts

and fighting

• Impatience

• Feeling Isolated or disconnected

Behaviors

• Withdrawal from friends and family

• Starting arguments

• Changes in sleep

• Changes in appetite

Work

Physical

• Headaches

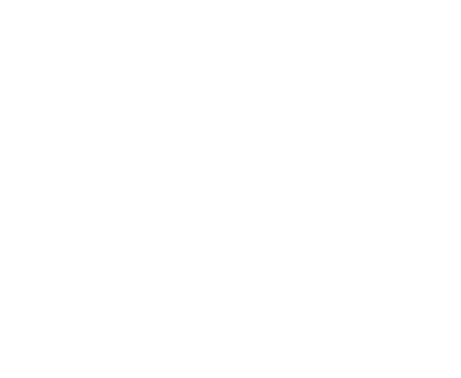
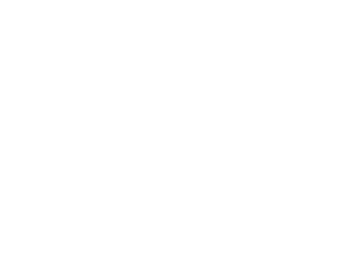
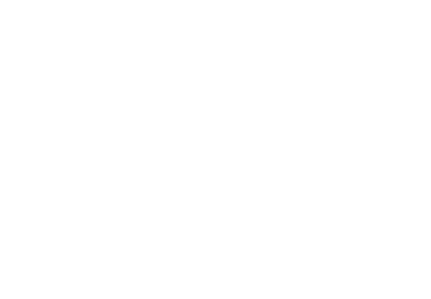
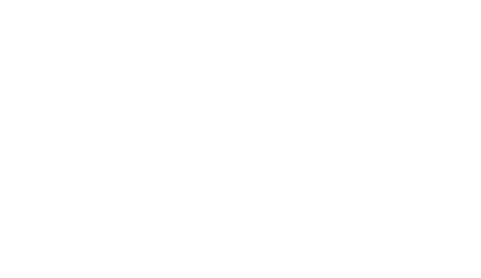
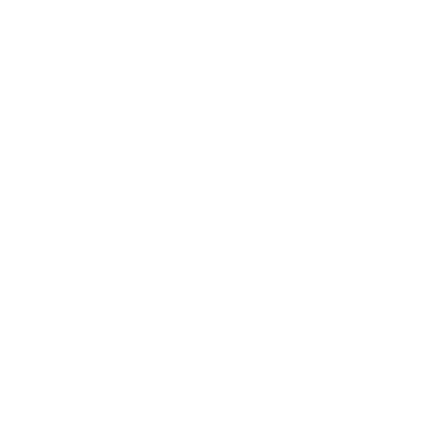
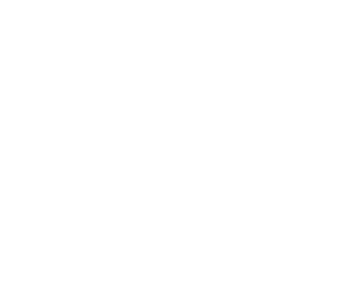
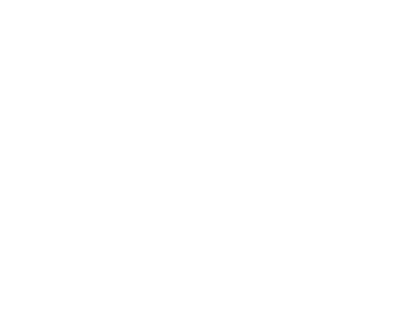
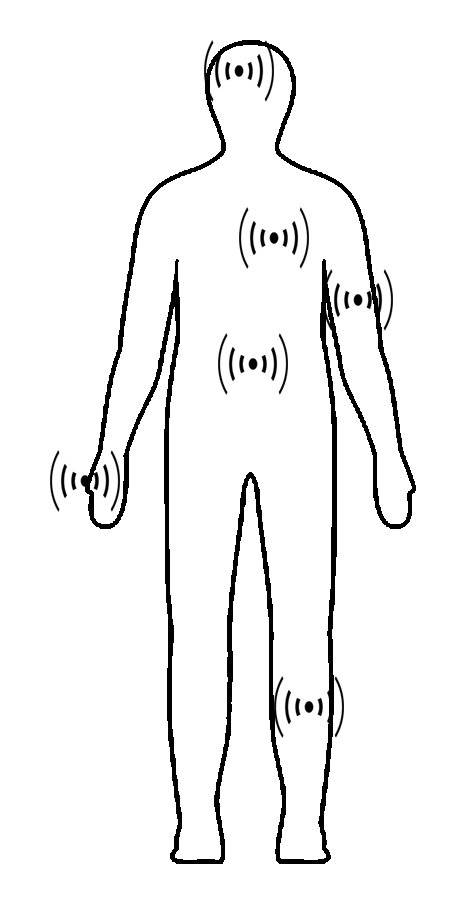
• Stomach pain

• Tense muscles

• Digestive issues

• Fatigue

• Clenching jaw/teeth



grinding

• Increased substance use

• Decreased motivation

• Task avoidance

• Low morale

• Frustration

• Burnout

Activity 3: How Stressed Am I?

*Display Handout C: How Stressed Am I? on the screen.*

It’s important to know the types of things that trigger your stress response. This looks different for everyone; something that causes stress for one person, another person may not be impacted by at all. For example, think about getting up on stage to make a speech to 300 people. For how many of you would that be stressful to think about? *Ask them to raise their hands to respond.* For how many would this be no big deal? The important thing is to know yourself and what kinds of things make you feel stressed and how your body and mind respond so you can be aware of what’s happening.

Here is a tool you can use to check in with yourself about your stress levels. It’s also a good one to use with kids and teenagers. Let’s try it out. Can someone give an example of something that causes stress for them? *Choose someone to share. If no one volunteers, provide your own example, such as “sitting in traffic” or “hosting a large party or gathering”.*

Now, without pressing enter, I want everyone to type into chat the number that corresponds to the level of stress this experience would cause for you. I’ll give you a few seconds to think about it, and then we’ll hit enter together. Okay, now everyone enter your number into the chat. *Alternately, you could ask for volunteers to share their numbers verbally and not use the chat.* Now, I’m going to ask you to think generally about how stressed you are right now, using the scale on the screen. We’ll do the same thing, where you will type your number and we’ll all hit “enter” together. Please know that you can be honest, and we will not be judging each others’ responses. Okay, when you’re ready, hit “enter” to submit your number.

