



Study/Facilitation Notes for Stress Management
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This section forms part of

The NCEF in Association with the IHF

**Fit For Life Lifestyle Management
Specialist Module**

This Module is accredited by the University of Limerick and carries 15 ECTS Credits



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Content of session :

- Stress and what it means to you
- Stress- positive and negative sides
- Types of stress
- Recognising symptoms of stress
- Stress proofing
- Relaxation

Aim of session: To recognise your symptoms of stress and how to handles stress effectively in your life

Learning outcomes:

- To recognise how you respond to stress
- To identify positive and negative sides of stress
- Daily hassles/stressors and how to reduce the effects
- Identify the short and long term effects of stress
- To practise relaxation technique to reduce stress response

Powerpoint slides

- **Slide 3**

Group work stress free world

Group activity: A totally stress free life 10 minutes

As facilitator your objective is to get the group to come to the conclusion that stress is impossible to eliminate and we all need a certain amount of stress to motivate us to get things done. Communicate this information to the group taking into consideration the composition and the educational level of the group.

1. Ask the group to pair off with someone they don't know very well.
2. Instruct the group as follows:

Take it in turns to describe your idea of a totally stress free lifestyle. You can be as wild and as fanciful as you like. It doesn't matter how crazy your ideas are. Let your imagination go!

3. Inform the group when it's time for the other person to speak. Make sure the instructions for this exercise are clear. Get them started by suggesting the following;

- Daily massage
- Lots of money and no work
- Hot bath and no kids
- Disposable plates

4. Get the group to feedback to the rest of the group

5. Ask the group what they would miss or what would be the disadvantages of a stress free life

6. Following this exercise the group should see that;

- Low stress/low demand lifestyles can be very boring or frustrating and can even cause stress
- There are demanding aspects of their lives that they would rather not change or give up
- Pressure or demands can be energising/motivating as well as stressful

- **Slide 4, 5, 6**

What is stress?

Research into stress began in the 1930s when doctors became interested in how stress related to illness and disease and in particular how the body responded to such factors as heat and cold.

Hans Seyle who did a lot of research into stress and how the body adapts to it (1936) described stress as the non-specific reaction that arises in demanding or challenging situations. Conditions in the environment that induce this reaction are labeled **stressors**. The bodily response to these stressors is what we call **stress**.

Stress is an individual matter. Some describe stress to refer to the pressures placed on them; others to the physical and mental consequences of those pressures. For some it is positive (eustress) while for others it can be negative (stress or distress) and cause them to develop illness and disease.

Distress is damaging and unpleasant stress. This type of stress can cause anxiety, fear, worry or agitation. This is a negative, painful feeling, something that needs to be avoided.

Eustress can be a pleasurable and satisfying experience and can increase mental awareness and heighten cognitive and behavioural performance. This is the positive side to stress and this stress can arise from planning a wedding, sports competitions or before a stage performance etc.

While stress is in an individual matter, it is also a societal issue in the sense that we all live in a society in which control is limited. Policy makers, governments, workplaces all have a part to play in limiting or causing stress.

Stress can therefore be defined as a mismatch between demands placed on us and our perceived ability to cope. All of us have demands placed on us: workload, relationships, deadlines, illness etc which we have to cope with. How we deal with these demands depends on our perceptions of the stressor and our ability to cope. Coping can depend on personality, experience, support, training etc.

A stressor triggers a stress response. Such a response is sometimes necessary for our survival. The stress response is not a danger to health per se but when it occurs repeatedly and intensively without periods of rest and recuperation in between, it can become dangerous to health.



- Slide 7

Sources of stress

Stress is an inevitable part of our existence. Everything in our environment can be a potential stressor but ultimately stress comes from within; how we perceive it to be and how we cope with it. Some stressors however are unavoidable and will affect most of us at some stage of our lives. These stressors are often known as **life events** and are crises that must be faced, for example, illness, bereavement, financial difficulties, marriage troubles etc. Other events require some adjustment such as a house move, or a change in jobs or dealing with a problem child. Most times after a

life event or period of trauma the individual is able to regain their sense of normality due to support structures from family, friends and professionals.

