

Occupational Stress Management for Employees of the penitentiary system

*EPTAll: Innovating Together – Connecting
European Penitentiary Training Academies*



Training Center of
Justice of Georgia



NETHERLANDS
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE



Session I

Introduction

09:00-10:30

- Introduction to Stress Management
- The Meaning of Occupational Stress: Forms and Indicators
 - Environmental and Individual Risk & Protective Factors
 - Coping Strategies for Occupational Stress
- Assessing Individual Coping Strategies and Stress Resistance
 - Improving Communication to Reduce Stress
 - Improving Conflict Management & Cooperation Skills

Group Rules



We listen to each other



We respect each other



We speak from "I"



We take care of our needs



We arrive on time after the breaks



Confidentiality



My Expectations:

What do I
want to
happen

What do I
want NOT
to happen

Session I

What is stress?

11:00-12:30

MYTH OR NO MYTH?

Interpreting Workplace Stress Scale™ Scores

Total score of 15 or lower: *Chilled out and relatively calm.* Stress isn't much of an issue.

Total score 16 to 20: *Fairly low.* Coping should be a breeze, but you probably have a tough day now and then. Still, count your blessings.

Total score 21 - 25: *Moderate stress.* Some things about your job are likely to be pretty stressful, but probably not much more than most people experience and are able to cope with. Concentrate on what can be done to reduce items with the worst scores.

Total score 26 - 30: *Severe.* You may still be able to cope, but life at work can sometimes be miserable. Several of your scores are probably extreme. You could be in the wrong job, or even in the right job but at the wrong time and might benefit from counseling.

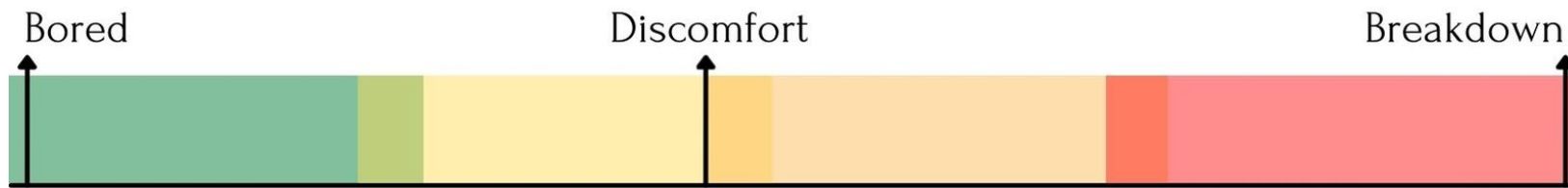
Total score 31 - 40: *Stress level is potentially dangerous.* The more so the higher your score. You should seek professional assistance, especially if you feel your health is affected, or you might need to consider a job change to a different position within the company or to a different company.

STRESS?

Your body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat.

Challenges that excite us and keep us on our toes, without which life for many people would become dull and ultimately not worth living.

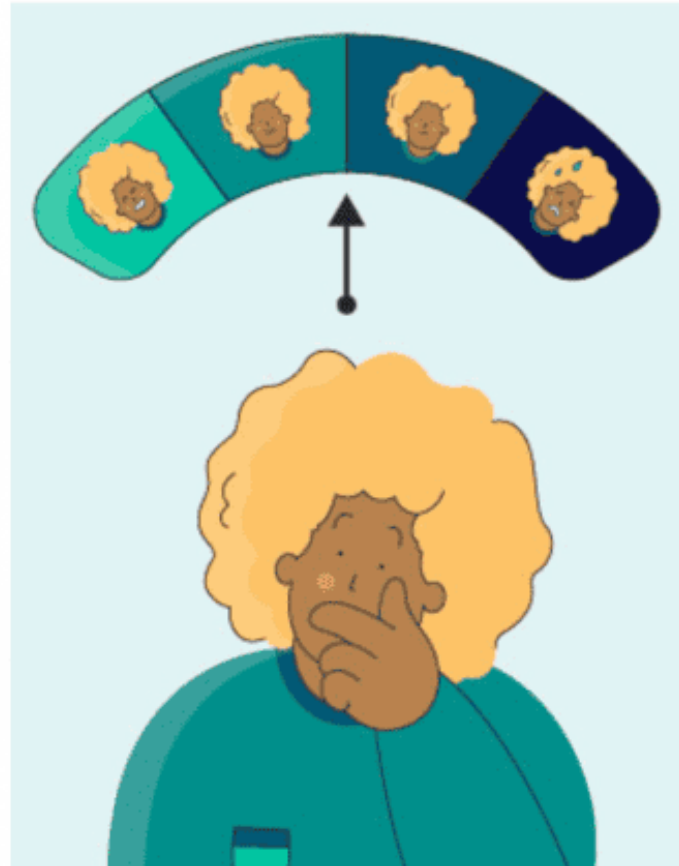
Fontana (1989)



