



# Plan for Resilience

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## Workplace Edition

For Leaders, Employees and Self-Employed



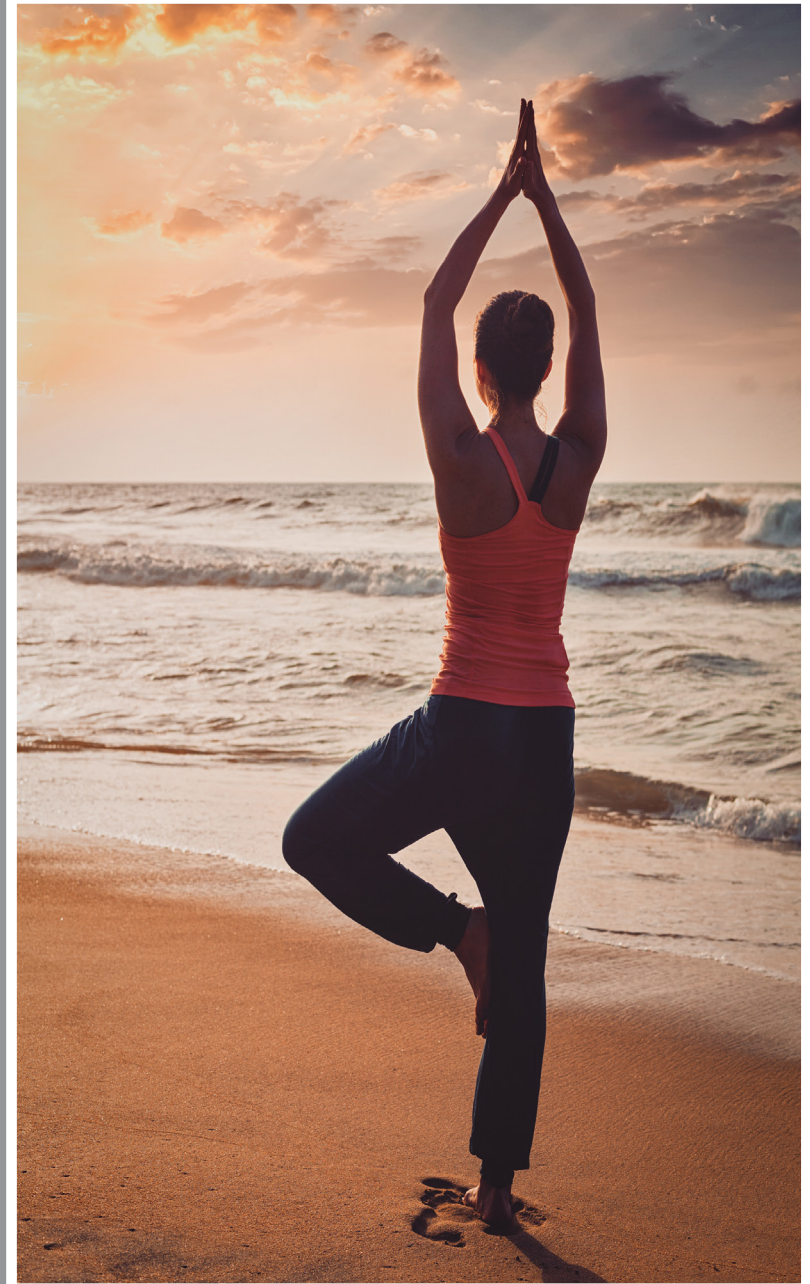
**This resource is not intended as a medical or mental health intervention.** If you are currently experiencing significant challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplace wellness or employee assistance program, or Crisis Services Canada: 1 833 456 4566. For residents of Quebec only, please call Services de Crises du Canada: 1 866 277 3553.



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# Developing Personal Resilience

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This resource can help you move from merely surviving to actually thriving by helping you build resilience and plan for stressful situations. Developing a plan to get through potentially stressful situations can have a positive impact on both your personal and work life.

Understanding how other people deal with stress can also improve your ability to be objective about how their actions may impact you. If we recognize that we all respond to stressors in our own way, we can also recognize that behaviours of another person which may seem inappropriate or problematic could be that individual's own struggle to deal with stress or adversity.

**Having a high level of resilience does not mean you will avoid stress. It means you will be able to adapt to it and recover more effectively from it.**

**RESILIENCE** IS THE CAPACITY TO ADAPT OR RECOVER IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

- Failure
- Trauma
- Tragedy
- Threats
- Harassment
- Loss
- Relationship or family problems
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Workplace issues

Many of us juggle personal, family, social, financial, and work demands. While we try to manage, any of us could be blindsided by an unexpected situation or overwhelmed when too many stressors happen at once.

Stress is a fact of life. Stress is not always bad or the result of a negative situation. **In fact, stress can help motivate us to develop positive coping strategies or find effective solutions to problems. Stress can be a positive force in our lives but too much can have the opposite effect.**

We do not always get to choose the situations we find ourselves in, but we usually get to choose how we respond in the long run. Recognizing our automatic, immediate, unplanned responses to stress and committing to building our own resilience will support our overall success and well-being.