Our response to stress is activated to help us deal with these events be it major or minor. However if someone experiences too many life events during a short period, their ability to cope and adapt may be overstretched and can lead to ill health.

External stress

External stress can refer to any event or environmental stressor that causes a person to feel tense or causes a state of stress or arousal.

Relationships

Relationships with family, children, friends or work colleagues can cause stress. Other major life changes such as changing jobs, moving house, getting married, death of a partner or parent or serious illness can put significant stress on an individual.

Work

Work can cause stress or symptoms of stress may manifest even more.

Daily hassles

Daily hassles are life's minor events such as traffic, noise or arguments with colleagues, which occur almost daily and which can habitually generate a stress response.

Catastrophes

Earthquakes, wars, airplane crashes are all stressful events which affect large numbers of people

Finance

Financial difficulties such as making bill payments can be a significant source of stress for some people.

Internal stress

Internal stress can be a subjective response to a stressor. It can cause an internal mental state of tension or arousal. It is the emotive, interpretative, defensive and coping mechanism inside a person. Emotional responses are states of increased irritability, explosiveness and displacement of anger and frustration. Internal stress can also be caused by perception distortion of the stressor and it may even be possible that no threat exists but the person has misinterpreted it as such. Internal stress can promote growth and maturity but it can also produce mental strain. When cognitive, physical, or emotions have been stretched to the limit people may say things like " I just can't take this pressure anymore" or "I feel like giving up" or " I am cracking up."

Internal stress is often how we talk to ourselves i.e. **self-talk**. What we say to ourselves affects how we feel and in turn what we do. Self-talk is usually automatic. We don't decide to think of certain things- the ideas just pop up. We often don't

notice what the ideas are and don't question them or take an alternative view of the situation. This can be a problem if the self-talk or ideas are negative and are restricting what we do or make us feel bad. Self-talk, *the thoughts and how the situation is perceived*, can rapidly affect feelings, *the emotional response*. However, if we learn to talk to ourselves more constructively and in a positive manner we can change our feelings and actions for the better.

Slide 8

- **Job related stressors**

Causes of job related stress

- Demands of the job
- Control over work
- Lack of support from managers and colleagues
- Relationships at work
- Role in the organisation
- Change and how it is managed.

Demands of the job

Demands include issues such as workload, work patterns (shift work) and the physical work environment. Demands can often exceed employees' capacity and deadlines with limited time to complete the job can place stress on them.

Shift work can place stress on employees through changes in their sleep patterns, metabolic rate and mental efficiency. These reactions occur because of disturbances to their circadian rhythm i.e. their internal body clock.

Control over work

How much authority employees have over the way they work and high demands placed on them with little personal control can be stressful and can affect health. In addition restrictions on decision-making, initiative and creativity can be stressful on the employee.

Support from managers and colleagues

Support from management such as encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues can help alleviate stress, with the opposite causing stress.

Relationships at work

Promoting a positive working environment, working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour can reduce work stress, with the opposite causing stress.

Role

Role ambiguity and role conflict can cause workplace stress. Role ambiguity i.e. when employees are unsure of their exact role and unsure of what management expects of them can lead to low performance, low job satisfaction, anxiety, tension and desire to leave the company. Role conflict such as overpromotion, underpromotion and lack of job security can also lead to stress.

Change

Any change in the organisation and how it is managed and communicated can influence workplace stress. Inadequate supervision from management, internal politics and rigid structure add to the stress of the workers.

Psychological symptoms of work stress

- Anxiety, tension and confusion
 - Feelings of frustration, anger and resentment
 - Feeling oversensitive or undersensitive
 - Withdrawal and depression and suppressed feelings
 - Poor communication
 - Feeling isolated
 - Boredom and job dissatisfaction
 - Lower mental functioning and loss of concentration
 - Lack of initiative and creativity
 - Low self esteem
-
- Slide 9

Abdominal breathing exercise

Group work- Are you breathing correctly?

Ask the group to perform this abdominal breathing exercise test
Get the group to sit in a comfortable position in their chair or to lie on the floor.

Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest.

As you inhale and exhale observe the movement in your abdomen and chest.

