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Understanding Our Stress

December 22, 2022



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Land Acknowledgment



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Learning Objectives

- Overview of mental health/wellness
 - Looking at how our mental health impacts the workplace and the importance of business and industry investing in wellness
 - Understanding short and long term stress as well as signs of unhealthy coping
 - Impact of stress on our overall health
 - Cultivating awareness around our thoughts, feelings and behaviours
 - Strategies for seeking support
 - Review resources and supports available
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Understanding our Stress: Personally and Professionally

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What is stress?

A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.



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What is Mental Health?

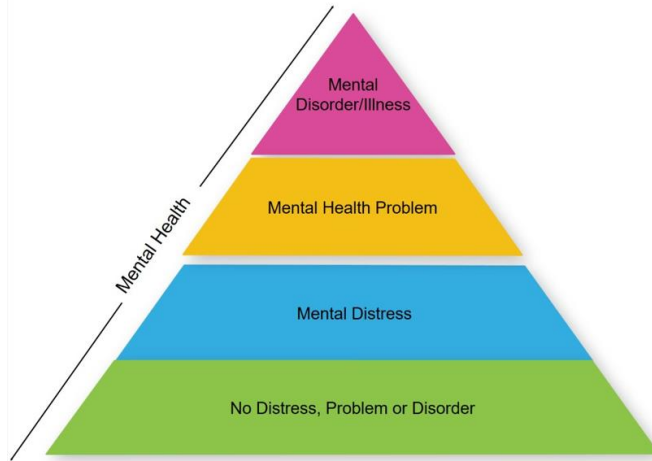
“A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”



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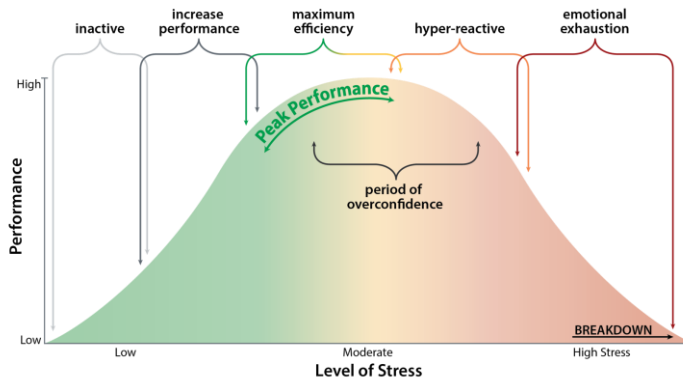
Mental States



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Human Performance and Stress



Adapted from: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2017); Diamond, D. M., et al. (2007); Swank, R.L., & Marchand, W.E. (1948); Watkins, A. (1997).

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Long-term Response

- Sometimes the effects of the stress are masked.
 - Staff stress may go unnoticed until well after (or into) the event.
 - Staff will often not realize the impact until they:
 - develop a medical problem.
 - take time off and then realize the contrast between stress levels before and after their time off.
 - Due to the stressful impacts for the organization as a whole, senior leadership may not receive or have opportunity to seek feedback until the problems are more serious.
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Long-term Response

- **Burnout**
 - Gradual wearing down; emotional & physical exhaustion due to external work and personal stressors (including limited work & personal supports, high workload demands, and limited resources).
 - sadness, apathy, cynicism, feeling discouraged, irritability
 - **Compassion Stress/Fatigue**
 - Stress and wearing effects of helping or wanting to help impacted individuals (effects of the difficult and intensive work/needs therein).
 - helplessness, frustration, self-isolation
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How does chronic stress impact our mental health?