## RESILIENCE CAN TAKE YOU...

FROM SURVIVING, WHICH MAY INCLUDE...	TO THRIVING, WHICH MAY INCLUDE...
Being stressed	Recognizing your automatic responses to stress
Reacting in unhealthy ways to stressors	Choosing healthier responses
Denying or ignoring stressors	Recognizing and exploring your stressors
Isolation or one-sided relationships	Balancing your support network – those you help and those who provide help to you
Doing what you have always done even if it's not working	Examining your options and making good decisions
Continually battling your personal weaknesses	Identifying and using your strengths
Resisting or feeling unable to make positive change	Committing to growing, learning, and thriving
Waiting until a crisis to find help	Ensuring that you are aware of potential resources

## OVERVIEW

When you consider your **Automatic Responses to Stress**, you are more empowered to then **Choose Healthier Strategies**. When you **Recognize and Explore Your Stressors** you can more easily see how to best **Balance Your Support Network** and **Examine Your Options** and **Make Decisions**. **By Identifying and Using Your Strengths** you are maximizing your ability to **Commit to Thriving**. It's also important to **Be Aware of Potential Resources**.

Some of the strategies shared with you will include brainstorming options to address challenges, taking action even when you feel overwhelmed by fear or worry, learning from your mistakes rather than being unfairly critical of yourself, and building a network of support.

Resilience may not ensure that you avoid stressful situations but can help make it easier to get through them. You may be better able to anticipate and prepare for many types of situations. Your stressors and responses often change from year to year, so we encourage you to revisit this regularly or when your circumstances change.

# Recognizing Your Automatic Responses to Stress

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## Why this matters

For most of us, stress is a daily occurrence. Often, our responses to stress are automatic. This means that we don't choose them or plan them. However, if we can identify some of our immediate responses to stress, we are more likely to recognize and address them before they create a major life or health concern. Most of us will have automatic physical responses as well as changes in our behaviours and emotions.

**Always eliminate the possibility that any of these responses may indicate an unrelated or underlying health issue that should be checked out with your doctor.** Once you know it is stress related only, you can use that information to help identify the source of stress earlier and make changes sooner.

**Understanding the automatic stress responses of others can be very important information for us as well.** When we recognize a stress response in others we are less likely to take their behaviour personally. In recognizing that this is their defence mechanism to deal with their own stress, we are less likely to feel the need to defend ourselves. In fact, we may be able to help them deal with it. For example, you may have a friend who needs personal space or they become agitated. Once you know that, you can see the agitation and step back to give them space or help them move to a better location.

## Instructions

Read each of the responses and potential impacts on the following pages. Check off your usual responses when you are experiencing stress and think about the responses you may have seen with others. It may be in the very first moment of stress or after prolonged or chronic exposure.

The following categories include physical, emotional, and behavioural responses. If you have a response that is not listed, please add it under the heading "Other".



## PHYSICAL RESPONSES

AUTOMATIC PHYSICAL RESPONSES MAY INCLUDE:	POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM THIS RESPONSE MAY INCLUDE:
<input type="checkbox"/> Hives	<i>Distracted by the discomfort, self-conscious about how it looks</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Changes in sleep patterns – too much or too little	<i>Inability to focus, more prone to accidents, decision making is impaired</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Blurred vision or impaired vision	<i>Fear of more serious illness, inability to focus</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches or migraines	<i>Can be disabling, increased irritability</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Exhaustion	<i>Become emotional, everything is more difficult</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Cold sores	<i>Become self-conscious or less social</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Irritable, especially with those close to you	<i>Damage relationships, avoid social situations</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Flushed and red in the face	<i>Risk from high blood pressure, embarrassment</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweating and/or nausea	<i>Feeling ill or self-conscious, avoiding situations</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Tension in neck or shoulders	<i>Irritability, pain, discomfort</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach or bowel problems	<i>Feeling self-conscious, avoiding activities</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis or autoimmune disease	<i>Pain, inability to engage in activities</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Shallow and/or difficult and/or rapid breathing	<i>Anxiety, panic attacks</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Clenching jaw or grinding teeth	<i>Pain in jaw, damage to teeth</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of energy – even talking is an effort	<i>Withdrawal, isolation, hopelessness</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	



## BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES

AUTOMATIC BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES MAY INCLUDE:	POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM THIS RESPONSE MAY INCLUDE:
<input type="checkbox"/> Using substances such as alcohol or drugs	<i>Addiction, relationship problems</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Using substances such as sugar or caffeine	<i>Increase in stress, poor health</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Making more mistakes	<i>Risk to reputation, job loss, injury</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Losing or forgetting things – keys, appointments, etc.	<i>Frustration, time lost, risk to reputation</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Clumsiness – dropping things, tripping, bumping into things, etc.	<i>Injury, damaging things</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Being disorganized with tasks	<i>Missing deadlines, poor quality work, wasted time</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Focusing on tasks without being strategic	<i>Wasting time, missing opportunities</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Swearing, inappropriate gestures	<i>Offending others, risk to reputation</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Hyper-scheduling or frantically making lists	<i>Increasing stress</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding social events or not being friendly with others	<i>Damage to relationships, isolation, risk to reputation</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Impatience with others	<i>Damage to relationships, demotivating others</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Falling asleep fully dressed	<i>Lack of quality sleep, missing out on social interaction</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Waking up worried	<i>Increasing stress</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pushing through, despite impact on your well-being	<i>Making mistakes, reducing productivity, increasing health risks</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Unhealthy change in physical activity	<i>Lower energy, weight gain, health risks</i>



## BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES (CONTINUED)

AUTOMATIC BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES MAY INCLUDE:	POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM THIS RESPONSE MAY INCLUDE:
<input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning obsessively or leaving things a mess	<i>Poor use of time, unable to find things when needed, build-up of germs or bacteria</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Isolating yourself from others	<i>Damage to relationships, lack of support system</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Lashing out in anger	<i>Risk to relationships, loss of respect, possibility of physical or emotional hurt</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Losing motivation to do a good job	<i>Job loss, loss of promotion, missed deadlines</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Working harder, longer or faster	<i>Risk of burnout, poor work-life balance, potential health problems</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Making poor decisions	<i>Damage to work or relationships</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming distracted – ineffective multitasking	<i>Making mistakes, producing poor quality work</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming narrowly focused or obsessed with task completion	<i>Missing your breaks, not interacting with others</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming bossy or aggressive	<i>Alienating yourself and others, creating too much pressure for perfection</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> No longer listening due to indifference or lack of energy	<i>Making mistakes, missing deadlines</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Appetite changes	<i>Health risks, weight gain or loss, lack of energy</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming compulsive	<i>Creating bad habits, not making thoughtful choices</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance through distraction	<i>Choosing unhealthy activities to avoid dealing with the stressor</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	

## EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

AUTOMATIC EMOTIONAL RESPONSES MAY INCLUDE:	POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM THIS RESPONSE MAY INCLUDE:
<input type="checkbox"/> Being fearful or paranoid	<i>Missing social or work opportunities, health risks</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Overthinking	<i>Increased stress, second guessing your decisions</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking self-awareness	<i>Regret, poor choices, taking on too much responsibility</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Crying for seemingly no reason	<i>Embarrassment, becoming self-conscious, avoiding social situations</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Losing objective perspective	<i>Catastrophizing, feeling hopeless or overwhelmed</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Being unable to make decisions	<i>Wasting time, missing opportunities</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming unresponsive to others	<i>Appearing rude or uncaring, isolation</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling like nothing really matters	<i>Sense of hopelessness, depression, mental illnesses</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Expressing anger or frustration	<i>Offending others, risk to reputation, violence</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Having emotional outbursts	<i>Embarrassment, stress</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Being defensive or feeling the need to justify every action/decision	<i>Fatigue, angering others, irrationality</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Being distracted or lacking focus	<i>Making mistakes, risk to job security or reputation, personal injury</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Being unfairly critical of yourself	<i>Headaches and other physical symptoms, not participating in social or work events, fear</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Saying no to many things	<i>Losing others' support, missing out on opportunities</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	

## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

By identifying your potential physical, behavioural, and emotional responses to stress before they happen, you can increase your ability to recognize when you are having a stress response.

This can enable you to reach out for help earlier, which may lessen the negative impact of stress on your work and health.

You may also have noticed that some of these automatic responses are things other people do that you may have attributed to their personality or character when in fact it may be a stress response for them.

For more information and resources related to the stress response: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/cardiovascular-disease/reduce-stress-level.html>

# Choosing Healthier Strategies

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## Why this matters

There are many strategies that can help reduce the negative impact of stressors. The following list includes potential strategies to help prevent or manage stress. Many are evidence-based approaches, such as mindfulness, practicing gratitude, and deep breathing. Others are practice-based approaches shared by those who used them successfully to manage their own life stressors.

**Not all of these strategies will work for everyone. In fact, some may cause you stress because they are not calming or enjoyable to you. Others may have neither a positive nor a negative impact.**

## Instructions

Check off the strategies below that you know work for you.

Put a checkmark by the strategies that you think might be helpful and that you are willing to try. Pick some key ones for you – many strategies may look interesting, but focus on those you feel you will have time to work on.

Choose some of these healthier responses to incorporate into your daily or weekly routines:

- ☐ Meditation
- ☐ Mindfulness or mindfulness apps
- ☐ Spirituality
- ☐ Deep breathing relaxation techniques
- ☐ Seek natural light every day
- ☐ Stay hydrated with water
- ☐ Ask for help and support
- ☐ Take work breaks away from your workstation
- ☐ Reflect on your personal values and strengths