If the hand on your abdomen rises as you breathe you are **breathing correctly** but if the hand on your abdomen is stationary then you are breathing incorrectly.

To practise the abdominal breathing technique follow the steps below. Stop breathing if you feel light-headed or dizzy and resume your usual pattern.

- Sit in a comfortable position, both feet firmly on the ground. Close your eyes, place your left hand on your abdomen and your right hand on your chest.
- Breathing normally, notice which hand moves as you breathe. Slowly count from one to four as you breathe in through your nose. Pause for two counts. They open your mouth and mentally count from one to six as you breathe out through your mouth
- As you breathe in this way, try to shift most of the movement toward your lower hand. Allow your abdomen to push your hand out as you breathe in and pull your abdomen in, letting your hand fall or move as you breathe out.
- After several minutes of slow rhythmic breathing, let your hands move slowly to your sides as your abdomen continues to move freely in and out with each breath. Slowly open your eyes and sit quietly.

This technique is excellent for emotional calming. Practise this every day to get the best effect. It will take about 10 weeks of daily practice before you will feel a difference.

Slide 10 & 11

Daily Hassles

A hassle is a minor event as opposed to a major life event, it can occur almost daily and which almost habitually generates a stress response. Daily hassles can include daily traffic jams, losing keys and not having enough leisure time etc. Research into the causes of stress confirms that daily hassles can be more damaging than the major life events. The stress caused by daily hassles accumulates because when we think of them in isolation we feel we can cope well. We don't often stop to add them all up. "The straw that broke the camel's back" describes the idea of daily hassles well.

Group work Daily Hassles -5 mins

Get the group to brainstorm on some of their daily hassles. Have them feedback to the rest of the group. To get the group started give examples that are real and that will help people to focus on daily hassles for example:

- Someone who regularly talks down to you
- Wet towels left in bathroom
- Photocopier that never has paper every time you go to print

Group work -Working through your daily hassles and dealing with them -20 mins

1. Get the group to work in groups of three
2. Ask them to sort out their daily hassles into three piles A B C
 - A** Planning your day differently to make better use of your time so to prevent them happening.
 - B** Those where, although the event could not be avoided, the amount of hassle it generated could be reduced
 - C** completely unavoidable hassle that you think you will have to live with
3. Ask the group to discuss how they would now deal with the hassle i.e. do they deal directly with the problem or procrastinate about dealing with the hassle.

For example: if towels are left wet in the bathroom, how do you respond?

- Curse and swear
- Shout at the person responsible
- Wash them
- Sit down with family members to negotiate ways of handling household chores
- Eat
- Smoke
- Take three deep breaths

Responses to this group work could be as follows:

Group A hassles: avoid them

Group A hassles are those that could be avoided by:

- **Negotiating a better arrangement** and being assertive about what you would like to see happen
- **Planning your day differently** to make better use of time and so to prevent them happening.

Group B hassles: reduce impact of hassle

Group B hassles are those where although the event could not be avoided, the amount of hassle it generated could be reduced. Consider the following;

Relaxation techniques: which dampen down or prevent your bodily responses to hassles and calm the mind so that concentration is improved

Self talk is something we do all the time. Replace defeatist talk with some positive or supportive self-talk and you will perceive the hassle in a different light.

Group C hassles: unavoidable

Group C hassles are completely unavoidable hassles that you think you will have to live with.

Consider suggestions made for group B but in addition

- **Reconsider whether the demands are unrealistic or even unethical** - are you being walked on, do you need to be more assertive
- **Review why these hassles are important** - are they linked to a greater good which you value highly, for e.g. looking after people close to you
- **Use as much practical and emotional support available** for e.g. can you avail of respite care for a family member if you take care of them.

As a facilitator you should communicate to the group the importance of spotting hassles and dealing with them appropriately. Recognising the cumulative and damaging effects that daily hassles can have on mental and physical well-being can motivate the group to think about ways to prevent them.

Slide 12

Physiological changes occur in our bodies when a threat is perceived or when we are in a stressful situation.