Eustress vs Distress

Eustress

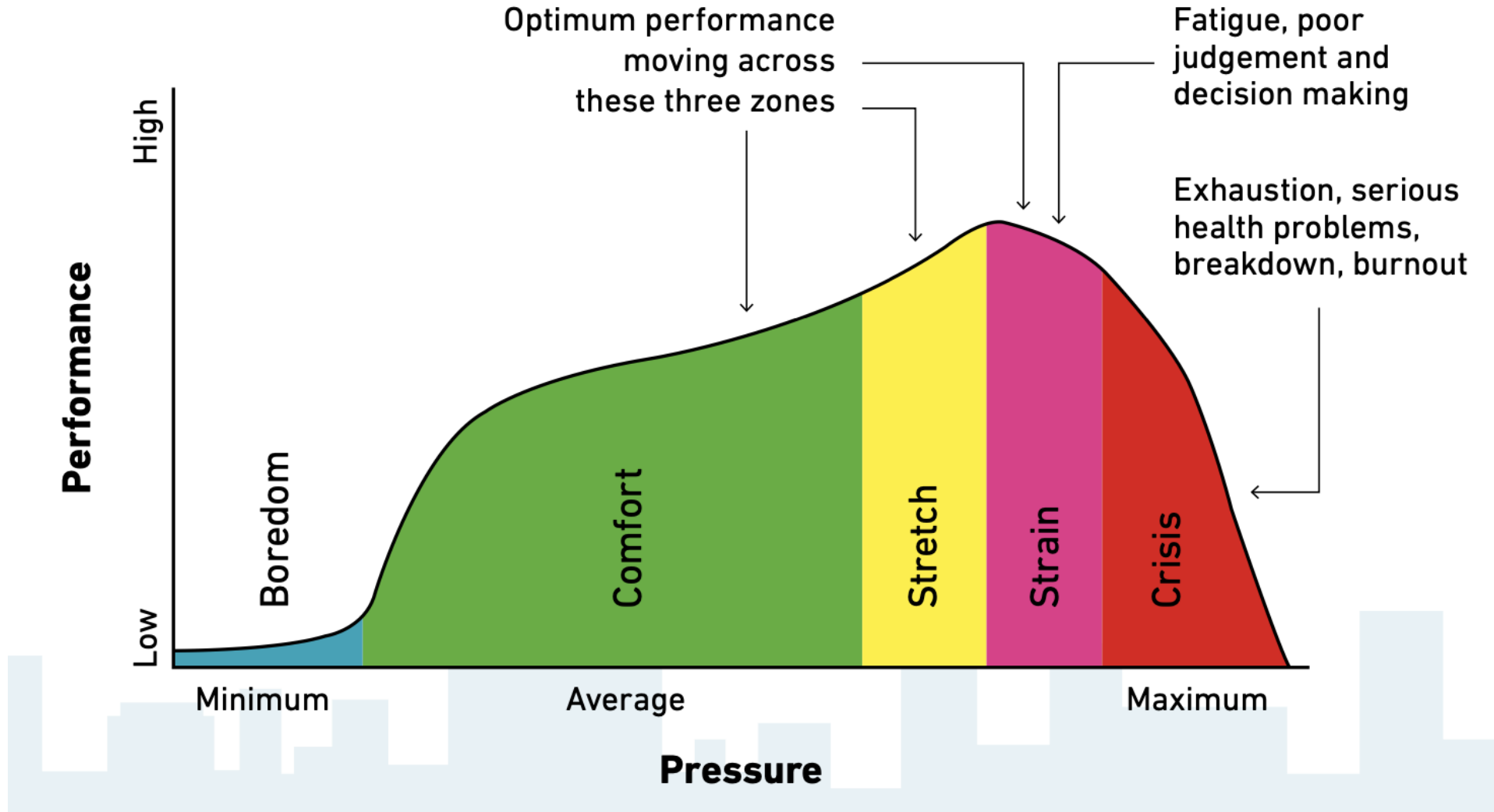
- Inspired, focuses energy
- Is short-term
- Is perceived as within coping abilities
- Feels exhilarating
- Improves performance and growth



Distress

- Causes anxiety or concern
- Can be short- or long-term.
- Is perceived as far out of coping abilities
- Feels uncomfortable
- Decreases performance

Stress Response Curve



What is Stressor?

