



Self-care and Stress Management for Health Care Professionals

Amy L. Horrex, PsyD, ABPP
Clinical Psychologist

Group activity!!



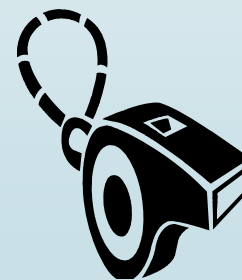
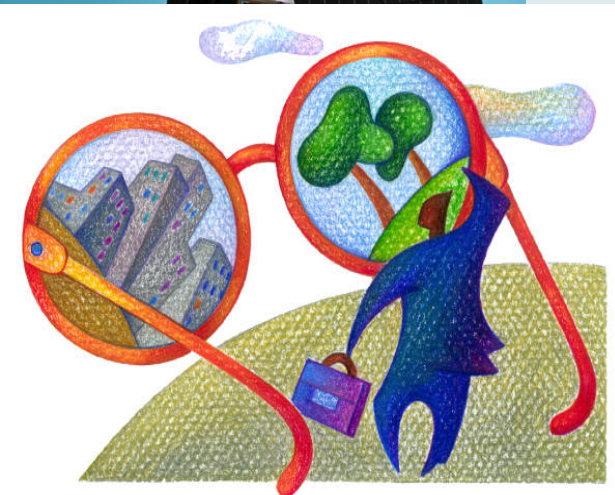


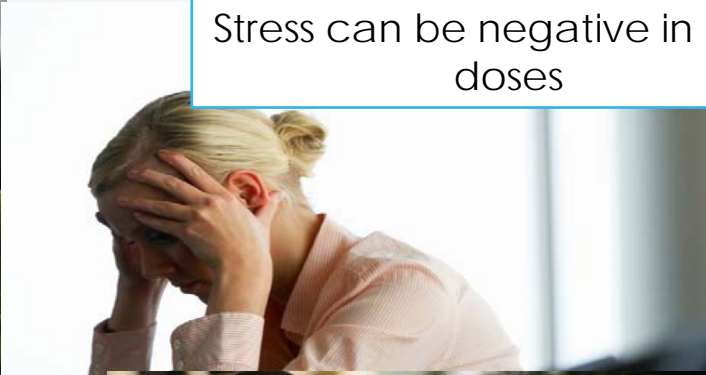
First, let's talk about stress...

- Stress: A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.
- Stress is a normal psychological & physical reaction to the many demands in life.
- Most Americans reported that they experience challenges with stress and managing stress multiple times throughout a calendar year.
- Human brains are hard-wired with an alarm system: Fight, Flight or Freeze
- The seemingly non-stop stressors of modern life means that your alarm system may rarely shut off.



Stress can be helpful in smaller doses





Stress can be negative in large doses





Experiencing stress

- ▶ The pace of modern life includes juggling many roles and responsibilities including work, home life, care giving, relationships, socialization, and transportation.
- ▶ Experiencing & perceiving stress is individualized, but there are common stressors and warning signs to look for to ensure stress is not taking over your life, health and relationships.

What does stress look like?

Physical

- ▶ Stress headaches
- ▶ Back pain
- ▶ Chest pain
- ▶ Heart Disease
- ▶ Heart palpitations
- ▶ HTN
- ▶ Decreased immunity
- ▶ Stomachache
- ▶ Sleep problems



What does stress look like?

Emotional

- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Restlessness
- ▶ Worrying
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Feeling insecure
- ▶ Lack of focus
- ▶ Burnout
- ▶ Forgetfulness



What does stress look like?

Behavioral

- ▶ Over-eating
- ▶ Under-eating
- ▶ Angry outbursts
- ▶ Drug and alcohol abuse
- ▶ Increased smoking
- ▶ Social withdrawal
- ▶ Crying spells
- ▶ Relationship conflicts





Adversity that Healthcare Providers often experience:

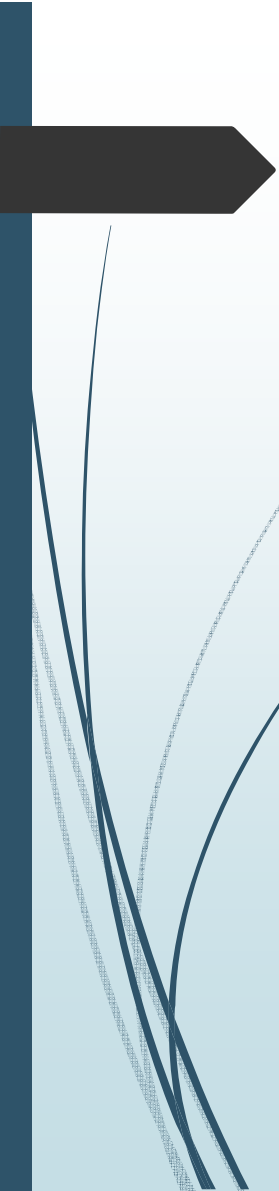
On top of the basic daily clinical and training requirements there may also be the following stressors:

- Exposure to suffering experienced by patients
- Exposure to details of traumatic events experienced by patients
- Increased demands for services with stable or decreased resources
- Isolation
- High Caseloads
- Time constraints
- Political/Administrative stressors

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet.”

– Remen, 1996





Predictors of stress/burnout: a mismatch in expectations

Workload: demand vs time and resources

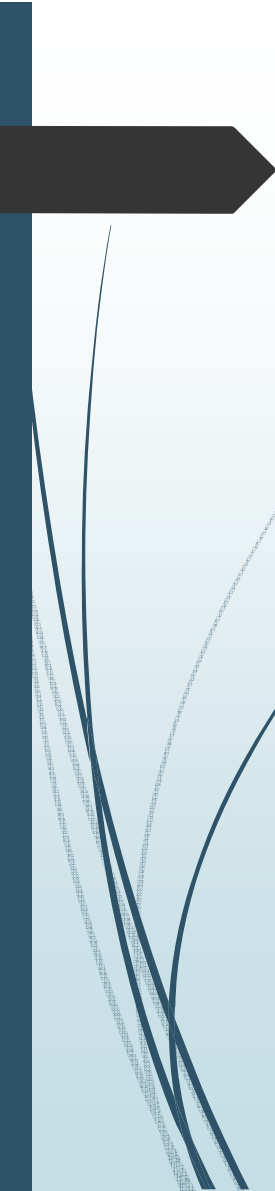
Control: influence in decision making, professional autonomy

Rewards: financial, social, internal recognition for work

Community: quality of relationships with managers, colleagues and subordinates

Fairness: openness/respect in decision making processes and organization

Values: congruency with person and organization's priorities and values



What can happen to us, as providers, when stress builds up and becomes fatigue or burnout?

Poor Risk Management:

Risk Management helps ensure good clinical practice, helps avoid malpractice, and can offer protection should a lawsuit arise. Clinical practice areas that fall under the “risk management” category include: Scope of Practice, Competence and Boundary Violations

If a provider is experiencing high levels of prolonged stress, burnout or compassion fatigue, they may be at higher risk of using poor judgment regarding their own abilities and competence to provide services and/or supervise others providing services.

What can happen to us, as providers, when stress builds up and becomes fatigue or burnout?

Boundary Violations:

Being vigilant about boundaries takes energy and clear thinking.

Those impacted by burnout or compassion fatigue may have a compromising ability to maintain healthy boundaries.





Stress Management/Stress Reduction:

☺ The Good News!

- Stress management is VERY important because it gives you the tools you need to reset your alarm system so it's not constantly in a charged up state!
- Effective stress management can save you your job, relationships and your health!



How do I know if I have a problem with stress?

The **FIRST** step to stress reduction is identifying problems you are having with stress.

- Am I drinking too much alcohol too often?
- Am I talking excessively or in circles without taking time to relax and think?
- Am I getting “worked up” more frequently?
- Am I worrying constantly?
- Do I check emails or take phone calls 24/7?
- Do I stay plugged into my ipod for hours blocking out the rest of my life?
- Am I becoming agitated or aggravated at things or people more often?
- Am I procrastinating or feeling overwhelmed and unproductive?
- Is my to-do list constantly growing with minimal things being checked off?
- Am I becoming overly emotional or more withdrawn/stoic?
- Am I cursing or complaining more than normal?
- Am I struggling to fall asleep, stay asleep, or don't want to get out of bed?
- Am I making poor/unhealthy/rushed decisions?