As you can see, there are varied responses. Each of us is walking around every day with a number that falls somewhere on this scale, and it can change very quickly. Try to pay attention to your own number each day, and also remember that everyone else is dealing with their own stressors, many of which we may have no idea about. This is a good activity to try you’re your loved ones to get a better sense of where everyone is on the scale and the kinds of things

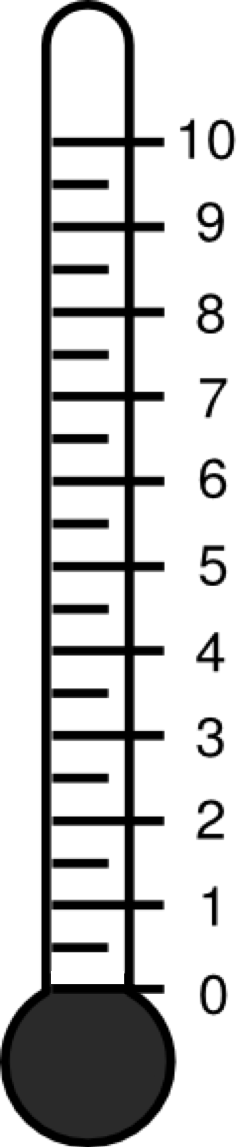
that cause more or less stress for each person. Remember that this will be different for each person, so be encouraging of others’ examples if you use this with your loved ones.

Once you’ve decided what your stress levels look like, use the thermometer to take your “stress temperature” throughout the day. You may want to use this at times when you notice you or those around you seem particularly tense. The goal is to become more aware of your stress levels and how they fluctuate throughout the day. Knowing when you feel the most stressed can help you come up with an effective plan to manage it.

Handout C: How Stressed Am I?

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

**Most Stressed**



**Ever!**

**Not Stressed at All**

Activity 4: Effective Communication

Communication is important in any relationship. During times of stress, good communication can be one of the most important tools in maintaining healthy relationships. When navigating a stressful experience, good communication is important for letting others know what you’re thinking and feeling and for helping you understand what others are experiencing.

*Display Handout D on the screen. Review the list with the group and ask for comments, reactions and feedback. Ask about new strengths or challenges to communication that come with stressful situations.*

Handout D: General Points to Consider for Effective Communication

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

Be respectful and calm. Stop what you are doing, and pay full attention to the other person. Talk about emotional issues when you are calm, remembering that you may be more stressed than usual in certain situations. If efforts to resolve a conflict are not working, take a break

and set a time to revisit the issue when both of you have cooled down a bit. *What are some specific challenges you are having around communication in your house and with others?*

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

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

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

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

Silence can be golden. Silence can often be an appropriate response. This is not the same as

“the silent treatment,” where one person completely ignores the other person. *Is it difficult or*

*uncomfortable for you to sit in silence with someone? How can you create space for each household member to get some quiet, non-discussion time?*

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

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

Activity 5: Quick Relaxation Exercises

There are many ways to manage stress through relaxation exercises that can easily be added to your day. Let’s try some together now. *Follow the activities below, demonstrating them to the group as you go*. As we are doing these exercises, you may become distracted by your thoughts. As this happens, take a moment to notice where your thoughts took you, note

where your mind went and then, without judgment, let go and return your attention to your

breathing. It is common to get distracted; bring yourself back to your breathing each time. The

goal is to take a few minutes to focus completely on your breathing.

Handout E: Quick Relaxation Exercises

We all breathe. It’s an automatic behavior necessary for life. While breathing is essential to life, many of us only breathe well enough to keep ourselves alive, but not in a way that brings relaxation. In fact, most of us pay very little attention to our breathing unless we’re congested, sick, panting or struggling to breathe for some other reason.

Let’s try an experiment:

• Make a tight fist.

• Notice what happens to your breathing.

• Unclench your fist and breathe using slow, deep breaths.

• Now make a tight fist while continuing to breathe deeply.

• What did you notice? Did you hold your breath or take shallower breaths when you clenched your fist? Was it harder to breathe deeply while clenching your fist? Was anyone unable to breathe deeply? *Allow the group to respond.*

Breathing deeply can make it harder to hold on to tension and stress. Let’s try a deep

breathing exercise together.

Exercise 1: Deep Breathing

When we become stressed, our breathing naturally becomes shallow, just as it did when you

clenched your fist. Making a conscious effort to take slow deep breaths will bring calmness to your body and mind.

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

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

How did this feel? Did you feel yourself relaxing? What sensations did you experience while taking deep breathes?

Let’s try another exercise.

Exercise 2: Hand Trace

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

move back down toward your palm. Switch hands, and repeat the exercise. This is a great exercise to teach children too. You can call it “rollercoaster breathing” or “starfish breathing.” Try doing it together as a family.

*Discuss how this felt.*

Activity 6: Things I Can Try to Reduce My Stress

What is one of the biggest barriers to practicing stress-reduction techniques? Often, people say it’s not having the time. We tend to become increasingly tense during high-stress situations and aren’t able to take time to do relaxation exercises.

What are some easy ways you can reduce stress in the moment without having to commit too much time to them?

*Solicit ideas from the participants on how to reduce stress in the moment. Have participants practice them as you discuss them. The goal is to get them thinking about and trying different ways to reduce their stress at any given moment.*

These were all great ideas. Let’s practice a few more techniques that can be done almost

anywhere, even while isolating at home.

*Display Handout F on the screen.*

Here, you’ll see a list of ways to relieve stress that range from quick to intensive. Which of these have you already done? Which would you like to try? If any look interesting but you aren’t sure how to make it work, bring it up to the group, and we can brainstorm together.

*Allow participants to have some time to review the list and discuss. If needed, ask about specific examples to help the group start the conversation. If there are no responses, you can share which ones you personally have found helpful.*

As you think of a stress-management plan, it is great to have several strategies in mind. With several options, you’ll be more likely to practice self-care on a regular basis rather than only occasionally. It will also encourage you to choose the right exercise for the situation you’re in. Adopting a regular practice of these techniques will keep stress from building to a dangerous level. The idea is to give our bodies and brains some respite from stress reactions. Not all the techniques work all of the time. If one doesn’t work, try another one.

