

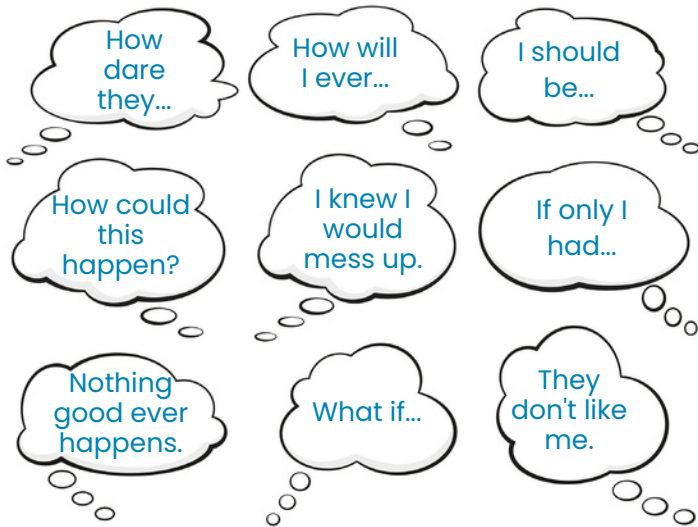
What is Stress?

Stress can operate as an alarm in the brain, which prepares the body to react as a defense mechanism for any demand.

- **External stressors** can include physical, environmental, social, and organizational factors.
- **Internal stressors** can include mind-traps, perceptions, and self-critical and judgmental thoughts.

Regardless of the stressor, the body has the same response called "fight or flight." During this response, many different reactions occur to defend against these demands. When we allow our bodies to get revved up, but don't allow the stress to dissipate, health problems can occur.

Mindfulness and Stress



Focusing on internal triggers is important for stress management because internal triggers are all controllable. Our thoughts, emotions, self-talk, and worry become constant and perpetual. Most stress is a direct result of these automatic thoughts.

Avoid Mind Traps

It is estimated that the mind processes an average of 80,000 thoughts a day! The mind is an amazing tool, but if we are unable to switch it off, it can overwhelm us. Practice being in the here and now instead of getting caught in a mind trap.



Why did this happen?

I won't be able to cope.

UNCHANGEABLE PAST

IMAGINED FUTURE

Be Present

Mind traps can include worrying about the past or thinking about the future. Few people live in the moment. Instead, most people dwell on the past or imagine the good or bad things that the future may hold.

You cannot possibly change the past - it has already happened. Likewise, you cannot possibly predict the future. It is yet to come! What you do have, is the here and now.

"If it's out of your hands,
it deserves freedom
from your mind too."



-Ivan Nuru

The Body's Stress Response

The more your mind starts to become anxious or fearful, the more fear arises as an emotion, and the more your body will react.

- Stored sugars and fats are released into the bloodstream to provide quick energy.
- The heart pumps faster to provide more blood to muscles.
- Breathing rate increases to provide oxygen to muscles.
- Perspiration increases to help reduce body temperature.
- Blood clotting mechanisms are activated to protect against injury.
- Muscles tense in preparation for action.

These symptoms can happen for hours at a time without you being aware of it. Over time, these demands can take a toll on your overall health and well-being.



We are all built with an automatic response to stress. It is important to know how you tend to respond to stress. Strive to be more aware of stress symptoms when they occur.

Also, try to identify your stress triggers, so you can practice a healthy and effective response to your stressors.

Putting It Into Action

Awareness

Notice the physical changes taking place in your body and the thoughts you are having. This helps you recognize how you tend to respond to stress.

Everyone has different symptoms. Identify your body's physical, mental, and emotional responses to stressful events.

Ask yourself:

- Are my muscles tense?
- Is my jaw clenched?
- How am I responding to the situation?
- Am I reacting out of habit?
- What am I thinking?

When you are aware of your body, your feelings, your thoughts, and your surroundings, you are practicing mindfulness, which helps to turn off the automatic responses to stress.

Breathe

Breathing deeply decreases the amount of cortisol released in the body and increases the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, or the system that calms you.

Choose and Change

Be intentional about addressing your stress and change your thinking or stress response by answering the questions below.

Ask yourself:

- Can I control this?
- How would I prefer to respond?
- How important is this?
- What are the facts?
- What am I thinking?
- Is this a battle I'm willing to fight?
- Will this matter in 5 days? 5 months? 5 years?