- ☐ Explore options – what can you do differently, cost/benefit analysis
- ☐ Search for a quick win – small victory, something positive
- ☐ Seek help to brainstorm solutions
- ☐ Gratitude – focus on what you appreciate in life
- ☐ Stay active doing things that you enjoy
- ☐ Be aware of your thoughts and how they affect you
- ☐ Avoid gossip and refocus conversations on solutions
- ☐ Ask someone to listen and provide an alternative perspective for you
- ☐ Read for pleasure
- ☐ Acupuncture or other complementary treatments
- ☐ Spend time outdoors, especially in nature
- ☐ Go for a drive
- ☐ Music – singing, dancing, etc.
- ☐ Laugh
- ☐ Volunteer or help others
- ☐ Exercise – walking, hiking, biking, etc.
- ☐ Sports or recreational activities
- ☐ Creative arts
- ☐ Spend time with children – read to them, listen to their laughter, play with them, etc.
- ☐ Create a poster with images of a positive vision
- ☐ Listen to enjoyable podcasts or videos
- ☐ Nutrition – increase healthy food choices
- ☐ Improve sleep habits
- ☐ Talk therapy
- ☐ Massage, aromatherapy, reiki or reflexology
- ☐ Spend time in silence
- ☐ Time spent with people who are a positive influence in your life
- ☐ Card game with friends

- ☐ Plan a trip
- ☐ Interact with animals
- ☐ Delegate tasks that are not your responsibility
- ☐ Seek medical advice and/or treatment as appropriate
- ☐ Naturopathic or complementary treatment
- ☐ Engage in hobbies you enjoy
- ☐ Make an effort to dress so you feel good about yourself
- ☐ Take a break when needed or at least every two hours
- ☐ Journal – write down your experiences and feelings
- ☐ Access help for time management strategies
- ☐ Communicate with a trusted advisor, friend or mentor
- ☐ Join communities or groups where you feel supported
- ☐ Other:

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## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

By including healthier responses into your regular activities, you not only help build resilience, you may be able to help alleviate stress in many different situations.

Choose healthier strategies in times of personal stress. **Take Your Break** offers healthy activities you can do alone or with others in 15 minutes or less in most settings:

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/newsletter/Healthy-Break-Activities>

# Recognizing and Exploring Your Stressors

## Why this matters

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after being blindsided or overwhelmed by adversity. One of the ways to improve our ability to bounce back is to be aware of the potential adverse events that could happen to any of us at any time and consider how we might cope with them.

**This is not intended to increase anxiety about what could go wrong, but to realize that many people have experienced these life events and successfully moved forward with their lives.**

For example, most of us know individuals who have experienced serious illness, disability, or loss and then bounced back to enjoy and appreciate life more than ever. We probably also know people who experienced a setback or disappointment many years ago, yet continue to experience anger or hurt about it every day.

**By anticipating that life will present challenges and developing your ability to bounce back from them, you can take your life from just surviving to thriving.**



## Instructions

The items listed on the following pages can be significant life stressors. They could happen to you or someone you care about.

There may be times in life when we have many different stressors, and times when we have only a few. Life is very fluid and can change at any time. We want to build resiliency to cope with any of life's stressors, but this is a lifelong learning activity. We will start with whatever is most relevant to you NOW.

**Check any items that you are coping with right now or know you will in the very near future. You will be asked at the end of this activity to prioritize one of your stressors to explore further for potential solutions.**

**Remember, when you check an item, consider if it is something you are coping with now or you foresee as a concern in the immediate future.**

## HEALTH

- ☐ Injury or disability
- ☐ Lack of emotional or physical well-being
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Your personal identity, including sexual identity
- ☐ Stress related to the health of friends or family members
- ☐ Vicarious trauma – impact on you when someone else is traumatized
- ☐ An unexpected diagnosis, either physical or psychological
- ☐ Inadequate access to care, support, or resources for self or others
- ☐ Management of chronic or episodic health conditions
- ☐ Overstimulation – no mental downtime due to work/life demands

## SOCIAL

- ☐ Coordination of schedules with spouse/significant other
- ☐ Support of parents or other adult family members
- ☐ Cultural expectations of family clash with other expectations
- ☐ Loss of a loved one
- ☐ Supporting others dealing with grief
- ☐ Loss of a pet
- ☐ Excessive exposure to negative, frustrated or angry people
- ☐ Isolation or estrangement from family or friends
- ☐ Unresolved conflict or difficulty maintaining relationships
- ☐ Sexual harassment/violence
- ☐ Aggression/violence/intimidation
- ☐ Gossip/ridicule/humiliation/bullying
- ☐ Social injustice
- ☐ Stigma or discrimination
- ☐ Lack of acceptance for who you are
- ☐ Lack of acceptance of who I am (by me)
- ☐ Identity-based marginalization
- ☐ Being ignored or shunned
- ☐ Unwelcome change in involvement in church, community or group
- ☐ Parental responsibilities, including adult children
- ☐ Management of children's school and extra-curricular activities
- ☐ Supporting children with special needs or health concerns
- ☐ Family breakdown – separation, divorce or custody issues
- ☐ Breakdown of relationship with friends or co-workers
- ☐ Empty nest syndrome – adjusting to life without children at home
- ☐ Fear of disappointing your family or friends

## FINANCIAL

- ☐ Having enough money to pay for day-to-day expenses
- ☐ Incurring unexpected expenses
- ☐ Debt repayment
- ☐ Incurring an investment loss
- ☐ Ensuring enough money for retirement
- ☐ Long-term care expenses for your parents, partner or other loved ones
- ☐ Losses due to traumatic experiences – fire, accident, floods, storms, etc.
- ☐ Health expenses – insurance, prescriptions, treatment
- ☐ Other:

## EMOTIONAL

- ☐ Dealing with change
- ☐ Lack of change / boredom
- ☐ Fear of failure
- ☐ Fear of missing out
- ☐ Impact from criticism, judgement or accusations
- ☐ Fear of being perceived as inadequate or incompetent
- ☐ Humiliation
- ☐ Chronic frustration or irritability
- ☐ Ongoing feelings of guilt or shame
- ☐ Continual disappointment, unmet expectations or feeling let down
- ☐ Fear of the social, political or economic climate of the world
- ☐ Fear of violence or terrorism
- ☐ Inability to relax or take time out
- ☐ Sense of hopelessness
- ☐ Other:

## WORK

- ☐ Job insecurity – fear of dismissal or contract not being renewed
- ☐ Lack of role clarity or shifting expectations
- ☐ Major organizational shifts – merger, acquisition, reorganization, etc.
- ☐ Conflict
- ☐ Organizational or team culture – lack of respect or civility
- ☐ Lack of time to plan, think or reflect leading to errors or poor decisions
- ☐ Ethical dilemmas
- ☐ Workplace bullying or harassment
- ☐ Mobbing – where a group treats someone insensitively
- ☐ Lack of job flexibility
- ☐ Lack of wage equity
- ☐ Lack of recognition or appreciation
- ☐ Fear of being perceived as inadequate or incompetent
- ☐ Stagnation – no opportunities for job growth or development
- ☐ Work pressures/demands
- ☐ Responsibility without reasonable authority
- ☐ Inadequate training
- ☐ Inadequate or ineffective resources
- ☐ Quality or safety concerns affecting your products or workplace
- ☐ Occupational health and safety concerns
- ☐ Workplace psychological health and safety issues
- ☐ Major traumatic events, including workplace injuries or death
- ☐ Lack of control over opportunities at work
- ☐ Return from vacation to a huge backlog
- ☐ Survivor guilt – when others lose their job or are injured
- ☐ Communication demands/expectations – immediate responses to email and cellphone
- ☐ Other:

# Please don't compare your stressors to anyone else's

Identify up to three of your current stressors to focus on for the exercises that will follow.

Stressor 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Stressor 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Stressor 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Recognizing all of your stressors can be somewhat...well, stressful. But it also allows you to begin to take control of your life and what follows are ways to help you do that.

Stress is inevitable, and it is not a competition.

One stressor can sometimes overwhelm us, while at other times we can manage multiple stressors quite well.

Whether you check off few or many, your stressors do not compare to anyone else's because everyone's experiences, both past and present, are different.

Any or all of these could be a stressor at some point in your life.

The intent of identifying potential stressors is to then build resilience, so we are better equipped to deal with them.



If you are currently feeling extremely overwhelmed, please reach out for help now.

There may be help available at your work, in your community, through your health providers, or through a crisis line like Crisis Services Canada 1-833-456-4566 (or if you are a resident of Quebec 1-866-277-3553). You can come back to complete this resource later.

# Examining Your Options

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## Why this matters

We have choices when it comes to dealing with stress and adversity. These choices can usually be classified as one of the four A's: **Accept, Avoid, Alter, or Adapt.**\*

**Recognize that valid choices are those that can eliminate or significantly reduce your stress:**



## ACCEPT

**Accept** the things (and people) you really cannot change. As hard as it may be, accepting what is not possible to change (rather than desperately or hopelessly wishing it were different) allows you to manage your stress more effectively:

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable
- Look at challenges as opportunities for personal growth and learning
- Share your feelings to help reduce their power over your emotions
- Learn to forgive and move on

For more on forgiving someone who has hurt you, check out the late Dr. Wayne Dyer's blog: <https://www.drwaynedyer.com/blog/category/forgiveness/>



## AVOID

**Avoid** unnecessary stress. Not all stress can be avoided, and it may even be unhealthy to avoid stressful situations that need to be resolved. However, when appropriate, try to avoid unnecessary stress by:

- Learning how to say "no" and stick to your boundaries
- Avoiding people who may foster or create a stressful environment for you whenever possible
- Taking control of your environment, such as establishing a low-stress work space
- Prioritizing your "to-do" list and dropping tasks or activities that aren't truly necessary



**We may make stress worse by refusing to reach out for help or denying there is a problem.**



## **ALTER**

**Alter** by shifting your external environment in some way so the stress is reduced or eliminated:

- Modify your environment
- Change your routines, including what you consume, how you move, what you watch and where you go
- Set boundaries in your relationships



## **ADAPT**

**Adapt** your internal thought processes:

- Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress
- Reframe problems as a desired solution, such as “I don’t sleep enough” reframed as “I need to improve the quality of my sleep”
- Consider potential consequences of taking various actions – Look at the big picture
- Set clear and reasonable expectations and standards for yourself

### **Less helpful strategies**

Some people turn to alcohol, food or other substances when they are stressed. This can help distract us from whatever is causing the stress, but it rarely makes things better and can often make things worse.

Others will step back and take time to consider potential approaches to addressing the cause of their stress. This can provide an opportunity to reduce the stress and gain perspective about what can be done.

