in equilibrium

Resilience Resources

   www.in-equilibrium.co.uk

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Challenging Negative Thoughts   (optimism)

The ability to recognise the link between negative thinking and reduced performance is a key resilience skill. Highly resilient people have the ability to stay grounded in reality without dwelling on negative outcomes.

It is not events themselves which stress people but the way we react to them. Most people think that stress is something that happens to them. But how you approach life - your beliefs, your thoughts, and your attitude – can have a major effect on your long-term pressure/stress management.

Do you see a glass of water as half empty or half full?

Is your attitude automatically negative or hostile?

Personality traits which are prone to turning pressure into stress

The Perfectionist

- Do you feel constant pressure to achieve?

- Are you hard on yourself when you make a mistake?

- Do you always feel you haven't done enough?

The Control Freak

- Do you need to control everything and everyone?

- Are you a bad delegator?

- Do you think lack of control is a sign of weakness?

The People Pleaser

- Do you need to have everyone like you?

- Do you care more for others than yourself?

- Do you hide your negative feelings so as not to displease others?

Lacking in Self-Esteem

- Do you feel that you have poor judgement?

- Do you feel like an impostor?

- Do you feel that you don't do as good a job as others?

Challenge your limiting beliefs

We all have limiting beliefs, which frustrate our progress and frequently result in stress. Many of these beliefs have implied "shalls" and "can'ts" such as:

- I'm not as good as other people

- Life is a struggle

- Change is difficult

Limiting beliefs can cause stress when they make us collide head-on into other people. You may have a fight with your partner because they didn't change the sheets every week: "Everyone changes the sheets every week," you say. Where does this idea come from? "Everybody knows it. My mother taught me."

In fact, this is not an immutable law. Believing there is an immutable law that "everyone" knows can cause stress until you acknowledge that it's really just your preference.

Challenge your limiting beliefs by:

- Articulating them

- Labelling them as beliefs and not as truths

- Admitting they are opinions which can be changed

- Admitting that beliefs held by others may be just as valid

Reframing

When experiencing stressful situations you lose the ability to see what you're doing that can make things worse. Reframing is a technique which changes the way you look at things which can make you feel better about them. Remember that there are always many different ways of looking at any situation. The reality may not change, but there are different ways of perceiving that reality. This being so, you might as well pick the perception that's going to cause you the least stress.

For example, let's say you just lost your job. Can you find the upside to this?

- Maybe you hated it, but lacked the courage to leave. Now you have the opportunity to find something better.

- It's scary finding a new job, but we never grow when we're not challenged. This could make you a stronger person.

Suppose a co-member of your team drives you mad by always acting superior. How could you reframe that behaviour?

- They are probably insecure.

- They may see you as a threat. By trying to put you down, they are hoping to rise above you.

- They may be having personal problems.

Distorted, Negative Thinking

Do you know any negative thinkers? Their thinking style is the opposite of optimism – it destroys confidence, interferes with their performance, and dampens their mental skills.

Examples of negative thinking:

- "We've got a new contract, that'll mean working late."

- "I've got a new boss, I'd better watch my step."

- "All these people are so successful. What am I doing here."

Types of Negative Thinking

Thinking in black or white terms

You are either the best programmer in the world or the worst. You snapped at your son, so you've got to be the worst parent in the world. It's all or nothing.

It's not really so.

Instead realise that you can't be defined by any single act, and one mistake doesn't usually destroy an entire project.

Overgeneralising

Similar to black and white thinking, the overgeneraliser sees every mistake as part of a dark and twisted pattern of inevitable failure. Every time you fail you see it as evidence that you will never get it right.

Instead, evaluate each incident on its own merits, and force yourself to be objective.

Personalising

This is the favourite ploy of those who walk around attracting guilt like a magnet. The boss ignores you and you wonder what you've done wrong. Only to find out later she fell out with her husband that morning.

Instead, the right reaction is not to assume the worst without more obvious evidence. If you really have done something wrong you'll hear about it soon enough.

Challenging Negative Thoughts

Use the following table to challenge your limiting beliefs and thinking errors:

Step 1: Think of a situation or event in which you felt stressed and note it down.	
Step 2: Note down how you felt and how you behaved in that situation.	
Step 3: As you think about the stressful situation/event and re-experience the feelings you had, note down the thoughts you had.	
Step 4: Look at the thoughts you had and see what underlying beliefs led you to think that way. Challenge your thinking and beliefs. Are they: - logical? - realistic (supported by the evidence)? - helpful	
Step 5: Identify a more helpful belief and way of thinking about that event or situation and note it down.	

Challenging Negative Thinking Habits

Each thought you have affects how you feel, each feeling you have affects how you behave and there are consequences to every single one of your behaviours, be it positive or negative. Behaviours that are CONSISTENT become HABITS and habits can become who we are and how we respond to our environment.

Negative Thinking Habits

In the following pages we will ask you to begin to note your negative thoughts. We will look at the negative thinking habits of thinking in black and white, comparing self to others, having impossibly high standards of perfection, concentrating on mistakes, ignoring successes, overgeneralising and mind reading. Such patterns of negative thinking daily undermine your sense of self-worth. However, you may be so used to this type of thinking that these negative thoughts seem reasonable and justified, and you no longer notice the effect they are having on you. No matter how bad or untrue the thoughts are, you tend to believe them. This is very painful to live with, more painful than any loss. This is because grief fades with time, but unless you take positive steps to change your thinking habits, your negative thoughts are always with you – undermining, judging, blaming and finding fault.

Think Negatively – Feel Negatively

Negative thoughts cause stress. If we THINK negatively about a situation, we will also FEEL negatively about that situation, regardless of the true facts. Although our negative thoughts are unrealistic, it is very difficult to check up on whether or not they are true. If someone attacks us physically and injures us, we can see we are hurt by examining the injury. But how can we judge whether or not another person is actually rejecting us or criticising us, we may just be misinterpreting their behaviour. Our feelings of distress cannot prove our interpretation is true, because when we think negatively we will have such feelings whether the interpretation is right or wrong.

Often, we think negative thoughts in a kind of shorthand. Words like "stupid", "weak" or "pathetic" may pop into our minds and carry with them strong feelings of self-dislike. Very often, too, people find negative thoughts difficult to "turn off", they may seem to have control of your mind, but the truth is you are so used to these thoughts they seem normal and ordinary. However, you do not have to go on living with them. With practice you can learn to change your negative thoughts to positive ones.

Become Aware

You have already begun to change your habit of negative thinking, just by being aware of it. By completing the challenging stressful thoughts log, you may have begun to notice a pattern to your negative thinking. Now we can follow this up by looking at the effect our particular patterns of negative thinking have on our lives. The price we pay for negative thoughts is very high. Consider what this continual undermining of your self-worth costs you in terms of family life, friendships, and work satisfaction.

When we look at what underlies our negative thinking we very often find it is the belief that most of our troubles and difficulties are caused by events outside of our control. In fact, many of our troubles and difficulties are caused by our beliefs about those events. For example, if you lose your job because there is an economic recession, this is outside of your control, but how you FEEL about losing your job and what you decide to do about it, is not.

How you respond

The next step in challenging our negative thinking is to learn to observe our reactions to events and situations. There is often a gap between the event and our emotional response, but we tend to believe that our response is caused by the event. In fact, it is caused by what happens during the gap, when our beliefs about the event take over. For example, if we call the event of losing a job A, and we call our emotional response, which is depression, C. There is in fact something that happens at B, which represents our beliefs about the event of losing a job. Most people are only aware of what happens at A, and believe that what happens at C, is caused by A, when actually it is caused by thoughts and beliefs at B. If we are calling ourselves inadequate and stupid because we have lost a job, and telling ourselves we will never get another one, we will feel depressed. If, however, we recognise that many people are unemployed, and we decide to take the opportunity of unemployment to do something positive, maybe to get closer to our family or friends, or learn to paint or take up karate, then we will not feel so depressed because we have lost a job.

It is important to remember that negative thoughts don't just stay as thoughts, they also translate into action. We do not just have negative feelings about events in our lives, we also have behaviours related to those feelings. If we believe that losing a job is the worst thing in the world and we become depressed about it, we may well spend half the day in bed, have very low energy and behave in a depressed way. This will have negative effects on our relationships with family and friends. Because we have low energy, we have less chance of finding another job. If we do get an interview and turn up with a negative and depressed attitude, we are less likely to be employed.

What we need to do is to learn to fill in the gap and find out what happens at B, which affects our feelings and behaviour. We then need to provide ourselves with alternatively positive thoughts and behaviours. The Challenging Stressful Thoughts log will help you do this. When you use the Log, note the differences between the negative feelings and the positive ones, and take particular note of the consequences in terms of your behaviour.

Taking 'Control' of Your Life

(Optimism, Problem Solving)

This exercise contains a number of elements that can help to increase personal resilience and reduce stress risk:

- Reflection

- Analysis

- Acceptance

- Prioritising

- Planning

- Action

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

To use this exercise, follow the instructions below (the tables to complete are on the pages after 'sources of pressure').

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 you 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 Increase Resilience' 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 Increase Resilience' 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 resilience 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.

- o **Change**. What changes are you dealing with in your life?

- o **Major life events** in the recent past, present or near future.

- o **Commuting** to and from work. Does this cause you problems?

- o **Decision making.** Are you facing any difficult decisions at present?

- o **Health**. Have you any concerns about your health or others' health?

- o **Emotions.** Are you angry, frustrated, upset, or worried about anything?

- o **Environments**. Does your home or working environment cause any problems?

- o **Money**. Do you have any money issues outstanding?

- o **Family.** How are things with your family; any particular issues?

- o **Relationships.** How are your most important relationships?