Short- term stress

Think about a sudden stress or threat you experienced recently. It could be something quite minor or it could be something like:

- Having an argument
- Just avoiding a road accident
- Fearing the safety of loved ones ("Help! they're late. Something terrible must have happened!")
- Suddenly realising that you have left your money at home when you get to the supermarket

Ask the group to choose one such event and get them to recall how their body felt as they reacted to stress.

- What did you notice going on in your body?
- Which parts of your body were affected?

Long-term stress

Now think about a time in your life when you were under long-term pressure and feeling stressed for weeks or months. This could have been:

- When you were taking exams
- When you first left home
- When you had a new job or were out of work

- When you were moving home
- When you had your first child

Notice that some of these examples describe something that you really wanted to happen but which was also stressful, Think back to that time and remember what your body felt like?

How do you respond to stress?

- Physically
- Mentally
- Emotionally
- Behavioural

Some possible signs of distress.

Many symptoms are not caused by stress alone, but stress may be a contributing factor.

Other symptoms may be almost stress-related. If a symptom becomes chronic you may wish to consult you family doctor.

Stressor response chain

The stressor response chain is a good system for analysing what happens between a potentially threatening event, the stressor, and the action the person takes. This model can be used to :

- Review points in the chain where changes will 'break the chain'
- To suggest various strategies that might be used at each of these intervention points
- To monitor the skills acquired for dealing with stressors

To explain the stressor response chain it is useful to look at the questions that will elicit a step-by-step account of how a person responds to the stressor. These include;

- 1) What actually happened? What was it about the event or situation that led you to feeling stressed?
- 2) How did you 'see' it? What did you say to yourself? How did you interpret what happened?
- 3) How did you 'feel' about it? What emotions were you aware of?
- 4) What changes did you notice in your body?
- 5) What action did you take? And how did this leave you feeling? Did it release the 'tension' or were you left feeling mentally and physically tense?

At each point in the chain the stressful responses can be 'broken' by an intervention that stops the build up of stress.

1. What actually happened? Change the threatening event

How to deal with it: Leave for work earlier to avoid the traffic jams.

2. How did you 'see it'? Change the thoughts

How to deal with it: Don't get upset by an argument with your loved one but see it as an opportunity to clear the air.

3. How did you 'feel' about it? Change the feelings

How to deal with it: Taking a criticism at work as a positive way of moving forward

4. What changes did you notice in your body? Release the tension.

How to deal with it: Go for a walk/cycle when feeling stressed

5. What action did you take? Harness your energy by choosing a different action response

How to deal with it: Be assertive about an incident rather than becoming angry or losing your temper.

Slide 13

Interactive session:

Slide 14

Physiology of stress

Stress is sometimes described as a lifesaving response to a threat to our physical survival. The stress response is always active to some degree to enable us to deal with everyday changes in the environment. When unusual or excessive demands, threats or challenges arise the stress response ensures that the body is in a state of alertness or readiness to deal with it. The changes that occur inside the body when a 'threat' is perceived is called the **physiological response to stress**. What happens with this response is as follows:

- The body gets ready to respond to what is seen as a threat. In extreme cases the body is prepared for 'fight' or 'flight'. But in less extreme forms this may happen many times in the day and some people hardly notice this happening in their body.
- The body receives a signal from the brain and gets ready to make a physical response. Many changes occur that enable the body to make immediate use of

energy and to stay aroused and alert. If a physical response is made the body soon recovers.

- Often the body gets tense and ready for action but no action is taken. Tension without action if happening frequently can lead to chronic stress. The person suffers from accumulating, undischarged tension.
- The changes in the body while useful in the short- term become damaging in the long -term. The body may also become more or less permanently held ready to respond in a '**warding**' posture. Continual 'warding' can cause long-term muscle and joint problems as well as chronic fatigue.

Bodily response to stress

- Adrenal glands secrete adrenaline which cause a rise in blood pressure and heart rate
- Glucose and fats are mobilised from the body's sugar and fat stores by the action of hormones and chemicals on the liver and fat tissues. Increased glucose and fats circulate in blood
- Adrenaline dilates the airway of the lungs so that air will flow more easily in and out of them. Breathing becomes deeper and rapid
- Blood drains from the skin leaving a pale colour
- Hormones trigger changes in bowel movements
- Salivary glands reduce their activity causing a dry mouth
- Sweat glands increase their activity causing a cold sweat
- Pupils dilate to allow more light into the eye, thus improving vision, especially in poor light conditions
- Muscles tense and contract getting ready for action
- Mental alertness increases leading to quicker thinking
- Muscles around the hair follicles contract causing goose bumps
- Blood clots more easily and blood vessels constrict leaving less chance of serious blood loss if injured.

