

## Tool 1: Taking 'Control' of Your Life

Tool 1 contains a number of elements that can reduce stress risk:

- Reflection
- Analysis
- Acceptance
- Prioritising
- Planning
- Action

Once you have a chance to really use this tool away from this course, give some serious thought to how you could apply these elements more generally in your life.

To use this tool, follow the instructions below:

1. Take a blank piece of paper. Reflect for a few minutes on all of the 'sources of pressure' in your life. Think about your whole life: home, work, relationships, environment and so on. Refer to the 'Sources of Pressure' sheet to help you develop your own list.
2. Now use your 'My control Inventory' sheet. Place each item in your 'sources of pressure' list into one of the two columns. That is, for each item decide quickly whether this is something you have 'some control' over or 'no control' over.
3. Once you have your two lists, challenge the list items on the right. Do you really have no control over these things? Are there some, when you really think about them, where you do have some control? If so, move them into the left column.
4. Now, accept that you cannot control the things remaining on the right. 'Release' them, let them go. Stop trying to influence what you cannot control. Stop knocking your head against a brick wall.
5. Concentrate your efforts on the list on the left. Go through the list and prioritise them. Which of these things are the most important in terms of your stress levels right now?
6. Take the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table. Select the five most important items in order of importance from the left hand column of your 'Control Inventory' and write them into the left hand column of the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table.
7. Start with the most important thing and do some action planning. What is the most important thing you could do now that would reduce your stress associated with that thing? Then think about what you can do in the near future, and then the medium future and so on. This is basic planning.

Don't be over-ambitious; concentrate most on what you can actually do in the short, medium and long term.

8. Once you have completed this exercise, how do you feel?
9. It is vitally important that you follow through and put these actions into effect. Again, be realistic. Don't try to do everything at once but focus on the most important things first, even if that is only one thing. Make a commitment to yourself to do that thing or things. If you see that through, you will get a real sense of achievement. If, on the other hand, you are too ambitious, and don't see it through, you will be disappointed and feel as if you have let yourself down. This will only add to your stress.
10. This kind of action planning is a wonderful stress management habit. If you can do this habitually you will have progressively more and better feelings of control over the things that really matter in your life.

## Sources of Pressure

We have many sources of pressure in our lives, all of which have the potential to cause stress. Think about and list all of the sources of pressure in your life. Below are listed some categories to help you develop your own list. These categories are designed to get you thinking and generating your own list. There may well be sources of pressure that you have that don't come into any of the categories. Try to be as specific as you can. Once you have completed your list place them into your 'my control inventory' table, dividing them between things you have some control over and things you have no control over.

- Change.** What changes are you dealing with in your life?
- Major life events** in the recent past, present or near future.
- Commuting** to and from work. Does this cause you problems?
- Decision making.** Are you facing any difficult decisions at present?
- Health.** Have you any concerns about your health or others' health?
- Emotions.** Are you angry, frustrated, upset, or worried about anything?
- Environments.** Does your home or working environment cause any problems?
- Money.** Do you have any money issues outstanding?
- Family.** How are things with your family; any particular issues?
- Relationships.** How are your most important relationships?
- Communication.** Are you having any difficulties in communication with important others?
- Organisation and Planning.** Are things in order and well planned or are they disorganised and shambolic? Is your life cluttered?
- Phobias.** Do you have any irrational fears?
- Social.** How is your 'social' life? Are you getting enough support? Are you seeing enough of the people you enjoy being with?
- Work.** How are things at work? What sources of pressure are you facing?
- Spiritual.** Do you have any difficulties with regard to spiritual concerns?

### My Control Inventory

Things I have (some) control over	Things I have no control over

**Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress**

Most important thing in terms of my stress level	Actions I can take <b>now</b> and in the future to reduce the stress associated with that thing.