- o **Communication.** Are you having any difficulties in communication with important others?

- o **Organisation and Planning.** Are things in order and well planned or are they disorganised and shambolic? Is your life cluttered?

- o **Phobias.** Do you have any irrational fears?

- o **Social.** How is your 'social' life? Are you getting enough support? Are you seeing enough of the people you enjoy being with?

- o **Work.** How are things at work? What sources of pressure are you facing?

- o **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 Increase Resilience

Most important thing in terms of my stress level	Actions I can take now and in the future to reduce the stress associated with that thing and increase resilience.

Assertiveness

(emotional awareness and regulation, reaching out, self-efficacy)

Assertiveness is a key ability found in highly resilient people. It is not possible to be in touch with your own emotions if you cannot express them honestly and clearly to others without giving offence.

What is assertiveness?

The word assertiveness is used to describe a certain pattern of behaviour or a style of communicating with others. It is a way of behaving which means we are communicating our feelings, thoughts and beliefs in an open, honest manner, without violating the rights of other people. It is an alternative to being aggressive or manipulative, where we abuse other people's rights, or to being passive, where we abuse our own rights. These four different ways of expressing ourselves can be seen as a matrix as follows:

ASSERTIVE	**AGGRESSIVE**
Not threatened by conflict	Hostile
Expresses demands and requests clearly and calmly	Rage – destructive anger
Negotiates with others	Irritable – suppressed anger
	Abusive (physically, verbally, emotionally)
PASSIVE	**MANIPULATIVE**
Withdraws from conflict	Makes others feel guilty
Gives in to others' demands	Uses victim status or illness to get their way
Allows others to walk all over them ('doormat')	Makes comparisons
Self-pity/resentment	

Comparing the four types of behaving/communicating, it is clear that being assertive is the most effective. Being assertive means we are able to ask for what we want from others; it means we can say no to the requests of others; it means we can express a range and depth of emotion, such as love, liking and anger, without feeling self conscious or becoming aggressive; and it means we can express personal opinions without becoming defensive. Very few people manage to be assertive all the time in all areas of their lives. Some people swing from being passive and not getting what they want to being aggressive because of the resulting build-up of frustration. It is undoubtedly true that we could all benefit from being more assertive in some areas of our lives

Why are we unassertive?

We act in an unassertive manner because we have learned through our experiences to behave that way. This learning process can be traced back to our early childhood. Small babies have no fear of expressing themselves and communicating their needs. They cry and smile openly; there is no inhibition or beating about the bush. But very quickly children learn to adapt their behaviour to the kind of responses they receive from those around them. Children's behaviour is subtly shaped by the models they are exposed to and by the encouragement, or lack of it, received from parents, family, friends and school.

Some children are encouraged and rewarded for expressing themselves openly and honestly and are quite comfortable expressing a range of emotions. Others may be encouraged to express their thoughts but find it more difficult to express emotions. We have all learned to be the way we are; therefore we can learn to behave differently.

The effects of being unassertive

The long term effect of being unassertive is a growing loss of self esteem. This term refers to our own evaluation of ourselves in respect to how competent, significant and likeable we see ourselves as people. The more we act in an unassertive way, the weaker is our positive sense of identity: the sense of 'This is me, this is how I feel and how I think'. This can result in a lack of sense of purpose, or a feeling that we are not in control of our lives, which in turn leads to negative feelings and symptoms of stress.

If we are failing to express ourselves openly and we are concealing our feelings and thoughts, this can lead to internal tension, also resulting in physical and mental symptoms of stress and potentially leading to aggression. Inherent in unassertive behaviour is poor communication, which leads to the development of unhealthy uncomfortable relationships. Communicating effectively in relationships is the best possible insulator against symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

Why be more assertive?

By being more assertive we can improve our sense of identity, our confidence and our self-esteem. A snowball effect is created: the more confident we feel, the more assertive we are and so on. By stating more clearly what our needs are, we increase the chances that these needs will be met.

Being assertive leads to a saving in energy and a reduction in tension. We are no longer preoccupied with avoiding upsetting others, and no longer overly concerned with making gains in an aggressive way. People who are generally assertive are resilient people who are simply happy to be themselves.

Six Assertiveness Skills

1. BEING SPECIFIC

This skill is about being clear yourself about what exactly you want to communicate and then making sure that you communicate it clearly to others.

In order to be specific, it is important to be clear about your own needs and priorities. Then you can decide what it is you want or feel, and are in a good position to say so specifically or directly. You also need to be clear that you have rights – you have the right to ask for what you want or need.

When you are clear about what you want and that you have the right to ask for it, you are in a position to communicate that specifically to others. Avoid unnecessary padding and keep your statement simple and brief.

2. REPETITION (broken record technique)

This skill involves preparing what you are going to say and repeating it exactly as often as necessary, in a calm relaxed manner. It helps you to stick to your statement or request without being distracted. Using this technique, you can relax because you know what you are going to say and you can maintain a steady comment, avoiding irrelevant logic or argumentative bait.

3. THE THREE PART SENTENCE

This skill is a way of making sure communications are two-way. Showing that you have listened to someone is likely to help get them to listen to you. The three parts of the sentence are as follows:

1. show that you have understood what the other person has said (listen and reflect)

2. communicate your side of the story

3. state what you want.

4. HANDLING CRITICISM

There are various ways of handling criticism assertively, without getting defensive or aggressive:

Negative assertion: This skill involves calmly agreeing with someone else's true criticism of your negative qualities and accepting that you have faults e.g. "Your desk is a complete and utter tip. You are very disorganised" " Yes its true I'm not very tidy" The key issue in negative assertion is, of course, self confidence and a belief that you have the ability to change yourself if you so wish and not feeling that you have to be perfect. By agreeing with and accepting criticism, if it is appropriate, you need not feel totally demolished.

Negative enquiry: This skill involves actively exploring criticism of your behaviour, to ascertain whether the criticism is constructive, or to expose it as manipulative and hurtful. For example, "You'll find that difficult won't you, because you are so shy?" You reply, "In what ways do you think I am shy?" If the criticism is constructive, that information can be used constructively and the general channel of communication will be improved.

5. SAYING "NO"

This skill is about saying "no" to unreasonable demands. When someone makes a request, it may be necessary to take a few seconds before responding. Give yourself time to work out whether the request is reasonable or unreasonable. If you are clear that it is unreasonable, be specific and clear about why you are saying no.

Saying "no" or disagreeing with someone may give rise to negative emotions – fear, anger etc. The key is to recognise and accept your emotions, but don't let them control your behaviour. Focus on the outcome you want to achieve.

6. WORKABLE COMPROMISE

This is a skill for when there is a conflict between your needs or wishes, and those of someone else. Assertiveness is not about winning, so you need to negotiate from an equal position. This means finding a true compromise which takes both parties needs into consideration. Compromising on a solution to a difficult situation need not compromise your self-respect.

Practice Exercises for Assertion

The following is a list of behaviour assignments or homework exercises, which will prove useful in increasing your level of assertiveness and confidence in communicating with others. Choose an assignment that would be moderately difficult and set a deadline to do it.

If you haven't done it by that time, either assume it was too difficult and choose another task, or alternatively, introduce a reward or incentive for doing it by another specified time.

1. Say "Good morning" to somebody whom you do not usually speak to.

2. Stop two people in the street and ask for directions

3. Go into an expensive shop, try on a number of articles of clothing, but buy nothing.

4. Go into a shop and ask if they will give you change for a five pound note.

5. Pay a compliment to a waitress, shop assistant or fellow worker.

6. Buy something from a shop and then deliberately return it, saying, "I've changed my mind."

7. Make a point of telling a friend a joke or funny story.

8. Ask somebody you know "How are you today?" and deliberately take an interest; try to draw them out and find how they are feeling.

9. Make a point of telling somebody how you are feeling and what you have been doing lately.

10. Ask somebody for a favour in a direct and specific way.

Social Support

(empathy, reaching out, problem solving)

Empathic people build social relationships and give out support. It also works the other way round, social relationships including receiving support helps to build empathy in individuals.

An increase in social support will also improve your 'reaching out' resilience skill by deepening relationships with those people important to you, not just in business but also family life as well.

Your problem solving skills will also benefit as a result of having an expanded social network of colleagues and friends you can consult when you can't produce a solution on your own.

Other people are very important to your ability to cope. Thousands of studies from the field of Social Psychology have repeatedly shown that social support is the number one buffer against stress. The more pressure there is, the more important that support becomes.

We are social animals. Unfortunately, many people forget this, and the media can glorify individuality and self-reliance to the point that people feel that they should be able to cope on their own. Yet we need other people and other people need us.

Generally the risk of isolation and loneliness has increased in recent times. These days, we don't tend to identify with our communities like we did or stay in the same district or town for as long as we used to. We don't stay in the same careers or organisations like we used to, and within our organisations the pace of change has increased dramatically. In addition, many of us work very long hours, and spend increasing amounts of time commuting. All of these changes have contributed to reducing the number opportunities we have to build good social relationships, and as a consequence the potential both give and receive social support has also reduced.

What can we do to make sure we get the social support we need?

Do an audit of your social life. Key questions you could ask yourself would be:

- o What are the most important social relationships in my life?
- o Are those relationships as good as they could be?
- o What could I do to invest in those relationships?
- o Do I need to develop some new relationships/friendships?
- o If so, what actions do I need to take?

A key issue is that of **investment**. Investment in relationships is one of the most important things you can do to prevent and reduce stress, and increase your resilience in the long term. Social psychological research has shown unequivocally that the most powerful influence technique is **reciprocity** – that is, you have to give to get.

