



Address Your Stress

Facilitator Guide

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT
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Address Your Stress

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:

-  (computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;
-  (hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.

*Essential class content is noted in **bold**.*

All class handouts are available for download on the [YRRP website](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout) at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified as online only in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class discusses the basics of stress: what stress is and how stress can affect our minds and bodies. Participants will have the opportunity to practice the following coping techniques: relaxation breathing and guided imagery.

Stage:

Pre-deployment, During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

If you have additional information or updated research to be considered for inclusion in this class, please send your suggestions to yrrp@psu.edu.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Projector

- Laptop
- Pens
- Note Cards

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
 1. Address Your Stress
 2. Identifying Stress
 3. Objectives
 4. Stress
 5. Real and Perceived Stressors
 6. Good Stress
 7. Cascade of Responses
 8. Stress Busting Strategies
 9. Guided Imagery
 10. Guided Imagery Steps
 11. Countering Stressful Thoughts
 12. Recognizing Stressful Thoughts
 13. Keep a Thought Record
 14. Learn About Your Thoughts
 15. Counter Your Stressful Thoughts
 16. Review of Objectives
 17. Review of Key Points
 18. Address Your Stress
- Handouts
 1. Thought Record
 2. Stress Resource Guide (online only)



Exercises:

1. Identifying Stress
2. Guided Imagery
3. Keep a Thought Record

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify when stress impacts well-being.
2. Identify strategies and techniques to address stress.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Address Your Stress

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

Welcome to the Address Your Stress class. I am excited about this class because the information we talk about can help you reduce the stress you feel in your life. **Everyone experiences stress, and most people want to handle their stress better.**

SHOW Slide 2: Identifying Stress

EXERCISE 1: Identifying Stress

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to identify their stressors and coping strategies. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

Let's begin by answering these four questions:

1. **What causes stress in your life?**
2. **What makes you feel off balance?**
3. **How do you know you are stressed?**
4. **What do you do to cope or deal with stress?**

Please write your answers on the note cards on your table. Think about stress you have had or are currently having as you answer each question. Any questions before you begin?

STOP the participants after 5 minutes; PAUSE for responses after each of the following questions.

What did you come up with for what causes stress in your life or makes you feel off balance?

What did you come up with for how do you know you are stressed?

What did you come up with for what to do to cope or deal with stress?

Keep your note card handy and the answers you gave in mind as we continue through the class. Think about the stresses you want to handle better in your life.

SHOW Slide 3: Objectives

Let's go over our objectives. At the end of this class, you will be able to do the following:

1. **Identify when stress impacts well-being.**
2. **Identify strategies and techniques to address stress.**

We will now explore what stress is and how to cope with it.

Stress and Stressor Defined

SHOW Slide 4: Stress

Since we identified what causes you stress in your life, how would you define stress?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: when things become too much; overloaded; too much pressure; worry; anxiety)

CLICK to bring up the definition of stress.

Stress is the response we have when life challenges seem greater than our ability to handle them (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Stressors cause our stress. We are exposed to stressors every day (Chiang, Turiano, Mroczek, & Miller, 2018; Joo, Chai, Jun, & Almeida, 2020), and the experience of stress is common (Keller et al., 2012; Saad, 2017). You identified your own stressors earlier when you pinpointed what causes you stress.

Stressors can have a negative impact on our bodies, minds, and emotions. Sometimes, stressors impact more than one life area, which can be difficult (Blaxton, Bergeman, & Wang, 2020; Chandola, Brunner & Marmot, 2006; Chiang et al., 2018; Eckenrode, 1984).

SHOW Slide 5: Real and Perceived Stressors

Stressors refer to events and experiences we encounter; stressors can be real occurrences, or they can be the result of how we interpret a situation. **Whether stressors are real or perceived, they can still disrupt our balance** (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Keyes, Hatzenbuehler, & Hasin, 2011; Vasunilashorn, Lynch, Gleib, Weinstein, & Goldman, 2014).