The stress system activates in response to diverse stressors:

- ✓ **Physical threats** (e.g., injury, cold weather).
- ✓ **Psychological stressors** (e.g., deadlines, interpersonal conflict).
- ✓ **Biological challenges** (e.g., infections, hunger).

STRESS IS GENERIC

Stress response is not designed to handle only one specific type of stressor. Instead, it's a “universal system” in the body that can respond to a wide variety of challenges

Forms of Stress



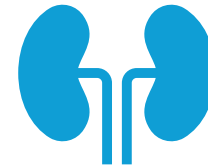
Short-term (Acute)

Generally beneficial, it sharpens focus, boosts the immune system, and mobilizes energy.



Medium-term

Lasting weeks or months, it can test our limits. Tools like stress inoculation and cognitive reframing are critical here.



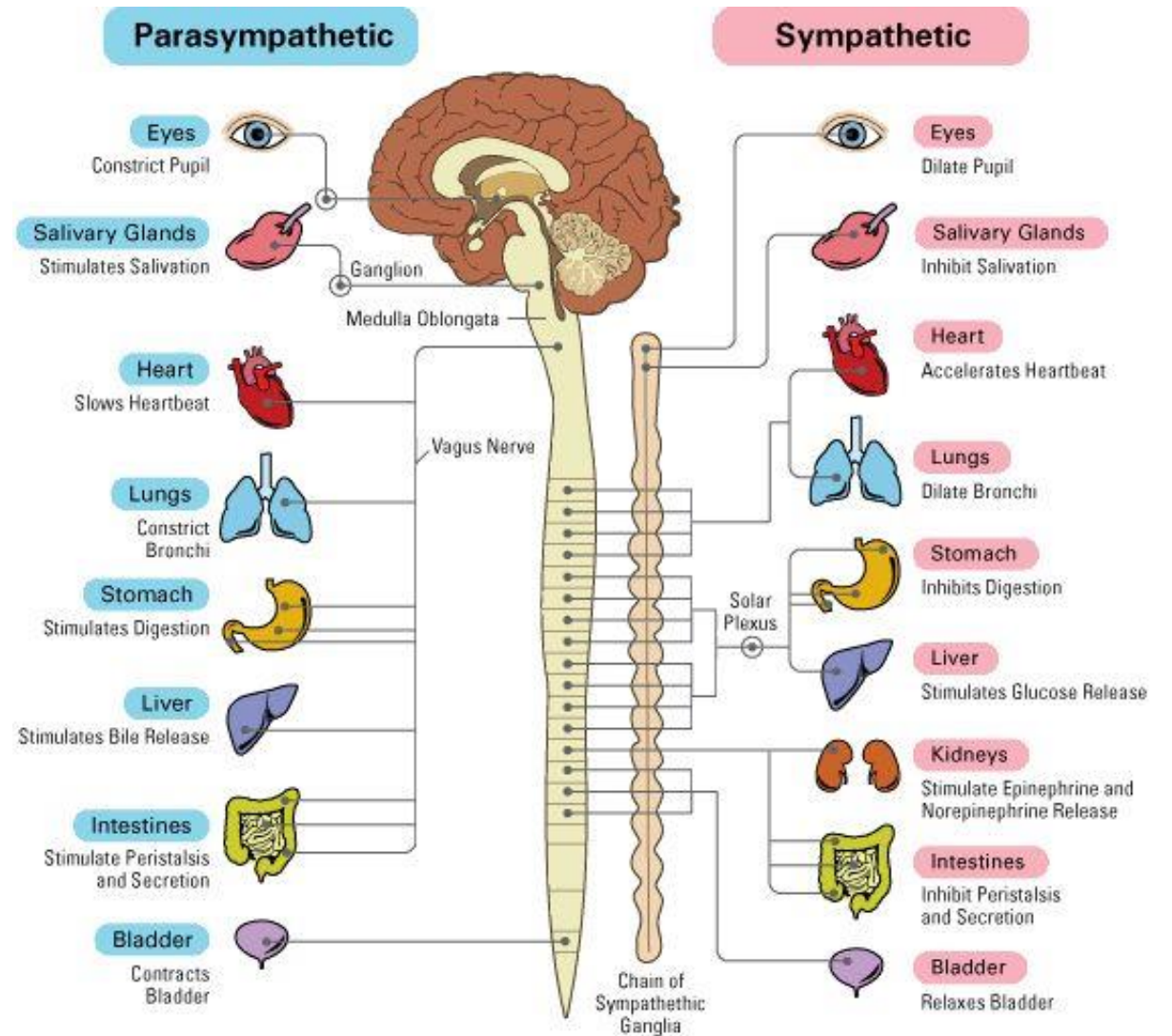
Long-term (Chronic)