The personal development guru, Stephen Covey talks about the 'emotional bank account,' the idea that with relationships you have to make deposits. If you keep making withdrawals, you will become 'overdrawn,' and the risk of the relationship breaking down increases. Of course, just like the stock market, we have to bear in mind that investments can go up as well as down as anyone who has teenagers will testify! So we have to take a long-term view, and trust that most of the time our investments will pay off. Yes, some people will occasionally let us down, but regular investment in current and new relationships will help to improve our resilience skills.

A well balanced brain will improve your ability to solve problems
(problem solving)

Introduction

One of the keys to successful problem solving is to have the ability to come up with creative ideas that are also realistic and logical. This can be difficult for individuals because most of us are predominantly either left brain thinkers (the side of the brain that is logical) or right brain thinkers (the side of the brain that is creative).

This is why a team with a mixture of left brain thinkers (finance & engineering) and right brain thinkers (marketing & personnel) is often very successful in solving problems as they can weigh up all the left and right brain ideas they collectively generate and combine them to find the best solution.

It is not always possible however to have a team of people readily on hand to solve problems! Accordingly to solve problems on your own it helps if you are able to use both sides of your brain to do so.

Are you a Left brain thinker or a Right brain thinker?

There follows a test to show whether you are more of a left brain thinker or right brain thinker.

Print out the following four pages taken from www.neuroskills.com to help establish if you are predominantly a left or a right brain thinker.

Turn the scoring page over so that you cannot see any of the numbers, then get a blank sheet of lined paper. Every time you read a description or characteristic that applies to you, write down its number on the blank sheet of paper. There is no certain number of characteristics you must choose. After you have finished you can score.

Look at the scoring sheet. Next to every number on your paper, write whether it was a L or an R. Count up the number of L's and R's. Whichever number is higher represents your dominance. If the numbers are close, that means you use both sides of your brain equally.

Exercise: Are you a Left brain thinker or a Right brain thinker?

Question Sheet

1. I constantly look at a clock or wear a watch

2. I keep a journal or diary of my thoughts

3. I believe there is a either a right or wrong way to do everything

4. I find it hard to follow directions precisely

5. The expression "Life is just a bowl of cherries" makes no sense to me

6. I frequently change my plans and find that sticking to a schedule is

7. boring

8. I think it's easier to draw a map than tell someone how to get somewhere

9. To find a lost item, I try to picture it in my head where I last saw it

10. I frequently let my emotions guide me

11. I learn math with ease

12. I'd read the directions before assembling something

13. People tell me I am always late getting places

14. People have told me that I'm psychic

15. I need to set goals for myself to keep me on track

16. When somebody asks me a question, I turn my head to the left

17. If I have a tough decision to make, I write down the pros and the cons

18. I'd probably make a good detective

19. I learn music with ease

20. To solve a problem, I think of similar problems I have solved in the past

21. I use a lot of gestures

22. If someone asks me a question, I turn my head to the right

23. I believe there are two ways to look at almost everything

24. I have the ability to tell if people are lying or guilty of something, just by looking at them

25. I keep a "to do" list

26. I am able to thoroughly explain my opinions in words

27. In a debate, I am objective and look at he facts before forming an opinion

28. I've considered becoming a poet, a politician, an architect, or a dancer

29. I always lose track of time

30. When trying to remember a name I forgot, I'd recite the alphabet until I remembered it

31. I like to draw

32. When I'm confused, I usually go with my gut instinct

33. I have considered becoming a lawyer, journalist, or doctor

Exercise: Are you a Left brain thinker or a Right brain thinker?

Scoring Sheet

1.	L	17.	L
2.	L	18.	R
3.	L	19.	R
4.	R	20.	R
5.	L	21.	L
6.	R	22.	R
7.	R	23.	R
8.	L	24.	L
9.	R	25.	L
10.	L	26.	L
11.	L	27.	R
12.	R	28.	R
13.	R	29.	L
14.	L	30.	R
15.	R	31.	R
16.	L	32.	L

The brain and its relationship to resilience

Our brain, just like the rest of our body, is made up of two halves, the right brain and the left brain and separated by a long cable of nerves called the corpus collosum.

For whatever reason nature intended our left side of the brain is "wired" to our right side of the body and vice versa. This also applies to our eyes.

We can thank Nobel Prize Winner (1981) Roger Sperry for his absolutely crucial discovery. Sperry conducted what are fondly termed the "split-brain" experiments. Here is what he did. A patient suffering from uncontrolled seizures had an area of his brain removed by surgery in an attempt to control his illness (his corpus callosum). If you recall this separates the right from the left brain. This meant that different visual and tactile information could then be presented to the patients left or right side very easily without the other side knowing. The results were amazing and significant to resilience.

With their communications link severed, each side of the patient's brain was functioning independently. This did not prevent his ability to walk, talk and eat, some very unexpected and exciting findings emerged when each side was examined independently of the other.

The right hand and eye could name and object (left brain) involved with identifying what something is, such as a pencil, but the patient could not explain what it was used for. When shown to the left hand and eye (right brain) involved with explaining the process and looking at the big picture the patient could explain and demonstrate its use, but could not name it.

Interestingly over time experiments have shown that most children rank highly creative (right brain) before entering school. Because our educational system places a higher value on left brain skills such as mathematics, logic and language than it does on drawing or using our imagination, only ten percent of these same children will rank highly creative by age 7. By the time we are adults sadly highly creative remains in only 2 percent of the population.

"The main theme to emerge... is that there appear to be two modes of thinking, verbal and nonverbal, represented rather separately in left and right hemispheres respectively and that our education system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere."- Roger Sperry (1973)

Below is a table to compare Left and Right Brain Functions:

Left Brain Function	Right brain function
Uses logic	Uses feeling
Detail orientated	"Big picture" oriented
Facts rule	Imagination rules
Words and language	Symbols and images
Present and past	Present and future
Maths and Science	Philosophy & religion
Can comprehend	Can "get it" (i.e. meaning)
Knowing	Believes
Acknowledges	Appreciates
Pattern perception	Spatial perception
Knows objects name	Knows object function
Reality based	Fantasy based
Forms strategies	Presents possibilities
Practical	Impetuous
Safe	Risk taking

Unfortunately most people will never reach their maximum potential because of the compromises that have been made between the left and right side of the brain. Sometimes skills which the right brain can perform better (emotional regulation, impulse control and empathy) are managed with less skill by the left brain. This can be seen in everyday interaction between two people who are in conflict where one person is showing no empathy and is therefore less able to understand a situation fully. In a nutshell emotional intelligence is taken over by the left brain taking full control and choosing logic, reasoning and details over imagination, creative thinking, emotional intimacy and artistic talent.

Therefore in terms of resilience it is important to try and balance right and left brain activity as much as possible. This is made difficult because research has demonstrated that at times of stress and adversity the left brain starts to shut down and the blood flow is diverted to the right side. This means that the very important ability to stop and think in specifics is lessened, and we are responding and behaving more from the right side. It is near impossible to be resilient in the areas of causal analysis and impulse control if the left side of the brain is not working to its full potential. Equally important is the ability to rebalance the brain by tapping into our right brain. In order to become more resilient the right side of the brain must be rebalanced in order to have more empathy and emotional regulation.

Some ideas of how to balance the Left and Right Side of the Brain

One way to help "shut off" the left brain, thus allowing the right side to have its say is to meditate (repeating a word over and over again) the left side gets bored and has a short nap so to speak therefore allowing the right side to dominate. The right brain can then enter our consciousness filling our minds with pleasant emotional and visual images that we have created during the meditation process.

Left brain thinkers are not very prone to spontaneous behaviour. Some simple things to do in order to help develop your right brain could include something as simple as changing habits. Watch something different on television; change what you order at your favourite restaurant without scrutinising the menu first. Listen to music whilst you clean or work on your computer as right brain thinkers can easily handle more than one task at a time as they think randomly and much less specific. This may be difficult at first but persevere it will become much easier over time.

There are many ways to enhance the left side of the brain. The most common are crossword puzzles and reading as much as possible as well as any maths puzzles etc. Basically anything that involves logical organised thinking will do.

Simple Relaxation Exercises
(problem solving, self-efficacy, impulse control)

Relaxation skills help to improve at least 3 of the personal resilience skills.

- o Our problem solving skills benefit from creating a relaxed state that can increase right brain creative idea generating activity, in the same way as meditation can.

- o Self-efficacy improves through the de-stressing state relaxation can induce which benefits both mind and body.

- o Short relaxation exercises such as the '60 second tranquilliser' can improve impulse control through enhanced clarity of thought and reduced feelings of anxiety.

Relaxation is marked by a state of calm, well-being, and easy breathing. To achieve a relaxed feeling, there are different paths you can take.

Try the following while sitting with your back well supported and your eyes closed.

Focus on your body

- o Slowly scan your body and relax all your muscles, starting with your feet and moving slowly up to your face muscles.

- o Tell yourself to let go of the tension as you focus on each area of your body.

- o When you have finished, think of yourself as relaxed and comfortable.

Focus on your breathing

- o Breathe out.

- o Breathe in slowly – way down into your abdomen

- o Breathe out slowly

- o Try this with your hand on your upper abdomen to be more aware of your breathing.

Focus on images

- o Picture a calm, peaceful scene

- o Imagine yourself sitting or lying on a beach feeling the warmth of the sun

- o Think of yourself as completely relaxed and enjoy the sensation.

Contemplation

Sit comfortably in a quiet place, with your arms and legs uncrossed and breathe gently for a few minutes. Then choose a word that feels comfortable for you (e.g. relax, calm, peace, love, om.)

Silently repeat this word to anchor your mind. Continue with this practise for 10-30 minutes. Open your eyes and stay seated for a few more minutes before engaging in activity.