Handout F: Things I Can Try to Reduce My Stress

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

 Breathe in slowly for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7, release for a count of 8

 Prayer or meditation

 Massage your face, head or shoulders

 Call or text someone who makes you feel good or laugh

 Take a hot shower or soak in the tub

 Listen to music

 Watch a clip of a comedian you like

 Read a magazine or book

 Think of a pleasant or funny memory

 Repair or tinker with things around

the house

 Make something new out of something old

 Organize or clean something

 Start a new hobby

 Draw, paint or doodle

 Learn something new

 Knit, crochet or needle point

 Change the linens on your bed

 Rearrange a room

 Play an instrument

 Do a craft project

 Cook a new recipe

 Organize the “junk drawer”

 Watch a movie, concert or sport

event

 Mail someone a card or letter

 Daydream

 Make a bucket list

 Dance, sing, act

 Make someone laugh

 Hold a virtual coffee chat with

friends

 Play a game alone, with your family or virtually – try a social game app

 Do a quick stretch

 Look at photos

 Do a jigsaw puzzle, sudoku or crossword puzzle

 Google something uplifting

 Savor a warm drink

 Find volunteer opportunities

(volunteermatch.org)

 Take a continuing education course

 Make a “Top Ten” list of your

favorite things (Ex: Favorite movies)

 Exercise

 Do something nice for someone

 Join a discussion group or book

club

 

 

 

Activity 7: Getting a Good Night’s Rest: How to Become a Better Sleeper

Sleep difficulties are common, especially when under stress. How many of you have had sleep issues within the last month? Have you noticed your sleep patterns change during particularly stressful situations?

Even though we all know that a good night’s sleep makes everything look and feel better in the morning and refreshes our minds and bodies, for many people, stress can make it difficult to find the “off” switch and get a good night’s rest. What are some things that have interrupted your ability to get a good night’s sleep?

*Allow for responses, and then display Handout G on the screen.*

Let’s take a look at Handout G. This handout describes some proven strategies to help you become a better sleeper and get your sleep cycle back on track.

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

SET YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

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

MONITOR YOUR USE OF SCREENS

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

CREATE A SOOTHING SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

• Keep your room dark and quiet. Your body has its own natural sleeping and waking clock. It wants to be active when it’s light and at rest when it’s dark. Try a sleep mask or room-darkening shades to block outside light.

• Find a comfortable temperature, as extremes can disrupt your chances for good sleep.

Cooler temperatures tend to be better.

• Make sure you have a “good” bed and pillow, ones that are right for you.

• Develop and practice a relaxing routine before bedtime. A warm bath, light stretching, listening to soothing music and reading are all activities that can help you find your “off switch.” It is best to save intensive workouts for at least three hours before sleep, as it can energize your body and awaken your brain.

• Avoid using your bed and bedroom for watching TV, laptop use, cell phone use, eating, etc.

• Don’t make bedtime the time to solve your problems. Make a “to-do” list for the next day, and then try to clear your mind. Sometimes, a phrase or short poem that you can recite to yourself may help clear your mind. For example: “Don’t fight with the pillow, but lay down your head, and kick every worry out of the bed.”

• Take a couple slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU EAT AND DRINK

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

• In the late afternoon and evening, avoid caffeinated drinks. Caffeine can remain in your system for up to 14 hours and increase nighttime awakenings.

• Avoid big meals right before bedtime, but don’t go to bed hungry. Try to drink fluids at

least two hours before bedtime, as a full bladder can interfere with sleep.

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU TOSS AND TURN

• If you can’t fall asleep within 30 minutes, go to another room and do something restful until you feel sleepy again. Don’t read in bed. If you want to read, get out of bed, and sit in a chair. Try not to expose yourself to bright, intense light, such as electronic devices, since that can “reset” your internal clock and keep you up.

• Don’t have a visible bedroom clock. “Clock watching” tends to intensify the misery of

sleeplessness.

• Avoid naps during the day if you are having trouble sleeping at night.

• Try progressive muscle relaxation. Get into a comfortable position and move through each muscle group, tensing and relaxing the muscles as you go. After, take several deep breaths.

• Try listening to a guided visualization meant to relax your body and mind.

Activity 8: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses

*Start by leading the group through the guided sensory exercises below. After, discuss Handout*

*H as a group.*

At times, we get caught up in our thoughts and emotions, and it’s hard to stop the loop of worried thoughts. When this happens, it is helpful to turn attention outside of ourselves. Let’s try a brief activity to see how turning attention to our senses refocuses our bodies and minds and disrupts the pattern of worried thoughts.

Guided Sensory Activity

Let’s all sit as comfortably as possible. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Now, focus for a minute

on your surroundings. Take note of what you see. What colors, shapes and textures do you

notice? Now, choose something specific, and look at it more closely. Really focus on the shape, color and texture. How does light affect its shading? Is it flat, rounded, rough, smooth?

Now, notice what sounds you hear. How many different sounds can you hear? Close your eyes or focus your gaze on the floor in front of you. Do the sounds appear different now? What is the loudest sound you hear? The quietest?

Now, focus on what you smell. Does one odor stand out distinctly? Is it strong or weak? Is it familiar or new? What else do you notice about the smell?

Now, focus on your sense of taste. Do you notice a distinct taste on your tongue right now? What is it? If not, imagine one food from the last meal you ate or that you would really like. Can you taste it? How does your body feel when you imagine it?

Now, focus on your sense of touch. Touch the fabric of your clothing or the chair you are sitting on. What is its texture? Is it soft, bumpy, smooth? Is it warm or cool? What else do you notice about it?

Now, slowly take three deep breaths and return your focus to the room.

Did anyone notice a change in their body or mind as we did this exercise? Take note of your stress level right now and see whether it’s different from before we started. Would anyone like to share? How do you think this activity might help during times of stress?

*Allow for responses, and then display Handout H: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses on the screen.*

Let’s look at Handout H: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses. What things bring you joy in these areas? When we’re overwhelmed by stress, we tend to tune out our surroundings. By engaging your five senses, you will bring focus to your mind and relax your body. Try to come up with things you see, hear, taste, touch and smell in your surroundings.

