

## Activity 14 - Coping, resilience and managing stress

The different situations you will be experiencing throughout your life may cause you worry, anxiety or stress. This is due to you experiencing new and different situations that challenge you mentally and physically. These helpful points will enable you to deal with stressful situations.

### Aims

- To help enable participants to recognise and deal with stressful situations

### Step 1: Introduction

Before beginning the activity remind participants of the importance of keeping themselves safe. Make reference to Activity 1 and the group contract. Make it clear to the participants that everyone copes differently with stress and as such everyone will have their own way of dealing with things.

### Step 2: Managing stress

- Facilitator to discuss background and context of stress using the information provided
- Do participants know what stress, coping and resilience are? Use the definitions provided to direct discussion
- Give each participant a copy of the participant worksheet. This can be discussed in pairs or small groups.
- Instruct participants to complete the participant worksheet – they can keep the worksheet

### Step 3: Review

- Ask participants how they found the activity?
- Why do they think it's important?
- Were they surprised by anything?
- Will participants try to use these in future?



### Materials needed:

Participant worksheets



**Stress defined** – Physiological or biological stress is our response to a stressor such as an environmental condition. Stress is a body's method of reacting to a challenge. Stress typically describes a negative condition or a positive condition that can have an impact on a person's mental and physical well-being.

**Coping defined** – Coping is expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimise or tolerate stress or conflict. The effectiveness of the coping efforts depends on the type of stress and/or conflict, the particular individual, and the circumstances. Positive coping strategies include spending time with friends, doing exercise, keeping a diary and talking about your problems. Negative coping strategies can cause you harm and include things like drugs, alcohol and hurting yourself.

**Resilience defined** – Resilience is defined as an individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. Stress and adversity can come in the shape of family or relationship problems, health problems, bullying, problems at school or workplace and financial worries, among others. Resilience is not a rare ability; in reality, it is found in the average individual and it can be learned and developed by virtually anyone. Resilience should be considered a process, rather than a trait to be obtained.

### **Why is relaxation helpful?**

When we are stressed, the muscles in our bodies tense up and this muscular tension causes uncomfortable bodily feelings, such as headache, backache, tight chest and so on. These aches and pains of tension can cause mental worry, making us even more anxious and tense. People who are tense often feel tired. Relaxing slows down the systems in the body that speed up when we get anxious. If we can learn to turn on the bodily symptoms of relaxation we can turn off the symptoms of tension. They are two sides of the same coin: You can't experience feelings of relaxation and tension at the same time.

### **Everyday life**

The ability to relax is not always something that comes naturally; it is a skill that has to be learnt like playing the piano.

- Stop rushing around – you achieve more by doing things calmly
- Give yourself short breaks – relax, stretch, go for a walk
- Adopt a relaxed posture. Deliberately relax if you notice yourself tensing up. Drop your shoulders, sit back in your chair, and unclench your fists.

### **When experiencing stress**

- Do not withdraw from social support
- Keep communicating – ventilate your feelings
- Keep areas and times for relaxation
- Do not expect too much of yourself
- Do not feel that you have to live up to others' expectations of you
- Think twice about how important tasks are. Try saying 'No'
- Break your goals into manageable proportions
- Think positively about your abilities

### **Stress release exercises**

**Hands and arms** – Clench your fists, and tense your arms; feel tightness in your hands and arms, hold for 5 seconds then slowly relax them. Release and relax each muscle group for 10 to 15 seconds. See how far they will go, but do not push. Do not hold on at all; let everything go.

**Breath** – Slow and steady, let yourself relax each time you breathe out.

**Shoulders** – Hunch your shoulders, and then gradually let them settle down

**Forehead** – Pull your eyebrows together, then gradually let your forehead smooth out.

**Jaw** – Bite your back teeth together, then gradually ease off, and let your jaw get heavy.

**Neck** – Pull your chin forward on to your chest, feel tightness, then relax.

**Tummy** – Pull in your tummy tight, then gradually let it go, feeling it relax.

**Thighs** – Push your heels down hard against the floor, feeling the tightness in your thighs, and then gradually let that go.

**Calves** – Point your toes, then gradually let that tightness go.

## Activity 14 - Coping, resilience and managing stress worksheet

When in stressful situations the following exercise may help you to deal with confusing or upsetting conditions. Most people are not mind readers, and so if you are upset about how someone/a situation is acting/progressing, you need to remember that. For example remember a time in your life when you got into a fight/argument with someone, and it was all a misunderstanding, or because you had different points of view.

Is this such a problem? Do people around the world all have to think the same? Of course not! So why do so many arguments happen? Normally because of communication breakdowns. It helps a great deal in a situation when you know what someone else is feeling, or where they are coming from.

Use the following technique to help when a strained situation arises.

### Stress management

How I normally deal with 'stress' can include (circle the ones you do):		
Shouting	Fighting	Going away from the situation
Taking time out	Arguing	Listening
Swearing	Listening to music	Getting more people involved

### Try and answer the following questions:

When I am stressed it feels like..

I can tell when I am getting stressed because..

I normally handle stressful situations by..

How can I tell when a situation is becoming stressful?

How can I better deal with 'stressful' situations?

I cope by..

I get support from..

**Responding to difficult situations:**

Take these steps, to explain to the person what's going on in your head, and see if it makes the situation different:

When you...  
*(Whatever they have just done/said)*

I feel...  
*(Whatever you have felt about what has happened)*

And I think that..  
*(Whatever you thought was going on/happening/going to happen)*

And in the future, what I would like to happen is..  
*(Let them know what you would like to happen)*

This technique, can be used, and applied in different situations in all areas of your life. It's good to learn, and practice at different times.