

**Reducing the Negative Effects of Stress:
A workshop for human service professionals**

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Stress and “burnout” are considered as a persistent component of the global, multicultural, workplace (Bhagat, et.al., 1994, Golembiewski, Boudreau, Munzenrider, & Luo, 1996). A majority of Americans state they would rather have more free time than money through hard work (Stantor, Rich & Iso-Ahola, 1998). It is a phenomenon which not only contributes to decreased production (Salas, Driskell & Hughes 1996) but also to increased tension in the family (Kelloway & Barling, 1994) and decreased physical and mental well-being (Millar, 1992). This results in numerous costs not only to the individual but also to the family members, the work community, and society. There is some research to indicate that the frequency of stress related health concerns has increased during the 1990’s (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997). The increase in dual-career households and the associated extra pressure has contributed to this increase (Barnett & Brennon, 1997). More employers are investigating stress management program (Internet, Business First, December 14, 1998) in an attempt to curb this increasing problem.

One of this government’s community health objectives is to reduce the negative effects of stress. Broadly speaking, this can be accomplished through education, health promotion, and treatment (Quick, 1992). This workshop is educational and focuses on informing health practitioners about the nature of stress what steps an individual can take to improve his/her stress management skills.

Program Approach and Rationale

The approach to the problem of reducing the negative effects of stress is three-fold, 1) train the human service workers who see people suffering the negative effects, 2) this training will be passed on through the delivery of better treatment and care, and 3) more people will be educated by these trained human service workers as they pass on the information. This workshop is to be provided by a Ph.D. in counseling (or psychology) who understands the counseling process as applied to persons dealing with work stress (Lowman, 1993) and who has extensive field experience across multiple settings. This knowledge would include awareness of the way women experience the workplace, given they represent the largest majority of human service workers (Bailey, Long & Kahn, 1993). This background is necessary because the workshop is tailored to the needs of each group of practitioners to which it is presented. Stories, co-worker related stress, clinical examples, clinical time management skills, non-compliant patient issues, HMO pressures, may all become a part of the open interactive style of the workshop.

The workshop is designed not like typical classroom, lecture style, instruction, but as an interaction between the audience and the trainer. The idea here is that it is likely everyone in the audience has experienced stress sometime in their lives. This becomes the basis for shared experience and a shared understanding of coping skills. In addition this shared understanding helps the trainer to fit the workshop specifically to the needs of the audience.

The workshop is scheduled as a half-day event. It is expected to cost organizations between \$200 and \$500, or to individuals between \$30 to \$50 (depending on the number of participants which is limited to ten), depending on the travel expenses. This is a negotiated fee. Most organizations have training budgets and most professional need continued training as

a part of their certification. Scholarships will be made available to individuals whose organizations may not cover the cost of the training.

This is an “audience centered” workshop grounded in information on the nature of stress and stress management. The workshop is designed using two components 1) experiential: the interaction with the audience mixed with human service experience of the presenter, and 2) knowledge: an understanding the nature of stress and stress management.

This workshop manual contains the knowledge-based materials that would be presented during the workshop and also given to the participants (bound in a folder). What can't be described in any detail is the experiential quality of the workshop other than to say that it is critical that people leave this workshop not only understanding more about stress and stress management but also with an improved sense of well-being.

The enclosed manual is written in a lightly scientific style to make it easier for human service professionals to convey the subject matter to their audiences. The manual is divided into two sections 1) understanding stress and 2) stress management. In addition there is a list of references including Internet sites. It is expected that this manual, and the interactive workshop, will help human service workers to decrease the negative effects associated with stress in their lives by providing them with a better understanding of the nature of stress and how to cope with it.

Understanding the Nature of Stress

Defining Stress

"Sometimes the terms stress and crisis are used interchangeably even though stress is actually a temporary or prolonged condition that requires people to adapt to circumstances or expectations shaped by the self or others. Stress is rarely a simple stimulus-response situation, but is rather an interactive process in which one's perception of the rewards in relation to the energy expended is an intervening variable. This individualistic perception implies that an interpretation of the situation, which may be positive, negative, or somewhere in between follows an appraisal. It is the appraisal and the ensuing judgment that determine whether one's adaptation to the situation is experienced as distress (pain) or eustress (pleasure)." (Janis, 1986, p. 4-5)

Janosik also makes a distinction between a crisis of opportunity and one which is overwhelming and stated "It is thought that a crisis has a natural termination regardless of intervention because it is impossible for individuals to tolerate such acute distress very long. The severity of any crisis must inevitably decrease in order for people to endure and survive. Outcomes of crisis range from creative problem solving to restrictive self-destructive acts." (p. 9, Janosik, 1986). But if crisis is an "acute variant" of stress it is possible that stress can become crisis. It is suggested herein that through the process of burnout, which is a chronic variant of stress, burnout can become an "acute variant" of stress and thus can become a crisis. Also certain characteristics of a crisis, or multiple crises, may lead to burnout.

Stress as a Process

The stress response starts with a stimuli that is interpreted as having survival importance. This stress then signals our monitoring system causing it to excite certain brain chemistry changes and inhibit others. This results in our attention focused on the survival stimuli, a preparedness to deal with the stimuli, and body changes that accompany the preparedness. These body changes are as follows:

- * increased heart rate, increased blood circulation, rise in blood pressure,
- * opening of the bronchial passages,
- * muscle tightening (particularly neck and back),
- * increased stomach activity (can lead to gas and ulcers),
- * a 10 to 20% increase in blood cholesterol, and,
- * a rapid rise in blood sugar level followed by a fall in blood sugar level.

These physiological responses are the way our body prepares for "flight or fight". The responses are survival based. They have limited negative consequences if there is constructive application following the stress response. The application is particularly important if the stress is frequent and/or of large magnitude.

Cohen and Gail Williamson, researchers at the University of Georgia, in an extensive review of the literature on stress on the human immune system conclude that there is likely to be a direct link between an increase in experienced stress and a decrease in the body's immune system (Psychological Bull., Jan. 1991). It appears that the stress response, particularly when we can't constructively ventilate, suppresses this conditioning response and thus results in a greater susceptibility to illness.

Stress is a part of living and the stress response is a natural part of our heritage. The key to its destructive effects is found not in the stress, or the response, but in our ability to successfully deal with that stress. When we believe that we don't have control, that our actions can't make a difference, and the stress remains then we are dealing with what Abrahamson et.al. (1978) refer to as learned helplessness. We convince ourselves that we are helpless, that no matter what we do there is no solution. It serves as one of the basic roots for frustration, anxiety, and depression. But Dweek and Wortman (1982) point out that not all persons respond to what could be interpreted as a "learned helplessness situation" in the same manner. In fact some even show an increase in performance. The authors also point out that outcome expectation (control over outcome, personal worth attached to outcome, emotions attached to

outcome) may be the significant variable in deciding whether an individual experiences learned helplessness or increased performance.

It is the person's appraisal of outcome which significantly affects the perception of stress. If the individual appraises initial failure (stress) in a given situation as having an outcome which can be changed through one's efforts, then learned helplessness and stress is less likely to occur. This concept of appraisal, or priming (Moss & Lawrence, 1977) has become a critical part of both understanding stress and developing a personal stress management program. But if the individual places responsibility of the failure (stress) solely on external factors which are simultaneously perceived as unchangeable then learned helplessness (stress and decreased performance) is likely to occur (Dweck and Wortman, 1982).

Hopelessness not only decreases task performance but also if maintained over long periods may increase the risk of death (Seligman, 1975). In addition to the state of learned helplessness, Barry R. Cournoyer (1988), from Indiana University, stated that the negative effects of stress are "...characterized as a progressively detrimental state or condition that has been stimulated by the perception of stressors in one or more sectors of the person's world, for which adequate coping skills and external resources are not available or used, and that severely affect one's physical health, emotional and social well-being, and role (job) performance." (pg. 261).

There are different types of stress and not all stress is detrimental. There is a difference between eustress (healthy stress) and distress (unhealthy stress) (Selye, 1978). Eustress can bring about founded insight and new solutions. Distress can bring about discomfort, poor decisions, and sickness - moving through the **Stages of Stress** (see below).

