

Managing Change

Group Exercise: Reduce Harmful Stress

This activity helps people to explore the range of feelings associated with personal change—arriving at acceptance and understanding of what are, after all, perfectly natural processes.

With support, participants can explore their fears and apprehensions associated with stressful, uncomfortable and crisis situations. Personal transitions are not necessarily bad, threatening or frightening: with increased understanding many of these can be fun, challenging and exciting.

This activity will enable participants to analyze incidents that placed them under severe pressure or stress and which caused great discomfort.

Situations

This activity may be used on its own or as part of a course or workshop program on the subject of stress. It is intended for use by all levels of employee.

Objectives

- To reflect upon incidents or situations that placed participants under severe, uncomfortable pressure or stress.
- To suggest possible reasons or underlying causes leading to the stressful condition.
- To seek remedies or options for reducing stress in the future.

Trainer guidance

Much of what has been written on stress is highly subjective and does not lend itself to easy diagnosis. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that experiencing some stress seems to be desirable and that “stressors”—those factors that act upon us and produce stress—affect different people in different ways and to varying degrees. At the prospect of delivering a public speech, for example, some individuals feel physically sick—while others will rise to the challenge and enjoy it.

The effects of stress can be grouped into two main categories:

- a. *Mental*—fatigue, irritability, anxiousness, sleeplessness, etc.
- b. *Physical*—indigestion, headaches, palpitations, sweating, etc.

While this activity is not a “cure all”, you can emphasize the necessity of raising awareness and understanding that stress is a perfectly natural state which all people experience.

Method

1. Inform participants that their cooperation is valued and will enhance the levels of interest and participation during the course.

2. After a brief introduction, divide participants into two or three groups and give them the following tasks.

a. Ask each participant to give a brief description of his/her stressful incident as recorded on the Stress Review (on the following page). While each account is being given, other members should listen carefully.

b. When all participants have finished their accounts, ask each group to discuss the points from these incidents. Distribute the Stress Review and ask groups to produce two lists, as instructed.

3. Bring participants together and ask each group's representative to provide feedback, using the prepared flipcharts which should be displayed side by side.

4. When all presentations have been made, lead a general discussion on the issues raised. Useful areas for discussion are:

- different perceptions about what constitutes stress;
- wide range of coping and stress-reduction methods;
- spectrum of normal feelings associated with stress;
- increased understanding and potential learning when individuals are prepared to trust others with their accounts of stressful situations.

Encourage participants to discuss and consider the likelihood that at least one of the stress reduction methods listed will help in *every* situation.

5. Ask participants to record key points about their learning from the activity and share these in their groups.

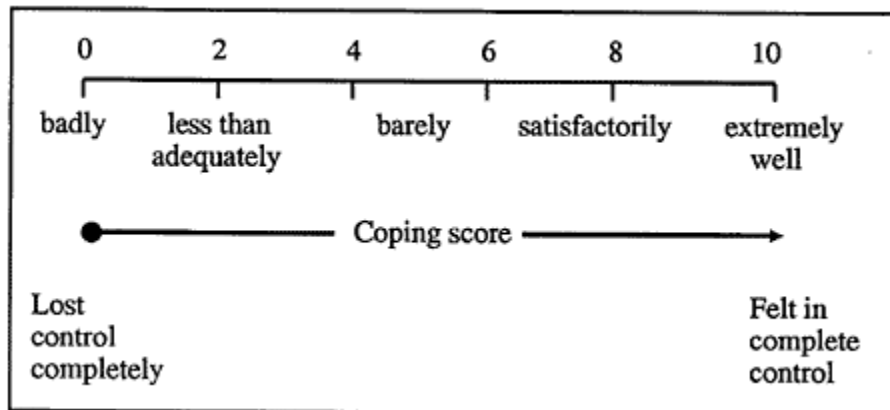
Handout: Stress Review

1. Briefly describe an incident or situation that caused you severe pressure/ discomfort/stress.

2. In one or two words describe how you felt as a result of this incident. In the box below are some examples of descriptive words to help you:

fine, grand, lovely, perfect, brilliant, happy, relaxed, calm, confident, angry, subdued, humiliated, funny, peculiar, awful, terrible, tired, weary, exhausted, weak, frightened, scared, petrified, uncomfortable, sick, sweaty, cold, hot, ill, alone, hurt, disgraced, incompetent, silly.

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, record how well you think you coped with this incident.



Incident

I felt...

Coping score

4. Finally, describe some methods you could usefully employ to *reduce* your personal stress should any similar incident occur.