

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

"WORKPLACE STRESS"

Part of the General Safety Series

OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **Stress is a hazard we all face.**
 - It creeps into our lives when it's time to pay the bills, or when we can't find the right tool for the job.
 - It comes in the form of a memo from the boss, a bad set of spark plugs, or a call from our children's school.
 - Even good things can lead to stress. New parents find that out in a hurry. They discover the "joy" of three a.m. feedings and diaper duty.

- **We all know the feeling of stress.**
 - Your muscles tense up.
 - You get an adrenalin rush.
 - You start to sweat.
 - Your heart's pounding.
 - Your stomach tightens.
 - Your blood pressure rises.

- **These changes might be alarming sometimes, but in what we call "positive stress" situations, they're only temporary.**
 - "Getting excited" under pressure is an old survival instinct, and a successful one.
 - Once the crisis is over, our body relaxes and "resets" itself back to normal, getting ready for the next challenge.
 - Positive stress is necessary to daily living.
 - It helps us buckle down and see things through.

- **"Negative stress" is not so healthy. With negative stress we feel a lot of the same things we feel with positive stress, but with a big difference.**
 - They're not temporary.
 - Negative stress never lets you relax, even after your work is done.
 - It feels like things just keep "piling up", and you're unable to catch your breath and "recharge your batteries".

- **"Negative stress" is not only unpleasant, it's unhealthy. Over the long haul, negative stress can cause:**
 - Migraines.
 - High blood pressure.
 - Ulcers.
 - And even a heart attack.

- **But we can combat negative stress through a three-step approach.**
 - Step one is to determine what causes your stress (that's how you know where you need to begin making changes).
 - Step two is to use relaxation techniques (these help drain away the physical and mental manifestations of stress).
 - Step three is to develop a positive attitude about life (that makes everything easier!).

- **Reliable physical indicators of stress include achy muscles, headaches and indigestion.**
 - When you're hit with these symptoms, stress may be the culprit.
 - How you're reacting to things may be the cause.

- **Let's say road traffic makes you crazy because it makes you late for work.**
 - When you're stuck in gridlock, you feel like your neck's in a vise.
 - You've got jets of steam coming out of your ears.

- **What can you do? Try "erasing" the problem. Make a change!**
 - Leave for work a little earlier.
 - Maybe carpooling or taking public transit are solutions.
 - You might benefit from taking a time management course, so you're not always arriving at work at the "last minute".

- **Then there are the big things in life that force you to confront new situations.**
 - Major changes like these can be very stressful.

- **Perhaps you've been transferred to a new facility in another state.**
 - Starting over can be a real challenge.
 - There's finding a place to live.
 - Learning your way around town.
 - Getting to know an entirely new set of coworkers.
 - Making new friends.

- **But you can lessen the impact of these changes.**
 - Simply focus on the little; familiar things that have always brought you pleasure.
 - This helps keep stress to manageable levels.

- **If you enjoy cooking, prepare some of your favorite recipes.**
 - If you are a runner or you enjoy walking, start doing a circuit around your new neighborhood.
 - If you are a movie buff, treat yourself to some of your old favorites at home, or find out what's playing nearby.

- **It's not important what you do, but that you enjoy doing it, and are relieving your stress at the same time.**
 - It's when problems grow to unmanageable levels that you've reached what's called "stress overload".
 - In these situations, you may have so many things to think about that you lose sight of what you should deal with first, and even how to deal with it.

- **That's when you should remember that there are some things in life that you simply can't control.**
 - Be realistic.
 - Eliminate them from your to-do list.
- **Don't put unreasonable pressure on yourself, and don't try to do more than you're capable of.**
 - That's just setting yourself up for failure, and greater stress.
 - You can't do better than your best!
- **Don't punish yourself for your mistakes.**
 - Learn from them instead.
- **Don't take criticism personally.**
 - It's usually meant to help you do a better job.
- **The next time you feel stressed out, take a moment, step back and examine the situation with a cool head.**
 - You may discover the problems really aren't so bad.
 - Stress always makes things seem worse than they are.
- **Stress can not only tie your muscles up in knots, it can also affect the very way you breathe.**
 - Your breaths become shallow and rapid, almost panicky.
- **You can control this reaction by doing simple deep breathing exercises.**
 - Fold your hands in your lap and sit up straight.
 - Slowly take a deep breath through your nose, relaxing your abdominal muscles so your lungs can fill freely.
 - Then, tighten your lips and blow the breath gradually back out between them.
- **Make a habit of doing deep breathing three or four times throughout the day, or whenever you feel stress.**
 - You'll find it helps!