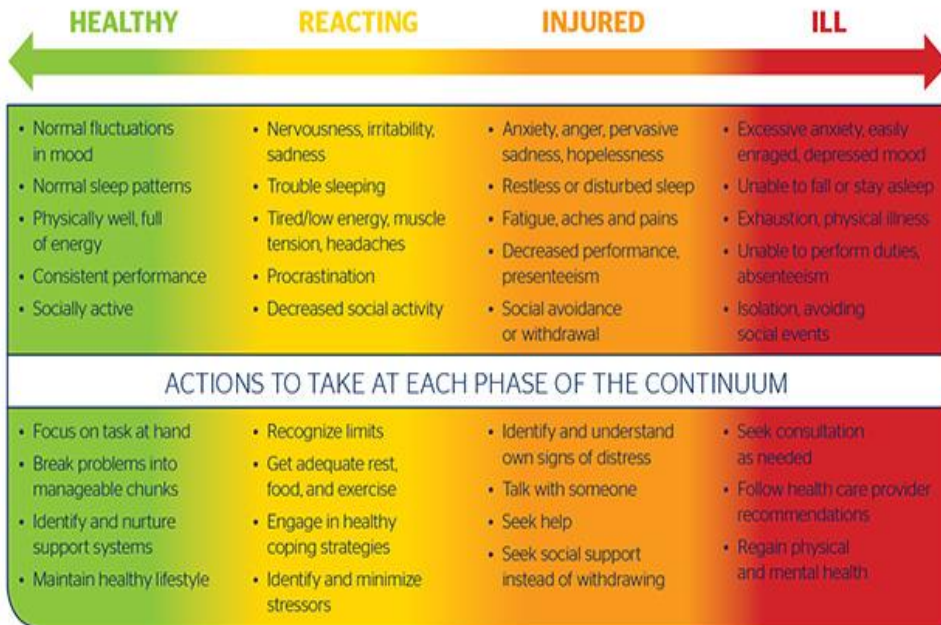
- Exhaustion
- Overwhelmed
- Conflict
- Apathy
- Negative attitude
- Decrease in confidence
- Avoidance
- Impatience
- Mental illness



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MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM MODEL



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Unhelpful Approaches to Stress Management

- Reduce Avoidance techniques: Negative emotion-focused strategies:
- Hyper-focus on helping others to avoid own stress
 - Ignoring in hopes that the situation will go away
 - Misuse of substances or medication
 - Keeping stress to oneself
 - Denial
 - Repetitive Venting
 - Substance misuse
 - Withdrawal/numbing through use of internet/electronics
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Activity – How much stress are you experiencing?

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Cultivating Awareness



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Unhelpful Thoughts

- Black and white
- Overgeneralization
- Mental filter
- Disqualifying the positive
- Mind reading
- Fortune telling
- Catastrophizing
- Emotional reasoning
- “should” statements
- Labelling
- personalization

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Investing in Ourselves: The Importance of Self-Care

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What is SELF-CARE?

HEALTH SKILLS AWARENESS POSITIVE IMPROVING
 INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION SUPPORT GOOD
 UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE WELLNESS MENTAL
 BODY CUES EMOTIONS WELLNESS NUTRITION
 MEDITATION TRADITIONAL PRACTICES HEALTH
 INFORMATION EMPATHY ACTIVITY

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Self-Care Barriers

- Levels of exhaustion & stress in post-disaster life and work.
- Considering self-care a luxury or indulgent.
- Lack of awareness about self-care needs.
- Being hard on ourselves
- Denial
- Western-European culture/value of over-work.
- High workload demands; limited



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The Foundation for Coping: Self-Awareness

What is Self-Awareness?

- The ability to identify how you feel and therefore what you need.

Benefits of Self-Awareness:

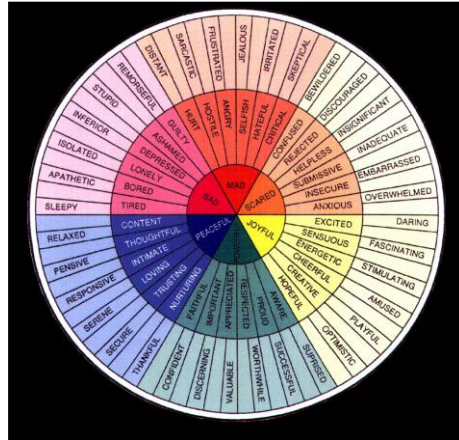
- You know what you need to do to feel better when you're feeling anxious, sad, overwhelmed, irritable, angry, etc....
- Clearly communicate your feelings and needs to others, which can decrease conflict and ensure you are being supported and your needs are being met.