Table 1: The Stages of STReSS

	S-T-R-e-S-S Stages	Description
S <u>Start</u>	Feeling uncomfortable, the “what ifs” begin to dominate thought. Feeling nervous, edgy, pressured. May also experience the up-down-up cycle.	Too busy or hurried. Deadlines are not met. Additional demands are annoying. Short cuts may affect quality. Lack of proper attention and forgetting will affect task quality. Too busy to communicate ideas completely. Easily frustrated with others but willing to struggle to listen.
T <u>Tired</u>	Tired often but not able to sleep well. Early stress body signs.	More busy-minded, decreased attention to task. Mind drifting, daydreaming, lack of focused concentration. Taking longer breaks from work. Starts to become removed from social activities. Extra-curricular activities decrease. Doesn’t listen much, spending more time seeking self-gratification.
R <u>wRong</u>	Anger, frustration. Too many things are wrong. Feeling trapped without a solution. “Why can’t they see it this way?” Stress body signs increase.	May try to “force” others to do the task the “right way.” Conflicts, errors, and serious delays may arise. May totally avoid difficult tasks and may complain frequently. Anger is directed at certain people or establishments. High degree of irritability and limited patience with others. Refusal to see other viewpoints except when they agree.
S <u>Sad</u>	Frustration turns to hopelessness. Insomnia and depression may follow. The up-down-up cycle increases.	The above three stages continue to repeat themselves without relief triggering depression. Depression affects task because of lack of willing involvement and poor attention. The person may become disorganized and unable to sort priorities. Stress body signs may contribute to the start of minor body ailments and trips to see the family doctor.
S <u>Sick</u>	More times away from work with colds, ulcers, injuries and other ailments. Emotionally and physically run down. Time in the hospital.	Lost time, task quality shows serious decrease and interpersonal skills are impaired. Lack of desire, organization, and drive are all evident. Total removal from society due to illness and/or “escape” related behaviors. Excessive emotions and denial affecting all aspects of the persons life. Obstinate and stubborn.

Sources of Stress

There are some common causes underlying the occurrence of stress which are described in the accompanying table entitled "Common Sources of Stress". But in addition to these sources ineffective coping skills can contribute to an increase in stress. The use of ineffective coping skills, to reduce stress, may actually increase stress.

Table 2: The Common Sources of Stress*

<p>General: A source of stress is a stimuli which through appraisal has become an emotional trigger. Sources of stimuli fall under five categories: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and environmental/social. Under each of these five categories there are ten general sources of stress which are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feeling trapped, helpless, or hopeless
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2. Prolonged periods of being in the “busy mind”
3. The trap of poor coping skills
4. The negative effects of barriers
5. Poor program design (poor teaching, support, challenge, reward, etc.)
6. High level of uncertainty (or ambiguity)
7. Trauma and/or crisis
8. Excessive risk taking behaviors
9. Any abrupt and/or dramatic change
10. Processing through a developmental stage and delayed or advanced development

These ten sources of stress can be found associated with each of the five components of the Integrated Concept yielding 50 general sources of stress. Some specific sources are as follows:

Physical	Mental	Spiritual	Environmental/social
Genetic Factors	Poor Task/Role Congruence	Not “Connected”	HOME
Illness	Information Overload	Loss of the “Gifts”	Others in Severe Stress
Injury	Lack of Autonomy	Cult Blindness	Loss, Abuse, or Severe Illness
Sensory Overload	Lack of Creative Freedom	Environmental/social	The Threat of Loss
Diet	Lack of Intellectual Stimulation	Relationship Problems	WORK
Exercise	Emotional	Poor Communication	Poor Task/Role Congruence
Loss of Sleep	Transference	Cultural Conflict	Lack of Meaning, Importance
Chemical Cycles	Exaggeration	Poor Task/Role Congruence	Threat of Loss, Low Rewards
Addictions	Poor Expression	No Source of Support	Poor Leadership, No Support

*Information compiled from personal observations and from the following references: Gottfredson and Holland, 1990, Kalimo, et.al., 1987, Riley and Zaccaro, 1987, Farber, 1983, Paine, 1982, Pines and Aronson, 1988, Vash, 1980 and Peter, 1969.

The “Catch 22” of Stress

In addition to the sources of stress contributing to the stress response, how one reacts to stress, i.e., their stress management, or coping skills, also affects the stress response. The catch 22 of stress can be stated as follows: *the actions/thoughts we engage in to relieve stress often increase stress*. The feelings of stress force us to pay attention to finding a way to relieve the stress. We must discover a solution. Unfortunately for many learners the stress reduction course they believe to be valid is not. Instead their actions/thoughts add to the problems of stress which only increases the drive to reduce the stress. A study by James A. Blumenthal in Durham, N.C., (Jan./Feb. 1994 Psychosomatic Medicine) revealed that persons who are hypertensive, a state frequently accompanying stress, exhibit slowed information processing and slowed recall of information - meaning that *as the stress increased past a certain level (a*

stress threshold) the learner actually becomes less effective as a problem solver. This decrease in problem solving efficiency is exactly opposite to what the learner is seeking - a solution which can relieve the stress.

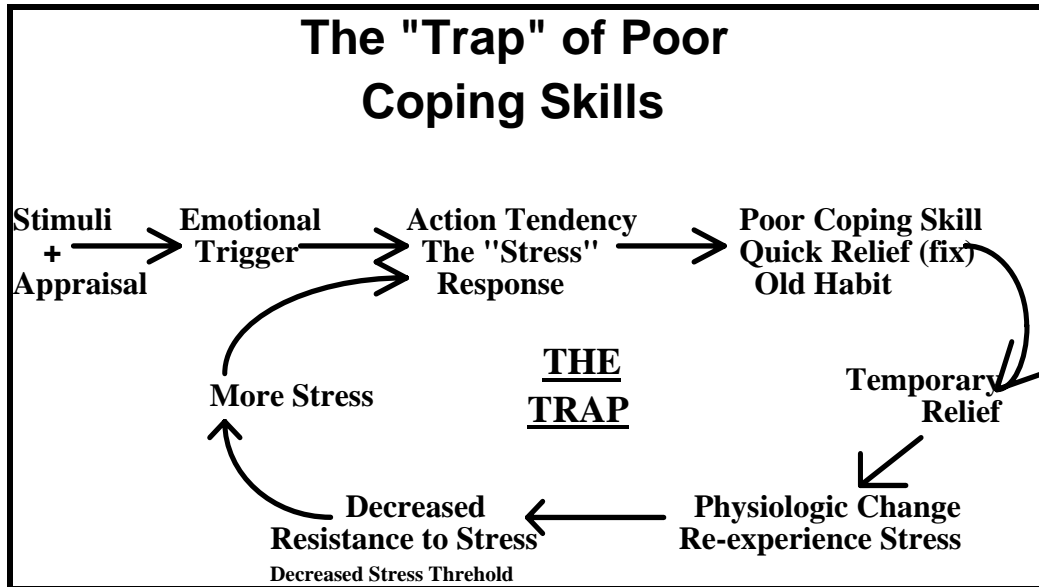


Figure 1: The diagram illustrates the “trap” of poor coping skills which were originally used by the learner in an attempt to decrease the effects of stress. The “trap” happens because these poor coping skills actually increase stress and thus increase the learner’s desire use them.

As we use these poor coping skills we might get temporary relief but when this fades we see that the stress is still there, and often appearing more intense, which results in a return to our poor coping skills - almost habitually - which contributes to an increase in stress, which....a cyclic trap. The trap of poor coping skills is illustrated in the accompanying diagram entitled the “Trap of Poor Coping Skills”. The "trap" works as follows:

- An emotional trigger generates an action tendency and a stress response.
- The stress response is managed using a destructive coping skill (e.g. alcohol use) as a quick solution, a habitual response or simply as a trial.
- The approach yields temporary relief.

- The temporary relief is followed by physiological changes and/or re-experiencing the stress. This is then followed by a decreased resistance to stress which results in the feeling of experiencing more stress.
- This feeling of more stress triggers the individual to use his/her coping skills more often. The cycle is now in motion and the more it continues the more likely the individual is to experience threshold excess.

Each poor coping skill is based on the myth that this particular skill will relieve stress.

