

# Distress & Relaxation



## WORKSHOP

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# Definition of Stress



- **Stress:**
  - Is a physical, mental or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension
  - Comes from a situation or a thought that makes you feel frustrated, nervous, anxious or angry
  - Can be a good thing
  - Can also be harmful
  
- **Harmful Stress - Distress:**

This is the kind of stress that would be helpful to limit and learn to manage in a healthy way

# Common Sources of Distress



Tension with parents/co-workers	Too much work to do and not enough time
Feeling unable to make use of your skills and abilities	Too many children per caregiver
Environmental issues- noise, lack of space, disorganized, etc.	Children need things immediately
Personal concerns – family, financial, health, etc.	Having few/no opportunities for professional development or advancement
Lack of clear communication with co-workers/supervisors/others in authority	Feeling like you have little control over how you perform your job

# Common Symptoms of Distress



## Cognitive:

Memory problems  
Inability to concentrate  
Continuous worry  
Racing thoughts

## Emotional:

Feeling Down  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Irritability (short temper)  
Inability to relax

## Physical:

Excessive Perspiration  
Chest pains/ elevated heart  
Frequent colds/illness  
Nausea, dizziness or headaches

## Behavioral:

Increase /decrease appetite  
Nervous habits  
Difficulty/irregular sleeping  
Excessive use of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs



## Activity:

### Knowing Your Sources and Signs of Distress

In pairs or small groups:

Discuss the following questions:

- What are my sources of distress?
- How do I know when I am experiencing stress?
- What are my distress reactions?

Be prepared to report back to the group

# The Link Between Thoughts, Behavior, and Emotion



Your thoughts impact your behavior:

- Stress comes from our perception of the situation
- Technically, the actual situation is not stressful, our perceptions MAKE IT stressful
- Sometimes we are right, sometimes we are wrong!
- There are common unhelpful patterns of thinking