\*Adapted from Mayo Clinic Staff (2016). Need Stress Relief? Try the 4 A's. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044476?pg=2>

## Instructions

Think about a specific stressor in your life right now and use the chart below to consider how each of the 4 A's – Accept, Avoid, Alter, Adapt – might make your stress better or worse.

### BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE STRESSOR FOR WHICH YOU WILL EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS:

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#### How I might make my stress worse:

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**ACCEPT** – Putting the situation in perspective – it is what it is – so that it becomes less personal or stressful.

**AVOID** – Refocusing away from the stressful situation or person, toward something more positive for you.

**ALTER** – Shifting your external environment in some way so that the stress is reduced or eliminated.

**ADAPT** – Changing the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress.

#### How I might reduce my stress:

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### YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Perhaps you use a coping strategy that is more damaging than healthy or helpful. Considering all of the four A's might help with managing your perspective of the situation and improving your stress level. The 4 A's are used in many organizations because they work.

Thoughts & Notes...

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# Balancing Your Support Network

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## Why this matters

How do you feel after you help someone? If you are happy to help others and feel good doing it, do you also feel good about asking for help? If not, why not?

Some of us were raised to believe that helping others was a sign of strength but asking for help was one of weakness. But do you actually think people who ask for help are weak? Probably not.

**RESILIENCE INVOLVES ACKNOWLEDGING  
OUR NEED TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER.**

All of us will have times when we can offer help and times when we should reach out for help. There are times we need to be supported and times we need to be supportive. Asking for help in our personal or work lives is one of the ways we can improve our resilience.

You may discover that there are more people than you were aware of who would be willing to help you. But not everyone can help with every issue. If the first person you reach out to is unable or unwilling to help, try someone else.

If you feel hesitant to reach out, think about how you feel when you are able to help someone. Many people welcome the opportunity to help and are relieved to find out that we all need help from time to time.

## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED:

You never have to be alone when you need support: there is always someone who really wants to help, including a professional or volunteer. There are multiple organizational and community resources that can be found in person, online, and over the phone. Take time to discover these supports now so they will be easier to find when you actually need them. And then when you need them, reach out.

The Government of Canada highlights varied supports here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/healthy-workplace/workplace-wellness/mental-health-workplace/resources-employees-mental-health-workplace.html>

You may have more support than you first thought. You might also notice that your support network is not as large as it could be.

This is not a popularity contest. We are fortunate if we have a few good people in our lives who will be there to help us.

To help develop your network, look for opportunities to use your strengths to assist others.

This can include joining a group, collaborating online or in person, volunteering, or finding one person who needs your help. However you choose to build a support network, the more people you support, the more people who may also be there when you need help.

## Instructions:

Think about family, friends, associates, colleagues, neighbours, or services you could reach out to for help. On the left side of this chart, list the names of people whom you can or do support for each specific task that is listed in the center column. On the right side, list the names of people who could provide that support to you. Try to include a variety of names so that you can create a diverse network of support for yourself.

THOSE I CAN OR DO SUPPORT	TYPES OF SUPPORT	THOSE WHO COULD OR DO SUPPORT ME
	Do errands	
	Help with housework	
	Help with work tasks	
	Offer emotional support	
	Be trusted with a secret	
	Provide a tough love approach by calling me on my stuff	
	Provide a reality check and question my perspective	
	Encourage and support unconditionally	
	Celebrate	
	Generate laughter	
	Encourage positive action	
	Explore potential solutions	
	Hold accountable to follow through	
	Have fun	
	Go to a social or work event	

# Identifying and Using Your Strengths

## Why this matters

When we talk about a person's character, we are talking about the sum total of who that person is, which means how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours shape who they are, how they see the world, and how they interact with the people around them. Every person has character strengths. These are positive qualities that are part of who we are and come naturally to us. It is much easier for us to use our strengths during times of adversity than to try to manage our weaknesses. For example, if patience is not your strength, trying to be patient when faced with a delay in a work project won't be easy. On the other hand, if creativity is a strength, distracting yourself from the stress and frustration of waiting while you begin a new, creative project might be helpful.

If you have not already done so, consider completing the free VIA Character Strengths Survey at [www.viame.org](http://www.viame.org). It will take you approximately 15 minutes. There is no need to purchase the full report to learn about your top strengths.

This survey is part of a research project, so you will need to provide personal information, including your name and email address for research purposes. Alternatively, you can just write down what you feel are your top strengths using the list found in **Appendix A**.

Once you know your top three strengths, write them down in the space below and then add ways to use them to help you deal with challenging times. The first three are examples to help you get started.

TOP 3 STRENGTHS	HOW I CAN USE THIS STRENGTH TO HELP ME DEAL WITH CHALLENGES
Forgiveness	<i>Because I prefer mercy not revenge, it's easier to move on, even when someone has hurt me.</i>
Love of Learning	<i>When things go wrong, I know I can examine the situation and learn a new way of going forward.</i>
Bravery	<i>Even when being opposed by many, I am able to do what I think is right.</i>

## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

We all have many character strengths, but we don't all have the same strengths to the same degree. For example, while everyone has curiosity, it will be stronger in some people than in others. Also, any strength can be overused to the point where it becomes a problem. Using the example of curiosity, not enough can make life boring - too much can make you seem nosy or intrusive. Recognizing strengths in ourselves and using them wisely can help us improve our own self-confidence and build connections with other people.

