



Managing Stress

Objective: this session will give tips on how to manage stress that all of us commonly face.

Contents:

This will cover the following:

- Understanding what is stress
- Understanding the reasons of stress
- Tips on how to manage stress



Note: It would be really helpful if for this session, the students sat around in a circle in their chairs or on the floor, with no table/between them. The change of structured seating makes for a great relaxed set up with better flow of communication.

This set up incidentally, is good for most attitude/behaviour workshops (not skill building ones like presentation skills etc.)

Facilitator to open by explaining the objectives and agenda of the session.

Exercise 1 : Ask the participants to share their own experiences and sources of stress.

How do you know you feel stress?

Facilitator asks people to discuss in groups of 3 and then share.

Hear what people say. Summarise as follows

Symptoms of stress:

- Feeling anxious, an ache in the pit of the stomach, irritable, or overwhelmed
- Having trouble sleeping, concentrating, or remembering things
- Experiencing headaches, muscle tension, or fatigue
- Losing interest in hobbies, social activities, not wanting to talk to anyone, not wanting to do your usual activities
- Eating more or less than usual, or having digestive problems
- In some extreme cases, engaging in unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, drinking, or drug use

Facilitator summarises:

The very first thing to understand, is that everybody experiences stress from time to time. EVERYBODY. There is no one in the world who does not feel stress—even plants and animals feel stressed. So, it is completely NORMAL.

So, now let us understand what exactly is this stress and why do we feel it.

Stress is like an extra bit of pressure that we feel due to some challenge we are facing in our lives. Stress is a natural response of the body and mind to the challenges and demands of life. Stress can have positive or negative effects, depending on how we cope with it. Some stress can motivate us to perform better, while too much stress can overwhelm us and affect our physical and mental health.

We all face such challenges, but each of us may respond in different ways. In some people, the same challenge can cause stress. So the key is how do we manage such challenges, how we think about it.

When you feel a bit of pressure, think about what could be causing it.

Some typical causes for young people can be:

1. Personal looks (my nose is too long, I am too fat, too short, too thin, etc etc.)
2. Academic performance (I am not good at Maths, I am not intelligent, my handwriting is rubbish, I am stupid, I am too slow, etc etc.)



3. Emotional issues (My mother is always finding fault with me, my father loves my sister better, I like that friend but s/he does not like me etc etc)
4. Facing abuse - physical, mental, trauma from family/friends/teachers/others
5. Other external use (some loved one is ill, too much work at home and no time to study, shift of house/city which you don't want, moving to a hostel which you don't like, money problems at home, etc etc)

Now, let us look at each of these, and see if you can tell me what is the solution in such a condition.

Facilitator takes each point and goes round the group, encouraging each person to speak up about how they would tackle such a stress if they ever felt it. Throughout the session, the Facilitator's attitude needs to be encouraging. It has to be an attitude which says to every child: 'You are wonderful, you are precious, you are special.' This is not to be said aloud, but expressed through the interaction.

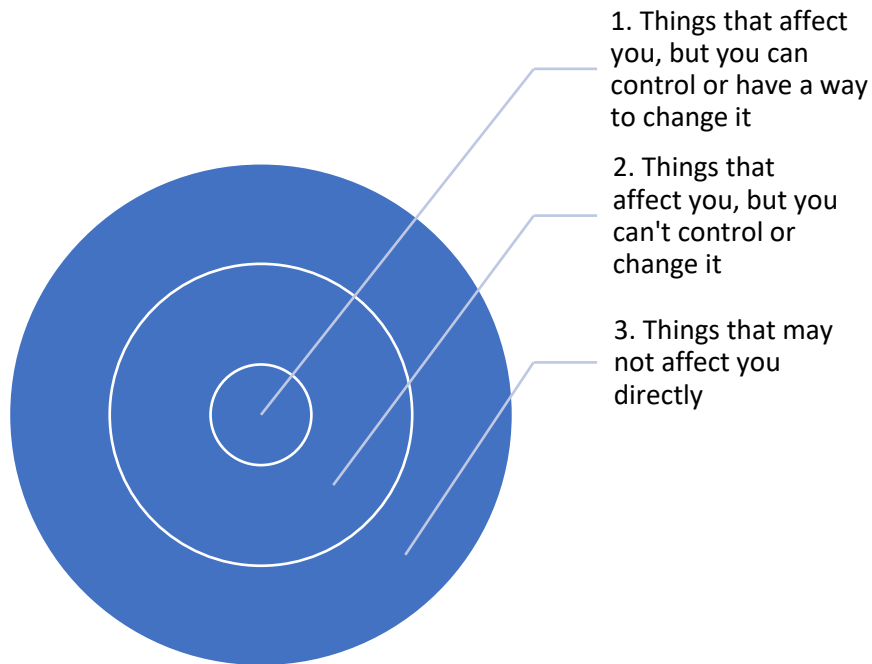
They will come up with their own answers to how they would tackle such a stress if they ever felt it.

