

## Emotional and Social Adversity Presentation

Today we will be discussing the topic of adversity. The types of adversity for today will remain unmentioned for the time being as I'd like to conduct two activities.

These are 10 of the most frequently used defence mechanisms. Whether or not you are an emotionally intelligent or mature individual, you are still prone to using these because we are mere humans. Not all emotions are easy to experience and as such, we try to understand, escape, or act on them. I'll be handing out these 10 defence mechanisms and you will read them for me. Whilst reading them I want you to mentally note if you see yourself in them.

### *Write these on cards for the Teachers*

**Denial** - I refuse to accept reality or facts, I may block external events or circumstances from my mind so I don't have to deal with painful feelings or events.

**Repression** - when unpleasant thoughts, painful memories, or irrational beliefs upsets me I unconsciously choose to hide them in hopes of forgetting them entirely. But although they are hidden, they still unintentionally affect my actions and relationships.

**Projection** - I may project (or displace) my thoughts or feelings onto someone else because they make me uncomfortable.

**Displacement** - I try to satisfy my impulses by directing strong emotions and frustrations I have about one person onto another person or object that doesn't feel threatening.

**Regression** - when I feel threatened or anxious I may unconsciously "escape" to an earlier stage of development. If I struggle to cope with events or behaviours, I may return to sleeping with a cherished stuffed animal, overeat foods they find comforting, or begin chain-smoking or chewing on pencils or pens. I may also avoid everyday activities because I feel overwhelmed.

**Rationalisation** - I may attempt to explain undesirable behaviours with my own "facts." It makes me feel comfortable with the events, even if I know it I am not okay with it. Though I didn't get the promotion at work today, it was okay because I didn't want the promotion anyways.

**Sublimation** - This type of defence mechanism is considered a mature, positive strategy. I redirect strong emotions or feelings into an object or activity that is appropriate and safe. So, instead of lashing out at my coworkers during a stressful shift, I choose to channel my frustration into a kickboxing class. I also redirect my feelings into music, art, or sports.

**Reaction formation** - I know how I feel but I choose to behave in the opposite manner. When I feel angry I act overly positive because I don't think I should be feeling this way.

Philippians 4:11-13 - 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

**Intellectualization** - When in a trying situation, I remove all emotion from my responses and instead focus on quantitative facts. After getting fired from my job, I spent my days creating spreadsheets of job opportunities and leads.

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*Scenario (use flashcards):*

1. Miss Henry popped up on you during one of your weaker class sessions and she gave you a below average grade because of how poor you performed, how would you make you feel?
2. Miss Boodie came in today on a rather low day, but knowing her, you were possibly expecting her usually vibrant and bubbly personality but you were met with her being snappy and aggressive, how would that make you feel?

These two scenarios are examples of precursors to emotional adversity. And with these examples, I can assume it is easy to see how we experience these on a regular basis. Making navigating our emotions even more important. Other examples of emotional adversities include feelings of mistrust, unforgiveness, lack of affection/ emotional constipation, abandonment, regret, narcissistic abuse (such as verbal, physical, passive-aggressive, or manipulative behaviours), anger, failure, stress, manipulation, loneliness, helplessness, shame, and disappointment amongst others.

If Miss Edwards had a family member that was diagnosed with terminal cancer her emotions are expected to be all over the place until she can gather her bearings. Where the problem lies is where she is persistently unable to function at work due to constant anxieties caused by her worrying about the health of her family. Her lack of control over her emotions and to soothe herself is obstructing the effectiveness of her work.

I'd like to highlight though, emotions are neither good nor bad, they just are. It is unhealthy for us to think of anger as a bad emotion and joy as a good one. When we do feel these emotions, it is important that we know how to regulate them in order for them to not become overwhelmingly uncontrollable, to the extent where you are left with little capacity to cope and reason. Emotional regulation comes hand-in-hand with emotional intelligence. If you are emotionally intelligent, you should be able to exert control over your own emotional state. This means, you learn how to reduce your anger and anxiety in a challenging situation, hiding visible signs of fear or sadness, as well as focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm when your present situation wants to prove otherwise.

*With all that has been said, what are some ways that emotional adversity can impact our lives (both professionally and personally) negatively?*

We want to be able to reduce the complications that emotional adversities may have in our lives. This includes bringing home burdens to school because you don't know how to properly compartmentalise, lashing out on another coworker because you can't get at your boss, performing poorly on appraisals because of anxieties, displacing your emotions for Mr Lewin on Ms Henry because she is the next best thing to getting back at administration. We don't want it affecting our professional life and reducing our work ethic, and we don't want it affecting our personal life either. We want to be able to go home and accept the love our

family has to offer without ruminating on how horrible the kids were today. Knowing how to overcome emotional adversity allows that.