Slide 15

Multimedia to illustrate short and long-term effects of stress

Short-term effects of stress

- Alert mind
- Dilated pupils
- Dry mouth
- Tension in shoulders & back
- Faster breathing

- Increase in blood pressure
- Sweaty palms
- Nausea
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Increased need to urinate

Long-term effects

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Burred vision
- Ulcers
- High blood pressure
- Excessive sweating
- High blood sugar
- Hyperventilation
- Palpitations
- Disturbed sleep
- Neck & back problems
- Bowel disorders
- Rashes, allergies
- Sexual difficulties

Slide 18

Stress and the heart:

Scientific research into the relationship between stress and heart disease has been ongoing for many years. Physicians, psychologists and people with heart disease all agree that stress plays a significant role in the incidence and course of heart disease, however, the precise nature of that role is complex and depends on the interaction of many factors both personal and societal. Stress is very subjective and therefore difficult to measure compared to high blood pressure and high cholesterol, both of which are known have a direct effect on the heart.

Hormones are produced as a result of the stress response. Although these hormones are useful in small amounts, too many of them, continuously and over time, can damage coronary arteries and may lead to high blood pressure. Blood pressure and heart rate increase in the short term and as a result the heart has to work harder to overcome the higher pressure and to pump more oxygen all around the body. With long-term stress the stress hormones which are not harmful over short periods may act to speed up coronary atherosclerosis by increasing clotting levels in the

blood, increasing inflammation of the coronary blood vessels, increasing blood lipids such as Low Density Lipoprotein cholesterol.

Stress can also affect the behaviour of certain people which may include:

- Increased smoking
- Changes in dietary habits
- Increased calorie intake
- Decreased physical activity
- Manifestation of increased hostility and anger
- Increased alcohol intake
- Higher coffee intake
- Changes in sleeping habits (poor sleep quality and decreased numbers of hours of sleep)

Many of the behavioural factors also influence the physiological factors for instance:

- Tobacco increases clotting levels in the blood
- Dietary habits affect blood cholesterol and obesity
- Exercise influences blood pressure, pulse and obesity

Slide 19 & 20

Physical activity: Be active for at least 30 minutes five days of the week. Walk briskly, cycle, jog, swim or enjoy any favorite activity. Build up your thirty minutes of activity over two to three shorter sessions, if you prefer.

Eat a variety of foods: Eat at least five or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day and cut down on fat, sugar and salt. Don't skip meals.

Reduce caffeine intake or switch to decaffeinated drinks: Taking in excessive amounts of caffeine is like being in a state of high arousal. Caffeine increases heart rate and may also stimulate the heart to beat irregularly. Too much caffeine is also associated with an increase in blood pressure. Caffeine is found mainly in coffee, tea, coca, drinking chocolate and cola drinks.

Quit smoking: Nicotine in a cigarette causes a temporary rise in heart rate and blood pressure. A smoker has two to three times the risk of having a heart attack compared to that of a non-smoker. Stopping smoking provides many benefits, both immediate and long-term, no matter what age. Smoking cessation services are available throughout the country for those wishing to quit; smoking cessation officers employed by the Health Service Executive run group sessions and one to one counselling sessions, while the National Smokers' Quitline (Tel: 1850 201 203) provides advice and support on quitting. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) may be an option for some people and studies show that the quit rates following NRT nearly double.

Avoid excess alcohol: Small amounts of alcohol may provide some protection against heart disease but excess alcohol can increase blood pressure and may damage the liver and heart. If you do drink, spread your drinking over the week, keep some days alcohol free and do not drink more than the recommended upper limits:

For men 21 standard drinks a week

For women 14 standard drinks a week

1 standard drink= ½ pint of beer stout or lager
= one small glass of wine
= one pub measure of spirits (whiskey, vodka or gin)

Adequate sleep: Get enough sleep and rest to recharge your batteries. Before going to sleep avoid caffeine, too much alcohol and a heavy meal as they may cause you sleep disturbance.