Handout H: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses

Things I Like to See

• Trees and flowers

• Art

• Family pictures

Things I Like to Hear

• My favorite playlist

• Birds chirping

• My favorite comedian

Things I Like to Taste

• Home baked cookies

• Hot cocoa

• Mint gum

Things I Like to Touch

• Hot shower

• Sun on my face

• Grass under my feet

Things I Like to Smell

• New rain

• Clean laundry

• Bonfire

*Icons by Stephanie Kadam, used under Creative Commons License (CC BY 3.0)*

Personal visualization

*Walk the group through a guided visualization exercises by slowly reading through the following*

*script.*

Another great way to quickly bring yourself to a more relaxed state is through visualization. Our minds are powerful tools and can help our bodies feel physically relaxed just by thinking about calming things. The more time you spend practicing, the quicker you will experience the benefits of a comforting and peaceful visualization. Let’s try it together.

Get comfortable in your chair and take a few relaxing breaths. You can choose whether you want to close your eyes or keep them open. Now, picture your favorite place. This may be the beach, a mountain cabin, your grandma’s kitchen or anywhere that brings you peace and comfort. Imagine you are at your favorite place right now.

Think about what you might see as you look around in this place. Be as detailed as you can, coming up with a few things you would see there.

Next, try to imagine what you might hear at this place. Are there noises from being outside? Do you hear the wind? Birds chirping? People talking?

Let’s move on to your sense of smell. What aromas do you smell? Freshly cut grass? Warm cookies? Saltwater?

Now, consider your sense of taste. What taste is on your lips? Salty air? Sweat? Something

delicious that you’d be eating or drinking?

Last, picture what you would be touching and feeling. What is the feel of the air? Do you feel a breeze? A hug? What’s the temperature like?

Try to sit with this for a few moments. The more detail you can build in, the better. Enjoy the calmness this place brings.

*Give the group a few moments to continue the visualization.*

Now, slowly bring your attention back to the room, opening your eyes when you are ready. No matter what’s going on in your life or what your level of stress is, you can easily place yourself in your favorite spot, and you’ll get almost as much pleasure as if you were there in person.

Activity 9: Taking a New Perspective

Although it seems like our reaction happens immediately after something stressful occurs, there is actually a slight pause in between. During that pause, our brains are interpreting the situation, deciding how we should react and sending signals to our bodies. This all happens very quickly.

Here’s an example: *You can ask the participants to fill in the thoughts and reactions parts or give the complete example.*

• Event: An occasion you were looking forward to had to be cancelled.

• Thoughts: “This is horrible! I was so excited for this event, and now I have nothing

to look forward to.”

• Emotional reaction: Angry, frustrated, sad.

*Display Handout I on the screen.*

Let’s take a look at Handout I and apply these questions to a few examples.

*Ask participants to volunteer to read each challenging situation aloud, then ask the group to give an example of a negative thought that would follow and what the reaction might be.*

Handout I: Taking a New Perspective

As you look at the images in Handout I, you can see how we can change the impact of events simply by changing how we think about them and what we tell ourselves about them.

In the handout, you’ll see that there is an event. Then, we have thoughts about the event. Our thoughts determine our emotional reaction. If we have negative, pessimistic thoughts, our feelings are also dark. If we can take a look at our thoughts and shift them to be more accurate, true and helpful, we’ll end up with more positive, less upsetting emotions.

Knowing this, how could you respond to these thoughts? Could you shift them to be more positive and helpful?

1. “I can’t believe this is happening to me. Nothing ever goes right for me.”

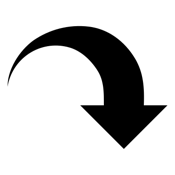
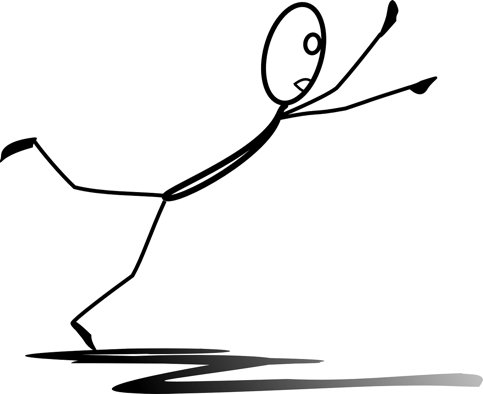
2. “No one understands what I’m going through.”

3. “This will never end. I’m going to feel this bad forever.”

4. “There is nothing good in my life right now.”

You can do this same process with any distressing thoughts you have.

Handout I



**EVENT**

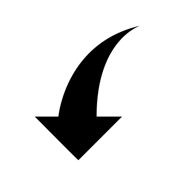
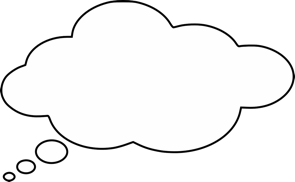
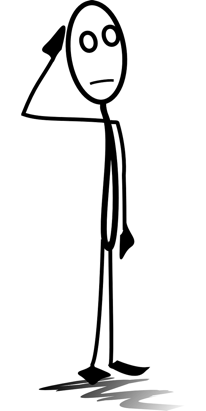
Check Your Thinking!

Besides my first thoughts about why this happened, can I think of 2 other reasons to explain it?

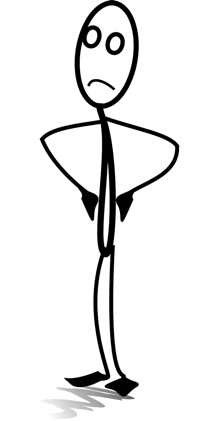
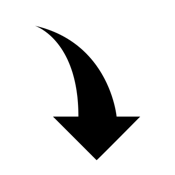
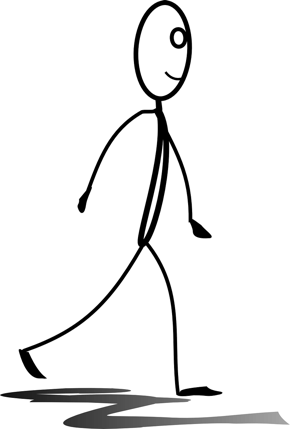
What is the evidence that my thought is true? What is the evidence that it’s false?

What is the worst thing that could happen? Could I live through it?

**THOUGHT**



**REACTION**



Activity 10: The Power of Gratitude

Even in highly stressful situations like the pandemic, natural disasters and personal challenges, there are positive things that occur. When we can turn off the TV, get outside, cook or spend time with our family, we can notice a shift in how we feel. It may help when we can notice the feel of fresh air outdoors, smell flowers and trees or move our bodies by stretching, walking and biking.

