

# Strategies to Navigate Stress and Build Resilience

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# Objectives

- Build optimism and positive emotions
- Manage counter-productive thinking
- Practice mindfulness
- Re-think stress

# Opportunities to use these skills

## **When you're experiencing counter-productive thoughts**

- Your mind starts wandering to all the 'what ifs' associated with changes at work, or what will happen if the tension at home continues to rise.
- When your thoughts are overly negative in nature, causing you to think that things are out of control or going to end in a worst-case scenario (e.g., "I can't do this anymore" or "This will never get better").

## **When your emotions are undermining your resilience**

- You're on the frontlines of the pandemic, and you find that you're so anxious and/or overwhelmed by the end of the day that you feel completely helpless, distraught, or run down.
- You notice that you are more irritable and find yourself feeling angry on a daily basis, **When you notice your behaviors aren't consistent with who you'd like to be**
- You find yourself more likely to get into an argument with a spouse or loved one.
- Your fuse is significantly shorter with your children, and you find yourself yelling on a daily basis.
- You are having a more difficult time feeling motivated, getting out of bed, or sticking with your normal routine.

# Optimism & Positive Emotions

# Optimism and Positive Emotions

## Optimism

- Research shows that optimists:
- Are happier and have less depression
- Are healthier (fewer illnesses, faster recovery, live longer)
- Are seen as better leaders
- Have stronger relationships
- Perform better under pressure
- Are more successful in school and work

## Positive Emotions

- Help us feel more calm (e.g., faster cardiovascular recovery)
- Help us think more creatively (e.g., vary the types of thoughts we have and our ability to use different, complex material)
- Helps us build more personal resources( e.g., relationships, skills, and knowledge)

# Positive emotions

- Counter-Productive Response
  - Notice if your brain starts to runaway with ‘what ifs’ or if you start to experience high levels of worry, anxiety, or stress.
- Positive Emotion Strategy
  - Pre-plan a strategy to give your brain and body and intentional boost of these benefits.
- Re-Focus on the Problem
  - Think of what is most likely to occur, and plan to deal with the outcomes. If you have no control over the problem, plan to deal with the emotions you’re experiencing.

# Three good things

Name, journal, or discuss three good things that have happened each day. Don't stop there! Reflect on why each of these items made your list. Think about what the good thing means to you, why it happened, or how someone in your life contributed to the good thing. For example:

1. *My spouse brought dinner on his way home.*

- Reflection: I'm really grateful that my spouse took the time to think about dinner, even though they worked all day. They remembered my day was going to be hectic and took care of the decision for me. This allows me to easily transition home and help the kids with their homework.

2. *The weather was great and I was able to take my dog out for a long walk.*

- Reflection: I felt so much more relaxed after spending some time outside in the fresh air. I also have been really proud of myself for taking 20 minutes out of my day to ensure I'm still getting exercise. I also love being able to see my dog swim in the lake, and it's been rewarding training her to walk next to me on the leash.

3. *I spoke to my best friend on the phone.*

- Reflection: I am grateful that my friend took the time to check in on me. She asked me about a couple projects I was working on with work and checked-in about how my kids are doing over the summer break. She always reminds me of what is important in my life and I appreciate the friendship we have maintained over the years.

Research benefits of naming three good things on a daily basis:

- Better health, better sleep, and feeling calm
- Lower depression and greater life satisfaction
- More optimal performance
- Better relationships

# Managing Counter-Productive Thinking



# Air technique

- Aware
  - Identify triggers in advance; notice counter-productive thoughts in the moment.
- Interrupt
  - Physical cue, deep breath, or positive emotion strategy.
- Replace
  - Pre-plan replacement thoughts or shift to a more productive thought in the moment.