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How do I perceive “negative” emotions?

- Feelings are my body’s way of communicating my needs.
- All feelings are valid.
- The more I avoid a feeling the more intense it becomes.
- Graded Exposure
- Challenging and shifting perspective.



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Daily Check In

Identify how you are feeling: (focusing on right now in the moment – be specific)

- **PHYSICALLY** (how does your body feel?)
- **EMOTIONALLY**
- **MENTALLY** (how are your thoughts? – ex: racing, clear, foggy, calm, scattered, positive, negative)
- **SPIRITUALLY** (Spirituality can mean different things for different people. For some people, it is their connection to God, Religion, or another Higher Power. For others it could mean their connection with Nature, Exercise (mind/body connection), Hobbies or Passions. Identify if you’re feeling Connected, Sort of Connected or Disconnected Spiritually).

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Creating Space for Self-Care

Adjusting Expectations to Meet Capacity:

- Perfection does not exist.
- Your capacity to accomplish things will vary depending on a variety of factors; sleep, health, support, pandemic, other children, etc...
- Survival.

Establishing Boundaries with Tasks:

- Prioritize 1-2 tasks MAXIMUM (Ask yourself, "What Absolutely needs to get done today?")
 - No task should be accomplished at the expense of your well-being. This can be a good measurement tool.
 - What do I want to do today vs. What do I have to do today
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Myth: Control = ↓ Anxiety

Cycle of Control

- Seeking control over more and more things in order to reduce anxiety.
- Increases anxiety
- Distract and avoid feelings and needs.

Letting go of Control

- Reduces anxiety
- THOUGHTS ---> Feelings ---> Behaviors
- Thought stopping and challenging strategies

"Going with the Flow"

- Dealing with life stressors if necessary in the moment.
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Importance of being Intentional

- Honoring your needs vs. Checking the Box
 - Quality
 - Allocating time (not trying to fit self-care in anywhere you can)
 - Asking for help - utilize your supports!

- Disconnecting vs. Recharging

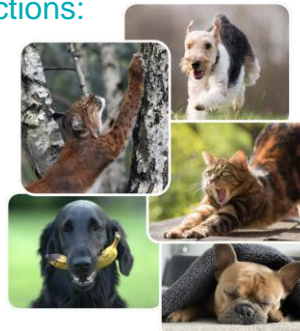
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Physical Strategies

Strategies important to our overall health and well-being, which can contribute to reduced stress reactions:

- Controlled breathing
- Daily physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Sleep management
- Time outside
- Simple activities like stretching/yoga



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Cognitive Strategies

Increase:

Positive emotion-focused strategies:

- Humour—watch a funny video.
- Acceptance.
- Reinterpreting the event in a positive light—positive self-talk.
- Taking time out for yourself each day.
- Gratitude practice (for work and home).
- Mindfulness practices.



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Social Strategies

- Seek out contact with family, friends, and colleagues who understand and support you,
- Be open to different types of support from different people
- Help others.
- Maintain routine in daily life and social activities.
- Have a trusted person who can watch for and notice changes in you.



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Self-Care in Action

- Making little changes in routines and daily tasks.
- Regular physical activity.
- Doing simple activities like yoga or stretching.
- Having creative activities or hobbies.
- Reach out to social supports.
- Giving time to yourself every day so you don't get sick or overly stressed by:
 - taking a walk.
 - doing some deep breathing.
 - spending time with your pets.
 - watching a funny video.