Chronic stress, if unmanaged, can impair memory, immune function, and cardiovascular health. It requires strategic intervention

The nervous system has built-in mechanisms to both activate and calm the stress response:

- **Sympathetic** activation is like pressing the gas pedal—fueling energy and action.
- **Parasympathetic** activation acts as the brake, calming the body and restoring equilibrium.

Important takeaway: Stress isn't inherently bad. It's a tool, and like all tools, it depends on how we use it.

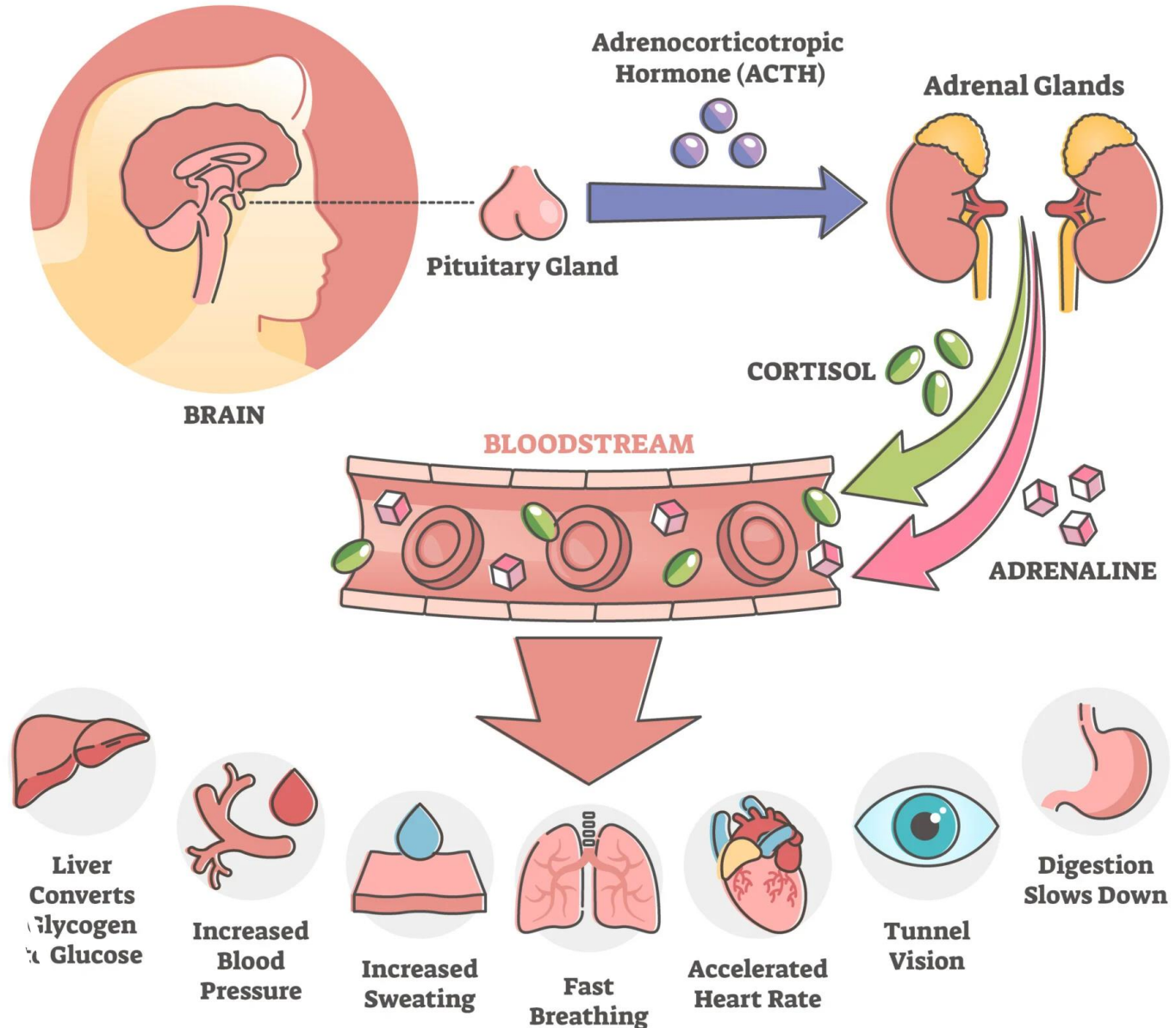


Schema Explaining How Parasympathetic and Sympathetic Nervous Systems Regulate Functioning Organs

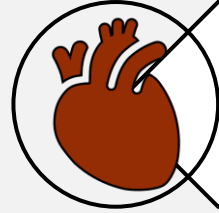
STRESS RESPONSE

Takeaway: The stress response enables heightened physical and mental performance in the short term.

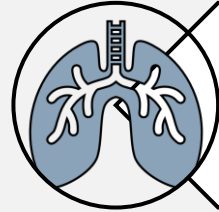
- **1. Activation of the sympathetic chain ganglia:** This network of neurons runs along your spine and sends rapid signals to various organs.
- **2. Release of adrenaline (epinephrine):** Adrenal glands release this chemical to increase your heart rate, dilate airways, and redirect blood flow to muscles.
- **3. Suppression of non-essential functions:** Systems like digestion and reproduction are temporarily inhibited to conserve energy for survival.



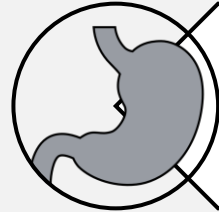
Physiological Effects



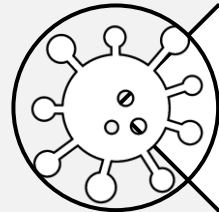
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure help deliver oxygen quickly.
- Chronic stress can lead to hypertension and damage to blood vessels.



- Breathing becomes faster and shallower.
- Prolonged stress can exacerbate respiratory issues like asthma.