The 60 second tranquilliser

It is important to practise this controlled breathing technique regularly away from stressful or anxious situations until you become quite skilled at it. You will then find it a useful tool to cope better in situations where you are likely to feel panicky or fearful.

- Using a positive thought will activate the parasympathetic nervous system and help to switch off the fight/flight reaction.

- Say firmly to yourself 'Take control'

- Repeat – ' I can do anything I want to' breathe out slowly

- Slowly breathe in and allow your abdomen to soften and rise

- Pause slightly

- Slowly breathe out, slightly longer than breathing in

- Say to yourself 'I am breathing in peace and blowing away tension

- Each time you breathe out relax your face, jaw, shoulders, and hands

- Move and talk more slowly

- Repeat again until you feel fully in control

The Shavasana yoga pose

This pose will help you achieve deep relaxation especially before sleep.

- o Lying on your bed with your arms by your sides, close your eyes and relax.

- o Gently move your joints – shoulders, elbows, wrists, fingers, knees, ankles and toes – to loosen them.

- o Take a deep breath in through your nose, counting slowly to three: let your abdomen swell. Pause for a count of three. Now breathe out very gently through your mouth to a count of six, letting your abdomen deflate. Practise this for two nights.

- o When this is smooth, try concentration. Focus on the spot between your eyebrows. Imagine you are looking at the rising or sinking sun. Feel the warmth on your forehead; let it pervade your skull. Imagine your brain relaxing, thoughts and stresses evaporating.

- o Your eyebrows relax and feel warm, then your eyelids, facial muscle and jaw.

- o The warmth spreads through your body, down from the back of your head to your neck, down spine, seat, thighs, calves, ankles and feet.

- o Bring your focus back to your neck muscles. Now let the warmth spread to your shoulders, arms, elbows, forearms, wrists, and fingertips.

- o Repeat the whole process several times until your entire body feels calm and relaxed.

- o Now imagine your heart is slowing down. Sense your blood pressure dropping.

- o Let yourself go into a state of trance. Just be.

Grounding

When we are channelling energy through our bodies, we must ground for the best results and also to protect ourselves from other people's negative energies.

There are many methods of grounding ourselves, from building an imaginary brick wall in between the other person and ourselves, to enclosing ourselves in a bubble.

The following is an exercise that may be useful to you.

1. Stand firmly, with feet shoulder width apart, and the knees slightly bent.

2. Relax and take deep breaths, allow your legs to take the weight of your body and become aware that your feet are firmly on the floor.

3. Imagine that your feet are sinking deeply in to the earth below you.

4. Imagine that you are a tree, the roots of which are growing into the earth from your feet. Allow the roots to sink deep into the earth, sinking deeper and deeper through the layers of soil and rock, deep down into the hot molten centre of the earth.

5. Once your roots reach the centre of the earth, imagine that you can attach an anchor to them. The anchor allows you to move freely, but keeps you connected to the earth.

6. This exercise will help to protect you, maintain your own energy levels and your own calm and relaxed nature.

Other things you can do to relax

o Say the word 'relax' or 'calm' to yourself as you breathe out

o Stretch

o Tense your muscles then let go (e.g., shrug your shoulders up, hold for a few seconds, then let go and notice the difference)

o Remember a time when you felt relaxed and recall the feeling

o Relaxation techniques CDs and downloads

Practice Exercise

Be aware of your tension. What part of your body gets tense when you are stressed?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Try one of the techniques. What changes do you notice in your muscle tension or breathing?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Practise the techniques daily. What works best for you?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What will help you to remember to use these techniques? (e.g. when you notice tension building or using the techniques at a certain time of the day).

Mindful Meditation
(self-efficacy, empathy, emotional regulation)

We have included this section on meditation because it can increase personal resilience in at least two ways:

Firstly it helps self-efficacy through the general health and well-being benefits it brings to both mind and body.

Secondly it is a way of stimulating creative thoughts from the unconscious mind which can be used to improve another of the resilience skills, problem solving (causal analysis).

What is Meditation?

There is significant research validating meditation as a simple and effective tool for releasing stress. It is an activity that raises our awareness to the level of our essential nature. Meditation is not about forcing our mind to be quiet, rather, it is a process to rediscover the quietness that is already there, within us.

How does it work?

Between our thoughts, we have a silent space. Through meditation it is possible to access this space which is the essential you, the thinking, creating and healing is enabled. When we come out of meditation we bring some of the creative thoughts and healing potential from this gap into our lives. By going back and forth on a regular basis we gradually integrate this creativity and healing throughout our whole physiology.

The scientific perspective

Electrical cycles in the brain can be measured and can vary according to what we are doing. There is a 'normal' range of cycles, known as 'beta 'rhythms, for everyday functions and the material world. When we sleep, we are mainly in 'theta' rhythm. Delta rhythms occur in the periods immediately preceding sleep and waking.

When during waking consciousness we are being particularly creative, 'alpha' rhythms may be present. Through meditation we may enter other states in which beta rhythms fade, while alpha, delta and theta rhythms become more constant. In such states our physical bodies relax and we may have an expanded awareness that leads to greater insight and intuition.

Drugs may induce other states, without the benefit of insight and intuition, but with the risk of undesirable side effects.

When to meditate

Traditionally meditation is practiced twice a day, at dawn and at dusk i.e. in the morning before breakfast and after work before dinner, for between 15 to 30 minutes. If this is not possible, then practice whenever time allows. Start with five to ten minutes and gradually build up on this. You will feel the benefits once you make a start.

To improve your ability to meditate you may pay attention to the following. However, do not be discouraged to keep up your practice if you cannot adhere to these.

- o Wash hands and face or have a shower before practice

- o Designate a special place in your home or outside to meditate

- o Keep your back straight during meditation as energy flows up the spine

- o Do not eat a heavy meal prior to meditation

Before commencing meditation

Before you start reflect on the following questions:

- o Who am I?

- o What do I want?

- o What is my purpose in life?

Self profile

The following will also generate an understanding of your self-image.

In three words describe:

	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3
A peak experience			
Life purpose			
Contribution to others			
Your heroes and heroines			
Qualities you admire in others			
Your unique talents			
Qualities you display best in your relationships			

These 21 words reflect who you are and the quality of your self

Through regular practice the answers will gradually emerge.

How to meditate

Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor. It is not necessary to always sit in the lotus position, as is the common image with meditation. It is also not necessary to have a lighted candle but you can have this if you prefer. Lying down is not recommended, as this is associated with sleeping. Sit in whatever position and location is comfortable for you. Always close your eyes. When our eyes are open, our attention is drawn outwards, opposite to the meditation process. So never try to meditate while walking, driving or in activity. At the end, keep your eyes closed and remain seated for two to three minutes. Allow your attention to gradually come back into activity before getting up.

Responses in meditation

- o Going to sleep - if this happens, ensure the room is well ventilated. Also avoid having a heavy meal prior to meditation.

- o Turbulent thoughts - release of negative thoughts

- o Bodily sensations - tightness in muscles, etc. release of blocked up energy)

- o Tranquility

- o Bliss

- o Insight

- o Release of emotions

In one session you may experience one or a combination of all of the above. All the responses are valid and therapeutic.

Remember, no meditation is bad meditation, as there will be some movement of vibration and energy which will produce subtle or sometimes dramatic changes.

Different Meditation Methods

You may wish to try each of the following methods and see which one feels best for you. Persevere and do not expect too much too soon. If you find your mind wandering during practice, do not be discouraged. Gently bring your attention back to your technique. Whichever method you use, you will find that each session will bring more clarity and energy into your life.

There are a variety of different techniques which all aim to quiet and slow down the mind.

1. **Primordial sound meditation**

2. **Object meditation**

3. **Five element meditation**

4. **Mindfulness**

1. Primordial sound meditation

Sounds that heal are called primordial sounds. Primordial sounds are vibrations of nature, which are subtler than words or language. The breath of the wind, the cadence of rain, the murmur of the ocean and the singing of birds are examples of primordial sounds. These sounds of nature remind us, at an unspoken level, of our true nature.

While listening to inspirational words or a beautiful piece of music, a cascade of pleasure-producing chemicals go through our body, restoring health and well being. Virtually every culture in the world has recognised the healing and unifying properties of sound. Sound can be used to create harmony and coherence within our body, mind, emotions and spirit.

Mantras are primordial sounds that express the fundamental vibrations of language. When used in silent meditation, mantras serve as vehicles to quiet the mind and expand awareness. The simple mantra "om" or "aum" is commonly used in meditation. (The book "Healing Mantras" by Ashley Ferrand Thomas, 2000 outlines other useful mantras) You can use any positive word you are drawn to e.g. relax, peace, love, calm, etc. to anchor your mind during meditation.

Always think your mantra or chosen word, in a very gentle, relaxed manner. Any time you feel you are focussing too hard on it, stop and come back to it easily. You may notice that the rhythm, speed or volume of the repetitive sound changes, and it may even become distorted. This is normal, continue to repeat it gently. You may also notice that you have become distracted by other thoughts or noises. This again is normal, so do not struggle against the thoughts, gently return to your practice and continue.

2. Object meditation

Choose a beautiful object like a flower arrangement, tranquil picture or site, lighted candle etc. Focus your attention on it steadily. Study the detail of the object, the colours, shapes, shades etc. Do this for 5 to 10 minutes, then close your eyes and visualise all the detail of the object. This practice is especially good for enhancing concentration and focus.

3. Five element meditation

A subtle but enjoyable way to derive nourishment from the environment is to experience the five elements of nature i.e. earth, water, sun, air and space. The following exercises are rejuvenating when performed on a regular basis.

