

Controlling Stress



Toolbox Talks

Stress Management Part 1

Stress. Many of us are faced with it every day, but we might not know how to deal with it. It is important to learn how to handle stress because it can affect our performance & relationships in our work & home. At work, stress can lead to distraction & cause an unfortunate accident. At home, stress can put a strain on family relationships.

Stress usually occurs when there are changes in our lives & we feel that we don't have enough resources to deal with those changes & demands. Which of the following do you think causes stress: getting married, winning the lottery, or having an argument? It is all of them. Stress can occur not only from negative life experiences, but also from positive ones. People react & deal with stress differently. Common stress symptoms include upset stomach, fatigue, tight neck muscles, irritability, & headaches. Some people react to stress by eating or drinking too much, losing sleep, or smoking cigarettes. Stress may also make you more susceptible to illnesses, including the common cold, ulcers, & some cancers. The first step to managing stress is to identify your "stressors," the events & things causing your reaction. Stressors may not only be events that cause you to feel sad, frightened, anxious, or happy; you can cause stress through your thoughts, feelings, & expectations.

Look at the list below: Which cause you stress? Can you think of other stressors in your life?

- Not enough time
- Family problems
- Personality clashes
- Unexpected change
- Extra responsibility
- Money difficulties

Everyone has to deal with life's problems. **A key to dealing with the big & little everyday stressors is coping with stress in a positive way.**

1. Acceptance- Many of us worry about things we have no control over. For example, a family illness, great deal of change at work, or finding out that your hockey team lost. One way to manage stress is to accept when things are beyond your control. It may be helpful to think positive thoughts such as, "Someday I'll laugh about this," or "It's a learning experience."

2. Attitude- Try to focus on the positive side of situations. Ask yourself, "What good can come out of this?, What can I learn from this situation?, & How can I handle this better when it comes up again?" **Solutions come easier when you focus on the positive & your stress level will be reduced.**

3. Perspective- We often worry about things that never happen. Keep things in perspective by asking yourself, "How important is this situation?, Can I do anything about it?, In five years, will I even remember it happened?" Think about the situations in your life that cause you stress. Are they important or unimportant? Are they controllable or uncontrollable? If they are controllable events, you can take action to change the situation; if they are uncontrollable, you can use your skills in acceptance, attitude, & perspective to reduce the stress.

Balance at Work: Workplace stress

43% of Americans feel that their job or work is the greatest source of stress in their lives. Recent research links workplace stress to four key factors:

- High demand – having too much to do in too short a time
- Low control – having too little influence on the way that work is carried out
- High effort – the emotional or psychological demands of the job
- Low reward – receiving inadequate recognition for a job well done

It's normal to expect a certain amount of stress in your life. In fact, stress can be good for you. In small doses, stress can generate the energy & motivation you need to meet the daily challenges at work & at home. **When you handle a challenge successfully, the brief but intense brush with stress generates an adrenalin rush that can leave you feeling happy & satisfied.**

Health problems tend to develop only if excessive stress becomes chronic. **When worry or tension continues for a length of time, the prolonged exposure to high levels of stress hormones can cause permanent damage to your body.** Chronic stress has been linked to heart disease, depression, immune disorders, diabetes, & is a contributing factor to many other health conditions.

Maintain a positive attitude: In many workplace situations, the factors that contribute to job stress can't be changed or may take a long time to improve. When stress is unavoidable, it's essential to maintain a good mental attitude. **Instead of dreading your workday, take a step back & try changing your perspective a little – you may surprise yourself by discovering a new passion for your work.**

Chart success differently: If you're driving hard towards a specific goal, you may have forgotten to enjoy the journey along the way. **Take time to appreciate the progress you're making, instead of focusing exclusively on your final destination.** Each morning, review the successes of the previous day (no matter how small!). Look for the positive – it's a great way to start your day

Change your patterns: Take a different route to work, try a new restaurant, talk with a colleague about something other than work. **When you make small changes in your daily routines, you'll find that your outlook on life improves dramatically.** Those little adjustments really do make a difference!

Reset your goals: Stress can be just as easily caused by frustration & boredom, as by overwork. Maybe you've achieved many of your work goals & you've hit a plateau. Or maybe you're just coasting at work, instead of challenging yourself. Now's the time to start fresh. **Come up with some new ideas & new goals that you want to accomplish – your enthusiasm will pick up when you start to see new opportunities on the horizon.**

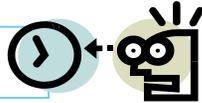
Face your fears: Are you putting up with the status quo because you're afraid to make a change? Are you refusing to take a risk because you don't want to face criticism, disapproval, or failure? **Think about the issues that are holding you back & decide if your fears are realistic.** Then take the plunge! A calculated risk may be just the thing to get rid of your restlessness & improve your job satisfaction.

Strive for excellence: Don't waste away your time doing work that doesn't help you achieve your goals. **Focus on the right things & you'll find your job satisfaction will improve & your stress levels will drop.** When you tackle a new task, ask yourself:

- What is the purpose of the job?
- What are the priorities & deadlines?
- What costs are acceptable?
- What are the measures of success?
- What resources are available?
- How does this relate to my own work goals & the goals of my organization?
- How can I perform my best in completing this project?

Take a vacation: Absence makes the heart grow fonder! Give yourself a well-deserved break to recharge your batteries. **Some time away from work will let you return refreshed & re-energized.** You won't do anyone any good if you're constantly running on empty.