Some examples of the poor coping skills trap are as follows:

- Myth: Unsolvable Problem. There is a perceived threat to the security of one or more of our emotionally driven survival needs and we can not see a way to remove that threat. We feel trapped and helpless, that there is no solution. We limit our problem solving approaches and in doing so increase our stress which increases our feeling trapped.
- Myth: If I think out all the "what ifs", I'll be safe. We fill our minds with "what ifs" and thus acquire more unknowns and more perceived threats. The more perceived threats we collect, the more fear (stress) we perceive, and the more fear (stress) we perceive the more "what ifs" we see.
- Myth: If I fix it then the stress will go away. We want to "fix it" even when it may not be our role to do so. Whether in our own lives or in someone else's, if we see something "wrong" we want to rush out and do whatever is needed in order to fix it - including increasing our own stress. The more we struggle to fix it the more stress we feel and the less capable we are of fixing it. There is the trap.
- Myth: If I work harder, faster, and longer the stress will go away. Our society has moved to a faster pace. Sometimes there are tasks that are demanded to be done in an unrealistic

time frame. When we are put in a situation where the demands of the task exceed our skills and our job security is linked to task performance there is usually stress. We may put in a lot of extra hours, become real busy, develop the busy mind, and appear to some as if we are "dedicated workers". But the busy mind limits our problem solving abilities (increased stress) and so we become more "busy" and the more busy we get the more stress we experience.

- Myth: If I use this chemical then I will feel better (I can face the stress better). Most chemical agents work to relieve stress because they act upon the body's nervous system. The agent of choice triggers a shift in this balance which temporarily relieves our stress. But after this shift wears off the body will seek to return to a state of chemical equilibrium during this process there is often an increase in the level of perceived stress. At this time the individual may return to the agent again seeking relief only to discover it temporarily, followed by more stress. This "up-down-up" cycle is often a consequence of the interaction of stress and several of the ineffective coping skills (e.g., use of alcohol).

Jackson, et.al. (1986) adapting the view point of McGrath (1976), point out that perceived uncertainty is the key determinant of both physiological and behavioral stress induced responses. Riley and Zaccaro (1987) state that "the stress experience is a process that occurs when a person (or group or organization) is confronted by a demand that is perceived to exceed the resources available to effectively respond to it." (p.3). Dweek and Wortman (1982) cite the importance of the individual's perception of expected outcome as related to the stress experience. This is supported by Dayton (1991) who states that a "therapist's cognitions, specifically irrational or exaggerated beliefs concerning therapy or the therapist role, may be

important mediators in the relationship between therapist stressors and burnout" (p.62). Dr. Orbach (1986) suggests that when an individual perceives they are facing an "unsolvable problem" it is a great source of stress - to the point of contributing to suicide. In part these authors are correct, it is the perception of uncertainty, demand exceeding resources, expected outcome, and the unsolvable problem which contribute to stress. But underlying each of these cognitive perceptions is an emotional perception - the stress response is basically an emotional response.

A detailed understanding of the human stress response requires a more complete understanding of human emotional processing which is beyond the scope of this manual. Understanding the underlying emotional perception behind the stress response is linked to understanding the perception of a threat to one or more of our emotive motivators (i.e., survival needs, nurturing). This is the key determinant underlying the stress response. If the emotional connection to one's stress response is mediated then the situational stimuli tied to the response can be viewed as a cognitive challenge instead of tied to a survival based emotional catalyst.

Because of this link between stress and the emotive motivators people under stress often become involved in actions aimed at satisfying the demands of one of these motivators in an effort to reduce the level of stress. This includes increases in the individual's involvement in sex, escape from fear, fighting, eating, and one's search for nurturing (sometimes by insulting in an effort to make self look better), stimulation, and meaning. The reason for its popularity of the "trap" of poor coping skills is that it works, temporarily (it doesn't solve the stress problem). Unfortunately this substitution process, using one problem to quell another in order to find temporary relief, does not address the central problem - there is stress that is still not

relieved. The substitution can be more a form of escape than a constructive solution.

Unfortunately the escape often becomes a habit, particularly as the intensity of the perceived stress increases, heading toward possible burnout. In the human services burnout is perhaps one of the leading causes of staff turnover and patient abuse (McConnell, 1982). A clearer understanding of these stress related phenomena might help to curb the too often associated negative effects.

Understanding Burnout

The term burnout was first denoted as a psychological syndrome by Freudenberger (1974,1975). Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual exhaustion due to conditions imposed by the environment (work, home, and school) and the individual response to those conditions.

"...both the popular press and the professional literature have often confused or equated "stress" with "burnout". Though these two concepts are similar, they are not identical. Burnout is more often the result not of stress per se (which may be inevitable in the helping professions) but of unmediated stress - of being stressed and having no "out", no buffers, no support system....burnout can be regarded as the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with a variety of negative stress (distress) conditions." (pgs. 14-15, Farber, 1983).

Stress without relief can lead to burnout which is characterized by the symptoms described in the final Stage of Stress and in the accompanying table, "Symptoms of Burnout". These stages of stress can be viewed as the phases which precede burnout, if no preventive measures are taken (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988; Schaufeli, W.B. & Bunnk, B.P., 1996). Burnout can have dramatic, counterproductive, effects on thinking and functioning (Dayton, 1991; Jackson, 1984). This is where stress becomes a crisis. Burnout can be viewed as an "acute variant" of stress which places the health and well being of the individual at risk.

There is still some lack of clarity regarding the definition of the burnout syndrome (Dayton, 1991), largely due to the long list of symptoms (see table below) which are

Table 3: Symptoms of Burnout*

Health	Relationships
Fatigue and chronic exhaustion	Isolation or excessive attachment, affairs
Frequent and prolonged colds or flu	Increased mistrust of others
Increased PMS symptom severity, irregular cycles	Isolation from immediate family, increased problems
Headaches, sleep problems, weight change	Decrease in interpersonal skills, increased conflict
Muscle tension/pain, gastrointestinal pain	Mechanical conversation
Exaggeration of previous medical condition (poor rate of healing)	Manipulative within the relationship often with the specific goal of obtaining self gratification
Emotional	Values/Spiritual
Increased fears, fear of "loosing it", increased anxiety	Sudden and often dramatic shifts in values
Depression, loss of meaning, hopelessness, trapped	Loss of spiritual connectedness - desire to escape
Decreased emotional control (increased impulsivity)	Isolation from spiritual friends
Increased daydreaming, and active fantasy	Loss of the "spiritual gifts"
Work	Attitude
Workaholic or seeks to escape work	Air of righteousness, egocentric, grandiosity
Loss of creativity, decreased problem solving skills	Cynical, pessimistic, frequent negative remarks
Distrust of management, severely critical of management	Extra critical of peers, and the "organization"
Frequent defensive and attacking language	Apathy, not caring, not acting to change, giving up
Use of "sick" humor when discussing clients (students)	
Frequently late for work and often leaves early	Excessive Behaviors
Forgets how to play while at work, doesn't enjoy work, lost sense of humor	Increased consumption of caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, sugar, and food cravings
Work productivity and quality decreases	Risk taking behaviors increase
Management "looses touch" with the workers	Overeating or anorexic
Workers assume routine duties	Promiscuity

*Modified from Carrol and White, 1982, p.44.

associated with burnout and the fact that many of these symptoms can be associated with other etiologies, e.g. depression. Too often burnout is looked at as being solely the responsibility of the individual who is suffering from the syndrome. Carrol and White (1982) suggest that burnout should be viewed as a form of ecological dysfunction, that is assessment and treatment of burnout should address the person, his/her ecosystem (total environment) and the reciprocal impact each has on each other. They state "Typically burnout occurs whenever a person with inadequate stress management and need gratifying skills must work in a stressful and need-

frustrating environment...Personal signs of burnout should not lead one to conclude that something is wrong only with the person and/or that "fixing" whatever is wrong with him or her will be sufficient to correct that person's problem. Signs of burnout, rather, should trigger an ecological system analysis, which should, in turn, lead to the development of a systematic intervention that addresses the key components of the ecological system, namely, the person, the salient elements of various ecosystems, and their interactions." (pgs. 42-43, Carrol and White, 1982). There remains some question as to the effectiveness of environmentally based stress management programs (Reynolds & Briner, 1994). Additional research (Cropanzo, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997; Gottlieb, 1997, Murphy & Hurrell, 1995) indicate that a combination of environmental changes and worker changes can make a difference in the nature of the stress response. Additional research is needed in this area (Internet site - Lawrence Murphy).

Outcome After Peak Stress

Every one has experienced some form of stress in their lives. The difficulties associated with stress begin to appear when people are dealing with peak stress. The determining variables on outcome after peak stress are not related to a single catalyst, whether stress,

burnout or crisis, but are related to the following variables listed in the table entitled “Key Variables Affecting Outcome After Peak Stress”.

