

# ***STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE SERIES***

## **Part 1:**

### **Defining Workplace Stress:**

Myths, Definition, On the Job Stress Relief

## **Part 2:**

### **Stress Fitness At Work**

Getting in Shape, Pacing Yourself, Mental Fitness

## **Part 3:**

### **Coping Strategies for Job Stress**

Stress Reduction, Enjoying Your Work

# PART 1: DEFINING WORKPLACE STRESS

## GOALS:

- To increase awareness about work-related stressors.
- To define job stress and discuss its effects.
- To practise some relaxation techniques to combat stress on the job.

## RATIONALE:

We all need some stress in our lives. It provides us with energy, motivation and vitality to daily existence. Prolonged and intense stress however, can affect our bodies negatively and may contribute to ill physical and mental health.

For many, jobs are not only a source of income but also a source of accomplishment, success and self-esteem. If negative stress continues to bombard us on the job, it can easily spill over to our home life and also seriously affect one's sense of self-worth. With today's fast paced lifestyle, especially in the workplace, it is now more important than ever to learn how to manage daily stressors effectively.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers, pens, pencils; copies of *Myths about Stress*; and *On the Job . . . Two Minute Stress Relievers* for each participant.

## METHOD:

### Warm Up:    **My Job Stress**

Ask participants to identify one source of stress they have experienced in the workplace. Flipchart responses and post for future use.

### Exercise 1:    **What I Think & Feel**

Divide the group into dyads. Tell participants to review the list of sources of job stress as identified in the Warm up and to choose one or two to focus on. Invite participants to complete the following sentence and share with their partners.

**When I experience \_\_\_\_\_ (the source of job stress - e.g. time pressure), the first thing I feel or think is . . .**

Bring the total group together and facilitate a discussion about the feelings and thoughts participants identified.

Questions to consider:

- How aware are you that you are under stress?
- How would you describe your symptoms (eg. physical, emotional, psychological)?

### **Exercise 2: Exposing the Myths**

Instruct group members to form a straight line facing you. Using a copy of ***Myths about Stress***, tell them that you are going to make some statements about stress. Advise them to step forward if they agree with the statement or to step back one step if they disagree. After each one, ask for discussion from both points of view.

Hand out copies of ***Myths about Stress*** and discuss each point with the group.

**Theory:** see Theory Box

### **Exercise 3: Relaxing on the Job**

Explain that while we do not always have control over things that stress us, we can help ourselves by learning how to take relaxation breaks. Using ***On the Job . . . Two Minute Stress Relievers***, lead participants through the exercises. Emphasize that they require only a few minutes and are one way to begin to manage job related stress.

Questions to consider:

- How are you feeling now?
- How useful could this exercise be in your workplace?
- What barriers might prevent you from implementing this technique on a daily basis?
- What have you already tried that works for reducing stress?



#### **Exercise 4: Plan of Action**

Ask participants to revisit the original list of job-related stressors as identified by the group. Participants are encouraged to choose one job stressor that they would like to respond to more effectively and to develop a plan of action to accomplish this goal, based on information learned today. You may encourage participants to share their goals with the group once sufficient time is given for each individual to complete this task.

#### **EVALUATION:**



# MYTHS ABOUT STRESS

**Myth 1:** A lot of stress makes you unproductive.

Too little stress can make you as unproductive as too much. The trick is to find out how much stress is optimal for you. Having enough stimulation in your life, but not too much, is the secret to maximizing your productivity.

**Myth 2:** Workaholics should slow down or they'll get sick.

Research indicates many workaholics are very satisfied with their lives, working long hours for a cause greater than themselves. Such people tend to have a particularly strong sense of well-being. The important point however, is to evaluate whether you feel your work is 'taking over' or whether you have adequate balance in other areas of your life.

**Myth 3:** Only unpleasant situations are stressful.

In today's society, it is important to note that even happy events (going on vacation, entering into a new relationship, starting a new job) can be as stressful as the concerns around meeting deadlines, increased job responsibilities, employment security and family pressures. Whether situations are pleasant or unpleasant, they are seen as the major stressors in our lives.

**Myth 4:** What's stressful for me is stressful for you.

Stress is not the same for everyone. It is something we each define for ourselves and in fact often create. Stress is dependent upon how we interpret situations and relate to the world around us. In other words, stress is in the eye of the beholder.

# ON THE JOB . . . TWO MINUTE STRESS RELIEVERS

## Step One:

Find the quietest place you can. Sit in a chair with your feet on the floor, your hands in your lap. Close your eyes.

## Step Two:

Take in three long breaths one at a time. Don't rush them. Breathe in through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. Concentrate only on breathing in and breathing out.

## Step Three:

Identify the major stress centres in your body which have stored up much of the tensions of the day. These usually involve the head, neck and shoulders.

*Shoulders & Arms:* With arms at your sides, pull your right arm and shoulder up, tensing for five seconds, then release. Repeat three times. Do the same exercise with your left arm, repeating three times as well.

*Head & Neck:* Rotate your head slowly and look over your right shoulder. Rotate head slowly back and look over your left shoulder. Drop head down on chest and rest it there for a few seconds. Repeat each movement three times.

## Step Four:

Slowly stand upright and extend your right arm out from your side and rotate backwards in large circles. Keep your body straight. Then rotate left arm backwards. Repeat exercise three times.

## Step Five:

Return to a sitting position and finish with three deep breaths, breathing slowly in through your nose and exhaling out through your mouth. When you are finished, give yourself a few extra moments to relax before getting up.



## THEORY BOX

### What is Stress?

- Our mind and body's response to any kind of demand or challenge, whether pleasant or unpleasant, positive or negative.
- Most often an internal reaction to our external environment. It can be felt physically - rapid heartbeat, tensing of muscles, faster breathing, increased adrenaline - and experienced mentally - through changing thoughts, perceptions, feelings and emotional states.

### What is Job Stress?

- Thoughts and feelings associated with work-related stressors.
- May include some or all of the following: a feeling of being overwhelmed; unexplained agitation or restlessness; feeling pressured; a sense of apathy or sadness; feeling a loss of control; a gradual building of frustration, anxiety or anger; a sense of periodic or on-going confusion; rushed or scrambled thoughts; a chronic feeling of worry or insecurity; a lack of or a sudden increase in energy.

### What to do!

It is essential to pay close attention to what your body is telling you about how stress is affecting you. Only then can you begin to identify the situations (stressors) that are associated with your stress response. The next step involves developing an appropriate stress-release plan specifically suited to your needs, job and lifestyle.

Important to managing stress is to strive to work towards achieving a sense of balance in one's life. This enables you to develop a greater sense of overall well-being.