

UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND HOW TO MANAGE IT WORKSHOP

SATURDAY 29TH JULY 2023



FACILITATED BY TRACY SMITHERS

STEP-BY-STEP COUNSELLING

www.stepbysteptherapies.co.uk

Hello name is Tracy, and I wanted to take the time to introduce myself to you. I have worked with adults, children, young people, and families, in a range of areas over the years. I started out as a nursery nurse, then trained as a counsellor, followed by a degree in youth and community studies. I've worked within schools, charities, and local councils. I've also worked in libraries.

As well as this I am interested in people's relationships with food and eating sugary/processed foods can impact our stress. I have a sugar-free blog, which was voted top 5 sugar-free blog in the UK in 2018.

Along the way, I have supported many people that have experienced stress in different forms including relationships, work, and financial stress. I have also learnt a great deal about how stress can impact our physical and emotional well-being. With this in mind, I decided to put this workshop together in order to help people understand stress, the impact it can have on their lives, and ways to manage it.

STRESS is something that many of us will have experienced in some shape or form in our life. Sometimes stress can be used positively to help energise or motivate us. On other occasions, it can have a negative impact on our lives. It is also possible to experience stress and not recognise we are stressed.

Stress isn't always an easy thing to manage or to understand which is why I decided to deliver the workshop and put this booklet together.

WHAT IS STRESS?

“Stress is the body’s reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure.”

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/>

The website goes on to mention that when stressed our body releases a hormone called adrenaline. This is often known as a fight or flight response, which means that we either run/leave a situation causing us stress or we remain in the situation and fight it.

It can often be a case that people develop a pattern of whether they choose flight or fight based on childhood experiences, life circumstances, or trauma.

Not all stress is a ‘bad’ thing sometimes it can be positive. It can motivate us, energise, and enable us through life. However, stress in its more negative form can have to impact our physical and emotional well-being, including our health, mood, relationships, behaviours, work, and experience in life.

Stress over a long period of time can lead to a huge impact on our daily lives, and overall wellbeing, and has the potential to develop into emotional exhaustion and burnout.

By understanding stress, and its impact, alongside having the tools to manage our stress, we reduce the risk of becoming burnout and exhausted.

ACTIVITY:

One way of releasing our STRESS is simply getting a piece of paper, and writing down everything that is causing you STRESS right now.

When you have done this, have a look at it are there any themes? Does the stress that you are experiencing belong to YOU? By this I mean, are you feeling STRESSED as a result of expectations or pressure that comes from others? STRESS can have a domino effect, and can be passed from person to person. When we pause, and reflect it might be that if this is the case, this is STRESS that we don't need to carry any longer. This can often happen when relating to relationships or to work-related STRESS.

If you see themes arising from your list these can be useful to explore in further depth at some point. However, if it no longer serves you, I invite you to get rid of your list if you feel comfortable doing this. Sometimes people find it helpful to burn or bin it. However, it's important to do what's comfortable for you.

TYPES OF STRESS:

Stress can vary from person to person, and also on the different causes of stress. However, stress appears to come under three areas.

ACUTE STRESS: This is when the body reacts to recent events, forthcoming situations, or a sudden situation arising.

EPISODIC ACUTE STRESS: When someone feels like they are always under pressure or getting things wrong.

CHRONIC STRESS: Continual stress which occurs over a period of time. This might happen as a result of stress in relationships, work, or financial issues. Chronic stress is when you are most likely to enter into a flight or fight response. Whilst experiencing chronic stress this is a period when your body and mind are more likely to be on high alert. This can have an impact on your overall health.

Some of the above information was found on the following website.