Breathing: Breathing is essential to life and breathing patterns often reflect our state of mind or emotions. We breathe between 16,000 and 20,000 times a day, so it can be a powerful tool in gaining some control over how we react to situations. Try the abdominal breathing techniques.

Relaxation: Every day include a relaxing activity. Try going for a walk, watching a movie, listening to music or reading.

Slide 21

Stress proofing- psychological factors

Awareness: Become aware of how your body and mind reacts to stress. Change your thoughts so that you 'see' it differently. Take a brisk walk or practise deep abdominal breathing to deal with stressful feelings.

Assertiveness: Consider assertiveness training to learn how to become assertive without becoming aggressive. A lack of assertiveness can lead to a feeling of low self-esteem and low self-confidence.

Willingness to seek support: Seek support from family, friends or work colleagues or talk to a counsellor if you want more expert advice.

Positive self talk: Catch yourself in negative talk and substitute twice a day with positive talk.

Time management: Take one thing at a time. Don't overdo things.

Personal time: Take some time out for yourself each day.

Training: Consider training to help you develop personal handling skills or to help you up skill at work.

Friends: Take time out to see friends. Sharing problems with friends and family can help you cope with the situation. Join a class or take up a new hobby to meet new friends. Agree with somebody. Life doesn't have to be a constant battleground.

Frequent short breaks: Take breaks away from work and home life and take extended breaks rather than short weekend breaks.

Learn to say 'no': Some people find it difficult to say no to requests from friends and work colleagues. It is important to say 'no' in the right way.

Slide 22

How to be assertive

Being assertive is an effective way of increasing coping skills. Assertiveness is a way of communicating effectively and it means being able to say what you feel, think or want but it is also about being able to understand other people's point of view and to negotiate and reach a compromise. Being assertive is:

- First deciding what you want
- Saying what you want clearly and specifically
- Supporting what you want by how you say it
- Not being manipulated or side tracked
- Listening to the other person
- Aiming for a 'win-win' situation

Slide 23

As a facilitator communicate to the group that time management is not about packing in as much work as possible.

If we manage our time well we can make time for relaxation, physical activity, friendships, and the other things that allow us to handle stress more effectively.

Time management

The aim of time management is to help you spend your time more effectively. It is about:

- Establishing priorities (look at what's important to you)
- Cutting out time-wasting
- Learning to say 'no' or delegate
- Making time to take care of yourself and handle stress
- Taking short breaks from routine tasks even if it means closing your eyes for a few minutes
- Concentrating on the task in hand
- Not cluttering your diary with appointments
- Never missing your lunch or tea breaks
- Not worrying unnecessarily about what might happen...
- Seeking help and support when the going gets tough

Slide 24

Quick body exercise

Read the script below to the group, giving them time to do the actions and to become aware of their body's response. As you go through the exercise, observe what signs of **warding** are present in the group. Feed these back to the group to increase their awareness of their reactions.

As you beginFREEZE, don't move a bit. Now pay attention to the position of your body and the sensations.

- **Can you drop your shoulders?** If so, your muscles were unnecessarily raising them.
- **Are your forearm muscles able to relax more?** If so, you were unnecessarily tensing them.
- **Is your body seated in a position in which you appear ready to do something active?** If so, your muscles were probably unnecessarily contracted.
- **Can your forehead relax more?** If so, you were tensing those muscles unnecessarily.
- **Check your stomach, buttocks, thighs and calf muscles?** Are they, too, contracted more than is necessary?

Unnecessary muscle contraction is called 'bracing'. Many of us 'brace' our muscles and suffer tension headaches, neck aches or bad backs as a result.

Now take a moment for yourselves to concentrate on just letting your muscles relax. Notice how that feels.

Slide 25 & 26

Self-talk is based on a form of cognitive behavioural therapy. Cognitive behavioural therapy has been defined as the art of using your head. The theory argues that our emotional reaction, i.e. the way we feel is determined by the way we structure reality- the way we see or interpret it. The stressor response chain is based on this theory.