EARTH

Walk barefoot on the earth for at least 10 minutes every day.

Have your attention on your feet with the intention to absorb nourishment from the Earth.

WATER

Walk along a natural body of water. Allow the cooling coherent influence of the water to calm and energise you.

SUN

Allow the light and warmth of the sun to permeate you.

Acknowledge the energy-giving force of the sun, the source of all life on earth.

AIR

Take a walk where there is abundant vegetation and inhale deeply the breath of plants. The ideal time to receive the life-force of plants is just before dawn or shortly after sunset.

SPACE

Gaze into the heavens at night. Let your awareness touch the stars and the furthest reaches of the cosmos.

4. Mindfulness

Begin by sitting comfortably and closing your eyes.

Gently allow your awareness to go to your breathing. Simply observe your breath innocently as it moves in and out. Do not try to alter your breath in any conscious way.

As you observe your breath, you may notice that it changes. It may vary in speed, rhythm or depth. You may even notice that it seems to stop for a time. Whatever happens with your breathing, simply observe it. Innocently watch the inflow and outflow of your breath.

From time to time your attention may drift away from your breath and go to a thought in your mind, a sensation in your body, or a sound in the environment. Whenever you notice that you are not observing your breath, gently bring your awareness back to your breathing.

For the next few minutes, relinquish any expectations you may have about this process. If you find that you are focussing on a feeling or mood or are waiting for a particular experience to occur, treat this as you would any other thought and gently bring your awareness back to your breath.

Continue this way for the next 20-30 minutes, then take your attention off your breathing and just be silent. Wait about two or three minutes before slowly opening your eyes.

The Feelgood Factor Exercise

(self-efficacy, optimism, reaching out)

This exercise involves a period of reflection and the production of a very important list.

Firstly, just take a few seconds to relax.

Now, what you need to do is take some time to think about all the things that give you that all important "Feelgood Factor". **These are the things that, when you think about them give you a warm feeling inside, a feeling of true joy, happiness, contentment, and/or love.**

Please do not write down things because you feel they are things that should give you these feelings. This is not about 'shoulds,' but about what 'is.' Be honest with yourself, and don't worry about what other people might think of your list.

The best thing is just to ask yourself the question: "What sort of things really make me feel good?" and see what comes into your mind. It could be particular memories, events, people or relationships, activities, pictures, music, animals/pets – it doesn't matter what the things are as long as they give you good, positive feelings inside.

As you think about them write them down in a list. See the following page.

Things that give me the 'Feelgood Factor'

(Use this page to write your list)

Just thinking about and producing this list is a good resilience exercise in itself. It makes you focus on the feelgood things rather than the negative stressful things, which will of course reduce your stress. However, there are a number of things specifically that you can use your list for.

Work out what's important

You will probably have found that producing your 'feelgood list' has been a very thought provoking exercise.

Highly resilient people have the ability to identify what is really important to them in their lives. This awareness is crucial to their ability to identify their feelings and where necessary have the ability to control their feelings.

It can prompt you to ask yourself some big questions:

o   What is really important in my life?

o   What gives me joy?

o   What is really not important?

o What should I give my attention and effort to, and what should I ignore and not give much importance to at all?

These are **'perspective-changing'** questions. When we reflect on and ask them, suddenly some things that seemed important, aggravating, irritating, frustrating, or stressful, now don't seem worth getting stressed about.

Involve yourself in joy-giving activities

Your 'feelgood' list will almost certainly contain activities that give you joy. Many of us for any number of reasons stop doing things which give us joy, for example because 'we're too tired' or 'too busy,' or sometimes simply because we just haven't really thought about them for a long time. It may seem obvious but doing things that are 'joy-giving' will reduce your stress risk.

Firstly, you will be happy and not stressed when you are doing them. Secondly, joy-giving activities are distracting. They help us switch off from our stressful thoughts. Being able to switch off like this aids our physical recovery. And thirdly, the more joy-giving activities we get into our lives, the higher our self-esteem and self-regard becomes, buffering us from the effects of stress.

So if your list contains **activities:**

o Look at each activity.

o Ask yourself if you are really getting enough of that activity.

o Think about how you are going to get more of it into your life.

o Are there things that don't bring you joy, which you could let go of to give yourself more time for the things that do?

o Be concrete. Ask yourself: "What precisely must I do so that I can regularly indulge in that activity?" Think about what you can do now, next week, next month, next year.

Breathing Exercises

(impulse control, emotional regulation)

Diaphragmatic or deep breathing is probably the most widely used technique to improve the 'impulse control' resilience skill. Give it a try the next time you feel under pressure or are stuck in a tense situation. Maybe you have an irate customer on the phone who is being unreasonable and aggressive. You can feel yourself beginning to get angry and losing control. Try the following while listening: take several slow, deep breaths into the pit of your stomach, follow this with some normal breathing, then take several more deep breaths. Most people are surprised at how well this simple exercise calms them down and clarifies their thinking.

Diaphragmatic breathing

This is about learning to breathe slowly and deeply from the stomach rather than from the upper chest. A simple way to see this happen is to lie on your back with a book on your stomach. The book will move up and down if you are breathing from the stomach.

Paced breathing

We recommend that you perform ten paced breathing cycles 3 times a day. A breathing cycle is a breath in, holding your breath for a short period and then breathing out emptying the lungs.

As a discipline for increasing energy mentally and physically, increasing the oxygen saturation of the blood, increasing circulation of lymph and the removal of pollutants, it is a good idea to do paced breathing of ten cycles (1 cycle = in and out) 3 times a day.

There are 3 levels of breathing cycle you can use, each uses the ratio 1:4:2 in relation to the breath in: holding your breath: breathing out. You should start off by practicing 10 cycles 3 times a day at level 1 and progressing towards doing 10 cycles 3 times a day at level 3.

Level 1: Breathe in over 2 seconds, hold for 8 seconds, breathe out over 4 seconds.

Level 2: Breathe in over 3 seconds, hold for 12 seconds, breathe out over 6 seconds

Level 2: Breathe in over 4 seconds, hold for 16 seconds, breathe out over 8 seconds.

Walking and Breathing

Paced breathing can also be carried out when walking, using each left and right step as your count instead of using a second in time. For example, using the ratio of 1:4:2 you would breathe in while taking one step, hold the breath while taking four steps, and breathe out while taking two steps.

A more simple walking and breathing technique is to breathe in over eight steps and out over twelve steps or less. Many people find this technique to be very relaxing.

IMPORTANT: You should only do what you feel comfortable with, at no time should you strain yourself doing these exercises!

Sleep

If you haven't done it already, become aware of your energy levels and performance on days after a bad night's sleep.

Good quality sleep: this means waking up refreshed with enough mental and physical stamina for the new day. This is essential for performing at your best, which helps you manage increasing workloads and have enough energy for a good work life balance. We all know the difference a really good night's sleep can make.

Do You have a sleep problem? An individual has a degree of sleep problem if they have difficulty getting to sleep, if they wake up during the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep, or wake up in the morning not feeling refreshed. Regularly sleeping though the alarm clock is not a good sign.

Chronic tiredness: a quarter of the working age population are said to be chronically tired, and doctors say more and more have TATT, Tired All The Time. The more consistently we can get good sleep the better. Think how much energy you have felt and how you have performed after a good night's sleep compared to a poor night's sleep.

More than a third of all adults in the UK have sleeping problems. If you think you are one of them then don't just accept it. There are many things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep, some of which are covered below:

- **Dealing with excess adrenaline**

Individuals who have difficulty switching off after work or before going to bed may have excess levels of unused adrenaline in their body. If this is not used up before sleep, it can prevent the brain waves slowing down enough to obtain the most restorative deep sleep. If you cannot switch off, take a brisk walk, or go for a work out in the gym.

- **Eat early to ensure good quality sleep**

Are you eating and drinking less than 2 hours before you go to bed? It can take food up to 2 hours to fully digest, so if you do eat late you risk indigestion.

Drinking before you go to bed can also disturb your sleep, particularly if you drink coffee or tea as they act as a stimulant. However, some people do find that an evening drink such as chamomile tea can help them sleep later on. Alcohol will also affect your sleep quality. It may help you fall asleep but it will also dehydrate you, causing you to wake early with a dry mouth and throat.

- **Empty your mind**

Is your mind too active? Are you thinking about tomorrow's demands and challenges? If you are, try writing down all your plans for the following day before you go to bed to free your mind for sleep. This is a simple but very effective

technique. Anxiety always reduces when we increase our perception of control. The act of writing things down also means we don't have to worry about forgetting to do them. It also unclutters your mind and slows it down. It is better to avoid having things around that may trigger thoughts which could keep you awake. For example, keep work-related items out of the bedroom.

o **Acquire relaxation skills**

Everyone knows that you can't 'force' yourself to go to sleep any more than you can 'force' yourself to remember things. A very pleasant way to drift off to sleep is to practice physical and mental relaxation, especially breathing relaxation combined if necessary with muscle relaxation.

This also works very well if you want to get to sleep. If you combine it with a visualisation of a peaceful scene it can be an enjoyable way of drifting off to sleep. Remember, relaxation and visualisation are acquired skills; so the more you practice them the easier they become.

o **Nightly rituals**

Nightly rituals, whatever they are, can also send a strong message to your unconscious that you are ready for sleep. Examples include listening to soothing music, having a bath or reading a novel.

The above is certainly not an exhaustive list, but the main message is that you find, through trial and error, what works for you.   And remember, we all need different amounts of sleep, so don't worry if you are not sleeping as much as your partner. They may need more than you do.

Edinburgh has a sleep laboratory headed by Prof. C.J. Idzikowski and he has written a paperback with a CD, called Learn to Sleep Well Kit: A Practical Guide to Getting a Good Night's Rest. It was published in 2002 and is still available on Amazon.