More information and tools to help you use your strengths to thrive in all areas of your life can be found here:  
<http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Reports-Courses-Resources/Resources/Character-Strength-Fact-Sheets>

# Work Resilience for Leaders

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## Why this matters

Not being able to work can exacerbate stress. If you were not able to do your regular work for any reason, having a plan that minimizes potential negative impact from your absence can make a big difference.

## Instructions

Answer each of the questions below.

1. If you were unable to do your regular work, does your workplace provide accommodations so you can work from home, part-time, or job share? If these options are not available or possible, who might be able to cover for you?

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2. What would be the effect on your workplace, co-workers and employees if you were unable to do your regular work? What can you do about that?

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3. If your organization does not provide a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you could not work?

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4. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

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5. What tasks could just wait or be dropped altogether if you were unable to work?

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6. Your work will likely evolve over time. This means that your needs could change. For this reason, set a reminder to review this plan again in one year.

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## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated may help with decreasing this particular stressor.

# Work Resilience for Employees

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## Why this matters

Not being able to work can exacerbate stress. If you were not able to do your regular work for any reason, having a plan that minimizes potential negative impact from your absence can make a big difference.

## Instructions

Answer each of the questions below.

1. If you were unable to do your regular work, does your workplace provide accommodations so you can work from home, part-time or job share? If these options are not available or possible, who might be able to cover for you?

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2. What would be the effect on your workplace and co-workers if you were unable to do your regular work? What can you do about that?

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3. If your organization does not provide a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you could not work?

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4. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

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5. What tasks could just wait or be dropped altogether if you were unable to work?

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6. Can you set a reminder to review this again in one year? How will you do that?

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## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated can help with decreasing this particular stressor.



# Work Resilience for Self-Employed

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## Why this matters

For those who are self-employed, not being able to work for any reason can exacerbate stress, especially if yours is the only source of income for your household. Letting down your employees or clients can also add to your stress. If you were not able to do your regular work, having a plan for business continuity can make a big difference.

## Instructions

Answer each of the questions below.

1. What would the effect be on your clients and your reputation if you were unable to do your regular work? What can you do about that?

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2. If you are self-employed or your organization does not provide a benefit plan, how would you continue to pay your bills if you could not work?

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3. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

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4. How might you generate passive income (income that continues when you are not working)? Consider product sales, rental fees, etc.

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5. What property or possessions could you sell and/or what savings do you have available?

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6. What could wait or be dropped altogether if you are unable to work?

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7. What friends, colleagues or family members could help out or temporarily cover your role if you were unable to work?

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8. Complete the following table to identify those who could help you meet commitments or obligations to clients and/or continue to provide for your employees. Consider individuals, services or other organizations that could provide assistance. These could be competitors who offer similar services/products or temp agencies who provide short term workers.

## WORK RESILIENCE FOR SELF-EMPLOYED CONTINUED

WORK RESILIENCE FOR SELF-EMPLOYED Who can help you meet your commitments			
NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL	PHONE

Your business will likely evolve over time. This means that your needs could change and those who could help you could change. For this reason, set a reminder to review this plan again in one year.

## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Stressful thoughts about work can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your work situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated may help with decreasing this particular stressor.



# Commitment to Myself

## Why this matters

At this point, we've explored how you might automatically respond in the face of adversity and have considered alternative responses or daily habits that could be more beneficial. Now you can commit to one thing that you are willing to do differently for at least three weeks to improve your own resilience.

## Instructions

Choose one of the items listed below or create your own.

**Over the next three weeks, I will commit to working on:**

- ☐ Reframing challenges as an opportunity for growth
  - Life will always present us with stressors, such as disappointment, frustration, conflict, or loss. We don't always get to choose what happens to us, but we always get to choose our response. With this commitment, you will pause to consider what you may have gained from any of these events. It could be that you have learned what not to do next time. It could be that you are spurred to take action that propels you toward something better. It could be that you have learned to be more sensitive or compassionate. In each case, record what you have gained and review them all at the end.
- ☐ Taking action to complete tasks I know are good for me
  - Motivational speaker Mel Robbins talks about immediately taking action when we have a thought about something we know is good for us, but don't have much motivation to do it. For example, if you know you should call a family member, but don't feel like talking on the phone, just count down (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) and make the call without the motivation. Just do it. You will probably feel much better afterward. This can work whether the activity is eating something healthy, going for a walk, or asking for help. Count down and then just do it. Sitting and waiting for motivation rarely spurs us to take effective action.

- ☐ Brainstorming options to address stressors I encounter using the 4 A's
  - Regularly use the 4 A's, to consider your options and evaluate how they might make your stress better or worse.

- ☐ Expressing appreciation to those who help me
  - This can help us recognize that many people want to and do offer help in both large and small ways every day. Whether it is someone who holds the door open or someone who makes us a meal – thank them specifically for what they did with as much detail as possible. For example, say, “Thanks for holding the door for me,” or, “I really appreciate you making me this sandwich.” By doing this, you will probably find that people will be quicker to offer help or support, as you will be encouraging and rewarding this type of behaviour.