As a group, let’s take turns sharing three positive things you have experienced today and one thing that you are looking forward to tomorrow.

*Give time for participants to discuss.*

What was this exercise like for you? Did anyone have trouble coming up with something? How do you think it might be helpful to practice gratitude regularly? *Add that practicing this simple exercise daily is proven to increase happiness and provide a buffer from the effects of negative emotions. The more specific that they are in their examples the better.*

Here are some suggestions for how you can make gratitude a part of your daily life, even during these uncertain times:

• Write down things you’re grateful for on paper or on your computer or phone. It’s great

to get into a daily habit of this.

• Share your daily list with a friend or family member as part of your routine. Ask the other person to share three good things from their day.

• Ask each family member to state one thing they are grateful for during a family meal.

Does anyone have other thoughts or ideas on how to create a daily routine for practicing gratitude?

Activity 11: Mindfulness Practice

*This activity does not have an accompanying slide or handout.*

You’ve likely heard about the idea of “mindfulness” or “living mindfully.” But, can anyone

explain it means exactly? *Allow for responses.* The simplest definition of mindfulness is paying attention on purpose without judgement in the moment.

Being mindful means being present in your daily life. Often – and especially when we are under significant stress – we function on “autopilot” and go through the daily motions without paying close attention to ourselves, our surroundings and others. This saves us valuable

energy when our reserves are low, but it also causes us to miss out on important cues that our bodies give us to tell us when we are overwhelmed and need to take better care of ourselves.

By learning to stay mindful, even when we are navigating difficult times, we can improve our ability to recognize and meet our needs, to enjoy the moment and find positivity, to build and

maintain healthy relationships, to concentrate on our work, to be creative and to properly react in high-stress situations.

Let’s explore mindfulness a little more deeply and do some exercises.

Since mindfulness is about staying in the present moment, there are many ways you can practice and train your brain to stay connected to your immediate surroundings rather than getting lost in the past or worrying about the future. One way to do this is to bring your attention to your breathing.

Let’s start by getting comfortable in your seat. You can either close your eyes or find a point to focus your gaze. For the next few minutes, focus on your breathing and nothing else. Go at your own pace, thinking about the in breath and the out breath and the pauses in between. Notice where the breath enters the body and where it leaves the body. Notice when your mind wanders. Refrain from judging and simply bring your attention back to your breath. Whenever you’re ready, begin your mindful breathing.

*Allow participants to do this for 2-3 minutes. Then, gently bring their attention back to the group.*

What was that exercise like for you? Was it challenging for anyone? *Allow for discussion.*

Try practicing this exercise throughout your day. When you notice your mind wandering, gently bring yourself back into the present moment. It might help to carve out a dedicated time to practice mindful breathing. You can also practice mindfulness in other ways, such as mindful movement and mindful eating.

Every time you practice mindfulness, you are building new pathways in your brain and growing your mindfulness muscle. It might be tough initially, but, just like any muscle, the more you exercise it, the stronger it will get. Be easy on yourself while you are learning and practicing.

Activity 12: Body Scan

*This activity does not have an accompanying slide or handout.*

There is a strong connection between our brains and our bodies, and this becomes increasingly apparent when we are under significant stress. When our minds interpret something as stressful, we feel it in our bodies. And, on vice versa, when our bodies react in certain ways, it can be a good indicator that there is a stressor we need to pay attention to. Has anyone experienced something stressful and felt it in their body? What kind of reaction did you have?

*Allow time for discussion.*

Though you might feel disconnected from your body during times of stress, with practice, you can start to easily identify where you are feeling stress and thus learn to identify reactions to

certain setbacks and achievements that you might not even recognize. Knowing yourself both emotionally and physically will help you make adjustments as you work toward improving aspects of your life that you would like to work on. Let’s try a body scan exercise to help you practice identifying what’s going on physically in your body.

We often forget to pay attention to how our body is physically feeling as we experience different emotions. This exercise can be changed to either allow you to slowly tune in to each part of your body or to be a quick check-in with yourself that can be done throughout the day.

Start by getting into a comfortable position. Feel free to close your eyes or focus your gaze on the floor. When you are doing this activity on your own, try to eliminate distractions if possible.

Bring your focus to your breath. Notice how it feels as you breathe in and out. Relax your entire body as you continue breathing slowly in and slowly out.

*Allow them to do this for a minute or two.*

Now bring your awareness to your body, starting with your feet. Focus on how your toes feel, the bottom of each foot, your heels, ankles and the tops of your feet. As you move through each body part, think about how each one feels, noticing any pain, discomfort, numbness or other feeling. Don’t worry about any feelings you notice, just note them and move on.

Now bring your awareness up your legs, focusing for a moment on your shins, then your calves, then your knees and then your upper legs. Be sure to continue breathing deeply and calmly. Notice your lower back and your upper back. Now, focus on your stomach, chest and shoulders. Breathe in deeply and then out again. Bring your attention to your neck, your face and head. Pay special attention to your jaw and eyes, noticing any tightness or tension you might find there. Now, end by taking a final deep breath in and out again.

*Give them time to rejoin the group.*

Does anyone want to share what that was like for them? *Allow for responses.*

When you practice this on your own, think about which areas of your body feel tense or painful. The more you do this, the more you’ll start to see where you personally hold onto stress. These are places you want to focus on when doing meditation, stretching and breathing exercises. You can also gently tense and relax each muscle to bring focused relaxation as you move through you scan. A quick body scan each day can help you take note of where your body and stress levels are, and a long body scan can bring calmness and relaxation.

Section 4: Application

*This segment offers the opportunity to provide of a brief summary of what you and the participants have discussed. Have participants review the module. Ask them what they will take with them.*

As we wrap up our discussion today, I/we am going to ask you to rate your stress level again *(if you did the stress thermometer activity during the workshop). Display Handout C on the screen and ask people to rate their stress level right now. Ask them to think about whether their stress level changed throughout the workshop and, if so, what may have contributed to that change.*

I/we encourage you to rate your stress level a few times per day during periods of high stress and a few times per week when things are more normal for you. When you make a habit of intentionally noting your stress level, you will likely notice some interesting patterns. As you use the provided resources and implement the tools we practiced today, it will help you manage your stress and cope in healthier ways.

