

JUST THE FACTS-COPING WITH STRESS

What is Stress?

“Stress” is a term people often use to describe a feeling of pressure, strain, or tension. People often say that they are “under stress” or feel “stressed out” when they are dealing with challenging situations or events. In this handout, we will talk about how relatives and the person in NAVIGATE can all cope more effectively with stress. People who have developed psychosis are often stressed. Furthermore, relatives with a loved one with a psychotic illness often experience high levels of stress, and this stress can impact negatively on the ill relative. Persons who develop psychosis seem to have better outcomes if their families find positive ways to deal with stress—so good stress management becomes important from everybody in the family.

- Everyone encounters stressful situations.
- Sometimes the stress comes from something positive (like a new job, new apartment, or new relationship) and sometimes from something negative (like being bored, having an argument with someone, or being the victim of crime).
- According to the stress-vulnerability model, stress can lead to an increase in symptoms and is associated with relapse.
- You can develop strategies to help you cope better in stressful situations.
- Family members may be able to help the relative in NAVIGATE deal with stress effectively.

One in five people report some problem with stress.

Questions:

- Describe the last time you felt stressed. What was that like? How did you feel? When was the last time you saw your relative in the NAVIGATE program under stress? How could you tell? How did the stress affect his/her symptoms?

What makes family members feel stressed?
What makes the relative in NAVIGATE feel stressed?

- Different people find different things stressful.
 - For example, some people enjoy going to a party and meeting new people; others find it makes them nervous.
- Knowing what a person finds personally stressful will help him/her cope better.
- There are two main types of stress: significant life events and daily hassles.
- Significant life events refer to experiences such as moving, getting married, the death of a loved one, or having a baby. Some life events are more stressful than others; for example, getting a divorce is usually more stressful than changing jobs. Importantly, even positive life events (like having a baby or getting a new job) can be stressful.

Life Events Checklist

Put a check mark next to each event that you have experienced in the past year. If the relative in NAVIGATE is not attending the session, circle the stressors he/she experienced in the past year.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moving | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting married | <input type="checkbox"/> New boyfriend or girlfriend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New baby | <input type="checkbox"/> Broke up with a boyfriend
or girlfriend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce or separation | <input type="checkbox"/> Went on a diet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Injury | <input type="checkbox"/> New responsibilities at work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illness | <input type="checkbox"/> No place to live |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New job | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of a job | <input type="checkbox"/> Stopped smoking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inheriting or winning money | <input type="checkbox"/> New responsibilities at home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking or using street
drugs caused problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Injury or illness of a loved
one | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a loved one | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Victim of a crime | |

- Total number of life events checked off for you
 Total number of life events checked off for the relative in NAVIGATE

Moderate stress= 1 event
High stress= 2-3 events;
Very high stress= more than 3 events

"Daily hassles" are the small daily stresses of everyday life that can add up if they occur over time.

Daily Hassles Checklist

Place a check mark next to each event that experienced in the past week: Circle the hassles your relative in NAVIGATE experienced in the past week if he/she is not attending the session.

- Not enough money for necessities
- Not enough money to spend on leisure
- Crowded living situation
- Crowded public transportation
- Long drives or traffic back ups
- Feeling rushed at home
- Feeling rushed at work
- Arguments at home
- Arguments at work
- Doing business with unpleasant people (sales clerks, waiters/ waitresses, transit clerks, toll booth collectors)
- Noisy situation at home
- Noisy situation at work
- Not enough privacy at home
- Minor medical problems
- Lack of order or cleanliness at home
- Lack of order or cleanliness at work
- Unpleasant chores at home
- Unpleasant chores at work
- Living in a dangerous neighborhood
- Other: _____

___ Total number of life events checked off for you

___ Total number of life events checked off for the relative in NAVIGATE

Moderate stress= 1 or 2 daily hassles

High stress= 3-6 daily hassles

Very high stress= more than 6

Questions:

- What is the most stressful life event you have experienced in the past year? How about your relative in NAVIGATE, if he/she is not attending the session?
- What are the most stressful daily hassles you have experienced in the past week? How about your relative in NAVIGATE?

Home Practice Options

Between sessions, most people find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here are some home practice options for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

1. Use the daily hassles checklist to track stressful events over the next week.
2. Go over the life events and daily hassles checklists with a family member or supportive person to identify stressful events. Ask your family member or friend what daily events he or she finds stressful.

Check it out:

- ✓ How could the family talk together about the stressors the family member in NAVIGATE is under if he/she is not attending the sessions?
1. Make a list of questions you can ask that person and practice asking the questions of your relative. Plan ahead so you can address concerns or questions about the level of stress your family member in NAVIGATE is under.

How to recognize stress

- Stress can affect your physical health and emotions as well as your thoughts, behavior, and mood.
- Recognizing your personal signs of stress can help you do something about it.

Use the following checklist to identify your own personal signs of being under stress.

Signs of Stress Checklist

Place a check mark next to each sign that experienced in the past week: Circle the hassles your relative in NAVIGATE experienced in the past week if he/she is not attending the session..

