

Stress Management



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Early Psychosis Intervention Program

Part 2

This handout describes some additional strategies that people often find useful for reducing stress.

Rational Thinking

Controlling Internally-Generated Stress

Negative thinking causes stress because it damages your confidence that you are equal to the task you face.

You are thinking negatively when you put yourself down, criticize yourself for errors, doubt your abilities or expect failure.

The following two steps can help you combat negative thinking.

a) Thought Awareness:

Thought awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts for a time, perhaps when under stress, and become aware of what is going through your head. It is best not to suppress any thoughts - just let them run their course while you observe them and watch for negative thoughts.

Examples of common negative thoughts include: worries about how you appear to other people, dwelling on consequences of poor performance, self-criticism and feelings of inadequacy. Make a note of any negative thoughts you encounter.

Thought awareness is the first step in the process of eliminating negative thoughts - you cannot counter thoughts you do not know you think.

b) Rational Thinking:

Once you are aware of your negative thoughts, write them down and review them rationally. See whether the thoughts have any basis in reality. Often you find that when you properly challenge negative thoughts they are obviously wrong. Often they persist only because they escape notice.

With rational thinking you look at the basis of these negative thoughts, and challenge them rationally. Where the thoughts are obviously wrong, you can eliminate them. Where the thoughts may be fair, you can work on the problem to eliminate or neutralize it.

Reducing Daily Hassles

Preventing Stress by Streamlining Your Life

We all experience frustrations on a regular basis.

Things such as misplacing ones keys, being stuck in a long line-up at the grocery store, getting stuck in traffic or missing the bus may seem like minor annoyances. However, these types of daily hassles can add up to create a significant source of stress.

Many of these daily hassles can be easily avoided or managed through the use of two simple strategies.

a) Time Management:

Analyze how you currently spend your time and revise this so that the use of your time is more effective. For example, if you always go to the grocery

store at 5pm when it is most crowded, consider going at a different time of day to avoid long waits in line. Alternatively, by pre-planning your meals for a week could allow you to do shopping just once/week. In planning how you will spend your time, it is important to use a daily schedule to help remind you of the things you are to do at specific times.

b) Increased Organization:

A cluttered environment and/or frequently misplacing things such as keys can increase stress. You can help reduce your stress simply by reducing clutter and developing a system for storing or placing important items (e.g., a hook for a key by the front door, using a filing system for important documents, etc.).

Reducing Responsibilities

Managing Stress by Decreasing Workload

Recognize when stress gets to be too much and the other stress management strategies are not helping to eliminate your feelings of stress. When this happens, it is time to consider reducing your responsibilities and obligations in order to reduce your stress level. These could be responsibilities such as work, school, volunteering, household duties, or social clubs.

The following steps may help guide you in reducing your responsibilities.

a) List all responsibilities:

Think of all the different things that you are currently doing and are responsible for. Make a list of these responsibilities.

b) Evaluate your responsibilities: For each of the responsibilities on your list, consider how stressful you find each, how easily they can be delegated to others, and what the consequences would be for no longer engaging in them.

c) Decide which responsibilities to reduce: Your decision should be based on your evaluation.

d) Develop and carry out a plan for reducing these responsibilities: This might involve informing others of your decision or delegating work to someone else

Summary

You now have an overview of some of the approaches that you can use to effectively manage your stress. Some other strategies include regular exercise, eating and sleeping well, and goal-setting.

The best approach to stress management is individualized – experiment with different strategies to find ways of reducing stress that work for you.