

STRESS, ANXIETY AND COPING STRATEGIES



What is Stress?

Stress is defined by the way in which we **react** or respond to the stressors in our lives and not the stressors themselves.

www.psychologyfoundation.org

Stress: Beneficial, Tolerable and/or Harmful?

How does Stress Impact us?

Positive effect of stress:

Stress can be a positive force when our reactions to it are moderate and of short duration. This type of stress is part of life and in fact, it allows us, in moderate doses, to improve our performance in the short term. Examples may include a job interview, presenting in front of a large audience, throwing a party, etc. By learning to adjust to these situations and by paying attention to our thought process we can successfully manage ourselves in these situations, thus learning to be more resilient to everyday stressors.

Tolerable effect of stress:

Other times, stressors may cause a more serious but still tolerable stress response. These situations can have the potential of impacting the structure of the brain and our neuronal pathways of stress reactions, but the stressors are of short duration. Consequently, the brain can recover from this stress and undo the negative effect of the stress. Examples of these stressful situations may include a car accident, the news about the illness of a loved one, a difficult conversation with a colleague, etc.

Toxic effect of stress:

If the stressors that we are facing are more dangerous and when their duration is chronic, then stress may become toxic. This would include situations where we feel we have little control over the stressors that impact us. In fact, when our stress response is frequently fired up and stays fired up, such as in situations of chronic stress, the resulting toxic stress can negatively impact our brain chemistry, and affect our brain anatomy, especially in developing brains. More specifically, the impact can be the increasing or decreasing of our hypervigilance, which makes us either more or less reactive to normal stressors of life. Situations that may fall in this category include but are not limited to abuse, traumatic life events, etc. To summarize, over time, exposure to toxic stress can lead to an unhealthy hypervigilance to less harmful stressors in our environment, which in turn can lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms.

<http://www.psychologyfoundation.org> &
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

ANXIETY

Anxiety refers to fearful, apprehensive thoughts and feelings about what might happen.

Anxiety becomes problematic when worries and fears persist over time, are disproportionate to the situation (trigger or stressor) or are not age-appropriate and/or interfere with functioning in one or more areas of life (e.g., school, work, relationships, mood).

There are effective treatment approaches for anxiety problems and disorders. There are also a number of healthy coping strategies that, when practiced regularly, may help lessen anxiety and improve mental health. Coping strategies are most effective when work, home and learning environments are supportive and allow for accommodations when and if needed.

Good management strategies include:

1. Learning about anxiety and the body's stress response system (fight, flight, freeze) as we need to "*name it before we can tame it*".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcDLzppD4Jc>

2. Practicing and prioritizing self-care and healthy routines (e.g., eating well, getting sufficient sleep, exercising, taking work breaks, practicing relaxation, noticing and celebrating accomplishments, fostering positive thinking)

[Personal Resiliency one-pager](#)

3. Maintaining a good support network (e.g., friends, family, treatment support when needed, church group etc.)

Want to learn more? Visit:

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>



EVERYDAY PRACTICES SERIES

How to Respond, Not React to Stress?

Self-care 101! It's not about a magic wand, but healthy daily practice to support our well-being (Personal Resiliency one-pager)

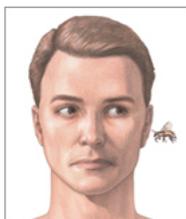
Mindfulness: is about being fully present, aware of what we're doing and not reactive to what is going on around us (<http://www.mindful.org>)

However...is mindfulness for everyone?

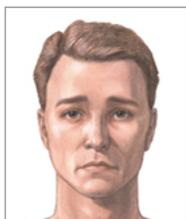
While the wellness committee highlights and promotes this practice, we also invite a critical lens to further our thinking related to this (and other topics). We invite you to:

1. Read the following article:
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-science-behind-behavior/201604/the-little-known-downsides-mindfulness-practice>
2. Then ask yourself or discuss with others:
 - a. What are my initial reactions towards this article?
 - b. If considering that mindfulness might not be suitable for all, how would I incorporate this lens for myself, for others?

Stress vs Anxiety:



Stress is caused by an existing stress-causing factor or "stressor"



Anxiety is stress that continues after the stressor is gone

Not all Stress is Created Equal!

Imagine stress as a glass of water that a person is holding in their hands. You may wonder how heavy the glass of water is. However, truthfully, the weight of the glass of water is not important. What is important is how **long** the person is asked to hold the glass of water.

For example:

- If a person is asked to hold the glass of water for a few minutes, there will not be a problem.
- If they are asked to hold the glass of water for a few hours, their arm will ache from holding the same glass of water.
- Finally, if the person is asked to hold that glass of water for a few days, without being able to put it down, the pain will be intolerable.

However, the more resources, strategies and practices we have, the more adaptive coping mechanisms we will be able to pull from to support us in "holding our glasses of water".

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS & RESOURCES

REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND EENET CONVERSATION STARTERS

There are many healthy ways to manage stress and anxiety. How do you manage?

What is happening in your board to support student and staff stress management?

Suggestions for Reading:

- The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook, Edmund J. Bourne

Some Websites to View :

- www.anxietybc.com (Audiences: Children, youth and adults).
- <http://www.amindfulsociety.org>

Apps to Consider:

- Mindshift APP for teens and young adults who want to manage anxiety <https://www.anxietybc.com/resources/mindshift-app>

Videos and Ted Talks:

- How to Make Stress Your Friend, Kelly McGonigal https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend
- Meditation lowers truancy and suspensions: www.edutopia.org
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9-phWL8t08>

QUIZ: "What's Your Stress Index"

- http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/whats-your-stress-index