<https://www.good-thinking.uk/types-stress>

**There is a lot of different information online and from a variety of organisations on stress. If you are interested to know more, I have included a list of useful resources on stress at the back of this booklet.*

TAKE TIME TO CONTEMPLATE: *If you have experienced stress in the past or are currently experiencing stress, which type of stress do you most identify with? How has it impacted you?*

DIFFERENT CAUSES OF STRESS:

- Being under pressure
- Life events such as bereavement
- Worry
- Lack of control over a situation
- Responsibilities (feeling overwhelmed)
- Lack of work/other activities
- Bullying/Abuse/Discrimination
- Financial circumstances
- Poor diet (low in nutrients and high in sugar)

HOW STRESS CAN IMPACT OUR DAILY LIVES

- Lack of Sleep
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Digestive issues
- Heart problems
- Skin conditions
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling stuck and unable to move forward in life

**Please note that these are just some of the ways that stress can impact our lives. The impact of stress can vary depending on the individual, and the circumstances.*

TAKE TIME TO CONTEMPLATE. *Where do you experience stress in your body?*

MINDFULNESS ACTIVITY:

The process of Mindfulness is about noticing and being aware of what happens in each present moment. Being aware of our own thoughts, feelings, surroundings, and body in a current moment.

For this activity, I invite you to close your eyes, and take 3 deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. You can be seated, or laying down for these. Take time to be aware of your surroundings, what can you hear, what can you see, what can you smell, what can you taste, and how you are feeling.

At the end of the 2 minutes bring yourself gradually back into the room where you are laying or seated. What was the experience like for you? Were there any thoughts or feelings that came as a result of your experience?

**There are many good resources on Mindfulness if you would like to explore this further. One resource that you might find useful is a book by Mark Williams called Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in A Frantic World.*

You can also find YouTube meditations from Mark Williams which include the 3-minute breathing space, or the 10-minute body scan. Both can be very useful when managing stress.

WAYS TO MANAGE AND REDUCE STRESS

- Eating healthily
- Reducing smoking/drinking
- Processed/sugary foods
- Exercise
- Getting plenty of sleep or rest
- Spending time outdoors
- Taking time out
- Doing something you enjoy
- Mindfulness
- Talking to family or friends
- Being KIND to yourself

If you need to seek professional help such as speaking to your doctor or talking therapy.

**Sometimes when we feel stressed it can cause us to feel cut off and isolated. It's important to remember that you are not alone, it's not unusual to feel like this. Seeking support from others whether it be people we know or professionals can play a key role in reducing and managing our stress levels.*

When feeling stressed it can be helpful to find an activity that we enjoy to focus on. Doing this can help us relax and de-stress. Here are a few activities that you might find helpful.

- Going for a walk
- Baking
- Reading a book
- Doing a puzzle
- Colouring in/Drawing
- Journalling
- Gardening
- Swimming
- Listening to music
- Spending time with pets/animals

There are many different activities that can help reduce stress. Have you got any favourite ones that aren't mentioned here?

ACTIVITY: Is it hard to imagine life without it being stressful? If you were to wake up tomorrow morning and all the stress was gone. How would life be? How would you feel what would you be doing? How would you feel? What would be different? Take time to contemplate this. It might help to write down or draw what a stress-free life would look like to you.

Once you have done this contemplate; what small steps can you take to create a life with less stress.

Sometimes Stress can take over our lives, and leave us feeling overwhelmed and disempowered. One of the key things we can do when managing stress is to recognise this is how we feel and take the power back. Once we take back control of how stress impacts our life, we can then take steps to reduce it and move forward into a happier less stressful future.

Most importantly.....

BE KIND TO YOURSELF.

RESOURCES/FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT STRESS

Here are some useful links and resources about stress that you might find helpful:

Books: Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in A Frantic World by Mark Williams

Website links:

Mindfulness YouTube meditation clip by Mark Williams (3-minute breathing space)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOne1P0TKL8>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/signs-and-symptoms-of-stress/>

<https://www.stress.org.uk/free-resources/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/stress>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/risk-factors/stress>

Within this booklet and the workshop, I mention the impact our diet can have on our stress levels. This is something I have discussed in my sugar-free blog. For more details; please take a look at my SUGAR-FREE BLOG

<https://sugarfreeme923.wordpress.com/>

or PRACTICALLY A SUGAR-FREE ME FACEBOOK PAGE.