Table 4: Key Variables Affecting Outcome After Peak Stress

1. The learner’s perceived need to satisfy one or more of the ten emotive motivators.	
2. Change.	3. Severity/frequency of change.
4. The learner’s stress threshold.	5. The learner’s use of coping skills.

The first two variables have been discussed previously. Restated they are as follows:

1. The nature of a person's perception of the link between the event (stimuli) and the potential threat to one of the person's drives to survive¹ is the underlying determinant in all stress responses, and,
2. Stress is often tied directly to environmental events, changes in events which affect our perceptions about our well being can contribute to the stress outcome.

¹A threat to any of our emotive motivators (e.g., survive needs) can elicit the stress response.

The last three variables are described in the accompanying table and in the following

Table 5: Significant Variables Affecting Stress Threshold

<u>Task and Role Congruence</u>	
<u>Decreases Stress Threshold</u>	<u>Increases Stress Threshold</u>
Skills below or greatly exceeding task requirements	Skills nearly match task requirements
Poorly defined task	Accurately defined task
Poorly defined role	Accurately defined role
Task and personal support poorly defined	Support well defined and easy to access
Poorly defined rewards and consequences	Expectations well defined
Task monitoring and training not provided	Task monitoring and training provided
<u>Outcome Expectation</u>	
Seeking perfection or expecting failure	Positive, realistic, and relaxed
Overly maternal or paternal	The teaching approach with "letting go"
Enabling, excessive helping, co-dependent	"Letting go", stating and acting on self need
"Us" versus "Them"	Cooperation, knowing the limits of responsibility
Helpless, hopeless, feeling trapped, defeated	Resilience, accepting the challenge, relaxed
Frequently perceived threat	Understanding the source and personal status
Overwhelmed by uncertainty	Positive expectation, faith, rest (relaxed)
<u>Biological - Environmental Factors</u>	
Ignorance of the limits of genetic predisposition	Modifying actions according to genetic limits
Conflict between task demands and cultural biases	Match between task demand and cultural biases
Family trained thought/action patterns produce negative consequences resulting in decrease task performance	Recognition of family trained thought/action patterns resulting in decrease task performance - acting to produce a change in these patterns
Pollution - water, food, air, noise, poor lighting	Living and working in a "clean" environment
Unsafe environment with a risk of injury	Safe environment with limited risk of injury
Changes in one's internal chemistry without balance	Awareness of personal chemical cycles
<u>Application of Coping Skills</u>	
Use of destructive coping skills - caught in the "Trap of Poor Coping Skills"	Use of constructive coping skills which help to reduce the negative effects of stress
<u>Overlapping Stressors</u>	
At any time in the learner's life an overlap of actual stressors, such as developmental crises or physical trauma, with perceived stressors, such as situational crises, may occur. This can result in an increase in the stress severity index for the time which the overlap exists.	

*Data synthesized from personal observation and from the following references: Carol and White, 1982, Dweek and Wortman, 1982, Gottredson and Holland, 1990, Jackson, et.al., 1986, and Dayton, 1991.

stress diagrams. In the following table the most important variables affecting the person's stress threshold are briefly described. It is possible to improve the person's ability to deal with stress by increasing their stress threshold, by increasing their tolerance to stress so that they remain below their stress threshold. When a person exceeds their stress threshold they will experience thought and behavior patterns associated with threshold excess - resulting in

decreased task productivity. Stress management should follow a course which helps the learner to eliminate those actions associated with threshold excess.

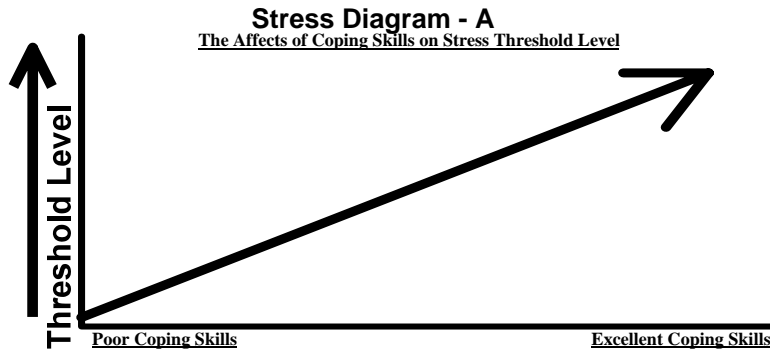


Figure 2: Diagram illustrating how as one improves their coping skills they increase their tolerance to stress, that is, they increase their stress threshold level.

These three stress diagrams illustrate several important points:

- ◆ The threshold level increases as the effectiveness of the coping skills increases (stress diagram A).

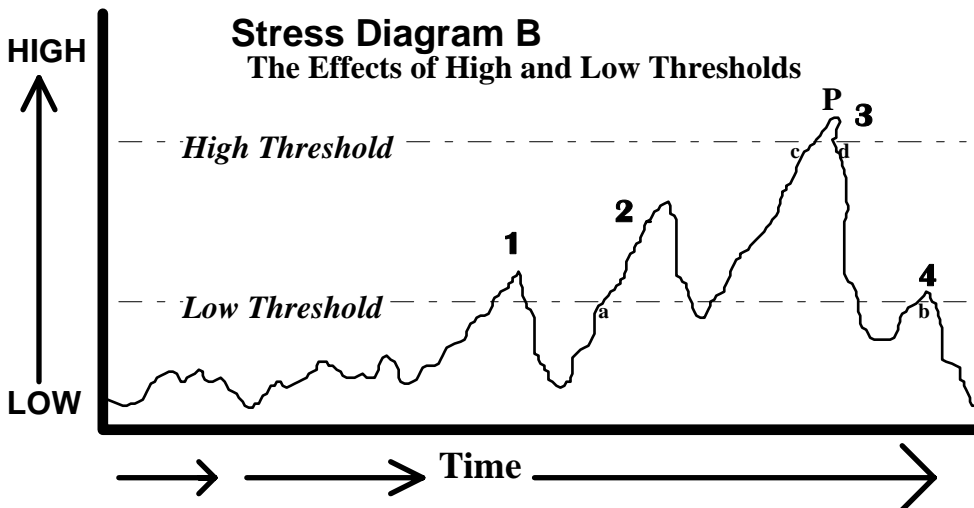


Figure 3: Illustrates the effects of a low stress threshold versus a high stress threshold. The mountainous line represents the course of events in the learner’s life with the peaks (numbered 1-4) being peak periods of stress. The learner with the high threshold experiences a peak stress period with a low Si, severity index (the duration c-d x the intensity, height P from line c-d). The learner with the low threshold experiences a peak stress period with a high Si, severity index (the duration a-b x the intensity, height P from line a-b).

- ◆ The perceived level of stress decreases as coping skills increase (stress diagram A).
- ◆ A peak stress event is that event which results in an increase in perceived stress (over some time period) ABOVE the threshold level (see peak P in stress diagram B1 which is above the threshold line c-d) and results in some decrease in performance.

