

SOME STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES THAT YOU MAY WANT TO USE IN YOUR LIFE

Effective stress management begins with starting to take one small step at a time to change some of the unhealthy habits and patterns that you have been developing in your life up to now. Stress does not cause you to become angry, disrespectful, or abusive but stress can be a major contributor to becoming angry in hurtful and problematic ways (for some people). Below are some ideas that can be helpful in learning to address and handle the stress in your life more effectively, which can also assist you in learning to handle your anger more effectively. Try some of them out, start using the ones that work for you, and make these ideas a regular part of your ongoing life. Also think about incorporating some of these ideas in the *De-Escalation Strategies* portion of your *Escalation Prevention Plan* and in your *Anger Toolbox*.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP AND REST

- Go to bed early enough to get 7-8 hours of sleep in order to awaken refreshed
- Take daytime naps occasionally if you need to do so

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

- Be aware of what, how much, how, and when you are eating
- Decrease rich, salty, oily, and fatty foods
- Avoid tobacco, too much caffeine, excessive alcohol consumption, and drugs

ENGAGE IN REGULAR NON-COMPETITIVE AEROBIC EXERCISE

- Participate in walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling, exercycling, calisthenics, cross country skiing at least three times a week to release natural relaxing and pain-relieving agents (i.e. endorphins) that can help you in handling the build-up of stress in your ongoing life
- Strenuous exercise also releases adrenaline and cortisol, but in smaller and more manageable doses, which can help your body learn how to handle these hormones more effectively when they are released in other situations in your life
- Avoid creating more stress through excessive competition and the need to “be the best” at the any sports that you do choose to play

LEARN TO SLOW DOWN AND TRULY RELAX

- Give yourself permission to “escape” at times but find positive ways to do it
 - ...this desire to “escape” is a basic human need!
- Develop and use a variety of creative techniques to “get away from it all”
 - ...Take a hot bath/shower
 - ...Take a whirlpool or sauna
 - ...Have a massage
 - ...Practice deep breathing (in through your nose and out through your mouth)
 - ...Use progressive muscle relaxation (see an example of this in Unit I of this workbook)
 - ...Listen to calming and peaceful tapes, DVD’s, or on your iPod or cell phone (baroque classical or new age music, jazz, nature sounds)
 - ...Practice meditation/yoga/ta’i chi chih
 - ...Use visualization/imagery (e.g. your “quiet space” from the *Time-Out Plan*)
 - ...Use biofeedback/self-hypnosis

...Get out in nature and enjoy the “out of doors”

...some doctors are now even prescribing this for their patients as being outdoors in nature can decrease levels of stress hormones, lower blood pressure, promote movement and exercise, allow you to see and interact with other people (reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation), lift your mood and reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, lower levels of inflammation in your body, contribute to feelings of generosity and selflessness, offer you perspective on yourself and the world around you, and allow you to breathe fresh air to get away from pollution which is linked to respiratory problems and a variety of other medical issues

- Avoid using alcohol, illegal or prescription drugs, video games, the Internet, your cell phone, your tablet, your computer, and TV as your primary ways to relax and “take the edge off”

BALANCE WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR LIFE

- Pursue creative outlets and develop attention-absorbing hobbies
- Participate in interesting recreational activities
- Take time for vacations and “time off” in order to truly get away from all the “work” activities in your life
- Schedule “fun” and time with your friends into your life
- Give yourself permission to “loaf” and “kick back” occasionally

ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE

- Stay aware of what is truly important to you in your life (i.e. the priorities and values you have for yourself)
- Set realistic goals for yourself (short-term and long-term) and then GO FOR THEM!
- Get rid of the “CLUTTER” in your life (both material items and “emotional baggage” that may be adversely affecting your daily living)
- Keep your own calendar and work hard at not over-scheduling yourself
- Watch out for procrastinating (which just creates more stress and anxiety in your life)
...set reasonable time frames for getting things accomplished and then actually do them
- “Divide and conquer” when you have a lot to do and are feeling overwhelmed
...break up what seem like insurmountable tasks into smaller pieces and take on one thing at a time
- Get up earlier to make your morning less hurried
- Take advantage of “off-hours” times for shopping and errands

USE YOUR MENTAL ABILITIES TO ANTICIPATE AND MANAGE POTENTIAL STRESSORS

- Become more aware of the specific stressors in your life
- Start to anticipate and prepare more effectively for upcoming events and situations
...i.e. create a positive rather than a negative rehearsal for them
- Use more positive and validating self-talk to intervene in your negative, critical, blaming, hostile, cynical, and self-defeating thoughts

DEVELOP YOUR SOCIAL SKILLS AND AN EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Learn about and work to actively use:
 - ...open, honest, and respectful communication
...including being a good listener to what other people are saying to you
 - ...assertiveness skills
...i.e. find your “voice” (hopefully an effective and respectful one) and start to share important parts of yourself with others, to “stand up for yourself,” and to say “no” and set clear limits and maintain healthy boundaries whenever necessary