Because we cannot control everything that happens to us, this class focuses on how we perceive what is happening to us. Perceived stress is subjective and reflects our appraisal of a scenario or situation (Cohen et al., 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Vasunilashorn et al., 2014). Perceived stress is our interpretation of what something may mean. **We may read more into a circumstance than is warranted and then react to it as though our interpretation is real.**

For example, a perceived stressor might be “My husband is late; he must have been in a car accident.”

The husband could be late for any number of reasons. Maybe, he cannot find his keys!

SHOW Slide 6: Good Stress

We just discussed how some stress is unavoidable; however, did you know some stress can be good for us?

In fact, when we feel somewhat stressed, we usually perform at a better-than-normal level. **Moderate stress, especially when we perceive it as a challenge or as something that can make us perform better, can keep us sharp, alert, and energized** (Boswell, Olson-Buchanan, & LePine, 2004; Sheng, Wang, Hong, Zhu, & Zhang, 2019), **and moderate lifetime stress might make us more resilient** (Dooley, Slavich, Moreno, & Bower, 2017; Seery, Leo, Lupien, Kondrak, & Almonte, 2013). Good stress can drive us to perform heroic acts; ace a job interview; reach a personal goal; or make a positive life change, like getting married or having a child. **However, too much stress, especially in the form of loss or threat, is different, and this can be harmful for our well-being** (Boswell et al., 2004; Felix et al., 2019; Keller et al., 2012; LePine, LePine, & Jackson, 2004; Xu et al., 2019).

SHOW Slide 7: Cascade of Responses

How do you know when you are stressed? What happens to your body when you are stressed?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: angry; agitated; overly emotional; withdrawn; very little emotion; tense; nervous)

We can feel that something is happening to our bodies when we are stressed.

The stress response involves multiple reactions in the body. Our body changes when we are exposed to stressors that we do not think we can handle. What might surprise you is how big of an impact stress can have on the body (Birkett, Johnson, & Gelety, 2017; Bloomfield, McCutcheon, Kempton, Freeman, & Howes, 2019; Gianaros & Wager, 2015; Zimmer, Buttlar, Halbeisen, Walther, & Domes, 2019).

For example, if you fear speaking in front of others and you are faced with performing this task, your body will set off a chain of reactions. Your breathing may increase, your heart rate may increase, and your palms may sweat. You may even feel a sense of danger. This sense of fear is your nervous system reacting to stress. Stress also turns off the bodily processes that help us relax and feel calm.

Stress also affects your immune system. **Prolonged stress, real or perceived, wears us down** (Cohen et al., 2012; Miller, Chen, & Zhou, 2007). Repeated exposure to stress makes us more vulnerable to colds, flu, and other sicknesses (Cohen, Tyrrell, & Smith, 1991; Segerstrom & Miller, 2004). It also can diminish our energy. **When we are under stress, our ability to recall information over time may decrease, we are more likely to have negative moods, and our daily chores may seem more difficult to handle** (Hidalgo, Pulopulos, & Salvador, 2019; Marin et al., 2011; McEwen & Sapolsky, 1995; Santiago et al., 2016).

There is a real cascade of bodily events. So, what do you do?

Approaches to Managing Stress

SHOW Slide 8: Stress Busting Strategies

The following are **stress busting strategies** that may help you handle stress:

- **Journal about your stress and worry** (Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002; Whitney & Smith, 2015)
- **Take the perspective of a detached observer** (Moser et al., 2017; Park, Ayduk, & Kross, 2016).