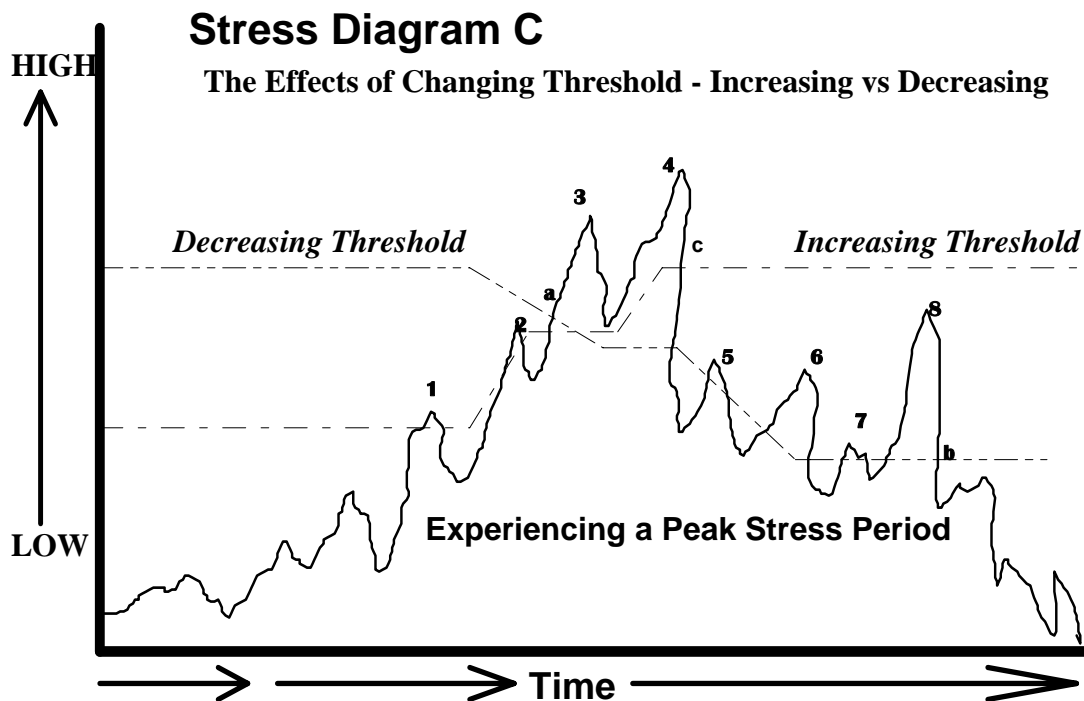


Figure 4: Illustrates the effects of changes in the learner's stress threshold. The mountainous line represents a series of events with peak stress episodes numbered 1-8. If the learner develops strategies which allow him/her to increase their stress threshold then the number of peaks which contribute to threshold excess actions decreases. The contrary is true for a decreasing stress threshold, that is more peaks are experienced with threshold excess actions.

- ◆ Many peak stress events can occur over a given period of time (stress diagram C), particularly if the threshold is low (stress diagrams B and C).
- ◆ A peak stress event may be the result of a situational crisis, a developmental crisis, a stressor or any combination of these catalysts.

- ◆ Threshold levels may change over time depending on the effects of the five stress outcome variables, but in particular the use of coping skills.

Another important point is illustrated in the diagrams - there is a direct relationship between threshold level and stress severity index (Si). The severity index (Si) of a peak stress event is a function of how much the stress exceeds the threshold level (I = intensity) and for how long (D = duration),

$$\mathbf{Si = I \times D.}$$

Using this relationship as a representation of reality then it can serve as a basis for refinement of the distinction between the terms stress (distress and eustress), crisis, and burnout:

1. A peak stress event is that event which results in perceived stress above the threshold level and therefore is most likely to result in distress.
2. Increases in stress which do not exceed the threshold level are most likely to result in eustress.
3. A crisis is a form of a peak stress event and is likely to be experienced when the Si is high and $I > D$ (see stress diagrams B - peak labeled P).
4. Burnout is likely to happen at any value of Si as long as D is significantly larger than I, as illustrated in stress diagrams B and C with the low threshold and the long duration a-b.

It is clear from the stress diagrams that not all forms of stress will result in distress and that variations in the threshold level effect, by definition, the Si and the likelihood of crisis, distress, or burnout.

Mae Brown says "People are like teabags; you never know how strong they'll be until they're in hot water." (in Berman, 1985, p.23). In other words the true flavor of a person's personality comes out when times get really tough. Their beliefs, their barriers, and their strengths are all tested. Times of stress can be viewed constructively and used wisely to point

out our weaknesses and our strengths or they can lead to burnout. Everyone will in his or her lifetime experience some form of stress. How they handle it will be a testimony to the strength of their coping skills and a reflection on their knowledge regarding how to live successfully with stress.

Stress Management: Removing the Negative Effects of Stress

Successful stress management is a combination of community support, environmental changes, and individual training. Riley and Zaccaro (1987), look at treatment (or management) of stress as being composed of five approaches:

- 1 - Individual Primary Prevention: Stressor Directed - skill level, outcome expectation, time management, physical health, understanding cultural effects, constructive coping skills.
- 2 - Individual Secondary Prevention: Response Directed - outcome expectation, relaxation techniques, support, constructive coping skills.
- 3 - Individual Primary Prevention: Symptom Directed - therapy, medical intervention.
- 4 - Organizational Prevention: Role Congruence and environmental effects.
- 5 - Organizational Prevention: Task Congruence and environmental effects.

These five approaches are reflected in the accompanying table "Significant Variables Affecting Stress Threshold". As discussed previously it is the relationship between an individual's stress threshold and their stress perception, their appraisal, which causes distress or eustress. It is important to look at these threshold variables not as sources of stress (although they may be) but as factors which affect the level of an individuals stress threshold. When changes in these factors occur the individual either has an increased threshold or a decreased threshold.

Table 6: Significant Variables Affecting Stress Threshold

Decreases Threshold	Increases Threshold
<u>Task and Role Congruence</u>	
Low Skill Level	Matched Skill Level
Poorly Defined Task	Accurately Defined Task
Poorly Defined Role	Accurately Defined Role
No Support Defined	Support in Place
Task Demands Exceeds Resources	Resources Available
Low Reward/Feedback	Satisfactory Rewards/Feedback
Poor Supervision	Strong+Sensitive Supervision
<u>Outcome Expectation</u>	
Pessimistic or Perfection	Positive, Realistic and Relaxed
Overly Paternal	Teaching and Letting Go
Excessive Helping (Co-Dependant)	Letting Go, Caring for Self
“Us” versus “Them”	Cooperation, Accepting Responsibility All of the above - Get Help!
Helplessness, Hopelessness	Tackling the Challenge
Feeling Trapped, Defeated	Understanding the Source
Perceived Threat	Positive Expectation, Faith, Hope
Uncertainty	
<u>Biological-Environmental Factors</u>	
Genetic Predisposition Ignored	Genetic Predisposition Heeded
Cultural Biases Conflict	Awareness of Cultural Conflict, Coping
Poor Family Habits	Aware of Acquired Family Habits, Coping
Pollution (noise, chemical, light)	Work Conducive Environment
Unsafe Setting/Task	Support During Hazardous Duty
Changes in Personal Chemistry	Awareness of Personal Chemistry, Coping
<u>Application of Coping Skills</u>	
Destructive Coping Skills-	Constructive Coping Skills -
Getting Caught in the Trap	Staying Out of the Trap and Healing
(see attached chart listing coping skills)	
<u>Overlapping Stressors</u>	
Any additional stressors which are added to an individuals initial perception of stress may affect the individual’s threshold level.	

Successful treatment of stress should not take the naive approach of attempting to design a stress free environment or a stress free individual. But a successful treatment approach should focus on what reasonable steps can taken to increase the threshold level of individuals through both individual and environmental change. The key environmental variables are 1) task/role congruence, and 2) the physical environment A detailed discussion of the environmental effects on changing stress threshold is beyond the scope of this paper.

The stress response is an emotional response and the information applicable to emotion is applicable here (and visa versa). Consider how the following variables are dependent upon each other:

- ⇒ The stress response is dependent upon the process of emotion.
- ⇒ Emotion is dependent upon the process of appraisal (primary and secondary).
- ⇒ Appraisal is dependent upon the range and success of our coping skills (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and environmental).
- ⇒ The success of our coping skills depends upon our ability to understand our own stress threshold and the factors which affect it.

The key individual stress management technique which affects the success of stress management is the awareness of stress threshold and its relation to the development of coping skills.

Stress and Coping Skills

Skilled stress management is directly linked to the development and use of constructive and opposed to destructive coping skills (see accompanying list, "Comparative Coping Skills"). The destructive nature of coping skills lies not in the skill itself but in its contribution to one's emotional state, their stress threshold, and their ability to shift from destructive to constructive coping skills.