*For the following, you may want to provide an example or use a specific example presented in the group. For example, if you find your stress level rises when you are interrupted while working remotely, you can try a quick breathing exercise before responding.*

Let's do a quick review. Can each of you please:

1) Name one thing that you learned from today’s discussion.

2) State when, in the next week or so, might you use some of the skills we have

discussed and practiced today? And,

3) Name one person you could talk to about what you have learned today?

*As with face-to-face workshops, this where we want participants to be specific and to the point; we want focus, not details. For example, if someone says, “I will listen to my partner,” try to get the statement narrowed down to something like, “I will try to spend at least five minutes a day listening to my partner and giving only positive, supportive feedback.” It is important to help participants make their statements specific. They should be concrete, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited (SMART goals).*

Section 5: Closing Matters

*After participants have identified their “next use” of the skills, share the process for giving an evaluation:*

Responding to the challenges of high-stress periods requires a quick response to change. We want to continue providing a module that can best support and prepare others to meet those challenges. Please click the link in the chat box to take a short survey about your experience today. *Ask your technology host to do this.* We will also be emailing you a link to the survey along with the handouts we reviewed today and some additional resources.

As you continue to navigate challenges in your lives, know that the Red Cross is here to support you. You can contact your local Red Cross for additional needs and the Red Cross Hero Care Center for emergency requests.

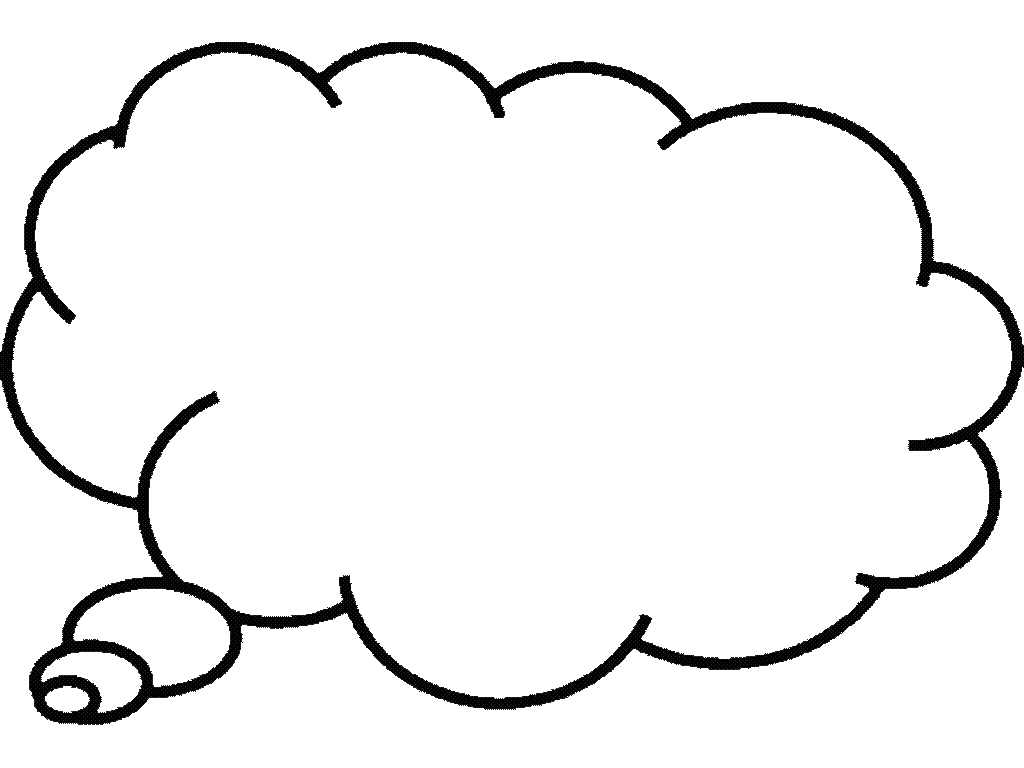
Thank you for participating in this workshop today. Even through virtual connection, we can continue to support one another and maintain healthy relationships. We encourage you to use these skills to help you reduce stress during difficult times and to improve your quality of life

to improve your overall health and wellbeing.

Appendix A: Handouts

Handouts follow on subsequent pages.

Handout A: Defining Stress



Handout A: Defining Stress

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

• What is stress?

• What does it mean to “be stressed?”

• Is stress the same for everyone?

• What is the opposite of being stressed?

• Do we need stress?

• Why do you think stress is so common?

• When you are discussing your day, what stands out more, the things that went well or the things that didn’t go well?

• In what ways is your stress heightened during certain events, scenarios or times of year?

Handout B: Signs of Stress

These are examples of how stress can manifest itself.