To do that, we need to first learn how to improve our emotional regulation capability, so as to decrease dysregulation. Learning how to regulate your emotions puts you in a position to decrease negative emotions, understand your emotions, and control your actions. There are different ways in which we can achieve this, but I'll be looking at 3 proven scientific ways in which it can be developed:

### **1. Consistent self-awareness appraisals -**

This is where we practise daily self-evaluation to stay updated with our emotions, new likes and dislikes and the whole works. This helps us to face the emotions that we are inclined to suppress or eliminate if someone asks because of the pain they cause. This helps us to search for better ways to deal with our emotions because we cannot neglect the fact that they are there. This ensures long-term wellbeing with a permanent solution to emotional distress.

### **2. Practising self-soothing -**

When we self-soothe we do things such as meditate using music, taking a walk, having a relaxing bath or a massage, using reminiscence therapy to think back on our day and what we can do better the next time. Self-soothing, as the name suggests, helps us to relax and reduce the toxic effects of emotions that may persist such as anger, sadness, and neglect.

### **3. Attentional control -**

During this, we divert our attention away from the negative emotion itself and look at the situation from a different POV. Let's say during lunch Ms Henry came to you to speak about your consistent tardiness for work. Yes, you might feel sad at the end of the conversation, a bit embarrassed, sure, but what else? Take away from it, the possible embarrassment that you're feeling and look at why the conversation took place in the first place. What did you learn coming out of that conversation? You have also gained insight on how you can avoid that confrontation in the future.

Taking this approach towards emotional regulation will help you to manage your emotions during conflicts and confrontations, compartmentalise your feelings from home so it doesn't completely influence your work ethic when on school grounds, and helps you to lead a healthier emotional life as well. This also helps to direct you in the path of finding positive ways to carry out emotion-focused coping.

We will always be faced with emotional adversities, it is our responsibility to ensure that we come out on the better end of it all.

Here is a handout with ways to cope with Negative emotions. Any questions so far?

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It is not a secret that it is a struggle to get requisitions filled for resources we need to carry out our work appropriately here at work. Am I correct? Okay, nice, nice. Would you deem that a social adversity? With the understanding that social adversity refers to the hardships relating to or faced in society or an organisation.

Okay, good. There are generally two types of social adversities: public and private. It is public if it affects individuals on a wide scale, such as a country, multiple organisations, or multiple communities. It is private if it only affects a small population such as a community, a school, a constituency, or a household. It is also easy to see how a private social adversity can become public adversity as well, if what affects 3 schools begins to affect 15. When fraud schemes are no longer just affecting the BPO sector, but also all the banks in Jamaica. When the English department isn't the only one who is suffering from teachers who do not mark registers, but rather 6 of the 7 departments in the school.

In this setting, what is private social adversity may refer to single classes or grades, administration only or academic staff, or even just one resource lab and not all the labs. And what is public is that which is affecting the entire school population. So, all or most grades face skin bleaching on the rise, all of the resource labs are without working equipment to carry out practicals, or only 3 of every 15 requisitions are filled every 7 months in this school.

What are 2 social adversities you are facing as a department privately, and what do you believe the school is facing on a wider scale?

Of these adversities that you highlighted, do you believe that others know that they are currently facing these adversities? Did you know that you were facing social adversity?

Another question, can you solve these adversities? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Many times we opt to leave social adversities alone because it seems too hard to take on. That's actually a fact. When the teachers were striking because of poor wages, it was actually a private social adversity that they took to the public stage. They made their adversity everyone else's problem by provoking empathy within everyone else. They did a good job, but did it accomplish the goal they were heading for? What made them stop? Why did they start in the first place?

Using the strike as an example, here a few things to take from it:

1. You cannot go at change on your own, you have to have a group of people with you to help. This group of persons will aim at gathering a larger crowd as well that will help to provoke change. Imagine Mr Henry trying to decrease indiscipline in the school on his own. He alone will be going to the classes to check regularly, he'll do all the searches, the disciplining of students and communicating with parents and all the work. It would be exhausting and impossible to do on his own.