Table 7: Comparative Coping Skills (a brief list)

Destructive Coping Skill	Constructive Coping Skill
<u>Physical</u>	
Alcohol Abuse	Physically Appropriate Use
Substance, Drug, Abuse	Medicinal Use Only
Sex Addiction	In a Caring Relationship - Not Escape
Food Addictions	Occasional Use, Not as an Escape
Television	Selected Use, Not as an Escape
Exercise - Aggressive Escape, Potential Addiction	Appropriate Use of Exercise
High Risk Behaviors - Adrenaline	Appropriate Use of Risk
Self Harm	Never to Be Used
<u>Mental</u>	
Excessive Seriousness	Use of Humor
Excessive Complaining	Positive, yet Realistic
Compulsive Focus on One Solution	Open to Many Solutions, Looking
Exaggerated Application of a Belief	Remaining Open to Appropriate Growth
Repetition of an Idea, Concept	Remaining Open to New Ideas
Winning, Needing to Win	Healthy Competition
One-up Insult Game	Appropriate Social Skills
Rationalization, Minimizing	Integrated View, Accepting the View
Seeking Perfection	Embracing Failure
<u>Emotional</u>	
Exaggerated Responses	Balanced Emotional Responses
Overgeneralization	Understanding the Uniqueness
Unrealistic Expectations	Realistic Expectations, Letting Go
Strong Defense Mechanisms	Good Social Skills, Self Worth
Attention Seeking	(as above)
Withdrawal	(as above)
Denial, Distancing, Spacing Out Transference	Accepting the Feelings, Getting Help
Transference	Understanding Each Unique Event
Over-reliance on Emotions, False Conclusions	All of The Above
<u>Environmental/Social</u>	
Work-a-holism	Balanced Time Utilization
Co-dependency, Constant Giving	Balanced Relationships
Needing Control of Others	Cooperative Relationships
Illegal Short Cuts	Finding the Durable Solution
Withdrawal From Support Group	Appropriate Use of Support Group
Escaping From Responsibility	Accepting Responsibility

High Risk Behaviors	Appropriate Risk
Excessive Peer Compliance	Healthy Autonomy, Assertiveness
Spiritual	
Excessive Commitment To Dogma	Open Minded Self Growth
Spiritual Dogma	Personal Spiritual Strength

Preventing the negative effects of stress is found in the prevention of threshold excess. An important part of threshold excess prevention is the development of constructive coping skills as opposed to those that are destructive and contribute to the "trap". This is aided by doing the following:

- Know the Stages of STRESS,
- Exercise regularly,
- Eat a balanced diet,
- Eliminate substance abuse,
- Have regular physical check-ups,
- Listen to your body,
- Learn to relax, and,
- Practice skilled problem solving.

These may seem like simple common sense steps, but they are not so easily heeded.

Listening to Our Body

Listening to your body means that we pay attention to even the smallest signs of sickness or stress. We then take steps to get healthy before the small signs turn into big troubles.

Listening to our body requires that we take the time to stop being busy, that we are quiet long enough to hear what our body is trying to say. There are early warning signs.

There is a physical component to the cycle of stress (as exemplified in the "Trap") which is part of a feedback loop: stress - physical symptoms - more stress. It is similar to the vicious cycle of emotions and often a part of that cycle (remember stress is basically an emotional response). As this physical cycle continues unabated it contributes to pain and bodily dysfunction. This leads to cognitive dysfunction - in particularly loss of attention and the

effects of such loss. This results in decreased complex problem solving skills. As the learner's problem solving is shown to be ineffective in removing the stress then this adds to the stress and to an "apparent trap". As the trap appears inescapable the stress becomes overwhelming. This is a wonderful example of an inefficient feedback loop and if allowed to continue without re-training the learner may follow a path of escape and perhaps self destruction in order to get out of the "trap" of this feedback loop. The learner caught in such a "trap" should seek sound professional help.

The professional should help the learner to improve their body knowing through body listening. This requires knowing the interpretation of the early warning signs specific to the individual learner. Body listening requires that we integrate professional wisdom with our own self-perception, remembering that neither will be totally accurate all the time. The emphasis is on early detection, on prevention, instead of waiting until things are really bad.

Another aspect of body listening is that we can try to become aware of how ill health/stress effects our thought processes. This is an individual analysis. We need to learn our own personal limits, the boundary conditions that describe our personal health. Each of us are affected differently. There are changes in how we perceive, in our ability to control emotions, in how we make decisions, and, in how we solve problems.

An important part of listening to aid stress reduction is to be able to accept our emotional feelings without being overcome by them. It is being able to learn the difference between self real emotions and those that are environmentally valid. Work at breaking out of limbic runaway, the vicious cycle. Accept that we are emotional beings, be gentle with ourselves, then move on to healing and harmony.

One way to aid body listening and healing is to take time to quiet our busy mind so that it can hear and heal. This entry into the "quiet mind" can be accomplished through meditation. It is learning to elicit the relaxation response as opposed to the stress response and when we practice this it becomes easier to hear.

Relaxation

Dr. Herbert Benson defines the relaxation response in his book, "The Relaxation Response":

"You will learn that evoking the relaxation response is extremely simple if you follow a very short set of instructions which incorporate four essential elements: 1) a quiet environment, 2) a mental device such as a word, a phrase, (a prayer, or an image), which should be repeated (concentrated upon) in a specific fashion over and over again, 3) adoption of a passive (not forced) attitude, which is perhaps the most important of the elements, and, 4) a comfortable (body relaxed not asleep) position." (parenthetical comments added by this author).

Dr. Benson (1973) cites several benefits one can receive from a regular weekly practicing of the relaxation response. These are backed by solid scientific and medical research and are summarized below:

- ◆ Relieves anxiety, stress, and the tendency toward high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, heart attack, and stroke.
- ◆ It can help you to stay healthy.
- ◆ Relieves fatigue and helps us deal with stress.
- ◆ Reduces the tendency to smoke, drink, and "turn on" with drugs.
- ◆ Can be used to help us sleep better.
- ◆ Helps to conserve the body's natural reserve of energy.
- ◆ Makes us more alert. We can have a larger scope of perception and then focus more on the important parts of life.
- ◆ There are no negative side effects, it's all natural!

Using PET scans of the brain's glucose intake psychologist Richard Hair at the University of California found that persons testing poorly on abstract reasoning exams showed a

significantly higher level of total brain glucose consumption. This means that their brains were working harder but succeeding less. This can happen in the state of the busy mind and these cognitive effects can be reduced in the state of the relaxed quiet mind. It may be that relaxation not only contributes to health but also to overall brain efficiency when we are already healthy.

Relaxation comes in many forms and it's concept can be abused. When procrastination becomes a way of life, the use of relaxation can be distorted. The focus here is not on describing those who use the need for relaxation as an excuse to escape from the pressures and responsibilities of reality. The constructive use of relaxation refers to the use of quiet meditation that refreshes the mind and enables us to more easily tackle our problems. It's used in the same manner as incorporating exercise into a regular part of a healthy life. We dedicate a certain amount of time each week to being alone and quiet, time to spend in the quiet mind.

There is some validity to the relaxation response in terms of brain functioning. During stress the different functional centers of the brain (see the IPM) act almost independently (Thatcher and John, 1977) whereas during meditation these functional centers act in harmony (Banquet, 1973, 1979). Mark Westcott, Department of Psychology, University of Durham in England, using EEG studies showed that during meditation there was an increase in left-right brain harmony. It may be that this brain synchronization is a healthy state of awareness necessary for insight, creativity (creative categorization), and efficient problem solving.

Sleep and meditation are not the same although they overlap. In Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's book on transcendental meditation (1963) he discusses that the state of the "meditative mind" can be found at the junction between wakefulness and dreaming. Think carefully about when you are about to fall asleep. You relax, then your mind drifts, then for an instant your

mind is not drifting it's just quiet. Following this quiet is sleep. Meditation is a deliberate exercise aimed at extending that quiet mind without falling asleep. Sleep and meditation have very different brain wave patterns, meditation has higher alpha/theta and lower beta/alpha wave ratios (Banquet, 1979). Learning to experience the quiet mind both during meditation and while working can greatly aid reducing the negative effects associated with the stress response.

The art of meditation is more than simply sitting still and decreasing random thought (or random attention). There is a body relaxation, a shift in breathing, a shift in mental focus and a shift in feeling. These are experienced during the early stages of the learner's practice with meditation. Using a machine to learn how to generate alpha waves will not mean that the learner will become skilled at the art of meditation. This does not mean that established meditation strategies are not worth using. It is up to the individual to use the approach that they like the best without getting lost in the technique itself or being destructive.

One possible meditation technique is described below:

Find a quiet place where you can relax without interruption. Make your self physically comfortable. Remove worry, think only about relaxing. Set relaxing as the only thought in your mind.

Close your eyes and try to feel your toes (without moving). Now flex your toes while simultaneously inhaling deeply. Hold both the flex and the breath for the count of four. Then exhale continuously for the count of nine while simultaneously relaxing the toe flex. Repeat.

