

Activity 9.1: Considerations for Personal Emotional Control

Use as an initial assessment of self-control and strategies to improve your control

Background. You are responsible for your own health and happiness, your self-control, your words, and your actions. What you do or not do is up to you. You have the power. Self-control requires both in-the-moment strategies, such as the five suggested below, as well as a personal plan that can include proactive strategies to minimize stress, boundaries or rules for trigger situations, enforcement of consequences, and establishment of a support network.

Wellness Compass SMART In-the-Moment Self-Control Strategies

- S** Self-affirm: Stay committed to your personal mission statement and goals.
- M** Maintain your glucose level: Eat or drink every two to three hours.
- A** Acknowledge your weaknesses: Proactively plan to minimize irritations and maximize control.
- R** Relax and reframe: Take two deep breaths and focus on two positive thoughts or actions.
- T** Too much tension? It's time to go; walk away, take a break.

Developing an emotional control related management plan is tough partly because it's emotions and partly because it is so personal. Activities 9.1 and 9.2 are designed to be completed one after another, culminating in the development of a draft for an emotional management plan. Prior to implementing this plan, travelers are encouraged to also complete Activity 20.1a, 20.2a, 20.3 and consider if creating a Wellness Checklist (to facilitate building new habits and monitoring progress) will be useful. Should self control be your strong suit, consider using the processes to manage either stress, or another key aspect of well-being in your life.

Part A. Proactive stress and situation management

Check what you do well; star strategies that may also assist you.

- ◇ *Plan: be proactive.* Are you sufficiently prioritized and organized? If not, how can you better organize and therefore plan to reduce stress? (See chapter 16.)
- ◇ *Manage your triggers.* Certain people, situations, smells, sounds, or sights can evoke loss of control because of a past negative experience. Typically, you and your plans must acknowledge your key triggers, and then you must create alternative scenarios or coping strategies and practice them until you can use them automatically.
- ◇ *Reduce expectations.* Analyze your obligations. Do you need to cut back on what you do either temporarily or permanently? What's most important? What can you delegate, reduce, or omit?
- ◇ *Set boundaries.* Do you need to firmly set written boundaries for what you will do or will not do? With whom? What are the boundaries and consequences, and when will you implement this plan?
- ◇ *Stay healthy.* How well are you taking care of yourself? Do you get sufficient quality nourishment, water, sleep, rest, and relaxation? What do you need most? (See chapter 12.)
- ◇ *Use exercise to de-stress.* Are you getting the exercise you need to reduce your stress, tension, and pain, or otherwise provide mood-boosting brain chemicals? (See chapter 13.)
- ◇ *Reduce stimulation.* Are you over stimulated? Do you consume excessive caffeine, or are you exposed to excessive noise, heat, or traffic? What needs to change?

- ◇ *Use spiritual strategies.* Are you practicing prayer, meditation, or yoga? These are powerful strategies; try them to find out what works best for you. (See chapter 4.)
- ◇ *Mind your attitude.* Are you sufficiently positive or very critical? If you are not upbeat, what can you do to become more positive? (See chapter 7.)
- ◇ *Get connected.* Do you need to talk to someone? Who can help you? When will you call him or her? (See chapter 8.)
- ◇ *Do you need chemical support?* Will natural or homeopathic relaxation support (e.g., chamomile tea or lavender oil) help? If you need more support than over-the-counter natural remedies and are already exercising at least moderately five times a week for thirty minutes per session, it may be time to see an MD for pharmacological support.
- ◇ *Should you see a doctor?* How are your blood pressure, blood sugar, eyesight, hearing, and dental health? What do you need most? (See chapter 10.)

B. Personalize your in-the-moment plan

Consider writing down a series of steps you'll commit to taking in your three most damaging or most common trigger situations (perhaps one for home, one for work, and one for travel). The SMART plan is a good starting point. Memorize the sequence of these steps and practice until you can automatically make this occur anytime you want to. Possible enhancements to this plan include the following:

- ◇ *Assess.* Quickly evaluate your emotions/feelings and goals, e.g., "I'm getting upset (anxious, stressed). I choose to calm down and create a positive outcome."
- ◇ *Distract.* Stall for time by sharing a humorous story or reframed comment; sipping, nibbling, or stretching; asking a clarifying question; or, if possible, turning on relaxing music. Typically this requires you to first breathe and then actively engage in your stall tactic as if it's a normal aspect of the way you consider a situation.
- ◇ *Refine your escape plan.* Sometimes asking for a break requires a bit more refinement than simply exiting the situation. Aim to courteously but quickly remove yourself from the situation, perhaps with "I'm sorry; I need a moment ...". If you can, apply relaxation strategies and reengage in one minute. If you are not ready after one minute, return to propose a better time or alternative, state how you will follow up, and then follow up as promised. When you are calmer, assess your success: clarify what occurred, what you did well, and what you could have improved. Modify your escape plan accordingly.

C. Situation management strategies

- ◇ *In the car:* If you are driving, consider immediately pulling over if you are out of control; or, if the driver is out of control, ask him or her to pull over so you can get out. Do it the first time it comes into your head, as there may not be a second opportunity.
- ◇ *In public places:* Keep your voice down and consider moving to a private place if you need to continue the situation at this time. Remember common courtesies! If you need to, walk out to calm down so you don't do something you will regret.

In stressful private situations: Consider calling a time-out for two minutes; take a bathroom break, a walk, and so forth; or continue at a future time. If the situation gets violent or verbally abusive, call 911 immediately!