- **Develop a gratitude practice** (Matvienko-Sikar & Dockray, 2017).
- **Focus on the present** rather than the past or future (Donald, Atkins, Parker, Christie, & Ryan, 2016; Nasser & Przeworski, 2017).
- **Do a physical activity** (Asmundson et al., 2013; Flueckiger, Lieb, Meyer, Witthauer, & Mata, 2016).
- **Talk to a friend** (Lee et al., 2019).
- **Look for something potentially positive in the situation** (Kivity & Huppert, 2016; Kudinova et al., 2016).
- **Slow down your breathing** (Iglesias et al., 2005; Ma et al., 2017).
- **Relax your body** (progressive muscle relaxation) (Roozbahani, Nourian, Saatchi, & Moslemi, 2017).
- **Do something good for someone else** (Han, Kim, & Burr, 2018; Raposa, Laws, & Ansell, 2016).

For a description of these stress busting strategies, download Handout 2: Stress Resource Guide on the [YRRP website](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout) at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

SHOW Slide 9: Guided Imagery

As mentioned, one stress reducing strategy is to relax your body. Guided imagery is a stress management technique that can help you do just that. Guided imagery allows you to use your imagination to create a sense of relaxation in your body and mind. **Just as thoughts of real or imaginary situations can trigger stress, relaxing thoughts can promote relaxation** (Apóstolo & Kolcaba, 2009; Barry et al., 2017; Nasiri, Akbari, Tagharrobi, & Tabatabaee, 2018).

SHOW Slide 10: Guided Imagery Steps

EXERCISE 2: Guided Imagery

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to learn a technique that they can use in times of stress. It is important to take your time going through this exercise so that participants get the full benefit. Use a slow and calm voice throughout the exercise. Take long pauses between each sentence of instruction to the participants. If you would like to use any audio, consider using one of the mobile apps listed on Handout 2. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

To use guided imagery, **find a comfortable position, relax, and concentrate on your breathing. Make sure you keep an open attitude.** Then, **think of a visual theme, such as a beach, forest, or your family, and allow your mind to develop the image**

using all of your senses. In guided imagery, you create calming and relaxing images in your mind. **The key is to see the images in great detail and notice everything about them. Choose images that are personally meaningful, positive, and detailed enough to engage your mind and body. Use your senses to be creative in the details.** You can practice guided imagery almost anywhere.

Let's try this technique together. We start with relaxation breathing. **Loosen your abdomen, and breathe through your nose with your eyes closed. Notice all the physical sensations associated with breathing.** The sound. The feeling. Relaxed breath. Soft tummy.

GIVE participants a minute to begin a rhythmic breathing pattern.

Now, select the image you wish to see in your mind. Something peaceful. Serene. Calming. Meaningful to you.

GIVE participants a minute to formulate an image.

Once you have that image in mind, begin to sharpen the image in your mind. See the colors. Feel the textures. Connect smells to the image. Are you alone? With a loved one?

GIVE participants 2 minutes to formulate an image.

Now, bring the image into even sharper detail. Note everything about the image. Where are you? A new place? A familiar place? What do you smell? Perhaps flowers. Salt water. Food. If the sun is shining, imagine the feeling of warmth on your skin. Maybe you are expecting a cool breeze. If there are other people, see their faces in greater clarity. Their expressions. Are they talking? Hear their voices as if they are with you right now.

What are you doing in the image? Whatever you are doing, imagine that you are calm. At rest. Peaceful. You have no cares at this time. No pressures. No kids to take care of. No errands to run. It is safe. Secure. This is your time outside of ordinary time.

Notice everything about where you are right now because I want you to be able to return to this place whenever you choose. Whenever you need it. Whenever you need a place of calm and peace.

Notice how peaceful you feel right now. You are going to carry that feeling forward as you begin to focus on my voice in the present. Notice any noises or distractions in the room right now. Allow your attention to move toward the room. My voice. Open your eyes. Keep the feeling of calm with you. Remember it in

detail. Now you are completely present in the moment.

PAUSE for responses after each of the following questions.

What did you notice?

How was this experience for you?

What kinds of details did you think of?

Great work!

SHOW Slide 11: Countering Stressful Thoughts

When you are stressed, you also tend to have more negative thoughts and feelings.

The good news is you can become very good at controlling those negative thoughts. Today, we are going to learn another technique that can help you identify and counter your negative thoughts.