- Blood flow is redirected from digestion, leading to issues like bloating or nausea.
- Chronic stress can cause ulcers or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).



- Short-term stress boosts immunity by mobilizing white blood cells.
- Chronic stress suppresses immune function, increasing vulnerability to infections.



- The amygdala, responsible for processing fear, becomes hyperactive.
- Chronic stress reduces activity in the prefrontal cortex, impairing decision-making and emotional regulation.

Occupational stress

“Harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (NIOSH, 1999).

- ✓ Fear of being laid off
- ✓ Overtime
- ✓ Demand vs reward
- ✓ Conflict/miscommunication
- ✓ Lack of control over your work
- ✓ Etc.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion associated with work. It is a consequence of chronic stress at work, which is inefficiently managed primarily on a social and organizational level, and then on an individual level. It is characterized by three dimensions:

1. exhaustion,
2. work-related cynicism
3. reduced work efficiency.

Burnout Signs

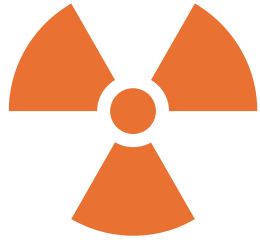
<p>Physical</p>	<p>Emotional</p>
<p>Cognitive</p>	<p>Behavioral</p>

Session III

Environmental and Individual Risk and Protective Factors

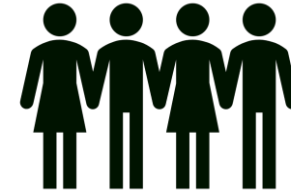
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Environmental Factors



Environmental Risk Factors

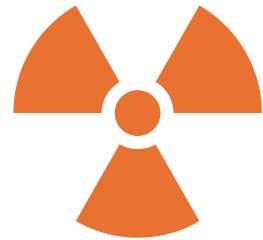
- High workload and time pressure.
- Role ambiguity or conflict.
- Poor communication.
- Unsafe or high-tension environments.
- Lack of support.