What are my stress triggers?

The **SECOND** step to stress reduction is identifying your stress triggers.

- ▶ Job pressures
- ▶ Relationship problems
- ▶ Financial difficulties
- ▶ Daily hassles/demands
- ▶ Child care duties/delegation
- ▶ Commuting
- ▶ Being over committed
- ▶ Meal planning

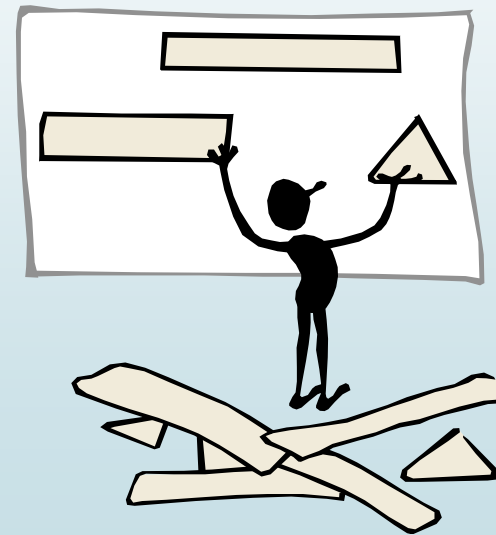


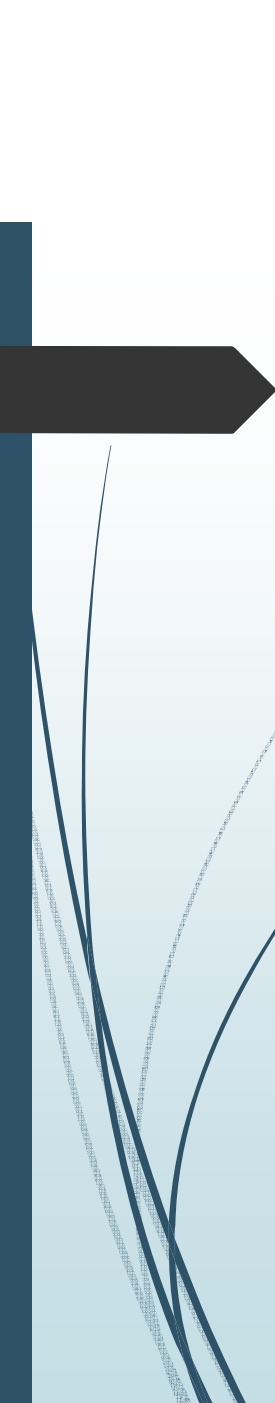
What are some strategies for managing stressful situations in a healthy way?

The **THIRD** step to stress reduction is to make a change in how you manage stress.

The 4-A's:

- Avoid
- Alter
- Adapt
- Accept





Avoid the stressor or unhealthy ways of coping with stress

Believe it or not, you can avoid a lot of stress!

- Take control of your surroundings
- Maintain healthy boundaries.
 - Avoid people who bother you when possible
 - Reduce your to-do list (prioritize and cut the least important).
 - Learn to say “no.”
- Avoid “hot button” topics.
- Avoid complaining, smoking, over drinking, isolating...



Alter the stressor

One of the most helpful things you can do during times of stress is take inventory, then attempt to change your situation for the better!

- ▶ Respectfully ask others to change their behavior & be willing to do the same.
- ▶ Examine your thoughts and interpretations of events that impact your stress level. Determine if you need to:
 - ▶ Express your feelings rather than bottle them up.
 - ▶ Be more assertive
 - ▶ Be willing to compromise, learn to be more flexible when appropriate.
 - ▶ State limits in advance
- ▶ Learn new/improved ways to manage your time.



Aadapt the stressor

Thinking you cannot cope just adds to the stress. That is why adapting, which often involves changing standards or expectations, can be most helpful in dealing with stress.

- Reframe the issue/problems.
- Look at the big picture.
- Adjust your standards.
- Focus on the positive & practice thought-stopping when negative thoughts start pouring in
- Be creative/ Think outside the box.
- Create a mantra for yourself.
 - “I can handle this” or “I can do hard things.”