- Headaches
- Sweating
- Increased heart rate
- Back pain
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Increased need for sleep
- Trembling or shaking
- Digestion problems
- Stomach aches
- Dry mouth
- Problems concentrating
- Anger over relatively minor things
- Irritable
- Anxious
- Feeling restless or "keyed up"
- Tearful
- Forgetful
- Prone to accidents
- Using alcohol or drugs (or wanting to)
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Being aware of signs of stress can help you take steps to prevent it from getting worse.

Questions:

- Have you noticed any signs of stress of stress over the last week? What do you do when notice you are under stress? How do other family members recognize that the relative in NAVIGATE is under stress?

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1. Use the signs of stress checklist to track your daily stress over the next week. How many times a week are you feeling stressed? What do you do when you feel stressed?
2. Review signs of stress checklist with your family member in NAVIGATE.

Family Members and Stress

Family conflict can make psychotic symptoms worse. When relatives learn to deal with stress well, this is one way to reduce tension in families and improve the quality of life for the person in NAVIGATE and their loved ones.

Improving stress management is critical for ALL family members.

Strategies to Prevent or Cope with Stress

- Recognizing stressful situations is the first step to preventing and coping with stress.
- By avoiding some stressful situations, you can focus more of your time on enjoying yourself and achieving your goal(s).
- If you can't avoid stressful situations, you can get better at dealing with the stress they cause.

- Most people find it helpful to be familiar with a variety of stress management strategies.

Strategy	Example	I already use	I would like to try
Recognize situations that caused stress in the past	Think of ways to handle stressful situations. If large holidays with your family make you feel tense, try taking short breaks away from the larger group.		
Schedule meaningful activities	Identify activities that reduce stress. For some people, work is meaningful and enjoyable while other people look to volunteering, hobbies, music, or sports.		
Schedule time for relaxation	Take time to relax each day, to refresh your mind and body from the tensions of the day.		
Have a balance in my daily life	Evaluate your activities and determine if too much activity is causing stress. Be sure to leave time for sleep and for restful, relaxing activities.		
Develop my support system	Seek out people who are encouraging and supportive, rather than critical and pressuring.		
Take care of my health	Be sure you are eating well, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and avoiding alcohol or drug abuse to help prevent stress.		
Talk about my feelings	Share positive or stressful feelings with a friend or family member.		
Write down my feelings in a journal	Keep a journal of the positive and negative feelings to avoid bottling up your feelings.		
Avoid being hard on myself. Identify positive features about myself	Create reasonable expectations for yourself, and give yourself credit for your talents and strengths. Identify positive features about yourself and remind yourself of these things when you are feeling stressed.		
Using relaxation techniques	Make a plan to use a relaxation technique such as relaxed breathing, progressive muscle relaxation or imagining a peaceful scene. (see below)		
Using positive self-talk	Develop a short phrase to say to yourself when you feel stressed such as "This is hard, but I can do it," or "If I take this one step at a time, I'll be able to handle it."		

Maintaining my sense of humor	It is hard to feel stressed when you are laughing. Make a list of things that make you laugh and try one the next time you feel stressed.		
Participating in religion or other form of spirituality	Make a plan to participate regularly in a religious or spiritual activity.		
Exercising	Work off your stress by making a plan to exercise regularly.		
Listening to music	Put together a playlist of your favorite songs to listen to when you are feeling stressed.		
Doing artwork or going to see artwork	Make a plan to fit art into your weekly routine. Read an art book or draw pictures.		
Participating in a hobby	Find a hobby you enjoy. Make a plan to try it out with a friend.		
Other:			

Reducing stress in the family can help the relative in NAVIGATE avoid worsening symptoms or a relapse, and help you live a more satisfying life.

Question:

- Which strategies for reducing stress are you most interested in trying?

Home Practice Options

Between sessions, most people in our program find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here are some home practice options for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

1. Identify a stressful situation that may occur over the next week. Select a strategy for preventing stress to try out and make a plan to use it in the coming week. Get supplies if you need them (e.g. a journal, a schedule of church activities). Track how well the strategy works to reduce stress.
2. If the person in NAVIGATE is not in the session, other relatives can ask the relative in the NAVIGATE program which stress management strategy he/she might want to try over the next week. Help him/her make a plan to practice the strategy.

Relaxation Techniques

Using relaxation techniques can be very helpful in coping with stress. Three types of relaxation techniques are described below:

- Relaxed breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Imagining a peaceful scene

Relaxation techniques are most effective when they are practiced on a regular basis. When you are first learning a technique, you usually concentrate on doing the steps according to the instructions. As you become familiar with the instructions, you will be able to concentrate more on the relaxation you are experiencing. Choose one of the following techniques and try practicing it daily. After a week, evaluate whether you think the technique is effective for you.

Relaxed Breathing

The goal of this exercise is to slow down your breathing, especially your exhaling.