Stress management competency indicator tool

The following tool was commissioned by the HSE with support from the CIPD and Investors in People. The tool is available on the HSE website and has been replicated on the following pages for your use after the training course.

The 'Stress management competency indicator tool' in this document is designed to allow you to assess whether the behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress at work are part of your management repertoire or not. The aim is to help you to reflect upon your own behaviour and management style in relation to developing your resilience.

The next four pages look in turn at four behavioural areas identified as being important for managers to prevent and reduce stress in their staff. You are asked to consider a range of specific manager behaviours and put a tick in the column that most closely represents your level of agreement with each statement. You can then use the instructions at the end of each table to calculate your score on the behavioural area covered by that table. (NB the term 'team members' is used to refer to people who report directly to you/who you manage.)

The overall assessment process allows you to use the scores from the questionnaire to assess your effectiveness in preventing and reducing stress in your staff. It allows you to identify whether any of the areas are Development Needs for you, or whether you are Reasonable or Effective in each area.

Some tips and ideas on how you can use your assessment to improve your effectiveness in preventing and reducing stress at work, through your management behaviour, are also provided. Finally, there is a summary of the competencies required to prevent and reduce stress at work.

For more information on the framework of 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' please go to:-   **www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf**

Area 1: Respectful and Responsible: Managing Emotions and Having Integrity

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Integrity					
I am a good role model					
I treat my team members with respect					
I am honest					
I do what I say I will do					
I never speak about team members behind their backs					
Managing Emotions					
I act calmly in pressured situations					
I take a consistent approach to managing					
My moods are predictable					
I don't pass on my stress to my team					
I approach deadlines calmly					
I welcome suggestions for improvements from my team					
Considerate Approach					
I allow my team to plan their workloads					
The deadlines I create are realistic					
I give more positive than negative feedback					
I deal with problems myself rather than relying on others					
I allow my team to approach their work in their own way					
I show a consideration for my team's worklife balance					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					

	x 1	x 2	x 3	x 4	x 5
Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	**=**	**=**	**=**	**=**	**=**
Add the column scores together and note the total score **(maximum score is 85)**					
Now divide your total score by 85 and multiply by 100	(………./85) x 100 =				

Area 2: Managing and Communicating Existing and Future Work

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Proactive Work Management					
I clearly communicate job objectives to my team					
I develop action plans					
I monitor my team's workload on an ongoing basis					
I encourage my team to review how they organise their work					
When necessary, I stop additional work being taken on by my team					
I work proactively					
I see projects/tasks through to delivery					
I review processes to see if work can be improved					
I prioritise future workloads					
Problem Solving					
I deal rationally with problems					
I follow up problems on behalf of my team					
I deal with problems as soon as they arise					
I am decisive when decision making					
Participative/Empowering					
I give employees the right level of job responsibility					
I correctly judge when to consult the team and when to make a decision					

I keep my team informed of what is happening in the organisation					
I act as a mentor to my team					
I delegate work equally					
I help team members to develop in their role					
I encourage participation from the whole team					
I provide regular team meetings					
I give the right level of direction to my team members					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					
Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 110)					
Now divide your total score by 110 and multiply by 100	(……….../110) x 100 =				

Area 3: Managing the Individual within the Team

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Personally Accessible					
I prefer to speak to my team personally than use email					
I provide regular opportunities for my team to speak one to one					
I return my team's calls/emails promptly					
I am available to talk to when needed					
Sociable					
I bring in treats for my team					
I socialise with the team					
I am willing to have a laugh at work					
Empathetic Engagement					
I encourage individuals' input in discussions					
I listen when a team member asks for help					
I make an effort to find out what motivates my team members at work					
I try to see things from my team members' point of view					
I take an interest in my team's life outside work					
I regularly ask team members 'How are you?'					
I treat all team members with equal importance					
I check everyone is OK rather than just assuming					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					

Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 75)					
Now divide your total score by 75 and multiply by 100	(………./75) x 100 =				

Area 4: Reasoning/Managing Difficult Situations

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Managing Conflict					
I act as a mediator in conflict situations					
I deal with squabbles in the team before they become arguments					
I deal objectively with employee conflicts					
I deal with conflicts head on					
I try and resolve issues rather than act to keep the peace					
Use of Organisational Resources					
I seek advice from other managers when necessary					
I use HR as a resource to help deal with problems					
I seek help from occupational health when necessary					
Taking Responsibility for Resolving Issues					
I follow up team conflicts after resolution					
I support employees through incidents of abuse					
I make it clear I will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong					
I address bullying					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					
Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 60)					
Now divide your total score by 60 and multiply by 100	(………./60) x 100 =				

Overall Assessment

You have now calculated a percentage score for each of the four behavioural areas (or three behavioural areas if you are not measuring your ability to manage difficult situations) that have been identified as important for preventing and reducing stress at work. In order to interpret what these scores mean, use the following guidelines:

75% or below = Development Need: This is an area in which you would benefit from some development. Please refer back to the questionnaire to explore which of the behaviours you could consider using more often in the future in order to be more effective at preventing and reducing stress in your team.

76% to 89% = Reasonable: You show a good awareness of the behaviours needed for effectively preventing and reducing stress in others. It may be helpful to refer back to the questionnaire to see if there are any behaviours you could add to your repertoire in this area to increase your effectiveness in managing stress in others.

90% and above = Effective: You demonstrate the behaviours that have been shown to be effective in preventing and reducing stress in your team.

Your 'Stress management competence' profile:

Fill in each of the right hand columns. In the effectiveness column, add 'Development Need', 'Reasonable' or 'Effective' using the guidance above.

Competency	Percentage	Effectiveness
Respectful and responsible: Managing emotions and having integrity		
Managing and communicating existing and future work		
Managing the individual within the team		
Reasoning/Managing difficult situations		

What Do I Do Next?

In order to improve your effectiveness at preventing and reducing stress at work, we suggest the following steps:

Look for the behavioural area in which you received the lowest score and focus on this as top priority. If you have identified several Development Needs or areas that you would like to move into the 'Effective' zone, take them one at a time – you don't have to change everything at once!

Look back at the questionnaire to explore what behaviours are relevant to this area. On the following page is a summary of the four behavioural areas, and outlines of the key behaviours in each. Identify the ones that you indicated you do least and consider what you need to do in order to show these behaviours more often. It may simply be a matter of being more aware of how you are behaving at the moment and making small shifts to add the relevant additional (or alternative) behaviours to your repertoire.

You may find it helpful to check out with your team whether they would find it helpful for you to show more of these particular behaviours and how that would be different from what you do at the moment. You could ask them to give you feedback on how you are doing.

If you feel that it will be difficult for you to make these behavioural changes on your own, consider seeking support. For example, informal coaching or support from your own manager and/or from the HR department might be helpful; you might find it helpful to get some formal coaching or mentoring; and/or you might want to attend a training course to develop the relevant skills.

Summary of the 'Management Competencies for Preventing and Reducing Stress at Work' Framework

Competency	Sub-competency
Respectful and responsible: Managing emotions and having integrity	**Integrity** *Being respectful and honest to employees*
	Managing emotions *Behaving consistently and calmly around the team*
	Considerate approach *Being thoughtful in managing others and delegating*
Managing and communicating existing and future work	**Proactive work management** *Monitoring and reviewing existing work, allowing future prioritisation and planning*
	Problem Solving *Dealing with problems promptly, rationally and responsibly*
	Participative/empowering *Listening to, meeting and consulting with the team, providing direction, autonomy and development opportunities to individuals*
Managing the individual within the team	**Personally accessible** *Available to talk to personally*
	Sociable *Relaxed approach, such as socialising and using humour*
	Empathetic engagement *Seeking to understand each individual in the team in terms of their health and satisfaction, motivation, point of view and life outside work*
Reasoning/Managing difficult situations	**Managing conflict** *Dealing with conflicts decisively, promptly and objectively*
	Use of organisational resources *Seeking advice when necessary from managers, HR and Occupational Health*
	Taking responsibility for resolving issues *Having a supportive and responsible approach to issues and incidents in the team*

The CUSP™ Framework for Managers

Stress prevention

A good working climate is one where stress is largely prevented. While we cannot, in all likelihood, eliminate all stress, much of it could be prevented. In this section we introduce a critically important framework called 'CUSP™' that you can use both to prevent stress and reduce the risk when stress has occurred.

A key aim here is to build an atmosphere and team environment which de-stigmatises stress. Stress is simply a reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands. We all have excessive pressures or demands sometimes, so such a stigma is pointless and damaging. Unless people feel able to be open about what is causing them stress, you'll find it difficult to make headway in tackling it in any meaningful way.

The CUSP™ framework

This is a very simple framework that works equally as well in terms of prevention of stress as it does in helping someone who is not coping. In other words you can use CUSP™ proactively and reactively. Here, we will be mainly looking at using CUSP™ proactively to prevent stress.

This framework can be applied to any situation where pressure is present. What it does is get you thinking about your options in a structured way. There are always options, because the experience of stress is individual and depends largely on perceptions. If you can change or influence someone's perceptions, the way they think about a situation, then the stress can be prevented or reduced.

CUSP™ stands for:

- o Control

- o Uncertainty

- o Support

- o Pressure

Control

We have known about the links between stress and control for many years now. Indeed, psychologists have based whole models of stress around the concept of control. If we feel that we don't have any control in our working environment, this can be very stressful, especially when combined with high pressures or demands. Indeed high demands + low control can accurately be described as a perfect recipe for stress.