# Practice Mindfulness

# What is mindfulness?

- The practice of mindfulness is the ability to pay careful attention to what you're thinking, feeling, and sensing in the present moment without judging those thoughts and feelings as good or bad.
- Mind wandering – 47% of the time, people are thinking about something other than what they're currently doing (e.g., worrying about the future, dwelling on the past). We are less happy when our mind wanders, even when we're thinking about something “positive”.
- When you notice that your mind is wandering, instead of judging your thoughts, embrace uncomfortable thoughts/emotions as a part of life and return to the present moment.
- Countless studies link mindfulness to benefits like better health, lower anxiety, and greater resilience to stress.

*The following techniques will help us re-focus a wandering mind back to the present moment. The more you practice these techniques, the easier it will be to remain present.*

# Practicing mindfulness: three strategies to try

## **Thought Log**

- When you notice your mind is wandering, write down the thoughts that keep you from staying present focused (e.g., journal the thoughts that are causing your mind to wander)
  - No need to judge the thoughts, just get them on paper
- The log can help you become more aware of certain situations that really test your mindfulness.

## **Body Scan**

- Deliberately checking in with your body. Where is there tension? Where are you able to release the tensions? How shallow or deep are your breaths?
- You can also incorporate mindful breathing into this exercise. Take deep breaths and pay attention to how your lungs expand and contract, the temperature of the air as you inhale/exhale, and any changes in tension in your body

## **Present Scan**

- Whatever you're doing, do it with awareness (e.g., cooking and stirring the pot, brushing your teeth, taking a shower)
- Learn to immerse yourself fully in the present moment (see activity on the next slide)

# 3x3 grounding exercise

## **3 Things I can see**

- I can see the tree out the window
- I can see the dog laying on the floor
- I can see the coffee mug on my desk

## **3 Things I can hear**

- I can hear the fan spinning
- I can hear my kids playing in the other room
- I can hear the air conditioning humming

## **3 Things I can feel**

- I can feel the shoes on my feet
- I can feel the weight of my phone in my hands
- I can feel the watch against my wrist

# Re-Think Stress

# What is your current stress mindset?

## **Stress is harmful**

The effects of stress are negative and should be avoided.

### **People with this mindset tend to:**

- Distract themselves from stress instead of dealing with it
- Focused on getting rid of stress (may turn to alcohol or other substances)
- Withdraw their energy and attention from the stressor
- More likely to become depressed over the following decade

## **Stress is helpful**

The effects of stress are positive and should be utilized.

### **People with this mindset tend to:**

- Accept the stressful event and plan a strategy to deal with the source
- Be less depressed and have more energy
- Be more satisfied with their lives
- Have fewer health problems
- Be happier and more productive at work
- Have greater confidence in the ability to cope with challenges
- Find meaning in difficult setbacks

# The benefits of the stress response

- Challenge Response
  - A boost of energy and an increase in your ability to focus. You feel courageous, confident, motivated and are able to rise to the challenge
- Tend and Befriend Response
  - . Increased empathy for others and a sharpened sense of intuition. You are more likely to trust others, and courageously help to protect others you care about.
- Learn and Grow
  - After a stressful event, you experience strong emotions and/or mixed emotions with a desire to make sense of what happened. You replay/analyze the experience in your mind or talk to others about it.



# Rethink your stress mindset

- Bring to mind a recent experience that you would describe as stressful
  - e.g., a tough shift at work, a difficult conversation with a loved one, a financial set-back
- Look at the different benefits of the stress response on the previous slide – were any of those elements present during or after the stressful event?
  - Take a moment to describe, in writing, what elements of the stress response you saw
  - Discuss your thoughts with a colleague, friend, or loved one
- The next time you experience stress
  - Acknowledge the stress when you experience it
  - Welcome the stress – it is a natural response to something you care about
  - Shift thoughts of “irritation” to thoughts of “meaning”
    - Journal about how daily activities that you may find stressful are meaningful to you/aligned with your values

# Your Employee Assistance Program

**Call toll-free or visit us on the web**

**24 hours a day/7 days a week**

**Thank you!**

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