Repeat the above flex-inhale-relax-exhale exercise with the following body parts in the order they are given: feet, left leg, right leg, both legs, left hand, right hand, both hands, left arm, right arm, both arms, abdomen, back, shoulders, neck, face, whole body.

Don't move. Concentrate on your deep breathing. Slowly inhale, exhale. Repeat to yourself, " Everything is fine. It is time to relax. It is time to reach for that infinite calmness by casting off desire. Now is the time to relax." (You may wish to add some prayer or phrase of your own).

Keep focused on your breathing. Now shorten your phrase to "Reeee....(inhale)..Laaaaa.....(exhale)...xed". Repeat several times. Allow no thoughts to enter. Allow the peace to consume you. Enjoy the healing, cleansing, feeling of the quiet mind.

When you decide to arise to return to daily activities do so SLOWLY. Stretch, continue breathing, then open your eyes, stretch, rise slowly, stretch and finish with a few deep breaths. Now look out the window and see the beauty of life.

Meditation is viewed by some as a religious or "cultist" phenomena. Some people say that people who meditate are "spaced out" or "lost in some kind of trance". This may be true when meditation is used as a form of escape. But it doesn't have to be true. Meditation is a process that is meant to help us develop a natural state of mind - the **quiet mind**, which is the opposite of the busy mind. The quiet mind is harmonious, aids body control, body healing, problem solving, and spiritual insight. It is an important part of the spiritual process. Remember that there are many different ways to meditate. For example the use of a mantra or prayer, walking (or sensory scan) meditation, yoga, Ti Chi, dance trances, object focus (loss of object self separation) and breath work. The skilled human service practitioner will use a meditation program which best fits one's specific needs.

When one decides to accept a given meditation technique it is important learner practice happens daily! This practice should be done in a quiet place for at least 20 minutes. While practicing we should not worry about how they are doing, how perfect is the meditation, whether our thoughts are drifting, or whether or not it is "working". Instead we should sit back, monitor their breathing (and muscle tension/relaxation), learn to be an objective observer of self - watching and recording without emotion while continuing to return to some selected focus point (breathing, muscles, an object, music, a mantra, a prayer, etc.). "The final goal of

meditation is to be constantly conscious of experience so that relaxation and peace of mind become the norm rather than the exception.(p.47)...The primary goal of meditation is not relaxation - it is awareness (expanded awareness). This is what leads eventually to getting the mind back under control (out of the vicious cycle). Relaxation is a side effect of learning how to meditate.” (p.50, Borysenko, 1984, parenthetical comments added).

For most meditation alone will not remove all the problems related to stress although it does help a great deal. The biggest difficulty with meditation is learning to do it. We are so conditioned to think and act with our busy mind and acting busy that we may find it hard to see how this thing called meditation could be of any use. As physical exercise and rest help the body stay healthy so challenging problems and meditation help the mind. Both are hard to do and to practice on a regular basis.

Dr. Benson (1984) states that an individual can reach enhanced states of well being, without the negative effects of the stress response, through a combination of relaxation (meditation) and a strong belief system - what Dr. Benson call the Faith Factor. "If you truly believe in your personal philosophy or religious faith - you are committed, mind and soul, to your world view - you may well be capable of achieving remarkable feats of mind and body..." (p. 8). Dr. Norman Cousins in his book, "Head First: The Biology of Hope" supports this view. If we maintain a strong faith, a hope, for a positive outcome then healing and a reduction in the negative aspects of stress are likely to occur.

Earlier it was stated that the stress response is an emotional response directly linked to the perception of a threat to survival. One link to this threat perception is through is belief. It was also suggested that when one of the survival drives is perceived as being threatened, or taken away, that satiation through another drive can provide relief from stress. Satiation can

happen through belief which can provide meaning and a sense of relief from stress.

Problem Solving Skills and Stress Hardiness

It is important that any individual who seeks to reduce stress in their lives give serious concern to their own level of problem solving within what ever domain is providing stress.

The same advice is applicable to organizations - asking "Are my employees skilled enough to do their jobs?". An important aspect of the relationship between a person's problem solving skills and their ability to remove the negative effects of stress is their stress hardiness - a persons ability to maintain hope in the face of a crisis of despair:

"Dr. Suzanne Kobasa and her colleagues have studied the difference between these two extremes (despair and hope). In studies of business executives and lawyers, Kobasa first found that those with a great deal of life stress could be protected from physical illness by a combination of three attitudes which together describe the stress - hardy personality. Commitment is an attitude of curiosity and involvement in whatever is happening. Its opposite is alienation - a seen in the children in founding homes who have withdrawn from the world. The second attitude id control which we have seen is the opposite of helplessness. It is the belief that we can influence event, coupled with the willingness to act on that belief. The third is challenge, the belief that life's changes stimulate personal growth instead of threatening the status quo.

The attitude of hardiness lead to a kind of coping that Kobasa calls transformational. Committed people who believe they are in control and expect situations to be challenging and are likely to react to stressful events by increasing their interaction with them - exploring, controlling, and learning from them. This attitude transforms the event into something less stressful by placing it in a broader frame of reference that revolves around continued personal growth and understanding" (pgs. 23-24, Borysenko, 1984).

Miller, et. al., (1990) also found the involvement in work related decision making was crucial to reducing the negative effects of stress. But the development of stress hardiness is not simply about a sense of control - it is also a sense of when we do not have control. "These two paths, taking action where required and surrendering when no further action is possible - are

the paths to stress hardiness" (p. 37, Borysenko, 1984). This is also the path of the successful complex problem solver - to know when to act and when to not act in order to arrive at the best fit solution for a given problem. To learn to become "connected" to the problem-solution path. The more skilled problem solvers we become the less distress we experience and the less distress we experience the more opportunity we have to become more skilled at problem solving. This is one of the tools of threshold management - direct your energies toward solutions not problems and feel good about your accomplishments. Good threshold management leads to stress hardiness.

Additional Stress Beaters

Below is a list of some additional steps each of us can take, and or teach to the learner, to decrease the effects of stress:

- ◆ Ask the question "Am I feeling good?". Do this without asking why, without thinking about life, address only the feelings themselves. Then regardless of the circumstances that led to the way you feel try to find the happiness in your life, the reasons you could say you are lucky, the reasons why other people need you to feel good. Develop a plan to remove the negative feelings.
- ◆ Develop a constructive values and a positive outlook on growth and challenge. Think about the positive aspects of a stressful event:
 - o To become stronger, wiser.
 - o To learn about our weaknesses.
 - o To learn how to deal with our weaknesses.
 - o To see what needs to be changed.
 - o To see what we can't change.
 - o To learn to "let go".
 - o To develop empathy.
 - o To develop humility.
- ◆ Think positively but realistically. Do not become consumed by the "what ifs". Don't become too focused on "what could be" as opposed to what is. Do not let yourself become consumed by your past mistakes - try to learn and then forgive and forget. Be kind to yourself. Do not dwell on the negative. Practice positive self talk and positive

verbalizations about your situation. Practice non-judgmental thinking, try to sit back and just observe.

- ◆ Exercise regularly, build up to doing the equivalent of 20 minutes of aerobic activity 3-4 times per week, but do it without aggression or competition.
- ◆ Focus on removing the effects of stress, don't try to escape. Don't get angry! Be light - Don't Fight!
- ◆ Develop strong interpersonal skills.
- ◆ Develop good sleep habits.
- ◆ Assume only your own responsibilities. Acknowledge when there is an unresolvable conflict. We can not fix everything. Sometimes things must be accepted as they are, sometimes we have to walk away. Do not fix what others should learn to fix for themselves - show them the tools and how to use them and then walk away.
- ◆ Know your strengths, weaknesses, and the influence limit of your actions. Know your limits, know how far you can go before the busy mind starts to destroy your mental and physical health. Know your own personal signs of stress and when you **MUST** change direction.
- ◆ Watch carefully for the effects of the other problems (inappropriate cognitive/behavioral responses) on increasing stress, particularly self worth problems. It is easy to assume too much responsibility for a situation and then also carry the associated stress without the power to make the situation change.
- ◆ Don't try to be perfect, just competent and willing to learn from mistakes. Learn to flow at the pace of the events around you. Start your day slowly and relaxed. Don't be in a hurry to attain instant success, learn to be patient, don't try to force your own desires upon an unwilling crowd (unless that is your job as a policeman may have to do). Learn to say good-bye to an idea. Not every idea will work. ***Don't fight! Be light!***
- ◆ Live a life of realistic goals. Make sure they are goals which truly match your being. Don't make them so large that you receive no regular feedback, support for your actions. It is OK sometimes to seek support for hard work and effort. Find balance between seeking support and addiction to attention. Find balance between goal orientation and letting go, not striving, yet still knowing.
- ◆ Learn time management. Set priorities and work on one or two goals at a time. Work at a pace that is comfortable (not lazy) for you and your abilities NOT what someone else demands. Focus your efforts where they will do the most good. Do not set goals that are beyond your influence.