SHOW Slide 12: Recognizing Stressful Thoughts

There are many kinds of negative thoughts (de Oliveira et al., 2015; Kaplan et al., 2017). Here are some key categories of negative, stressful thoughts. Some of these categories may sound familiar to you. Let's go through examples of each so we can identify our own negative thinking.

In all-or-nothing thinking, everything is either black or white, always or never, perfect or a failure. Here is an example of an all-or-nothing scenario: John met Susan casually at a friend's party. He thought they had a good time, so he called her, but he got her voicemail. He left a message for Susan but did not hear back from her. He begins to think that things must not have gone well at the party, and John thinks, "I am a failure. I have nothing to offer Susan or anybody else."

Overgeneralizing thoughts involve clinging to a bad experience and expecting the negative experience to hold true forever. Here is an example: John thinks that because Susan did not call him back she does not want to go out with him. Therefore, John thinks, "No one ever wants to go out with me. I will never find the right person, so why bother."

Diminishing the positive involves not counting positive experiences. Susan finally does call John. She tells John that she was out of town for a few days because she recently got a job promotion at work. John immediately congratulates her. Susan tells John, "It was nothing, I just got lucky."

Jumping to conclusions is when we make a few, quick conclusions without considering the evidence. Here is an example: John jumped to conclusions when Susan did not call him back right away. John thought, “Susan hasn’t called me back, she must not like me.”

Catastrophizing is negative thinking that involves expecting the worst-case scenario. Here is an example: Susan thinks, “I missed John’s call. He’ll never take me on a date now.”

Should or shouldn’t thinking involves holding strict standards that no one can live up to. These types of thoughts often make you feel guilty. Here is an example: Susan thinks, “I should have called John back right after I heard his voicemail.”

Labeling is when we attach labels to ourselves based on our self-perceived shortcomings (e.g., calling yourself a loser or stupid). Here is an example: John thinks, “I am such a loser. No wonder Susan didn’t call me back.”

Personalization involves taking responsibility for things outside our control. Here is an example: John might think to himself, “It’s my fault Susan didn’t call me back.”

Can you think of any other examples of repeated negative thoughts?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: “I should have exercised today”; “I will never be anything”; “I cannot do anything right”; “No one cares about me”; “She/He is mad at me”; “I am not good enough”; “I have let people down”; “What is wrong with me?”)

Those are great examples! Now that we know about the types of negative thoughts we have, let’s learn a way to better understand our pattern of negative thoughts.

 **SHOW Slide 13: Keep a Thought Record**

 **EXERCISE 3: Keep a Thought Record**

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to engage in the process of developing a thought record. Participants will complete the first four columns for one or more rows. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

To better control our worry, we need to understand it. Keeping a Thought Record can help us do this.

A Thought Record allows us to keep track of our negative and worrisome thoughts (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979; de Oliveira et al., 2012; Rozek, Smith, & Simons, 2018).

Turn to **Handout 1: Thought Record**. I would like everyone to list at least one worrisome or negative thought they have had today and fill in the first four columns.

PAUSE to give participants time to fill in a thought.

Great, we will come back to this in a few minutes.

Ideally, you should **keep this Thought Record for 2 weeks. Each time you have a worrisome thought, add it to the Thought Record.** You do not need a lot of detail, just list the basics. In 2 weeks, you will have a very good picture of your Thought Record. **You can begin to examine patterns in your thoughts.** For example, **you can answer questions like: How frequently do I worry? When do I worry? What do I usually worry about? How strong are my feelings of worry?**

Keeping a Thought Record does not increase your negative thoughts or make you worry more. In fact, it starts to decrease your negative thoughts and worry because you are taking control of what has been out of control. Self-monitoring, like with a Thought Record, is a useful tool for helping to recognize and correct negative patterns of behavior (Moberg, Niles, & Beermann, 2019).