Time Management – Dealing with Time Stealers!



Toolbox Talks Stress Management Part 2



Are you running out of time before you run out of tasks? Do you wish you had more hours in the day to get it all done? Here are some common time-wasters that eat up precious minutes every day. [Learning how to plan for & manage these distractions will dramatically improve your effectiveness & productivity.](#)

1. Crisis management: You've already planned a full workday & suddenly, a crisis develops that needs your immediate attention. Unexpected problems can disrupt even the most carefully organized schedule.

Solution:

→ Don't let someone else's crisis become your problem. Try not to react to tasks that seem urgent but may not really be furthering your work goals or the goals of your organization.

→ When planning your workday, always ask yourself, "What is the best use of my time right now?" That will help you set priorities & focus your energy on the important tasks of the day.

→ Accept the fact that problems will always develop, so try to plan for them. Set aside some time each day to deal with unexpected issues – if nothing develops, you'll have the benefit of some extra time to complete other work or enjoy a short break.

→ Whenever possible, anticipate crises & take action to head them off – it's always easier to put out a small spark than a raging fire.

2. Attempting too much: It's easy to fall into the trap of taking on more than you can handle – & trying to get it all done 'yesterday.' If you don't allocate enough time to do things properly, you'll be left with half-finished projects & no sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.

Solution:

→ Start by setting realistic goals for yourself. Plan your activities each day, taking into account specific time commitments, such as meetings & appointments. Identify & prioritize all the tasks you have to complete during your available working hours & do the important jobs first.

→ Plan enough time to complete your 'to do' list – make sure you allocate some time to deal with your normal daily interruptions.

→ Make a habit of finishing the main task you've set for each day before you go home at night.

→ Try to complete one task before starting another – incomplete work drains your energy & leaves you feeling frustrated.

→ Learn to say no graciously – when someone asks you to take on a project, try to determine if you're really the right person for the job.

→ Delegate work whenever possible – remember, you don't have to do it all – many tasks can be done just as well by someone else.

3. Procrastination: The biggest thief of time is not decision making, but decision-avoidance. By reducing the amount of procrastinating you do, you can substantially increase the amount of productive time in your day.

Solution:

→ The longer you put a job off, the more it clutters up your daily schedule – if you have a job to do, take action. Do it now!

→ Don't postpone an important task simply because it's unpleasant – the task won't get better with time & you'll waste precious hours worrying about it or finding creative excuses to avoid it!

→ Make molehills out of mountains – if you're avoiding a task because it seems difficult or overpowering, try breaking it down into smaller segments & tackle a little part of it each day – you'll make better progress this way & your motivation will increase, as you become more involved in the project.

→ Arrange set times of the day for mundane tasks, such as going through mail, responding to memos etc – that way you won't be tempted to postpone work that's boring & repetitive.

4. Telephone interruptions: The telephone is one of our greatest communication tools – but it can also be our biggest time waster.

Solution:

→ Plan a specific 'telephone time' for returning calls – by grouping your calls, you'll complete them quickly & minimize the disruptions in your daily work.

→ Avoid prolonging work-related calls with unnecessary social chitchat – try to get your caller down to business quickly by asking "How may I help you?"

→ Let your caller know your time constraints – if you have a class to teach in 10 minutes, say so right at the beginning of the conversation (politely, of course!).

→ Try to avoid being placed 'on hold' when making a phone call – if someone is unavailable, arrange for a convenient time to call back or leave a message & your phone number.

→ Leave clear messages on other people's answering machines – always give your name & phone number, as well as a convenient time for a return call.

→ Encourage the use of e-mail – it's less disruptive & you can respond at a time that's convenient for you.

5. Unexpected visitors: "Do you have a minute?" When it comes to effective time management, these five little words can be lethal! Unexpected, 'drop-in' visitors can soak up your time like a sponge.

Solution:

→ Stand up when a colleague or visitor comes into your office or classroom – your body language will send the message that you're busy. Chances are your visitor will also remain standing & will get to the point quickly, instead of sitting down for an extended visit.

→ Try to establish the purpose of the unexpected visit as soon as possible, then deal with the issue immediately or arrange for a follow-up meeting at a more convenient time.

→ Try not to engage in small talk & set a clear time limit for the discussion.

→ Don't use an interruption as an excuse to stop work on a task or project – make note of what you were doing when you were interrupted & get back to your task immediately after the call or visit is complete.

→ Whenever possible, plan specific times for discussing routine matters with colleagues, staff, or parents – that will help limit the number of unexpected interruptions in your day.

6. Paper Clutter: If your workspace is cluttered & messy, you're probably wasting a surprising amount of time hunting for things that have gone missing in your desk or office.

Solution:

→ Avoid a paper buildup by setting aside a specific time each day to deal with your mail – any paper that you don't need to keep should be discarded immediately.

→ Don't use your desk as a giant 'in box'. Create in & out boxes for on-going work & place them on a cabinet or shelf, so they don't distract you from your daily tasks.

7. E-mail overload: E-mail can be a major distraction. It's hard to resist the temptation to check your inbox constantly. Learn to ignore that insistent little 'you've got mail' message & you'll find your day is much more productive.

Solution:

→ Establish a regular time of day for processing e-mail & look at it only then.

→ Reduce computer clutter by deleting or filing messages as soon as you've taken action on them.

→ Create a filing system for your e-mail, using broad categories & subcategories to keep like subjects together.