- ◆ Find people to share your life. Find at least one person with whom you can share almost every thought. Find support for who you are as a person. Try to get feedback for what is said about you so you can make a valid judgment regarding your personal growth. Evaluate an individual burn out programs and suggest that garnering personal/social support is an essential component of success (Dierendock, D., Schaufeli, W.B. & Buunk, B.P., 1998).
- ◆ You may wish to use physical techniques to aid muscle relaxation prior to using meditation. These techniques can include the hot tub, temperature bath, massage, sauna, float-tank, or biofeedback machines.
- ◆ Take time to have fun, to enjoy, to play, and to smile about life. Learn to laugh out loud. Don't get so serious that it destroys your smile. Find those revitalization activities that will clear out the busy mind and bring back joy, happiness, excitement and peace. Take time for you and don't feel guilty about it. Keep a good sense of humor. Do this in and out of the work environment. Focus on the moment, find the joy and wonder in that moment. Stanton-Rich and Isu Ahola (1998) document the importance of leisure as a stress beater.
- ◆ Do not remain in relationships where you are excessively denigrated, criticized, or patronized. If you choose to remain seek counsel.
- ◆ Practice your own constructive creativity.
- ◆ Take time to think about the big picture and your role in that picture. Don't sweat the small stuff. Practice the following:
 - o Consider the source, why is it happening?
 - o Stay focused on your own contribution to non-stress actions.
 - o Watch yourself, try not to let your actions/attitudes contribute to the stress (externally or internally).
 - o Maintain strong self support.
 - o Change it into opportunity.
 - o See it as a challenge to grow.
 - o Know it is inevitable - it happens to everyone in some form.
 - o Be willing to wait and do nothing if that is the action needed.
- ◆ Respite services are often incorporated within the realm of different human services and are an important part of stress management (Etzion, Eden and Lapidot, 1998).

In addition to these guidelines the reader should be willing to pursue help (through counseling) if a peak stress event is causing a significant decrease in task performance within any part of the individuals life and their usual coping skills are proving ineffective. Grief due

to loss of a loved one or loss of a limb are some examples of peak stress events for which the learner may need professional help.

Finally the reader may wish to analyze exactly what in the environment is causing the stress. This shouldn't be done until you have tried the above steps. This is because it is too easy to blame the environment for something that is a personal responsibility. If this is done it removes the responsibility from self. If we accept the responsibility for our own mental health as well as our reactions to stress then we will hopefully judge correctly whether or not to try to change the nature of our environment (which in many cases is hard to do). Remember stress changes an individual's perception and successful stress management changes how we perceive stress.

Robert M. Pirsig in "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" talks about coming to "know" the "goodness" of life as a way of dealing with most of life's stresses:

"The way to see what looks good, and to be at one with this goodness as work proceeds, is to cultivate an inner quietness, a peace of mind so that goodness can shine through...This inner peace of mind occurs on three levels of understanding. Physical quietness appears the easiest to achieve, although there are levels and levels of this too, as attested by the ability of Hindu mystics to live buried alive for many days. Mental quietness in which one has no wandering thoughts at all, seems more difficult, but can be achieved. But value quietness in which one has no wandering desires at all but simply performs the acts of his life without desire, that seems the hardest (p.265)."

Relationship Wisdom

One of the most frequent concerns that triggers stress in people's lives is the stress connected to relationships. Human service workers face this stress in two ways: 1) they encounter the problems as they affect those they are seeking to help and 2) they will need to address relationship concerns both personally and professionally. This author has addressed some issues surrounding stress and the helping relationship by defining different aspects of the

relationship more clearly. In “The Healing Relationship” (see www.SacredHealingNow.com). Briefly -- it has been proposed that the helping relationship can be viewed as having three different types of relationship: the healing relationship, the support relationship, and the habitual relationship (or one involving resistance). Each of these relationships has its own characteristics and understanding them helps to reduce the professional stress that can accompany entering into the helping relationship.

Summary of Stress:

Stress is something everyone will experience at some point in his or her lives. Stress, like all the barriers, is not in and of itself a destructive influence on mind awakening. It is when the stress exceeds our stress threshold that the negative effects of inefficient thinking can occur. Any crisis, developmental or situational, can bring about stress BUT how this happens is different for all people. Different people react differently to different crisis. This varying reaction is due to a number of variables which affect our stress threshold - one of the most significant of which is the strength of our coping skills. In general the stronger our coping skill the higher our stress threshold. Unabated stress over a significant period of time can lead to burnout. There are specific symptoms which characterize both the burnout process and the burnout syndrome. There are preliminary signs, stages of stress, which become increasingly more severe as the learner approaches the burnout process. An understanding of these components of stress may help to decrease the negative effects of stress.

There are numerous approaches espoused by "experts" to address the problems of stress but the solutions can be categorized simply into those which address the five variables that affect our stress threshold. If you increase stress threshold, whether through personal or environmental changes, then you increase the ability to deal with stress efficiently and thus decrease its effects.

Table 8: Summary - Removal of the Negative Effects of Stress

Topic of Concern	Description and Its relation to the Treatment of Stress
Relation To Emotion	The stress response is an emotional response. The learner needs to face his her emotions and to learn how they relate to feeling stressed. This includes identifying the feelings, the triggers, the process, the events, and the success/failure of intervention, which are associated with stress. Teach the learner that they can not control the occurrence of all the triggers which are associated with the stress response but that they can learn to control their reactions to the triggers which will alter the thought/action pattern associated with the trigger and in some cases change the power of the trigger as an stress stimuli.
Stress, Threshold, Eustress vs. Distress	Stress can be useful as it heightens awareness, increases motivation, and improves performance (eustress) in some situations. There is a relationship between the situational demands of the problem (domain) and the type of problems solving concentration needed to solve the problem (process). Once the stress level exceeds some stress threshold, (which is related to the domain - process interface) then stress contributes to impaired functioning (distress). Each learner should come to know their own stress threshold and it's relation to the interaction of domain and process. Through this knowledge each learner can improve his or her stress hardiness.
Stages of Stress	Stress threshold is a variable that changes over time and situation. Stress hardiness is recognized as the ability to maintain a high threshold over long periods of time and being able to prevent oneself from moving through the Stages Of Stress into burnout. Education regarding the stages and threshold management can help the learner develop stress hardiness.
Individual vs. Environment	Stress threshold is a variable function whose level changes with respect to both individual and environmental factors. The practitioner should assess the contribution of both to the level of stress being experienced by the learner and then develop a plan which reduces the environmental effects and increases the learner's stress threshold. Responsibilities for actions should be assigned. There should also be a balance between accepting the responsibility for change and letting go of that responsibility, knowing that you do not have the authority to direct that change.
Optimal Health, Meditation	Optimal health contributes to stress hardiness and stress hardiness contributes to optimal health. The feedback loop stress - physical response - more stress is an important part of the stress response and it's effects can be minimized through optimal health (diet, exercise, no drugs, meditation). It is also important for the learner to recognize his or her own early body signs indicating stress - become body aware - meditation can help this awareness. Take time to find the quiet mind and get rejuvenated.
Purpose And Meaning	There is an important link between our individual stress threshold during any given situation and the sense of purpose/meaning which we attach to that situation. The practitioner should help the learner to understand this connection - in terms of both increasing and decreasing stress threshold. One's belief can be very powerful tools in the construction of stress hardiness and it's deflation. Teach the learner to be open and ready to learn from every moment of every day - that is the journey.

It is also important to understand the type of helping relationship into which you have entered with another and to work within its confines. Changing one's perception of what appears to be stress in order to increase one's mental and physical well being is not easy, nor instant, but it is possible. A quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson helps to illustrate the point:

"To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded."

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Internet Information

An occupational stress assessment - <http://www.onsyd.com/stress/osa.htm>

Lawrence Murphy, current ecological research - <http://rap.nas.edu/leb>

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