- **Another way negative stress wears you down is by making it hard for you to think.**
 - Fight back by learning to "clear" your mind.
 - First, loosen your collar and take off your shoes.
 - Then do some deep breathing.
 - Once you find your natural rhythm, think about something that's soothing, like a day in the mountains, or a nice warm bath.

- **Ignore distractions and maintain your concentration.**
 - Be patient with yourself.

- **"Mind clearing" takes a little practice.**
 - But as you get better at it you'll feel better, too.
 - Doing this for just five minutes a day can give you more clarity and energy all day long, and free up your mind to meet that next challenge.

- **Relaxing mentally can be only half the battle. You can use these techniques to calm yourself physically, as well.**
 - First, do your deep breathing and mind clearing.
 - Then focus on some part of your body, such as your arm.
 - By imagining your arm growing warmer, heavier, and looser, you will gradually relax it.
 - Then move on to the other parts of your body and relax each of them in turn.
 - Uniting mind and body in overcoming negative stress will make you feel better inside and out.

- **Feeling strained and achy is a classic early sign of stress.**
 - Combat this muscle tension by doing a few stretching exercises.

- **Here's one for the neck and shoulders.**
 - Carefully turn your head to one side.
 - Hold this for a three count, then turn the other way for another three.
 - Now turn your head back to center.
 - Slowly dip your chin down to your chest, then pull your head back.
 - Repeat this exercise five to ten times.

- **Here's one for the upper back.**
 - Pull the wrist of one arm across to the opposite shoulder.
 - Give it a five count, then do the other arm.

- **To relax and stretch your muscles and keep your mind clear, take regular physical and mental "mini-breaks" throughout the day.**
 - They're quick, easy, and great for fighting off stress overload.

- **"Attitude" has a lot to do with how much we feel "stressed".**
 - You need to beware of developing negative attitudes about anything that you're involved in.
- **Negative attitudes just magnify stress.**
 - Instead, strive to adopt a positive attitude and be optimistic about your life.

- **Start empowering yourself by thinking, "I can do it."**
 - Decide to believe it, and you can make it true.
 - It helps to say it out loud!

- **Tell yourself this before taking up any challenging situation.**
 - Rehearse in your mind how you'll handle the problem.
 - Build your confidence with preparation.

- **You need to be organized about how you approach your tasks as well.**
 - Trying to do everything at once is not only impossible, it's a powerful stress-builder.

- **Draw up a checklist, with priorities, and take care of them one task at a time.**
 - Include alternatives for parts of the plan you think might change.
 - Create options for yourself so something doesn't blindside you.
 - Touch base with anyone else involved and invite them to contribute.

- **Check off each goal on your list as you accomplish it, and give yourself credit when credit is due.**
 - Congratulate yourself on the progress you make!
- **You may know other people who have triumphed over stress themselves, but you might not be aware of it.**
 - Don't be afraid to ask your coworkers, friends and family about how they've learned to handle stress.
 - They may surprise you with how helpful their suggestions can be.
- **You can keep your stress levels down by using a positive attitude to help you move toward a positive lifestyle.**
 - Staying healthy and "in shape" improves your ability to manage all types of challenges.
 - An aerobic workout strengthens your heart and lungs.
- **Get yourself healthy through exercise like jogging, biking, basketball.**
 - Something where you'll work up a sweat and increase your heart rate for at least half an hour at a time, three or four times a week.
- **When your work is done, reward yourself by shifting out of high gear.**
 - You will have earned the right to slow down and relax.
 - Make sure you do it.
- **And get to sleep on time!**
 - If your body fails to get the rest it needs, your energy level will take a nosedive, and so will the way you feel.

- **Physical problems only magnify stress. Good health relieves it.**
 - So make a habit of getting regular check-ups from your doctor, and paying attention to what they say.
 - They may suggest you work on improving your eating habits.
 - Good nutrition and a low salt diet will also strengthen your defenses against negative stress.

- **Finally, remember that simply talking about your problems can be one of the most effective tools for combating stress.**
 - If talking to a friend or coworker isn't enough, try to get some counseling.
 - There may be resources available right in your community.

- **Try an online search for "counseling services" and your ZIP code.**
 - Or talk to your doctor.
 - Your company may offer confidential counseling services, as well.
 - Sometimes simply asking for help is the best course of action.

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- **Stress is not something you have to live with. There are so many practical and effective ways to relieve it.**

- **Identify the situations that cause you stress, then work to eliminate them by making positive changes in your life.**

- **Practice relaxation techniques, like deep breathing, clearing your mind, and focused positive imaging.**

- **Do stretching exercises to loosen tense muscles.**

- **Maintain a positive attitude about life and work toward a healthier lifestyle.**

- **Finally, learn to talk about your problems.**
- **Stress happens. That's life, and that's work. But you don't have to let it take over.**