Environmental Protective Factors

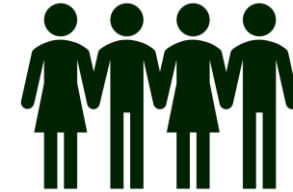
- Clear role expectations.
- Supportive leadership.
- Positive team dynamics.
- Effective communication channels.
- Access to mental health resources.

Individual Factors



Individual Risk Factors

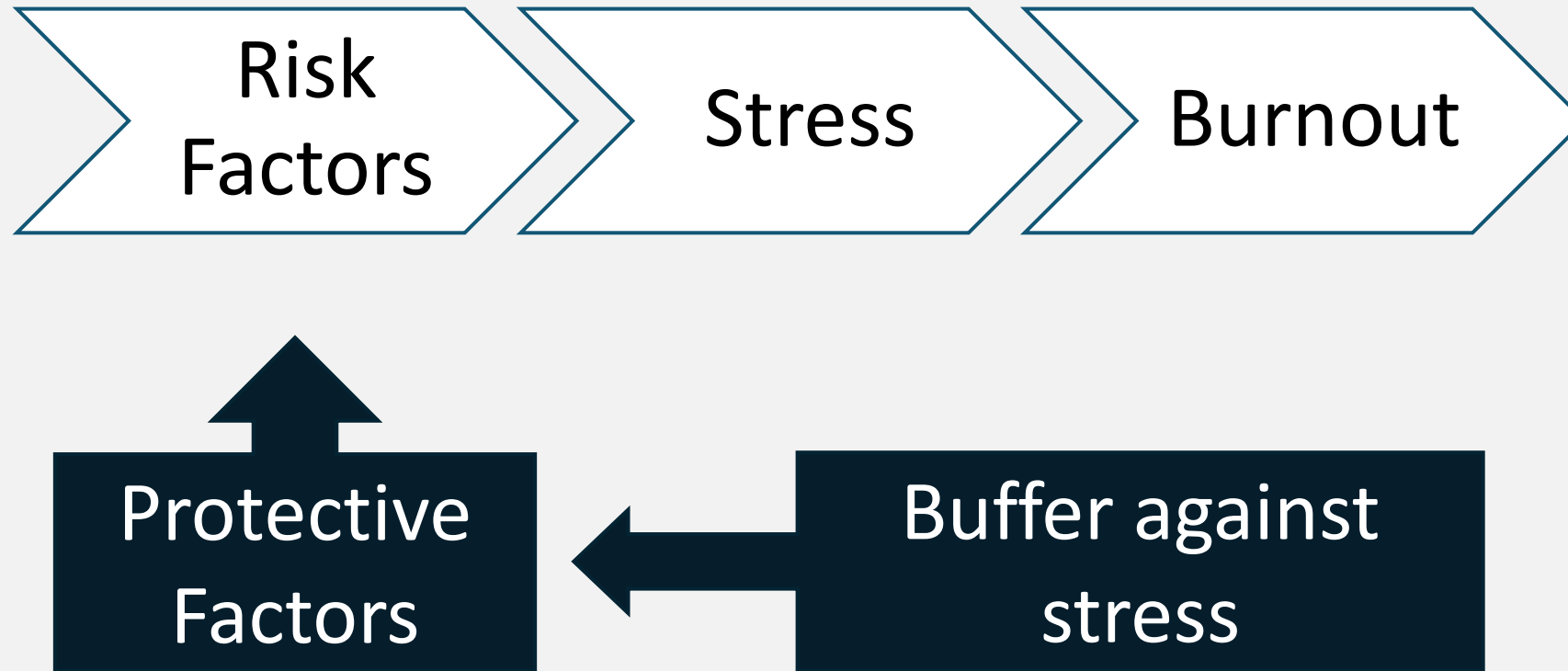
- Low resilience or adaptability.
- Negative coping mechanisms.
- Personality traits like high neuroticism.
- Lack of self-awareness.



Individual Protective Factors

- Emotional intelligence.
- Healthy coping strategies.
- Self-efficacy and confidence.
- Social support networks.
- Personal health habits.

Interaction of Factors



Takeaway Activity:

Write down one environmental and one individual factor you plan to address to better manage stress in your workplace.

Session IV

Stress Management Strategies

15:30-17:30



Everyday hassles

- Minor, but frequent reoccurring events
- Cumulative effect on health and well-being

01

Avoid

Eliminate unnecessary stress by avoiding triggers.