If we also feel unsupported at the same time this recipe is even more of a risk. We have to be careful when considering this. We are dealing with subjective perceptions, with the way people see things and feel about things, not just with 'objective' reality.

There are major implications here because, as managers, we can influence both perceptions of control and enable actual control. Thus we have the capacity to influence stress levels positively or negatively. In fact, the negative side of this is worrying. It suggests that if we are ignorant of the importance of control or do or say things that lessen perceptions of control then we may be damaging people. We may inadvertently be causing them severe stress and increasing the risk of depression. We may also be causing damage to their immune system, increasing the risk of colds and flu, and in the long term, of cancer and heart disease. See below for some tips on enabling control for your staff.

Uncertainty

Feelings of uncertainty are also strongly associated with stress. In recent years, our working environments and cultures have changed markedly into ones where there is a lot of uncertainty. This is one reason for increases in stress levels across all sectors. The pace of change has increased and is still increasing, none more so than in our workplaces. High uncertainty is associated with feelings of insecurity and anxiety, causing us to feel stressed. In periods of rapid organizational change, feelings of uncertainty increase and control decreases, a double whammy in terms of stress. This makes organizational change a high risk factor for stress-related injury and illness. The most important factor in minimizing/maximizing the risk is communication. See below for ideas on 'uncertainty reducers'.

Support

Probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. What this means is that if we have the right kind of support, we can cope with more pressures or demands without suffering from stress. Put another way, the more pressure there is the more important support becomes. Research appears to show also that in terms of our social networks, if we have good supportive networks at work and away from work, such support actually boosts our wellbeing whether or not we're under pressure.

As managers, you are in a unique position where support is concerned because you can provide both social and practical support to your people. However, you must be careful not to make assumptions about what support people need. If we offer people the wrong kind of support or offer it in the wrong way we can end up causing stress rather than preventing or reducing it. As you work through the actions discussed on this course you will get some useful tips to help you support people appropriately and effectively.

Pressure

If you can identify, then tackle, the specific sources of pressure (stressors) in your team's working environment, you reduce substantially the potential for stress-related

illness amongst your staff team. No two working environments are the same, so all are likely to have their own specific stressors apart from the more general, organizational sources of pressure.

It is important to acknowledge that there will be sources of pressure outside of your (and your team members') control. In terms of minimizing stress risk it is important to identify and target what you do have some influence over.

There are overlaps with the C, U, and S above, but this part of the framework is about thinking about what specifically could cause stress in your area, and what you could do to address those potential causes.

Summary of CUSP™

Research and experience then tells us that if you can:

- o Enable increased perception of control;

- o Reduce uncertainty, and the associated anxiety and insecurity;

- o Provide support, especially in highly pressurised or stressful situations;

- o Tackle sources of pressure (stressors) in your work area…

then you will minimize the risk of stress-related illness and increase wellbeing and performance at work.

Practical hints and tips for C, U, S and P can be found below…

(C) Control Enablers

Enabling control is not about abdicating responsibility. It is not about adopting an 'anything goes' mentality. You are a manager. You still have to take tough decisions, and still have to manage poor performance. So enabling control is about encouraging people to take responsibility for their own performance while being clear about what is expected of them.

1. Delegation. In stress terms, delegation is a critical management skill because it enables control. It says 'I trust you to get this done without me always looking over your shoulder.' Good delegation will also reduce the pressure on you, as you won't have to micromanage. Ask yourself, and encourage others to ask you, difficult questions about letting go of control. Enabling control is not easy for many managers. It may make you feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable to start with, but stick with it and it will pay great dividends.

2. Enable control over the physical environment e.g. the look of the office, the use of plants, make workstations more attractive etc. This can have several benefits in addition to boosting perceptions of control:

   o More relaxed surroundings

   o Improved mood

   o Better air quality e.g. through use of plants

   o Improved overall working environment

   o New environment may contain 'anchors' to positive emotions and attitudes

3. Offer as much flexibility as you can over working arrangements. If staff can make choices that reflect their needs or lifestyle, this will reduce the risk in various ways:

   o Reduces stress risk attached to non-work pressures

   o Addresses commuting stressors

   o Enhances sense of control

4. Encourage people to be assertive with you (not passive, not aggressive), and be prepared to accept constructive criticism of you and your management style. View it as an opportunity to adapt your style to suit each individual. If people see that you respond well to assertive communication and to constructive criticism, they will feel as if they have more control. You will also stand a better chance of finding out how you cause them stress. The more you know about how they feel, the less the risk because you can respond more quickly thus reducing the risk of stress-related illness.

5. Involve people in decision making both at the individual level and at the team level. As a rule give as much control to your team members over decisions as you possibly can, and if you cannot involve people in the decision making process, explain clearly and unambiguously why that is the case (because that will reduce uncertainty). Explain the decisions you have taken.

6. Consult and involve people on decisions about workload. People often feel that they are overloaded because of the perception that it is not within their control. In fact, if people feel they have some control, they generally work harder, achieve more, and are more satisfied with the outcome.

7. Encourage staff to develop their own 'microroutines', which work for them e.g. taking short breaks every 45 mins and a longer break every 90. Breaks are important, especially if people are under pressure. We all need recovery time to manage stress effectively. So encourage people to take control over this

important aspect of their working life. People rarely abuse this. On the contrary, they value being trusted in this way, while manager-controlled breaks can be resented and a cause of dissatisfaction

8. Change will inevitably have an impact on perceptions of control, so take care to assess any risks to your team associated with the change and take special care to communicate clearly about what is happening as often as possible.

9. Taking people for granted undermines their sense of control. Try very hard not to do it, and encourage people within your team not to do it either.

10. The opposite of enabling control is an aggressive style of management. Bullying, aggressive styles of management take control away from people. It makes them fearful and causes them severe stress with very negative consequences for their health and wellbeing. If you receive any feedback that you are perceived as 'aggressive', take that feedback seriously and try sensitively to find out what has led to that perception. Talk it over with a mentor or someone at HR. You may need to consider some additional training or one-to-one coaching to improve your interpersonal skills. Again, try not to regard such perceptions as a personal attack. Rather, they are an opportunity to change your style and become a better manager.

(U) Uncertainty Reducers

As uncertainty increases so do feelings of anxiety and insecurity. This increases the risk of stress. Approaches that reduce uncertainty and ambiguity reduce the risk substantially. Many of these approaches involve communication and decision making. Reducing uncertainty is particularly important in times of organizational change when the risk of stress is high.

1. Communicate! Especially during times of organizational change, effective communication is vital to manage the risk of stress. In risk assessment terms, change is a hazard that has the potential to cause very real and lasting harm. The risk is high. Without effective communication people fill in the gaps, usually with nightmare scenarios. This leads to them ruminating constantly about what might happen, putting them in chronic 'fight-flight' (stress). This can be very damaging to mental and/or physical health. Bear in mind that in change situations you are the main information resource, sometimes the only reliable source. In stress terms, what is known is always better than what is unknown. Even when the news is bad, real eventualities can be planned for and alternative strategies generated. This not only reduces uncertainty, but also increases a sense of control.

2. Be open, approachable and welcoming with your staff. If staff perceive you in this way they are much more likely to share their worst fears with you. If you don't know what these fears are, it will be very difficult to address and challenge those fears. In addition, the more they know you as a human being, warts and

all, the better you will know them. So give of yourself, invest in relationships. In terms of stress prevention, it's the best investment you can make.

3. Avoid being secretive. You may not think that you are secretive, rather that you are protecting your staff e.g. 'What they don't know they won't worry about'. Unfortunately, if you are perceived as secretive, this may cause stress because staff may develop nightmare scenarios, or believe you are deliberately withholding information from them. 'Protecting' people in this way usually backfires horribly.

4. Be clear about roles, tasks and priorities. Uncertainty and ambiguity about your role can be a major stressor. This is especially the case if you aren't sure what the role really is or who you're answerable to. Clarifying these issues reduces 'role ambiguity', potentially a major stressor. Also, working with your team on clarifying what the priorities are and what's really important can help by reducing stress associated with 'role conflict'. Role conflict occurs when people feel they have conflicting demands and priorities.   Again it is clear that good communication is a critically important factor in minimizing the uncertainty associated with these 'role' stressors.

5. Don't assume people will know why… Assumptions that staff will work out why something has been done in a particular way are very dangerous. It may be obvious to you, it probably won't be to them. Never make assumptions about what people know. For example, you could use process checks. Here, you check out and clarify where people are and if they are with you (i.e. understand what to do and what you want). Make sure you give time for this to happen so that people have the same understanding that you have. Use the process check as an opportunity to ask questions. Ask whether you're going too fast or too slow.

6. Be careful about behaviours that may be ambiguous. If team members interpret your behaviour as confusing in any way, the risk of stress increases. In addition, your behaviour may be interpreted as aggressive. If that is the case, you are less likely to find out if people are not coping because they will be afraid of the consequences if they raise their fears.

7. Give as much clear information as possible. If you can, make sure information comes directly from you in person. Share information in a timely manner, especially if the information is related to changes that will affect your staff. Think very carefully about withholding information. Is it really necessary to withhold? Are you withholding information because of negative assumptions that may not be correct? Of course some information must remain confidential, but if information cannot be shared, don't keep quiet, make sure that people understand why.

8. Use emails sparingly and with great care. Emails can cause a great deal of stress. They can appear curt, even rude, and are very often ambiguous. They have no emotional content, and you cannot query something or ask for

justification. Because of overload, they can also add to the pressure, increasing feelings of lack of control and inability to cope. Email is a vastly overrated form of human communication. None of us can probably avoid using it, but don't be a lazy manager, go and speak to people whenever you can, and if you can't, pick up a phone. Use email less, speak to people more!