Steps:

- Choose a word that you associate with relaxation, such as CALM or RELAX or PEACEFUL.
- Inhale through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. Take normal breaths, not deep ones.
- While you exhale, say the relaxing word you have chosen. Say it very slowly, like this, “c-a-a-a-a-a-l-m” or “r-e-e-e-l-a-a-x.”
- Pause after exhaling before taking your next breath. If it’s not too distracting, count to four before inhaling each new breath.
- Repeat the entire sequence 10 to 15 times

Muscle Relaxation

The goal of this technique is to gently stretch your muscles to reduce stiffness and tension. The exercises start at your head and work down to your feet. You can do these exercises while sitting in a chair.

Steps:

- *Shoulder shrugs.* Lift both shoulders in a shrugging motion. Try to touch your ears with your shoulders. Let your shoulders drop down after each shrug. Repeat 3-5 times.
- *Overhead arm stretches**. Raise both arms straight above your head. Interlace your fingers, like you’re making a basket, with your palms facing down (towards the floor). Stretch your arms towards the ceiling. Then, keeping your fingers interlaced, rotate your palms to face upwards (towards the ceiling). Stretch towards the ceiling. Repeat 3-5 times.
- *Stomach tension.* Pull your stomach muscles toward your back as tight as you can tolerate. Feel the tension and hold on to it for ten seconds. Then let go of the muscles and let your stomach relax, further and further. Then focus on the release from the tension. Notice the heavy yet comfortable sensation in your stomach.
- *Knee raises.* Reach down and grab your right knee with one or both hands. Pull your knee up towards your chest (as close to your chest as is comfortable). Hold your knee there for a few seconds, before returning your foot to the floor. Reach

down and grab your left knee with one or both hands and bring it up towards your chest. Hold it there for a few seconds. Repeat the sequence 3-5 times.

- *Foot and ankle rolls.* Lift your feet and stretch your legs out. Rotate your ankles and feet, 3-5 times in one direction, then 3-5 times in the other direction.

*If it is not comfortable to do step #2 with your arms overhead, try it with your arms reaching out in front of you.

Imagining a Peaceful Scene

The goal of this technique is to “take yourself away” from stress and picture yourself in a more relaxed, calm situation.

Steps:

1. Choose a scene that you find peaceful, calm and restful. If you have trouble thinking of a scene, consider the following:
 - at the beach
 - on a walk in the woods
 - on a park bench
 - on a mountain path
 - in a canoe or sailboat
 - in a meadow
 - traveling on a train
 - in a cabin
 - beside a river
 - next to a waterfall
 - in a high rise apartment overlooking a large city
 - riding a bicycle
 - on a farm
2. After choosing a peaceful scene, imagine as many details as possible, using all your senses.
3. What does the scene look like? What are the colors? Is it light or dark? What shapes are in the scene? If it's a nature scene, what kinds of trees or flowers do you see? What animals? If it's a city scene, what kind of buildings? What kind of vehicles?
4. What sounds are in your peaceful scene? Can you hear water or the sounds of waves? Are there sounds from animals or birds? From the breeze? From people?

5. What could you feel with your sense of touch? Are there textures? Is it cool or warm? Can you feel a breeze?
6. What smells are there in your peaceful scene? Could you smell flowers? The smell of the ocean? The smell of food cooking?
7. Disregard any stressful thoughts and keep your attention on the peaceful scene.
8. Allow at least five minutes for this relaxation technique.

Home Practice Options

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1. Choose at least one of the relaxation techniques and try it out at least 1 time each day for 5-10 minutes for 1 week. Try building up to 20 minutes per day.

How can I develop a plan to cope with my stress?

- In this handout you have identified stressful situations, signs of stress, strategies for preventing stress, and strategies for coping with stress.
- The following form can help you put this information together as an individual plan for coping with stress.

Individual Plan for Coping with Stress

Stressful situations to be aware of:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Signs that I am under stress:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My strategies for preventing stress:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My strategies for coping with stress:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Home Practice Options

Between sessions, most people in our program find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here are some home practice options for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

1. Share your plan for coping with stress with a family member or support person. Ask that person to help you practice one of your strategies for preventing or coping with stress over the next week. If the person is part of your plan, practice the coping strategy with him or her.
2. If your relative in NAVIGATE did not attend the session, offer to help the family member in NAVIGATE practice one of his/her strategies for preventing or coping with stress over the next week. If he/she is willing, help him/her complete an "Individual Plan for Coping with Stress" form.

Summary Points Just the Facts-Coping with Stress

- *"Stress" is a term people often use to describe a feeling of pressure, strain, or tension.*
- *Persons with psychosis seems to do better if their relatives exhibit fewer signs of distress*
- *One in five people report some problem with stress.*
- *Life events and daily hassles are both sources of stress.*
- *Being aware of signs of stress can help someone take steps to prevent it from getting worse.*
- *Preventing stress can help someone avoid worsening symptoms or a having a relapse.*
- *Coping more effectively with stress allows one to focus on goals and important areas in one's life.*