02

Alter

Change your situation to reduce stress.

03

Adapt

Adjust your mindset to handle stress better.

04

Accept

Recognize what's beyond your control and accept it.

Coping Strategies

- Self-distraction #s 1 & 19
- Active coping #s 2 & 7
- Denial #s 3 & 8
- Substance use #s 4 & 11
- Use of emotional support #s 5 & 15
- Use of instrumental support #s 10 & 23
- Behavioral disengagement #s 6 & 16
- Venting #s 9 & 21
- Positive reframing #s 12 & 17
- Planning #s 14 & 25
- Humor #s 18 & 28
- Acceptance #s 20 & 24
- Religion #s 22 & 27
- Self-blame #s 13 & 26

Physiological SIGH

1. Perform a double inhale: **Take a deep breath through the nose, then add a second smaller inhale to "top off" your lungs.**
2. Follow with a long exhale: Release the breath slowly and completely through the mouth.

Benefits in Real-Time:

- Quickly lowers heart rate and blood pressure.
- Reduces feelings of agitation and anxiety.
- Can be done discreetly in any setting.

Use your senses



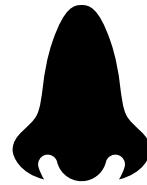
Notice five things
that you can see.



Notice four things
that you can feel.



Notice three things
that you can hear.



Notice two things
that you can smell.



Notice one things
that you can taste.

Stress Inoculation

Expose yourself to manageable stressors like cold showers or high-intensity exercise. Learn to remain mentally calm during physical activation.

- ✓ **Visual techniques:** Switching from tunnel vision to panoramic vision reduces mental tension even in high-activation states.
- ✓ **Controlled breathing during intense activity:** This raises your stress threshold, making previously overwhelming challenges feel manageable.

How it works:

- This method builds resilience by teaching the body and mind to recover more efficiently from stress, reducing the impact of future stressors.
- By intentionally switching to a broader visual field, you can deactivate stress-induced hyperfocus and engage the parasympathetic system, promoting relaxation.

Chronic Stress: The long-term battle

- ✓ **Sleep Optimization:** Maintain consistent sleep schedules and create an environment conducive to quality rest.
- ✓ **Cultivate social connections:** Loneliness increases the production of harmful molecules, which heighten fear and paranoia. Meaningful interactions release serotonin, which fosters trust, comfort, and well-being.
- ✓ **Gratitude Practices:** Write down or reflect on things you are thankful for regularly.

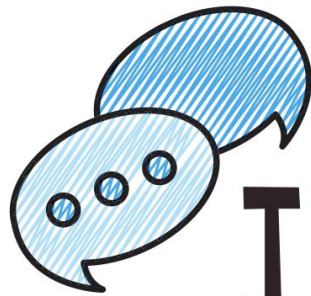
How it works:

- Without adequate sleep, stress hormones accumulate, increasing the risk of burnout and chronic stress. Sleep restores balance and enhances emotional resilience.
- Humans are social beings, and connection reduces stress hormones like cortisol while enhancing emotional regulation through serotonin and oxytocin (in certain intimate situations).
- By focusing on positive aspects of life, gratitude rewires the brain to perceive stressors in a less threatening way, reducing chronic stress and improving mental health.

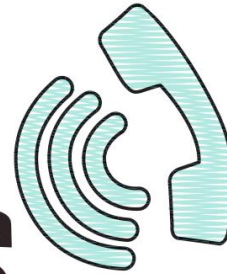


Day II
Session I

09:00-10:30



Assertive Communication



I-STATEMENTS WORKSHEETS

1 I FEEL

3 BECAUSE

2 WHEN

4 (MY NEEDS)



1 I FEEL

My feelings about a behavior / situation

2 WHEN

A blame-free description of the behavior that is a problem for me

3 BECAUSE

The effect the behavior has on ME

4 (MY NEEDS)

What I need the other person to do instead

“ EXAMPLE ”

I feel annoyed when you keep on checking if I've done my homework because it tells me you don't trust me. I need to be able to prove that I can do it on my own.