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Healthy Work Boundaries

Know your:

- Role
- Goals
- Resources
- Limits

Ensure that you:

- Share your own experience appropriately (to connect & empathize, rather than to redirect focus to your experience).
 - Seek and accept peer support—also offer care and support to others.
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Strategies for Seeking Support

- Start the conversation
 - With a supervisor
 - EFAP program
 - Physician
 - Mental health support
- Be forthcoming
- Participate in check ins
- Take care

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Where to go for help

- Help In Tough Times
<http://ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes>
- Local Addiction & Mental Health Offices
 - *811 can direct you to your local office
- Private service providers
 - Counsellors/therapists/psychologists in the community
 - Social service agencies may provide sliding scale private therapy as well
 - Psychologytoday.com

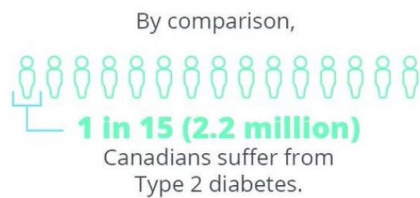
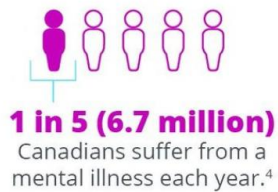
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The Business Case for Addressing Mental Health

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As part of the 6.7 million Canadians with mental illness, *Substance Use Disorder* (addiction), not always recognized as a mental disorder, is the *second most common*.⁵

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Mental Health in the Workplace

- 44% of workers say they have had mental health issues
- 1/3 facing challenges will seek help
- ¾ short term disability claims are related to mental illness
- Management of mental health in the workplace could decrease losses to productivity by as much as 30%
- Stress in a business contributes to at least 60% of workplace accidents
- Mental illness is the leading cause of disability, absence, presenteeism (physically present but distracted) with an economic burden of 51 billion dollars per year in Canada

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Impact of MH in the Workplace

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Possible self-injury – Risk of demotion/firing – Problems in MLAs – Increased illness – Loss of wages – Loss of self-esteem and respect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unsafe work environment – Having to cover for a co-worker – Reduced morale – Increased risk of injury – Increased number of disputes |
|--|--|

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Impact on Business

- More absenteeism
- Reduced productivity
- Reduced morale and higher staff turnover
- More accidents
- Higher workers' compensation and insurance costs
- Damage to equipment
- Theft
- Loss of business and/or customers
- Legal and liability issues

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Workplace Health Model

- More than 67% of the population over the age of 15 are in the workforce, and spend an average of 60% of their waking hours in the workplace
- Mental health problems and illnesses are rated as one of the top three drivers of both short- and long-term disability claims by more than 80% of Canadian employers.
- Mental health problems and illnesses account for more than \$6 billion in lost productivity costs due to absenteeism and presenteeism
- Workplaces are convenient places for people to get information and support

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Workplace Health Model

- The workplace has a strong influence on employee health and wellness and, in turn, has a positive correlation with family and community benefits.
- Workplaces have access to a large number of people on a regular basis and can provide ongoing support to employees.
- Workplaces have access to groups who may be hard to reach otherwise (e.g., minority groups and people who do not visit doctors and other health professionals regularly).

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Resources/References

- Centre for Addiction & Mental Health: www.camh.net
- My Health Alberta: www.myhealth.alberta.ca
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml
- Alberta Health Services: www.ahs.ca
- World Health Organization: www.who.int
- Health Line: www.healthline.com
- Self-Care in Disaster Times: Personal Wellness. Version: 03. Revised: 2020-10. © 2020, Alberta Health Services, Mental Health Promotion & Illness Prevention.
- Returning to a Shared Workspace: A Psychological Toolkit for transitioning to a new normal: https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CMHA_ReturnToWorkplace-Toolkit_EN_jan-2022_FINAL.pdf

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Resources/References

- Alberta Health Services – It’s Our Business:
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-job-manual.pdf>
- Canadian Mental Health- Mental Health First Aid Guide for Managers
<https://www.mhfa.ca/en/workplace-resources>
- A user-friendly guide to working together on health issues in the workplace, “Accommodation Works!” Canadian Human Rights Commission
<http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/accommodation-works>

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Resources/References

- Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction: Start the Conversation
<https://www.ccsa.ca/>
- The Centre for Addiction & Mental Health
<https://www.camh.ca/>
- Mental Health Literacy
www.mentalhealthliteracy.org

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Thank you!

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