Thinking

• Difficulty concentrating

• Poor memory

• Increased worry

• Preoccupation about a situation or event

• Focusing on the negative

Spirituality

• Loss of purpose

• Questioning the meaning

of life

• Loss of faith

• Questioning belief system

Emotions

• Anger

• Agitation

• Moodiness

• Depression

• Irritability

Relationships

• Reduced intimacy

• Increased conflicts and fighting

• Impatience

• Feeling Isolated or disconnected

Behaviors

• Withdrawal from friends and family

• Starting arguments

• Changes in sleep

• Changes in appetite

Work

Physical

• Headaches

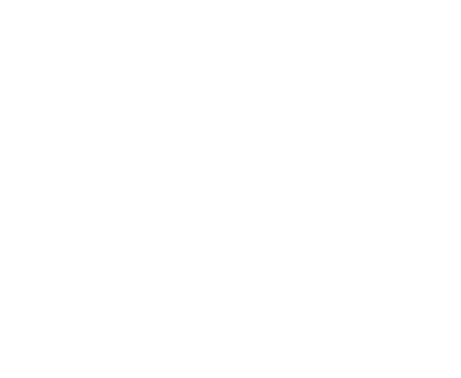
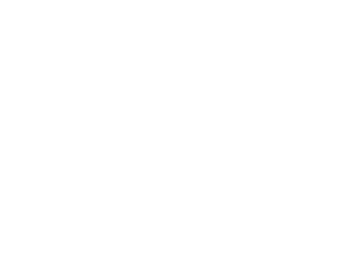
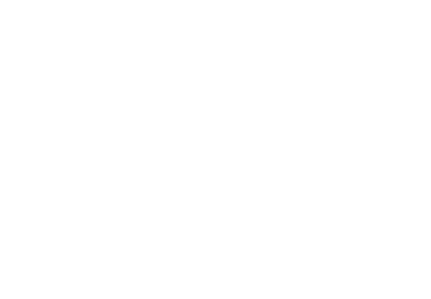
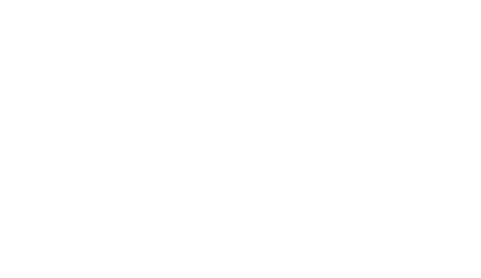
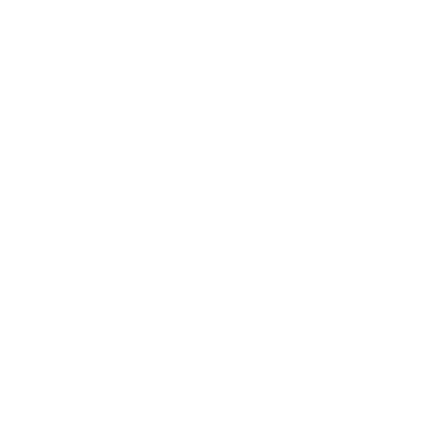
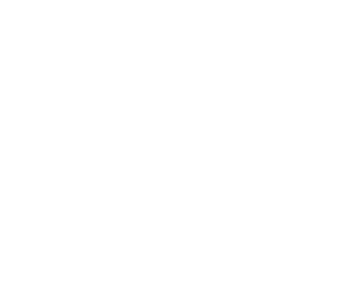
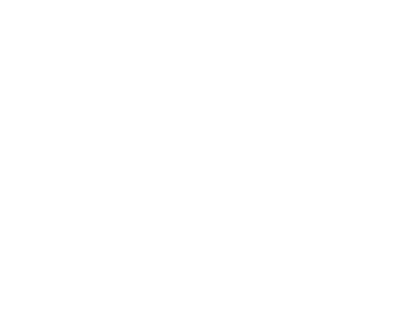
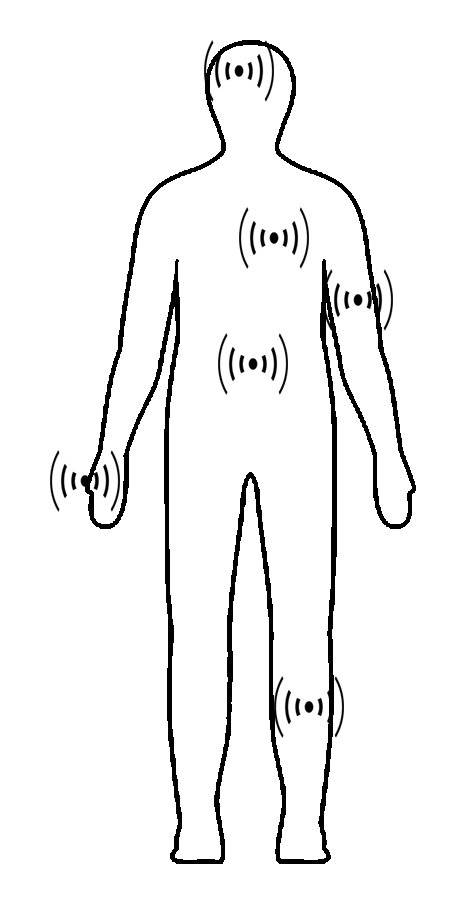
• Stomach pain

• Tense muscles

• Digestive issues

• Fatigue

• Clenching jaw/teeth



grinding

• Substance use

• Decreased motivation

• Task avoidance

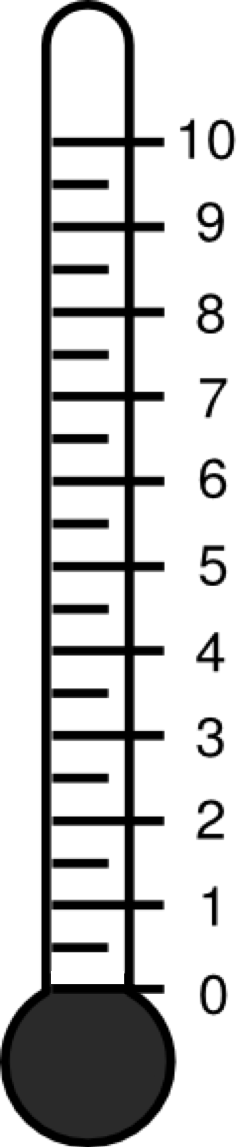
• Low morale

• Frustration

• Burnout

Handout C: How Stressed Am I?

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



**Most Stressed**

**Ever!**

**Not Stressed at All**

Handout D: General Points to Consider for Effective Communication

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

Be respectful and calm. Stop what you are doing, and pay full attention to the other person. Talk about emotional issues when you are calm, remembering that you may be more stressed than usual in certain situations. If efforts to resolve a conflict are not working, take a break

and set a time to revisit the issue when both of you have cooled down a bit. *What are some*

*specific challenges you are having around communication in your house and with others?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Listen carefully and pay attention to others. Seek Clarification. If you are unsure about what is

being said or asked of you, ask for clarification. Try to maintain a respectful sense of humor.

Handout E: Quick Relaxation Exercises

Exercise 1: Deep Breathing

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

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

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

How did this feel? Did you feel yourself relaxing? What sensations did you experience while taking deep breathes?

Exercise 2: Hand Trace

Start by holding out your left hand, palm up. Now, take your right index finger and run it along each finger on your left hand. Inhale slowly and smoothly as you move toward the tip of each

finger. Hold your breath for a second or two at the top of each finger, and then exhale as you move back down toward your palm. Switch hands, and repeat the exercise.