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2. They were very diligent in what was affecting them, why it was affecting them, how long it has been affecting them, and why everyone else would be able to empathise. They not only came on social media and took a stand from their perspective to say that they needed more money and they needed it now. No, they came, they told us why they were enraged, they explained how this also affects the education system, and why the public should care. Educating your audience, or the society that you are trying to provoke change within is crucial in social change. If no one knows what is wrong in the current system, what the new change will be, how the old change is affecting them and how the new change will be beneficial to them, they will be less inclined to change.
3. Be prepared for resistance. The teachers held out for some time because of the percentage of increase they were getting, and the fact that the government was not budging on their offer. But because they knew what they stood for, they held on until they would have gotten a better offer. Here is also where you increase your communication with the public. You remind them of all that was said before. This helps to solidify what you are trying to help them understand. It is also where you provide incentives to your society to persuade them to change. The teachers used stand-ins, black-outs, and sick-outs as their persuasive strategy.
4. You have to be strategic and consistent. Speaking from an outsider's point of view, I did not see the consistency in their strategy, and I do believe that their goal was not met. Someone on the inside might be able to say otherwise, but standing from this side of the line, I cannot see that. After establishing the goals you want to accomplish, also write what are the selling points for each. Where does 'X mark the spot' on each goal? How do you know you have accomplished your goal? Will you give up when you tire and you have recognized that the resistance is greater than the change? Will you change your strategy when you have recognized that a few of them are not working? What will you do next? From what I am understanding, the Union did not accomplish their desired goal because the increase is still displeasing. What do you think they should have done in order to ensure they accomplish their desired goal?

To conclude, social change is not easy. It takes hardwork and determination as our motto says. But it is definitely worthwhile when you look at where the endgame is. Social adversity influences feelings of frustration, sadness, embarrassment at times, anger, and even disgusts. Social adversity may inflict emotional adversity if it is one that provokes strong unavoidable emotions within us. So, we owe it to ourselves to take a step towards social change in order to overcome social adversity.

If we stay in social adversity, we risk decreasing our work performance because we are discouraged, we risk adapting to the bad social norms around us because we are too tired of trying to change it all on our own, we also risk losing focus of why we even started the

profession in the first place - we risk losing the love. Now, with all that is at risk, I do believe it is worth giving social change a chance.

Here is a handout on Lewin's ***Change Management Model***. It is one of the many change models in leadership, and an appropriate one for application in this school.

To leave you, I'll end with this scripture, Philipians 4 v 13: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. You can overcome emotional adversities, and you can achieve social change. Any questions?

## **Emotion-focused coping Mechanisms**

“...emotion-focused coping includes all the regulative efforts to diminish the emotional consequences of stressful events” (Schoenmakers et al., 2015)

### ***Emotion-Focused Coping Examples - (Cornell, 2023)***

**Journaling:** Writing about stressful events is a way of releasing negative energy. Describing what happened can increase perceptions of control, and might even help a person brainstorm solutions, which is also a problem-focused coping strategy.

**Selective Attention:** After a difficult day at work, focusing attention on the positive things that happened can reduce the anxiety of the negative events that occurred that day.

**Reframing:** Changing one’s perspective on a negative event can actually turn it into a positive. Try not to dwell on defeats, but instead look at opportunities to learn from mistakes and improve.

**Recognize Cognitive Distortions:** Some people have a tendency to see even positive events as negative. This is a type of cognitive distortion that can become very destructive. Learning how to recognize when you are over-analyzing a situation and looking for negatives is the first step to stopping this destructive habit.

**Exercising:** We all know that exercising is good for the body. But it is also a great way to release steam. If you exercise hard enough, the brain will actually release endorphins that will put you in a much better mood.

**Creative Expression:** Painting, sculpting, or playing a musical instrument can take the negative energy from stress and turn into a form of creative expression.

**Seeking Social Support:** Simply talking about stressful events with friends and family has several benefits. It allows one to vent those negative emotions, increases a sense of control, and knowing that other people support you can be comforting in and of itself.

**Downward Comparison:** Comparing one’s situation with others that have it worse may not sound like a nice thing to do, but it reduces the negative feelings a person has about their situation by making it seem not so bad after all.

**Forgiveness:** A lot of stress can come from the actions of other people in our lives. Either a rude comment or an act of workplace sabotage can make a person feel angry, vindictive, and unfairly treated. But dwelling on those actions only makes matters worse. Allowing yourself to forgive others is a way to stop the chain of negativity before it does too much harm.

### ***Lewin's Change Management Model - Extract from Mastering Adversity - Unlocking the Secrets to Mental Wellness***

This change model emphasises that change takes place in three (3) well-defined parts (indeed, 2022).