What kind of situations are likely to cause stress in some people:

- unrealistic expectations- others expecting too much of you
- conflicting demands, - you are caught between two conflicting demands, for example studying and looking after the home or parents
- difficult circumstances- challenges at home, health issues of family members
- traumatic events, such as accidents, violence, or abuse
- include major life changes, such as moving, or losing a loved one or failed relationships
- other lingering problems, such as illness, financial difficulties, or relationship issues.

One of the main causes of stress is the perception of having little or no control over a situation. When we worry about things over which we have no control, it is likely to cause stress.

Facilitator to explain the diagram below- the three concentric circles. (This is optional- only if the Facilitator is familiar with it. Other option is to just say that there are some things we can control (our actions etc), and some we can't control (the illness in a family member)



Managing stress

Managing stress effectively requires identifying the sources and symptoms of stress, and finding healthy ways to cope with them.

Some common strategies for managing stress are:

1. Changing the way you think about an issue

Facilitator to explain how negative thoughts can trigger stress and how positive thoughts can reduce it. Teach the participants to identify, challenge and replace their irrational or distorted thoughts with more realistic and helpful ones.

Some Examples: For example, you did not pass a competitive exam. Instead of thinking the worst, think of other options you could explore.

Suppose you feel that your peers in a new work area are avoiding you and not involving you. Instead of thinking negatively and avoiding them, maybe it might help if you went to one of them and expressed how you felt. The other option is to be confident and go with another group of friends. The ideal is to reach a situation where you don't have a need to be included by others.

Someone in your family is very ill and you are spending a lot of time caring for them, but things are not improving. Again, instead of thinking that the situation will worsen, think of what alternate options you can explore for caregiving or medical help. (It falls into the second circle - what affects us but we cannot do anything about it. Except prepare our mind to face the situation when it happens)

2. Adopt a problem-solving approach

Effective problem-solving can help cope with stressors and prevent them from escalating. This of the issue as a problem to be solved.



Participants could follow a simple process: define the problem, and generate possible solutions to solve the problem, and then look for help to implement actions.

Another helpful thing I have found is to ask them, 'When is a problem a problem?'

Answer: When we declare it as a problem. When we give it the tag of 'problem'.

E.g. Two people receiving the identical news can react very differently. One panics and gets upset while the other looks at it and comes up with 3 solutions. Which would you rather be? How can you be that person?

3. Practising relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation

Activity 1: Breathing exercises. Demonstrate and guide the participants to practice deep breathing, abdominal breathing and alternate nostril breathing (pranayama). Explain how these techniques can calm the nervous system and reduce stress.

Activity 2: Progressive muscle relaxation. Demonstrate and guide the participants to tense and relax different muscle groups in their body. Explain how this technique can release physical tension and promote relaxation

4. Seeking social support from friends, family, or professionals

Talk with close friends or family members re the challenges you are facing. Find someone who you can trust who is a good listener and you find helpful. Talk to them.

If you need a friend, first be a friend to someone.

5. Expressing emotions in constructive ways, such as talking, writing, or crying

This is another strategy you can use. Talking about your challenges and pressures or writing about it helps you to express your feelings and clears your mind to find a solution. Even crying helps- don't worry. Its natural. But do it in a safe space- either alone, or with trusted friends or family.

6. Engaging in physical activity, such as walking, jogging, swimming, or dancing

7. Pursuing hobbies and interests, such as reading, writing, painting, or playing music.

8. Avoiding or limiting substances that can worsen stress, such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, or drugs.

9. Seeking help from a counsellor or therapist if stress becomes overwhelming or interferes with daily functioning

Conclusion: Summarize the main points and skills learned in the session. Reiterate that:

- we feel stress when we imagine or think of a situation as negative to us- more so when we think it is not under our control
- some amount of stress can however be positive as it helps us drive action
- but depending on individuals, for some this may appear as pressure
- everyone feels some stress- it depends on how you respond to it and manage it
- use all the strategies we discussed to manage it

Ask the participants to reflect on their learning and apply it to their daily lives.