Handout F: Things I Can Try to Reduce My Stress

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

 Breathe in slowly for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7, release for a count of 8

 Prayer or meditation

 Massage your face, head or shoulders

 Call or text someone who makes you feel good or laugh

 Take a hot shower or soak in the tub

 Listen to music

 Watch a clip of a comedian you like

 Read a magazine or book

 Think of a pleasant or funny memory

 Repair or tinker with things around

the house

 Make something new out of something old

 Organize or clean something

 Start a new hobby

 Draw, paint or doodle

 Learn something new

 Knit, crochet or needle point

 Change the linens on your bed

 Rearrange a room

 Play an instrument

 Do a craft project

 Cook a new recipe

 Organize the “junk drawer”

 Watch a movie, concert or sport

event

 Mail someone a card or letter

 Daydream

 Make a bucket list

 Dance, sing, act

 Make someone laugh

 Hold a virtual coffee chat with

friends

 Play a game alone, with your family or virtually – try a social game app

 Do a quick stretch

 Look at photos

 Do a jigsaw puzzle, sudoku or crossword puzzle

 Google something uplifting

 Savor a warm drink

 Find volunteer opportunities

(volunteermatch.org)

 Take a continuing education course

 Make a “Top Ten” list of your

favorite things (Ex: Favorite movies)

 Exercise

 Do something nice for someone

 Join a discussion group or book

club

 

 

 

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

SET YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

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

MONITOR YOUR USE OF SCREENS

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

CREATE A SOOTHING SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

• Keep your room dark and quiet. Your body has its own natural sleeping and waking clock. It wants to be active when it’s light and at rest when it’s dark. Try a sleep mask or room-darkening shades to block outside light.

• Find a comfortable temperature, as extremes can disrupt your chances for good sleep.

Cooler temperatures tend to be better.

• Make sure you have a “good” bed and pillow, ones that are right for you.

• Develop and practice a relaxing routine before bedtime. A warm bath, light stretching, listening to soothing music and reading are all activities that can help you find your “off switch.” It is best to save intensive workouts for at least three hours before sleep, as it can energize your body and awaken your brain.

• Avoid using your bed and bedroom for watching TV, laptop use, cell phone use, eating, etc.

• Don’t make bedtime the time to solve your problems. Make a “to-do” list for the next day, and then try to clear your mind. Sometimes, a phrase or short poem that you can recite to yourself may help clear your mind. For example: “Don’t fight with the pillow, but lay down your head, and kick every worry out of the bed.”

• Take a couple slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU EAT AND DRINK

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

• In the late afternoon and evening, avoid caffeinated drinks. Caffeine can remain in your system for up to 14 hours and increase nighttime awakenings.

• Avoid big meals right before bedtime, but don’t go to bed hungry. Try to drink fluids at

least two hours before bedtime, as a full bladder can interfere with sleep.

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU TOSS AND TURN

• If you can’t fall asleep within 30 minutes, go to another room and do something restful until you feel sleepy again. Don’t read in bed. If you want to read, get out of bed, and sit in a chair. Try not to expose yourself to bright, intense light, such as electronic devices, since that can “reset” your internal clock and keep you up.

• Don’t have a visible bedroom clock. “Clock watching” tends to intensify the misery of

sleeplessness.

• Avoid naps during the day if you are having trouble sleeping at night.

• Try progressive muscle relaxation. Get into a comfortable position and move through each muscle group, tensing and relaxing the muscles as you go. After, take several deep breaths.

• Try listening to a guided visualization meant to relax your body and mind.

Handout H: Soothing Stress with My Five Senses

Things I Like to See

• Trees and flowers

• Art

• Family pictures

Things I Like to Hear

• My favorite playlist

• Birds chirping

• My favorite comedian

Things I Like to Taste

• Home baked cookies

• Hot cocoa

• Mint gum

Things I Like to Touch

• Hot shower

• Sun on my face

• Grass under my feet

Things I Like to Smell

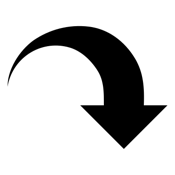
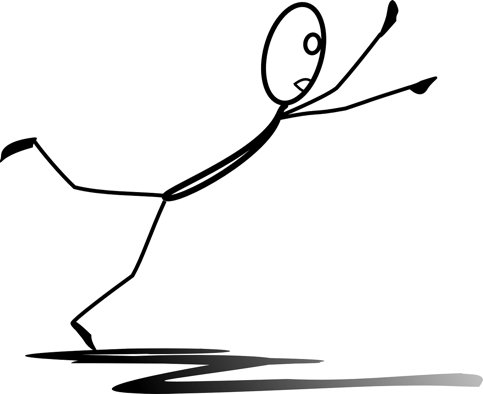
• New rain

• Clean laundry

• Bonfire

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Handout I: Taking a New Perspective



**EVENT**

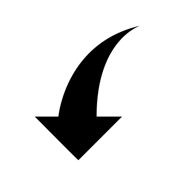
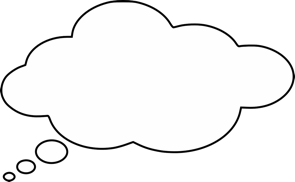
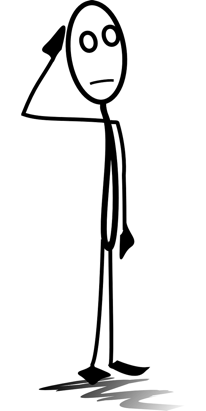
Check Your Thinking!

Besides my first thoughts about why this happened, can I think of 2 other reasons to explain it?

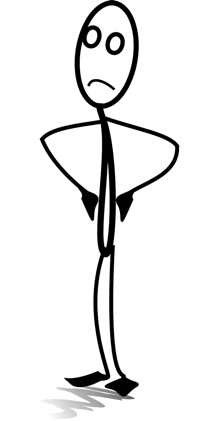
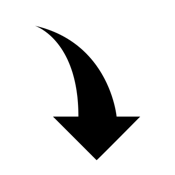
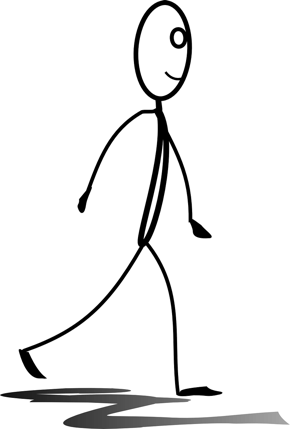
What is the evidence that my thought is true? What is the evidence that it’s false?

What is the worst thing that could happen? Could I live through it?

**THOUGHT**



**REACTION**



Appendix B: References

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