- a. Unfreezing - as the name suggests, you will be melting something. Melting the current hierarchy, or processes that you currently have at your home, your community, your workplace, your school, or your country. Lewin stated, "Motivation for change must be generated before change can occur. One must be helped to re-examine many cherished assumptions about oneself and one's relations to others". This aspect is where you will be preparing the people in society to accept that the change you are proposing is necessary. That women need to be paid the same wages as men, that more needs to be done to prevent teenage pregnancy. You will be breaking down the existing status quo/conditions before you begin to build the new operations.

Change is uncomfortable, so you will be making others feel uneasy with all the 'new things' taking place, things will now be unbalanced because you are implementing something new. You want them to feel uncomfortable, you do want to 'rattle a few feathers'. This will help them to see what you are proposing. This is where you go about educating the public on the need for change.

You will:

- Be determining what needs to be changed
  - Help others to understand that the current state is unacceptable - thus you will need to provide proof. Research, numbers, data over a specific timeline, hard facts to support your movement.
  - Have incentives and other individuals on your team to help to push the movement.
  - Show them your vision and your strategy for change.
  - Emphasise your 'why' for change.
  - Be open to hear from anyone and anyone who comes with questions and ideas.
- b. Change/transition - with all the uncertainty and discomfort that the unfreezing stage has created, the transition change will be where individuals begin to look for new ways to carry out their tasks. They begin to believe in the movement and act in ways to support you.

So, if you and your team have highlighted that your community church has not been supporting individuals in the community who suffer from abuse, you may find that church members are now open to ask abused individuals if they are open to have counselling sessions at the church. They may even take your advice to do regular outreach programs to invite government organisations to visit the community and do the appropriate checks for those who are being abused.

However, keep in mind that this will happen gradually. This means, it may take a few weeks or more, in order to solicit change, to encourage the masses to embrace the new direction and to actively participate to aid in its growth. With this gradual change as well, it will be important for society to understand how it will benefit them. How will them taking part in your movement be of any use to them? It's not like it is affecting them directly, so why should they care? This will take a great deal of time and effort from you in managing this transition period. Through consistent communication with the masses about why change is necessary, how it affects them now, how it affects those close to them, and how it can possibly affect them in the future, this will be how you will be convincing them to buy into your idea.

Because let's face it, not everyone will face prostitution, child abuse, domestic abuse, teenage pregnancy, or even praedial larceny, but its a possibility that a friend of theirs or their child may be a victim of it. So, exposing them to these possibilities, as well as providing them with data on the frequency of its occurrence, will be ways in which you will be able to convince them to jump on the change train.

So:

- Communicate clearly and often throughout the planning and implementation process.
  - Remind them of the benefits of implementing the change
  - Explain how the change affects everyone
  - Be prepared to answer questions honestly
  - Be prepared for those who are resistant to change and be able to deal with these barriers appropriately and swiftly
  - Involve others in the change process
  - Celebrate short-term wins
- c. Refreeze - based on the goals that you have established to accomplish, you will know when it is time to freeze. This may take days, weeks, months, or even years. You refreeze when your goal has been met and things are now in motion, society has embraced and adapted to the new social norm. Your objectives of your social change should be able to tell you the criterias by which you would define as 'signs of successful change'.

In a society that is prone to 'change' regularly, it is important that you create a sense of stability in this process. Without ensuring that this change has been stabilised/frozen, you run the risk of society being trapped in the norms of before and struggling to maintain the norms you are trying to instil. Ensure that the new operations are maintained throughout and set processes in order to ensure that these new operations are audited regularly.

We want to ensure that we keep in touch with the church about how many community members they have seen for the week. Join them during their support group sessions. Ensure that we establish a support group of our own at our meeting place, and have a helphotline for those who want to anonymously report abuse they have witnessed. All while still hosting bi-weekly seminars about the importance of abuse-support groups, why abuse should not be

tolerated, that being abused is nothing to be ashamed of, and reminding community members that even though they are possibly not abused, it may happen to someone close to them.

Here are a few things you will like to ensure during the refreezing stage:

- Highlight the changes that are made create a reward system that celebrates everyone who supports this change
- Identify barriers that are resisting the change
- Ensure you have persons in leadership position to establish the effectiveness of the interventions
- Create feedback systems where people will be able to be in touch with you and report any happenings
- Keep everyone informed and allow them to feel your presence where you have implemented this change
- Celebrate your success, this was not easy to accomplish. You and your team should be celebrated.