- ☐ Consciously learning from my mistakes
  - When we hide our mistakes, we risk repeating them or having them become even more of a problem. Taking responsibility for our mistakes and openly discussing them with the intention of finding solutions can significantly change our perspective. We can move from seeing our mistakes as weakness or failure to understanding that mistakes are part of life. This can help facilitate our personal growth and development.

- ☐ Accepting support when offered and reaching out when needed
  - Over the next few weeks, pay extra attention to offers of help you receive from others – helping you with homework, bringing you a coffee, making you a meal, etc. Make a mental note of when people offer help, and wherever possible, accept the help and say thank you. Also, ask for help when you need it. Don't worry if someone is unable to provide what you ask for, just congratulate yourself for having the courage to ask.

- ☐ Improving self-talk (the things I say to myself about myself)
  - Each time you say something derogatory to yourself about yourself, such as “I'm an idiot,” or “How can I be so stupid?” catch yourself doing this and rephrase the comment in a way you would for someone you care about. For example, “That was an honest mistake,” or “Try again.” Retraining your brain to think fewer unkind or critical thoughts will help you feel better and be more resilient.

**Put a reminder in your calendar now to review your progress next year. Keep your plan and refer to it when stress becomes overwhelming or share it with a trusted friend who will help you when needed.**



## YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED

Committing to a challenge and sharing your plans with someone may help keep you accountable to your goals. Limit your stress by choosing only one change to work on at a time.

Thanks for completing this plan for resilience

This resource is not intended as a medical or mental health intervention. If you are currently experiencing significant challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplaces employee assistance plan services, or Crisis Services Canada: 1 833 456 4566. For residents of Quebec only, please call Services de Crises du Canada: 1 866 277 3553.

# Coping Strategies Planner

Below, add in your most likely or existing stressors and the coping strategies or strengths you will use to deal with them. The first one is an example to help get you started.



**Stressor:**

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**Coping Strategies:**

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**Stressor:**

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**Coping Strategies:**

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**Stressor:**

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**Coping Strategies:**

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**Stressor Example:**

Loneliness

**Coping Strategies:**

Join a Group, Volunteer



# Be Aware of Potential Resources

Fill this in on your own or obtain a list of resources available to you within your organization, community, or other associations before you need them.

POTENTIAL ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES	CONTACT NAME/ORGANIZATION	EMAIL	PHONE
Human resources			
Benefit provider			
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)			
Peer support program			
Leader or manager			
Wellness/health centre			
Occupational health nurse			
Association or membership resources			
Other:			
POTENTIAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES	CONTACT NAME/ORGANIZATION	EMAIL	PHONE
Family doctor			
Local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)			
Mood disorder services			
Addiction services			
Distress/help line			
Child and family services			
Spiritual or bereavement counseling through church, temple, mosque, or funeral home			
Circle of support – people who agree to support each other in advance			
Physically close supporters (those who you see regularly)			
Peer support services			
Other:			

# APPENDIX A – The VIA Classification of Strengths

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Every individual possesses all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. You can discover your personal character strengths profile by taking the scientifically validated VIA Survey at <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>

## WISDOM

CREATIVITY .....	Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are.
CURIOSITY .....	You like exploration and discovery.
JUDGMENT .....	You think things through and examine them from all sides.
LOVE-OF-LEARNING ....	You have a passion for mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge.
PERSPECTIVE .....	People who know you consider you wise.

## COURAGE

BRAVERY .....	You do not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain.
HONESTY .....	You live your life in a genuine and authentic way.
PERSEVERANCE .....	You work hard to finish what you start.
ZEST .....	You approach everything you do with excitement and energy.

## HUMANITY

KINDNESS .....	You are kind and generous to others.
LOVE .....	You value close relations with others.
SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE..	You know how to fit in to different social situations.

## JUSTICE

FAIRNESS .....	One of your abiding principles is to treat all people fairly.
LEADERSHIP.....	You excel at encouraging a group to get things done.
TEAMWORK .....	You excel as a member of a group.

## TEMPERANCE

FORGIVENESS .....	You forgive those who have done you wrong.
HUMILITY .....	You do not seek the spotlight and others recognize and value your modesty.
PRUDENCE .....	You are a careful person.
SELF REGULATION .....	You are a disciplined person.

## TRANSCENDENCE

APPREC. OF BEAUTY ...	You notice and appreciate beauty and excellence in all domains of life.
GRATITUDE .....	You are aware of good things that happen and don't take them for granted.
HOPE .....	You expect the best in the future, and you work to achieve it.
HUMOUR .....	Bringing smiles to other people is important to you.
SPIRITUALITY .....	Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.

Thoughts & Notes...

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This resource was created by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace with final analysis and critique provided by Dr. Ian M.F. Arnold and M. Suzanne Arnold, PhD. Thanks also to Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada's managers and Mental Health and Wellness in the Workplace Working Group members who made a significant contribution in the enhancement of this resource.

This resource is based on the research that suggests that planning for adversity and knowing what to do when it happens can reduce the negative impact on physical and mental health. For more information and citations, go to [www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com](http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com)

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