- ...effective conflict resolution strategies when disagreements do arise
- Stay current in talking about your hurts, resentments, and frustrations with others so that they do not fester and build, creating emotional distance between you and others
- Be an effective problem-solver
 - ...i.e. clearly identify the problem, choose a plan to address it, take action, and evaluate how well the problem has been resolved
- Develop and maintain close emotional ties with others and share your troubles and problems with those you can trust to be supportive and helpful with you
 - ...make the effort to have friends and confidant(e)s in your life
 - ...this can help you get sick less frequently and even live longer
- Look for and find a sense of community
 - ...e.g. through family and friends, recreation and hobbies, a place of worship, neighborhood and community connections and organizations, self-help groups
- Reach out to other people and take the time to connect, even with strangers
 - ...e.g. interact with friends, acquaintances, extended family, neighbors, store clerks, your postal carrier, and others as you go through your day to step outside yourself at times
- Some research strongly supports the importance of connecting emotionally with others:
 - ...Dr. George Kaplan et al have been following several thousand healthy residents of Alameda County in California for several years:
 - ...people with fewer social ties had higher death rates than those who were more closely connected to other people and groups
 - ...Dr. Dan Blazer of Duke University found that elderly residents of Durham, NC, who reported higher satisfaction with their social contacts live longer than those reporting lower satisfaction
 - ...James Pennebaker, a psychologist, found that people given the opportunity to talk with another person about a stressful life event experienced a reduction in their blood pressure

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

- Like yourself for who you are
 - ...i.e. know and accept your strengths, shortcomings, values, thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs
- Take healthy responsibility for yourself and your actions (**and your inaction**, which is also a choice that you make)
 - ...work hard to stop blaming others for what happens in your life!
- Focus on the positive aspects of your life and the things you have to feel grateful for
 - ...develop and nurture an “attitude of gratitude” about who you are and what you have in your life
- Give yourself ongoing credit for what you are doing and accomplishing in your day-to-day living
- Be aware of your unrealistic and perfectionistic expectations and standards for yourself and work at letting go of them
- Learn to ask for and to receive help from others
 - ...allow others to provide emotional support for you and to help you in more practical ways (e.g. a household or yard project)
- Forgive yourself for mistakes you have made and then work hard to learn from those mistakes so you don’t continue to repeat them
- Develop and maintain an affirming sense of humor about yourself and other people in your life
 - ...laughter can actually be strenuous exercise and can lower blood pressure, release endorphins to help you relax, decrease stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, and even activate your immune system

...some research that supports the importance of humor in people's lives:

...amusing someone will significantly reduce the likelihood that he or she will subsequently engage in acts of aggression

...initially, experiencing someone or something as funny will arouse you but eventually you calm down and sometimes your body becomes calmer than before you laughed in the first place (endorphins again!)

- Make warm and nurturing physical contact/touch with others a priority (e.g. hugs, handshakes)

BE GENTLE WITH OTHERS

- Accept and like others for who they are
- Be willing to accept what others are willing to offer and give you
 - ...VS. expecting them to give you exactly what you think you want or need
- Be open to others' perspectives and ideas and understand that they may be different from yours and that this is okay
- Identify and work at actively intervening in your desire to control other people
- Tell others directly how much you value having them as a part of your life and how important they are to you
- Avoid longstanding "grudges" and "feuds" by learning to forgive others for things they have done and things that have happened in the past
- Make amends and apologize for things you regret saying or doing with other people from the past and in the present

KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

- Develop a healthy spirituality and a connection to the larger universe and use it every day
- Get involved with causes and ideas greater than yourself
- Learn to acknowledge and accept what you can't control about other people and the situations that occur around you
 - ...think about and use *The Serenity Prayer* that is often used in Alcoholics Anonymous (written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr):
***"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference"***
- Learn to "back off" from situations when appropriate to avoid becoming defensive and reactive
- Work to assess the actual importance of what happens around you
 - ...ask yourself, ***"Will I even remember this situation that I'm feeling so stressed and tense about today in a year (or six months or one month) from now?"***
- Identify and keep in mind the real priorities that you have for yourself in your life
 - ...e.g. are the people in your life more or less important than the "issues" that are bothering you or the "principles" that are supposedly being violated when you become stressed, tense, and angry?
- Avoid simply worrying and "stewing" about situations
 - ...instead, **DO** something that will help you take care of yourself and the issue at hand!
- Actively seek to discover what your struggles in life can teach you
 - ...begin to reframe difficult times into positive challenges that can offer you the opportunity to change and grow
 - ...start to view your struggles and emotional pain as ways that you can learn more about yourself and make your life even better as a result