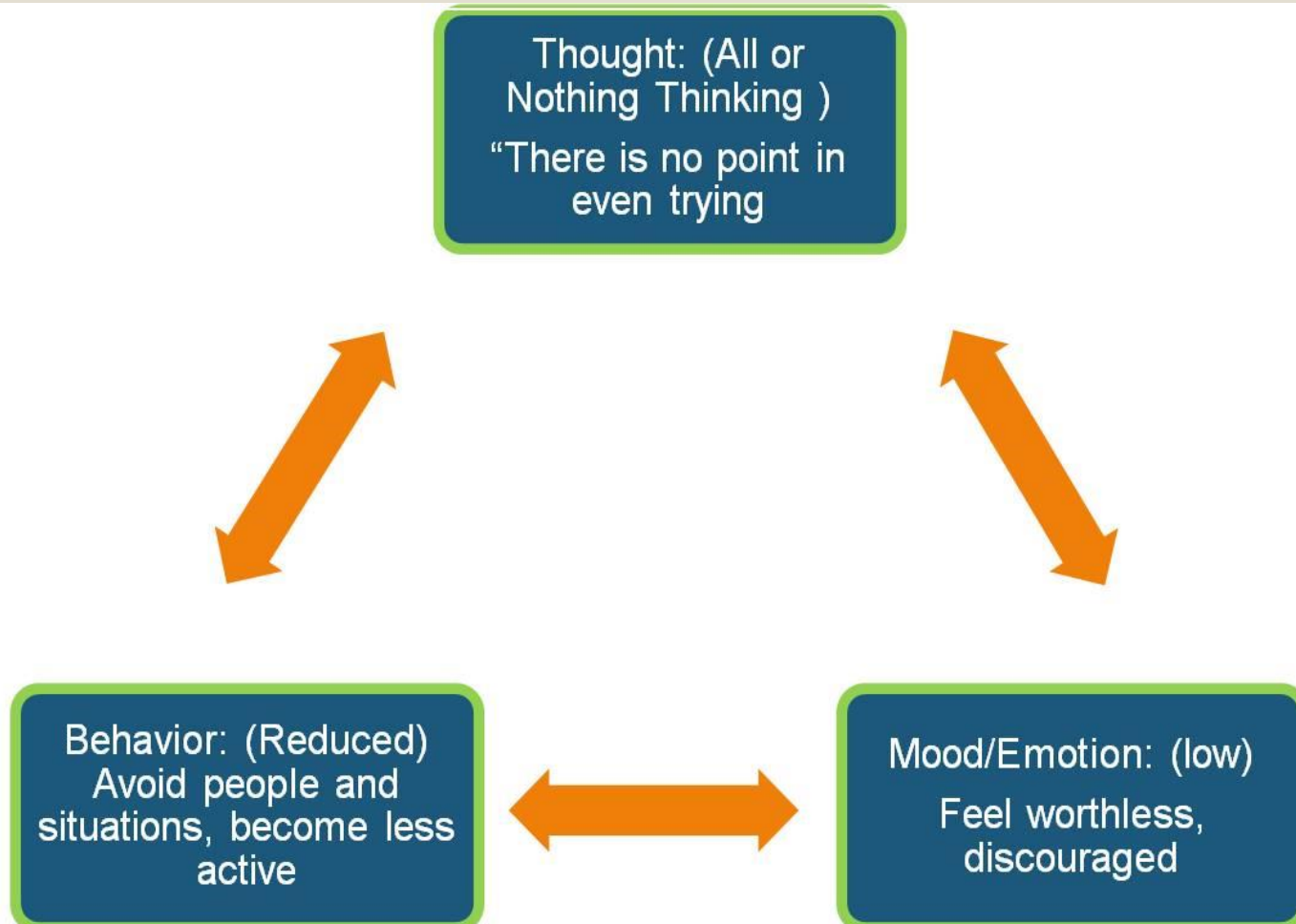
# Unhelpful Patterns of Thinking



All or Nothing Thinking	Overgeneralization
Jumping to Conclusions	Filtering out the Positive
Emotional Reasoning	Catastrophizing
Should Statements	Personalization

(Beck, 1995; Burns, 1989)

# Thought-Behavior-Emotion Cycle





# The Role of Control in Distress Reduction



## Focus on

### what is in your control

- Examples of areas in your control:
  - Your ability to prioritize work & personal obligations
  - Your reactions to events and people
  - Your thoughts
- Focusing on areas in your control results in:
  - Feeling empowered
  - Feeling relief

## Put aside

### what is out of your control

- Examples of areas outside of your control:
  - How people respond to you
  - Other people's feelings
- Focusing on areas outside of your control results in:
  - Feeling hopeless
  - Feeling anxious
  - Feeling STRESSED

# Our Personal Role in Distress Reduction



- Recognize that thoughts impact your behavior and emotions
- “Talk Back” to your unhelpful thoughts
- Focus on what is in your control versus out of your control
- Keep a flexible and revolving door approach to the types of activities or strategies you choose to reduce stress

# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



**Find a support system.** Find someone to talk to about your feelings and experiences.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



- **Change your attitude.** Find other ways to think about stressful situations.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



- **Be realistic.** Set practical goals for dealing with situations and solving problems.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



- **Get organized and take charge.** Being unorganized or engaging in poor planning often leads to frustration or crisis situations, which most always leads to feeling stressed.



**Keep Calm  
and  
Get Organized**



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



- **Take breaks, give yourself “Me time.”** Learn that taking time to yourself for rejuvenation and relaxation is just as important as giving time to other activities.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



**Take good care of yourself.** Eat properly, get regular rest, keep a routine. Allow yourself to do something you enjoy each day.





# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



**Learn to say "no."** Learn to pick and choose which things you will say "yes" to and which things you will not.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



**Get regular exercise.** Exercising regularly can help relieve some symptoms of depression and stress, and help us to maintain our health.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



