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Stress is a Normal Part of Life

Facilitator Notes

Main Learning Points:

This is the first session. Every session except this one will begin with a review of the Main Learning Points from the last session.



Note

This lesson could be used for family/friend groups or sessions. It offers an opportunity for the participant and family to practice skill-building together.

Remember

You can refer to the two-sided laminated “*Facilitator’s Delivery Checklist*” when using Team Solutions materials as a reminder of important facilitator tips.

General Tip

As you begin this first workbook on stress, be aware that different cultures may have different views on stress. If you are working with a culturally diverse group, you will want to be sensitive to their specific feelings about stress.

Potential Problem for this Session

Participants may have trouble grasping the concept of stress.

Possible Responses

1. State, “Although it is hard to define, almost everyone can remember a time when they felt tension and anxiety from stress.” Ask participants to discuss a time when they knew they were stressed. Make a list of their responses on the board for everyone to see.
2. Give the general definition of stress in this section and reflect how the definition relates to the examples they provided.

Suggestion for Topic Introduction and Relevance to Participants

“Today, we’re going to talk about how stress is a normal part of our lives. It seems that the world is moving faster and faster. We may find it hard to keep up sometimes. As we keep plugging along, trying to deal with our daily problems, we may feel tightness in our chest or knots in our stomachs. We may get cranky. We can reach a point where we think we can’t deal with one more thing, and realize that we are totally ‘stressed out.’”

“When you get really stressed, what kinds of feelings do you have?”

(Encourage responses.)

“Stress can have a negative effect on the health and abilities of all of us, not just a person with a mental illness. With this workbook, we will learn ways to reduce stress in our lives. By working through the exercises in each section of this workbook, you may find ways to manage or reduce stress, which will help you in your recovery.”

“Let’s answer the first six questions on the Topic Assessment before we start, just to see how familiar we are with this topic.”

Topic Assessment Answer Key

1. D 2. C 3. B 4. C

T – topic introduction
R – relevance to participant
I – identify objectives
M – materials for session
M – motivate to use

Topic Assessment



Mark one: Pre Post

Your Score:
+ ____ out of 4

Directions:

1. Read each question carefully.
2. Read every answer before marking one.
3. Mark only one answer to each question.

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Stress is:

- A. A sign of illness.
- B. A sign medicine is not working.
- C. A problem only people with mental illness have.
- D. Something everyone has.

2. A person with mental illness:

- A. Needs to get rid of all stress in his or her life.
- B. Needs to avoid all stressful situations.
- C. Can learn skills that reduce stress.
- D. Always relapses when under stress.

3. If you break out in a sweat when you are stressed, it is a sign you are weak.

- A. True
- B. False

4. People experience stress:

- A. In the same way.
- B. Early and often.
- C. In different ways.
- D. Only if they can't ignore it.

Topic Assessment



5. I am confident I understand that stress is a normal emotion.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure

6. This information is important for me to know.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

At the end of the session, answer these questions before turning in this paper:

7. This session helped me.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. What I liked about this session: _____

9. How this session could have been better for me: _____

Stress Is a Normal Part of Life

Objectives for this Session

1. Identify 1 way that people are stressed.
2. Identify 3 signs you notice when you are stressed.
3. Identify 1 skill you use to deal with stress.

Many people with mental illness have been told to avoid stressful situations because stress can cause symptoms to get worse. Although it is true that stress can affect symptoms, no one can avoid stress. Everyone has some amount of stress every day. Stress is a normal part of life.

Main Learning Point #1

Everyone has stress.

For a person with mental illness, like anyone else, completely avoiding stress is not the goal. How we respond to stress affects our health and well-being. The good news is that everyone can learn skills to cut down on stress. People who develop good skills to deal with stress generally say they are more satisfied and happier with life.

Main Learning Point #2

A person with mental illness can learn skills to reduce stress.

Defining stress. Stress is a normal reaction to demands made upon the body, but stress is not always easy to recognize. For example, stress is often the feeling of tension or pressure we have when we are making a change. We may be embarrassed or afraid when we don't know if we can do something. Stress can feel like many emotions or physical feelings.

Stress is a Normal Part of Life

(continued)

Improving stress awareness. Our bodies often show signs of stress that tell us something needs to be changed or handled differently. It can be easy to miss these signs. The signs can be different from one person to the next. What we have in common is that stress often makes us uncomfortable in some way.



Below is a list of common signs of stress. Circle the ones you have noticed when you have been stressed.

Physical signs:

- Headache.
- Poor concentration.
- Upset stomach.
- Sweating.
- Tight or tense muscles.
- Heartburn.
- Diarrhea, constipation, or going to the bathroom more often.
- Rapid heart beat.
- Increased blood pressure.
- Shallow breathing.
- Jaw pain.
- Tiredness.
- Being anxious or nervous.

Mood signs:

- Irritability.
- Anger.
- Depressed or sad.
- Loss of hope.
- Tension or anxiety.
- Tendency to get very excited or easily wound-up.

Behavioral signs:

- Trouble sleeping (either too much or too little).
- Pacing.
- Eating (either too much or too little).
- Smoking more.
- Trouble making decisions.
- Using or abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Staying away from others.
- Worrying about the same thing over and over.

List other signs of stress you have noticed: _____

Stress is a Normal Part of Life

(continued)

Main Learning Point #3

Stress is a normal reaction of the body.

Because we see the world differently and have different ways of coping with challenges, we experience stress differently. Something that is stressful for one person may not be stressful for someone else.

An example of how we feel stress differently is the experience of two people going into a swimming pool. A person who doesn't know how to swim will probably feel afraid and anxious (stressed) about getting into the water. Their heart may pound and they may even break out in a sweat. But a lifeguard probably will not feel afraid at all.

Both people go through the same steps to get into the water. The non-swimmer is very stressed because of his or her fear of drowning. But the lifeguard knows how to swim very well, so he or she has a different (non-stressful) reaction.

Although medicine can help sometimes, medicines are not the only way to deal with normal stressful situations.

Discussion Points:

1. Do you like to go swimming or get into a swimming pool?
2. How do you feel in that situation?
3. What physical reactions do you experience? (For example, "I am afraid," or "I am relaxed.")

We can see that everyone has their own reaction to a given situation.

Main Learning Point #4

People get stressed over different things.

Review & Moving Forward



The *main learning points* of this session are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Move Forward – Choose a Personal Practice Option

It's important to practice new knowledge and skills. What will you do between now and the next session? Please choose one option from the list below:

- 1. STUDY.** I am going to reread my handout at least once.
- 2. SHARE.** I will share my handout with someone in my support network. I will ask _____ to read it and talk with me about the type of stress they have.
- 3. ASSESS.** Complete the following sentences and bring to the next session:
When I get stressed, I _____

I would like to be less stressed when I _____

- 4. OTHER:** _____

Take an **“Extra Step Forward”** (optional)

- 5. TRACK.** Before our next session, I will look for a time when I have stress. I will work to figure out why I am stressed and how I am reacting to it. I will write it down and bring it to group next time.

If there is time left before the end of the session, you might talk about your personal practice goals. How will you **remember** and **complete** your goal by the next session?