Scenario	You are working on a group project, and one member is not completing their portion. You have repeatedly had to finish their work.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	Your boss keeps dumping new work on you, with little instruction, and not enough time. Despite working overtime, you're weeks behind.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	A friend always cancels plans at the last minute. Recently, you were waiting for them at a restaurant, when they called to say they couldn't make it.
"I" Statement	

Active Listening

L

Look interested

I

Inquire with questions

S

Stay on target

T

Test understanding

E

Evaluate the message

N

Neutralise your feelings

Difficult Communication

01

Listen

02

Ask
Questions

03

Acknowledge
Feelings

04

Empathise

05

Stay in
Control

06

Speak Slowly

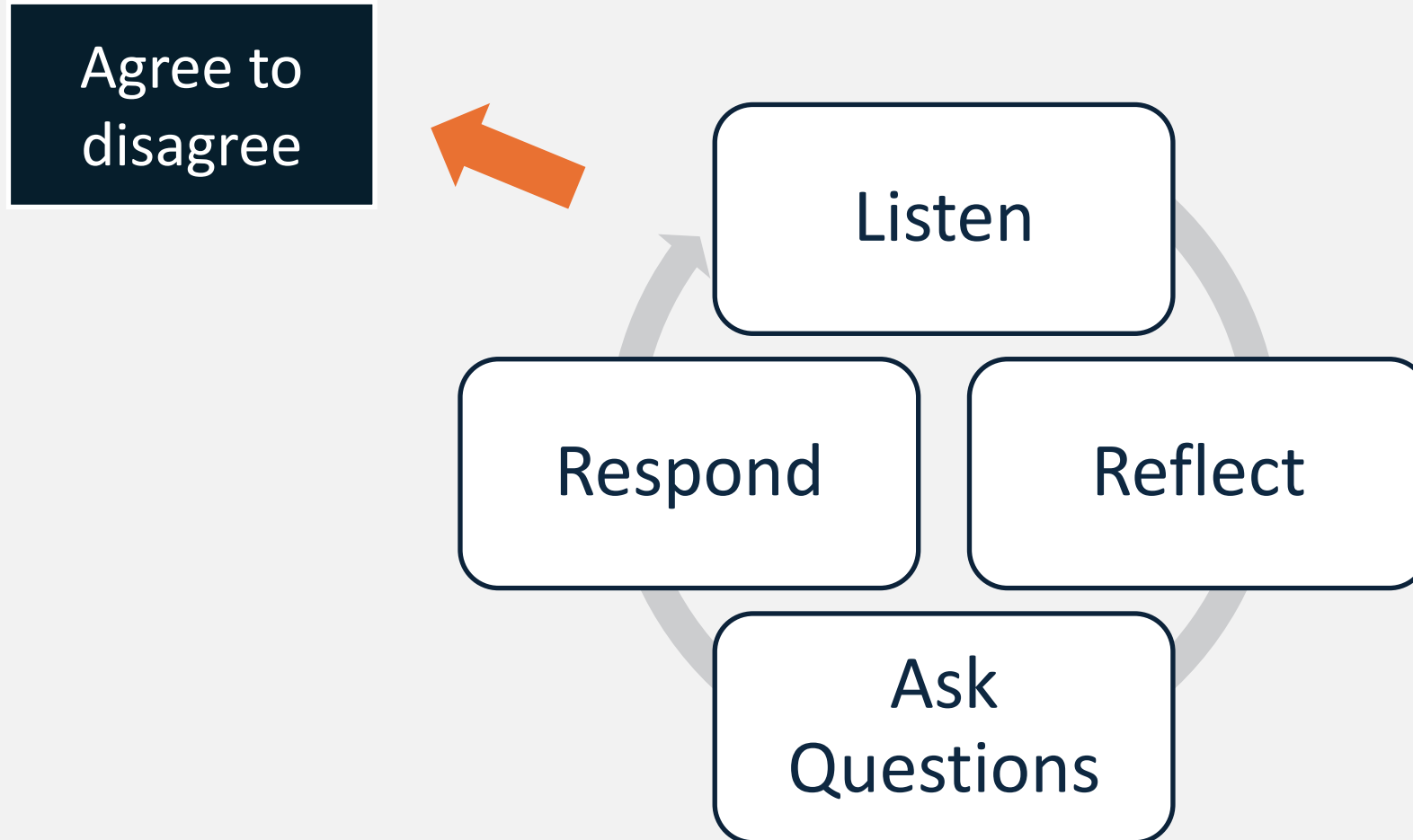
07

Give Evidence

08

Be Honest

Managing Criticism



Giving Criticism



Constructive Criticism

Time and place

Explain how you feel

Do not accuse

One at a time

Next steps