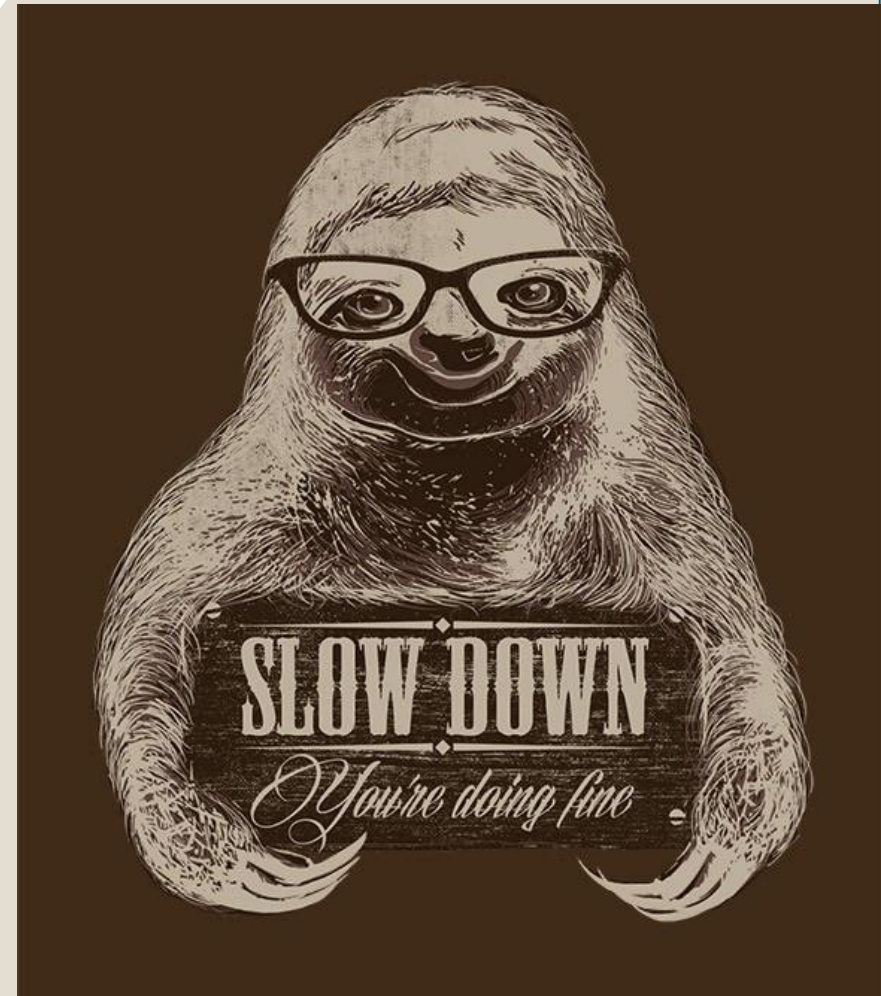
**Get a hobby, do something different.** For a balanced lifestyle, play is as important as work.



**Let's  
say  
we  
find  
you  
a new  
hobby?**

# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress

**Slow down.** Know your limits and cut down on the number of things you try to do each day, particularly if you do not have enough time for them or for yourself.





# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



## **Laugh, use humor.**

Do something fun and enjoyable such as seeing a funny movie, laughing with friends, reading a humorous book, or going to a comedy show.



# Every Day Strategies to Reduce Distress



**Learn to relax.** Develop a regular relaxation routine.



# Relaxation Techniques



## Breathing Techniques

### Controlled/Deep/Color/Mindful

- Simple, but effective! Can be done any time anywhere
- Controlled breathing helps us to calm down
- To keep thoughts calm and relaxed while breathing, introduce the words “calm” or “relax” while breathing out
- Imagine your other thoughts floating away in a balloon
- Sending warm, healing energy to every cell in your body
- Return your focus gently to your breath
- You may add a “mantra”

# Relaxation Techniques



## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Useful for relaxing the muscles when they feel tight because of emotional stress
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation provides the most optimal relaxation
- Key: tensing a group of muscles, hold in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds, relax the muscles





## **Activity: Stress Reduction Technique Practice**

- Breathing
- Progressive Relaxation



# Sitting Relaxation



- Feel the soles of your feet, noticing the whole surface
- Let the chair and floor support your weight
- Imagine that you are breathing through the soles of your feet
- Breathing warm, healing energy
- Breathe out tension, pain, negative emotions
- Take time to feel your body and relax
- Move from your feet upwards across your body

# Guided Imagery



- **Sea Shore**



# Rapid Relaxation Exercises



- **Abdominal Breathing**
- **Cook's Hookup**
- **Quick Tensing and Relaxing**
- **Creating a Symbol of Relaxation**

# Mental Techniques



## Thought Stopping

- Helps break the cognitive distortion cycle
- Gets you back on track
- Key: Notice your thoughts, use a trigger word to stop the thought
- Replace with a more helpful thought
- Example: “There is no point in trying”

STOP!

“ This situation could be easier if I first  
talked with ....

# Mental Techniques



## Positive Self-Statements

- Introduce repetitive positive and motivating statements into your day and in reaction to your thoughts
- Examples of positive statements:
  - I am smart! I work hard! I always do my best.
- Examples of positive thought replacements:
  - Instead of: “ I need to be perfect or I fail.”
  - *Replace with: “ I did a great job learning this new curriculum!”*

# Questions/Discussion



**THANK YOU!**