Accept the stressor

Sometimes you may have no choice, but to accept the things the way they are. For those times try the following:

- ▶ Talk with someone about your feelings
- ▶ Stop trying to control the uncontrollable.
- ▶ Look for the upside/practice positive thinking/self-talk
- ▶ Learn to forgive. It takes energy to be angry...sometimes it is better to shrug and move on.

EXAMPLE 1:

Cognitive Strategy

Taking the time to evaluate how your thoughts and interpretations of events impact your mood and functioning is important.

Health Care Providers are not immune to negative thinking styles and attributions. Evaluating how your thinking may contribute to the experience of negative (or positive) emotions is a critical skill for resilience and stress reduction.

EXAMPLE 2:

Be mindful of the positive

Paying attention to positive emotions and experiences such as happiness, joy, pride, love, contentment, esteem, interest and respect is **as** critical for building resilience as is evaluating negative emotions.

When you experience something good, try to slow down and live as fully as possible in all aspects of that positive feeling. What are you experiencing physically and/or physiologically? What are you thinking? What do you do as a result? What does this experience motivate you to do? Learning to scan for "the good" takes practice since most of us are used to scanning for "the bad."

EXAMPLE 3:

Increasing Support and Connection

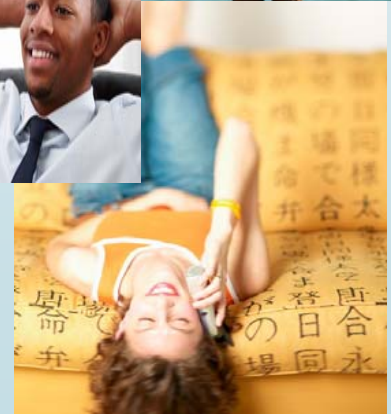
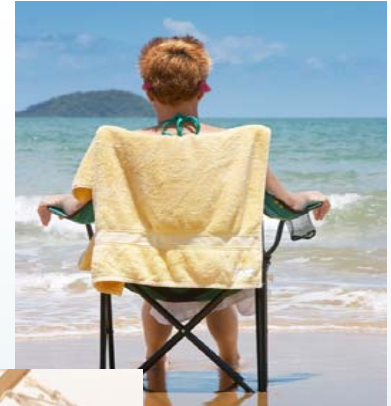
There is ample evidence that social support and feeling connected personally and professionally is associated with better mood and functioning.

Feeling connected to something larger than ourselves also has been shown to promote resilience. This can be an organization, religion, cause, or other spiritual outlet.

Adapt a healthy life-style

We need to practice what we teach!

- ▶ Exercise regularly
- ▶ Balanced/healthy eating habits
- ▶ Avoid alcohol/drugs/tobacco
- ▶ Engage in proper sleep hygiene/get enough sleep
- ▶ Make time for relaxation & fun!
 - Go for a walk, spend time with nature
 - Take a warm shower/bath
 - Savor a warm cup or coffee or tea
 - Play with your children or pet
 - Watch a comedy
 - Listen to music
 - Take a vacation or weekend getaway



And if all else fails... grin & bear it!



A recent study from scientists at University of Kansas found that the age old statement "grin and bear it" may actually have some merit.

Smiling during brief stressors can help reduce the intensity of the body's stress response (lowering blood pressure and heart rate), regardless of whether the person actually feels happy.

Smiling can influence our physical state, and smiling is also contagious so spread the joy! 😊 😊 😊



References

Compassion Fatigue/Burn-out

- ▶ Figley, CR (2002, Ed.) Treating Compassion Fatigue.
- ▶ Baverstock, AC & Finlay, FO (2015) Maintaining Compassion and Preventing Compassion Fatigue.
- ▶ Deployment Psych: <http://deploymentpsych.org>
- ▶ Rocky Mountain MIRECC Resources: <http://mirecc.va.gov/visn19/clinical/>

Strategies for Managing Stress & Self-Care

- ▶ Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-management/MY00435/DSECTION=stress-relief>
- ▶ Web MD: <http://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-management-topic-overview>
- ▶ University of Kansas Study: <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/smiling-facilitates-stress-recovery.html>
- ▶ Deployment Psych: <http://deploymentpsych.org/>