9. Give people regular feedback. People need to know how they are doing and what you think. If you don't tell them they will make assumptions and those assumptions may not be positive, causing them stress. So give constructive feedback. This reduces uncertainty and reduces the risk of stress.

10. Try not to give people mixed messages. This sounds easy but isn't. Work life is very complicated. For example, sometimes managers would like their staff to be innovative, to show initiative, but not to make any mistakes. Mixed messages like this increase levels of ambiguity, so try to avoid them. Better still, encourage people to let you know when you're giving mixed messages. That way you will be able to clarify what you really mean.

Change and uncertainty

Organizational change significantly increases pressure on people because it causes high levels of uncertainty, and staff can feel they have very little control over what is happening to them. That makes change a special case where stress is concerned. We recommend that managers should always take steps to minimize the risk of stress posed by change by seeking to increase control, reduce uncertainty, and by providing appropriate support. See all the specific hints and tips above and below.

(S) Providing Support

As stated above, probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. As with the other elements of CUSP™, support is important from a proactive and reactive point of view.

If people feel supported generally, that will help prevent stress. It doesn't necessarily mean that people will use support structures, but the fact that they are there and people know that they are there quite simply helps from a stress point of view. Likewise if your team members feel supported by you and perceive you as being supportive, it doesn't necessarily mean they will always come to you for support. The important thing is that they feel supported.

1. Encourage staff to come to you if they need to talk anything through. Make sure staff know when they can come to see you. If you can't have a totally "open door" policy, find a way to let staff know when your door (metaphorical or real) is open and when you would rather not be disturbed. Avoid being so booked up with meetings and other appointments that you are never available to your staff.

2. Meet with your staff on a one-to-one basis. We talk more about the importance of one-to-ones for identifying stress later.   Providing a regular confidential "space" for staff to talk through work issues with you is also a key mechanism for ensuring that staff feel supported by you. One-to-ones are also an important way for you to understand what other support your staff members need.

3. Listen. If staff want to talk about things, listening to what they have to say is key to providing support (in fact, it may be more important than helping them practically).   If you dismiss people's concerns or don't take the time to understand what they are saying, they will not feel supported and you are unlikely to know what other support you should be providing.

4. Give practical support and advice where appropriate. Helping staff understand things, advising them and providing them with coaching or mentoring will all build their sense of being supported by you. Beware stepping in and providing advice when it is not needed or doing things for staff that they could learn by doing themselves, as this can reduce perceived control (see above).

5. Hold regular team meetings. Use team meetings as a way of ensuring two-way communication between you and your staff and between team members. Make sure that team meetings are interesting and involve input from all those present. Don't be afraid of discussing sources of pressure openly at team meetings. Such discussions will help in a number of ways. Firstly, members of your team and will feel listened to. Secondly, you will gain an appreciation of how pressured people are feeling. Thirdly, you will become clearer about potential causes of stress for your team.

6. Encourage your staff to support one another. Fostering a supportive team atmosphere is key to ensuring that your staff feel supported, not just by you, but by their peers. Set an example of respect and good treatment and help your staff to follow it. Help resolve any conflicts that arise between team members in a sensitive, fair and supportive way.

7. Give staff the opportunity to ask questions. Whether in team meetings, one-to-ones, informally or by other means, make sure that staff have a chance to ask you questions.

8. Avoid blame. Everyone makes mistakes. If anything goes wrong, look first to remedy any problems and then for learning points. Don't look to allocate blame. This does not mean avoiding managing poor performance. If one member of your team is performing poorly, that will be stressful for the rest of the team, so the poor performer must be helped to improve their performance.

9. Ensure that staff get the training and development they need to do their job well. This may be about you or other colleagues providing on-the-job development or about more formal training and development activities. Either way, you need to understand what the development needs of your staff are and ensure that those needs are met (including supporting staff in the transfer of skills learnt in training

into the workplace). This is particularly important if a person's job has changed in any way.

10. Make sure staff know about all available support structures. If your organization has an Employee Assistance Programme or other counseling service, make sure your staff know how to access it and what support it provides. Make sure that staff also understand what other support structures are available to them, for example occupational health advice, access to advice and support from Human Resources and anything else available through the organization or through the local community.

(P) Reducing pressure

In seeking to prevent stress, the aim is not to reduce pressure for the sake of it. The right amount of pressure can be motivating and good for both health and performance. However, excessive pressure or demands will cause stress, especially when the pressure is unremitting or 'chronic'.

In today's workplace, the risk of stress comes mainly from 'overload', or too much pressure. But you should also bear in mind that a lack of challenge or too little pressure ('underload' as it is sometimes called) may also cause stress-related problems.

While enabling control, reducing uncertainty and providing support (the C, U and S of CUSP™) will make an enormous difference in terms of how well your staff can cope with the inevitable pressures in the workplace, there may also be things you can do that will directly reduce the pressures they are under. When thinking about how you can prevent stress in your team, it is useful to think about the pressures on your staff, identify the ones you have some influence over and look at ways to reduce them. The following points give common-sense, general ideas on 'pressure-reducers':

1. Set achievable objectives. Make sure that when you set your staff objectives that what you are asking them to do is reasonable. Avoid giving anyone an excessive workload. Monitor this regularly, not just at the time of appraisal.

2. Distribute tasks fairly between team members. When considering who should do what within your team, ensure that you are not giving anyone an unfair proportion of the overall workload.

3. Set realistic timescales. Allow people enough time to carry out the work you give them. Bear in mind how long tasks take and what other priorities a person has when setting deadlines for particular pieces of work.

4. Make priorities clear. When you ask staff to do work, make clear which responsibilities or tasks are the most important. Also clarify which are the most

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urgent. Help staff prioritise their workloads to ensure that the important things get done and that deadlines are not missed.

5. Plan ahead. Think about workload planning and scheduling. Aim to minimise peaks and troughs wherever you can. If your work area has particularly busy periods for any reason, ensure that you don't make the busy periods busier by making demands for things that could have been handled in a quieter period.

6. Hand over tasks as soon as you can. Don't sit on requests or pieces of work that have come in and only hand them over when the deadline is approaching.

7. Avoid giving staff conflicting tasks or roles. When setting objectives or giving staff work, think about the range of roles, responsibilities and tasks that they have. Look to see whether they have conflicting roles or priorities within their workload and aim to resolve any conflicts.

8. Match tasks to skills. When allocating work, bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of your team members. Aim to play to people's strengths and give them tasks for which their skills are a good fit.

9. Avoid giving staff repetitive and boring work where possible. Giving people insufficient challenge and stimulation in their work can cause stress. Consider how you can add interest and challenge to people's jobs.

10. Minimize environmental pressures. Consider aspects of the work environment such as noise, lighting, temperature, pollution etc. If these things make the workplace uncomfortable for staff, they can cause stress. Find ways of tackling these issues wherever possible. This is area where 'quick wins' are often possible. Anything you can do to improve the working environment for your staff will contribute to preventing and reducing stress.

Using CUSP™ reactively: tackling stress-related issues

We have been looking so far at using CUSP™ to prevent stress. Unfortunately, we can't prevent all stress, and sometimes we have to react once someone has become stressed in order to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing. Fortunately, the CUSP™ framework can be used reactively as well. The main difference being that you are applying the framework to a specific situation rather than to your work area in general. However, the principles are the same. Anything you can do to boost or enhance a sense of control, reduce uncertainty, provide support, or reduce pressure will help the person who is experiencing stress. Because the person is already under stress, they are a more vulnerable to stress related illness, so anything you can do here will help to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing.

It's a good idea to revisit all the hints and tips for C, U, S, and P above, and think about which are these could be applied to the specific stress-related situation you are dealing with.

The vitally important role of listening

Here, you are likely to be dealing with a situation where an employee is already experiencing stress. Face to face communication, and especially listening, becomes vitally important. You need to build up as good picture as you can of how the person feels and how they see the situation they are in.

Support for the stressed person

When using CUSP™ reactively, the aspect of providing support becomes particularly important. From a reactive point of view, there are two aspects to providing support:

1. How best to offer support

2. What sort of support to provide

You would no doubt agree that it is vitally important to be supportive when reacting to a specific stress-related situation, but it is also important to find out as best you can what practical support the stressed person needs. Good communication skills will help enormously here. In discussion with the person concerned, asking the right sort of questions in the right way should take you most of the way towards finding out 'what sort of support to provide.'

Know your support structures and services

Please make yourself as aware as you can be of all the support structures or services your employer provides. For example, does your employer provide a confidential counselling service? You may need to be in a position to refer someone to a support service, or point someone in the right direction (remember to make sure you record you have done so). Therefore, if you don't have sufficient knowledge about the support services and how people can access them, you will not be adequately equipped to manage risk effectively and put into effect what you have learned on this course.

Know your policies

If there are policies related to stress and related issues, pay particular attention to those. Do you have a specific policy on stress? Do you know what that policy says, particularly about the role of managers? You should. Are you familiar with your policy on absence or attendance, and what you need to do to manage absence effectively? Does your organization have a policy on 'dignity at work' or related to bullying and harassment, and would you know what to do if such issues come up? Is there a policy related to compassionate leave? Do you have a policy related to family friendly working or flexible working? If so, do you know how much flexibility you have in giving people

options? If you aren't sure about any support structures and policies, contact your Human Resources or Personnel department for help and advice.

Reduce pressure for the person under stress

It is worth remembering that someone under stress may already be experiencing high levels of pressure, so reducing pressure will be especially important. Think carefully about any adjustments that could be made to reduce the pressure. Prolonged exposure to excessive pressure or demands is a major risk factor for stress-related illness. Reducing pressure, even if it is only for a time-limited period can reduce this risk substantially.