SHOW Slide 14: Learn About Your Thoughts

The alternative to negative and worrisome thoughts begins with relying on evidence and not emotion. Talk back to your negative thoughts. Do not just accept worry, but question it. Grill your thoughts with questions (de Oliveira et al., 2012; Moberg et al., 2019).

The following questions are examples:

- When do I worry?
- What is the focus of my worry?
- Are there themes?
- What is going on when I worry?
- Who is around when I worry?
- What do I get out of worrying?
- What am I predicting will happen?
- **What is the evidence against what I am predicting?**
- **What is the best/worst that can happen?**
- **What might be an alternative view of the situation?**
- What is most likely to happen?

- If someone I cared about had the same worry, what advice would I give him or her?

Let's see what else we can do to counter stressful thoughts.

 **SHOW Slide 15: Counter Your Stressful Thoughts**

 **EXERCISE 3: Keep a Thought Record (Continued)**

Facilitator Note:

Handout 1 will be used. Participants will complete the last two columns. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

With these questions in mind, you are going to develop a strategy or a minimizer. You are going to work on taking even more control over your worrisome thoughts. This time, after you note your worry and rate how much it bothers you, you are going to come up with thoughts that run completely counter to the worrisome thoughts.

GO through the example on the slide.

This is an example of a Thought Record. Under the column labeled "Date/Time" it says 3/17/20, 5:30pm - the date and time the stressful thought began to occur. The second column states the situation that caused the stressful thought. For example, my husband is late. In the third column, record the stressful thought that comes to mind. For example, my husband is late; therefore, he must have been in an accident (perceived stressor). In column four, rate the stressful thought and label the emotion. For example, this situation scored as an eight, and the emotion was labeled as worry. This rating was based on a 10-point scale in which one represents the lowest amount of worry, and 10 represents the highest. In the fifth column, record minimizers, which are items that can help counter stressful thoughts. For example, minimizers for husband being late include the following: he is a good driver, rush hour traffic, stopped at the store, stuck in a meeting, he has been late before, and dinner is late anyway. The sixth column is used to re-rate the amount of worry after determining minimizers to counter the stressful thought. In this example, the amount of worry dropped from an eight to a five.

Could anyone share an example of a real worry situation he or she currently has and a rating (or a past worry that you were able to work through)? Can we think of any minimizers to help address this thought?

PAUSE for responses.

ASK the original volunteer. How would you rate this situation the second time?

Remember that countering becomes habit! It can be very scary to begin the process of countering our anxious thinking. Sometimes, the second score even goes up, and this is not surprising. **If we use this minimizing process on a regular basis, we may be able to reduce our negative thoughts and worry scores.**

Any questions on countering negative thoughts?

PAUSE for responses.

Summary

SHOW Slide 16: Review of Objectives

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **When does stress impact well-being?** *PAUSE for responses.*
(Possible answers: when the stressor is relevant to our well-being and we believe that we cannot handle the stressor; persistent over time; disrupts our balance; blocks our personal goals; impacts self-esteem, morals, values or sense of identity; impacts our body – angry, overly emotional, withdrawn, nervous, zaps energy, sicknesses, wears us down, and diminishes our energy)
2. **What are some techniques you can use to address stress?** *PAUSE for responses.*
(Possible answers: countering stressful thoughts; guided imagery; keeping a journal; limit worry to a specific time of day; do a physical activity; talk to a friend; focus on the present)

SHOW Slide 17: Review of Key Points

Remember, stress can be either real or perceived and can disrupt our balance. Stress can impact our bodily systems. Practice coping strategies and relaxation techniques to help you manage stress.

There are many strategies for managing stress other than the ones that we learned today. Some additional techniques and free useful resources (Stress Resource Guide) are included on the [YRRP website](http://www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout) at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. **Not all techniques work for everyone. Find one that you like and works for you.**

Some stress is good, but too much is not good. **If at any time you feel that stress is beyond your ability to cope, you should seek help.**

SHOW Slide 18: Address Your Stress

What questions do you have about anything we discussed today?

PAUSE for responses.

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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