Talking to yourself is quite normal and not a sign of madness!

Internal talk is like a running commentary and it may be formed ideas or whole sentences. For instance you may say 'I hope the shops are not too crowded' or 'I hope there will be no traffic'. You may also use pictures to sum up an idea. You might picture yourself in a queue and feeling stressed.

We should all aim to interrupt self-talk because:

- We're often hardly aware of it and how it influences our moods and behaviour
- It is usually private and we don't mention it to others in case it would appear foolish
- We get stuck in patterns of thinking, assuming that if something is wrong it is our fault

Example of negative talk

Self-talk: I cannot speak up at meetings as I feel too shy

Feelings: Anxious, lacking in confidence

Actions: Avoids talking at meetings

Slide 27

Have a look at the following and identify if you use these questions as part of your self-talk?

- **Am I over-generalising?**

Perhaps there are many queues in the shop and you say 'I always get into the slow queue'.

- **Am I taking responsibility for something that isn't my fault or is only partly my fault?**

Do you apologise when someone bumps into you? If someone doesn't see you or email you back in time do you assume you have done something to offend them?

- **Am I stuck in 'all or nothing' thinking?**

Do you think that because you are not very good at something that you must give up? Do you think that if you cannot get the holiday you wanted there is no point in going away at all?

- **Am I jumping to conclusions without enough, or any, evidence?**

Some people think they can mind read. 'When I saw my boss he was frowning, so he must be mad with me'. Or 'my boyfriend forgot my birthday therefore he doesn't love me anymore'.

- **Do I see something as catastrophic when it isn't?**

Are you overreacting? If you have a stain on your trousers do you tell yourself that everyone will notice it and you look ridiculous.

Am I ignoring or putting down the positive aspects?

Do you accept a compliment or a praise given to you or do you brush it off? Do you only look at what you did badly and not at what you did well?

Am I saying I should do something when I could choose not to do it?

Do you find that your self-talk includes... 'I should'... 'People should'... 'I ought to'... 'Or people ought' then you must stop to question it. There are some good reasons for the 'shoulds' but others are unhelpful causes of stress.

As facilitator get the group to examine their self-talk. Ask them to substitute positive talk at least twice a day.

Slide 28

Benson method of relaxation

The method of relaxation was devised by an American doctor, Herbert Benson who worked with patients that had high blood pressure. It is based on research which looked at the key factors in numerous Western and Eastern forms of relaxation and meditation. This research concluded that four key factors reduced the physiological stress response in the body. These were:

- Being in a quiet place
- Using a word or short phrase which should be repeated over and over again
- Adopting a passive attitude- just letting it happen rather than striving to relax
- Being in a comfortable position

Benson suggested using the word 'one' when teaching this method of relaxation. Tell the group that they can choose their own word once they have got comfortable with this technique.

Guidelines for learning the Benson method of relaxation

Prepare to relax

- Make sure you are warm. Use a blanket or extra clothes to do so.
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes
- Think about letting go of the tension in all your muscles, beginning at your feet and moving up to your face
- Think about loosening your muscles
- Allow relaxation to happen

Focus on your breathing

- Breathe through your nose
- Become aware of your breathing
- As you breathe out say the word 'one' silently to yourself (or another word, such as 'calm', 'peace' or 'easy')
- Breathe easily and naturally

Deal with distractions

- Distracting thoughts will probably occur. Do not dwell on these. Just return to repeating 'one' or your own word
- If you feel a tension in our in any muscle just let go

Completing the relaxation

- After relaxing for 10-20 minutes begin to bring your relaxation to an end
- Open your eyes and sit quietly for several minutes
- Then stand up slowly

Practise regularly

- Practise this technique once or twice daily but not for two hours after meal. Digestion can interfere with the relaxation response.
- Decide on a regular time to practice and aim to stick with it.

Finally

- Stress is part of our lives and inescapable
- Stress is not always bad
- It is how we perceive the stressor and our ability to cope that determines our stress levels.

CALM

Catch yourself getting anxious

Assert yourself by saying 'I can do' or saying 'no'

Long deep breaths

Muscular relaxation

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