



BACKGROUND NOTES: MANAGING STRESS, ANGER AND CONFLICT

Managing Stress

Stress occurs on a daily basis and can be healthy. At times stress can be overwhelming and we may have trouble dealing with it. Too much stress can seriously affect our physical and mental well-being. Over time, repeated stress can lower self-esteem, decrease academic performance and create a cycle of self-blame and self doubt. Stress is unique and personal to each of us. What is relaxing to one person may be stressful to another. The key to reducing stress is to find strategies that help you as an individual. The best way to cope with unhealthy stress is to recognize when your stress levels are building. Stress signals fall into four categories: thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical symptoms. When you are under stress you may experience the following feelings, thoughts, behaviours or physical symptoms:

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviours	Physical Symptoms
Anxiety	Self-criticism	Stuttering	Tight muscles
Irritability	Difficulty	Difficulty	Cold or sweaty
Fear	concentrating	speaking	hands
Moodiness	or making	Crying	Headaches
Embarrassment	decisions	Acting	Back or neck
	Forgetfulness	impulsively	problems
	Repetitive thoughts	Nervous laughter	Sleep
	Fear of failure	Yelling at friends	disturbances
		and	Stomach aches
		family	Fatigue
		Grinding teeth	Rapid breathing
		Jaw clenching	Pounding heart

Tips for Stress Management

There are many ways to manage unhealthy stress. Everyone needs to find ways that work best for them:

Take a Deep Breath. Stress often causes us to breathe shallowly and this almost always causes more stress! Try taking a minute to slow down and breathe slowly. Breathe in through



your nose and count as you breathe out through your mouth. Inhale enough so your lower abdomen rises and falls.

Talk It Out. When you feel stressed, try to express your feelings. Keeping feelings inside can increase stress. Share your feelings. Perhaps a friend, family member, teacher or religious leader can help you see your problem in a new way. Talking with someone else can help clear your mind of confusion so that you can focus on problem solving.

Take a "Minute" Holiday. Create a quiet place in your mind. You cannot always run away, but you can dream. Imagining a quiet place can take you out of a stressful situation. When you have the chance, take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a place where you feel relaxed and comfortable. Notice all the details of your chosen place, including nice sounds and smells.

Move! Physical activity can help reduce and prevent stress. When you feel nervous, angry or upset, release the pressure through exercise or physical activity.

Take Care of Your Body. Healthy eating and adequate sleep fuels your mind as well as your body. Well-nourished bodies are better able to cope with stress.

Laugh. Share jokes and funny stories with your friends. Laughter is good for you!

Know Your Limits. When in a stressful situation, ask yourself: is this my problem? If it isn't, leave it alone. If it is, can you resolve it now? Once the problem is settled, leave it alone. There are many circumstances in life beyond your control. If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at the moment, learn to accept what is, for now, until such time when you can change things.

Must You Always Be Right? Do you get upset when things don't go your way? Consider cooperation or compromise rather than confrontation. It may reduce the strain and help everyone feel more comfortable.

Have a Good Cry. It is normal for people of all ages to cry. A good cry during stressful times can be a healthy way to bring relief to your stress. However, crying daily can be a sign of depression.

Look for the Good Things Around You. It is easy to see only the negative when you are stressed. Your thoughts can become like a pair of very dark glasses, allowing little light or joy into your life. Decide to notice five good things around you. These can be positive or enjoyable moments or interactions.