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Customizable Soft-Skills Courseware

Managing Stress



Instructor Guide

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Instructional design and learning philosophy

We are committed to providing the best core-skills content possible for Instructor-Led Training (ILT). The following principles are applied in the development of programs:

Sound Instructional Design

All course content is developed using a variety of research techniques. These include:

- Brainstorming sessions with target audience
- Library research
- Online research
- Customer research (focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Subject Matter Experts (SME)
- Interviews with trainers

Expert instructional designers create imaginative and innovative solutions for your training needs through the development of powerful instructional elements. These include:

- Learning objectives — effective tools for managing, monitoring and evaluating training
- Meaningfulness — connects the topic to the students' past, present, and future
- Appropriate organization of essential ideas — helps students focus on what they need to know in order to learn
- Modeling techniques — demonstrate to students how to act and solve problems
- Active application — the cornerstone to learning — helps students immediately apply what they have learned to a real-life situation
- Consistency — creates consistent instructions and design to help students learn and retain new information
- Accelerated learning techniques — create interactive, hands-on involvement to accommodate different learning styles

Application of Adult Learning Styles

Adults learn best by incorporating their personal experiences with training and by applying what they learn to real-life situations. Our experienced instructional designers incorporate a variety of accelerated learning techniques, role-plays, simulations, discussions, and lectures within each course. This ensures that the learning will appeal to all learning styles and will be retained.

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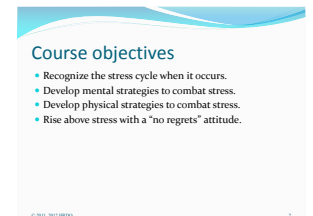
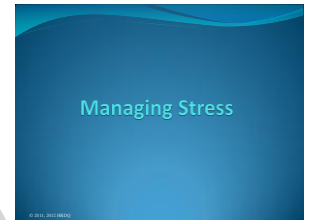
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Course objectives

Successful completion of this course will increase your knowledge and ability to:

- ◇ Identify the major stressors in your life
- ◇ Establish your optimal stress level
- ◇ Recognize the elements of the stress cycle
- ◇ Avoid “catastrophizing” and other unproductive self-talk
- ◇ Discuss the effects of mood on stress and learn to cope when in a bad mood
- ◇ Recognize when extreme moods require professional help
- ◇ Implement strategies for saying no diplomatically
- ◇ Communicate effectively, even when stressed
- ◇ Deal with people who stress you out
- ◇ Incorporate mental strategies for managing stress
- ◇ Integrate physical strategies for managing stress
- ◇ Develop problem-solving skills to reduce stress
- ◇ Reduce stress by developing a perspective of gratitude
- ◇ Live with a “no regrets” attitude

Discuss course objectives.



Chapter One



IDENTIFYING YOUR STRESSORS

Assessing your stress

Read each statement and rate its relevance in your life on a scale of 1–5 (1=very relevant to my situation and 5=not relevant at all to my life situation).

Statement	Rating
1. Noise distracts me from the task at hand.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Change is a constant at work/home.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I'm exposed to environmental pollutants.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I live/work in a building with poor ventilation, lighting, heating, cooling, etc.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I'm expected to do more and more with less and less.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I'm bored, unchallenged or idle for periods of time.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I experience frequent changes in technology, systems, expectations, or demands.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I set high goals and expectations for myself.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Decisions that affect me are made without my input.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I'm expected to achieve success.	1 2 3 4 5
11. I'm living the life I want to live.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I have control over my workload and how I spend my time.	1 2 3 4 5
13. I've been given responsibilities without the training to fulfill them.	1 2 3 4 5
14. Thoughts of my work intrude on my personal time and thoughts of my personal life intrude into my workday.	1 2 3 4 5
15. My performance depends on other people's cooperation.	1 2 3 4 5
16. I often wish I were anywhere else besides where I am.	1 2 3 4 5

Now that you have identified the most common sources of your stress, you will assess the level of the stress. The point of this assessment is to zero in on subtle issues that may be affecting participants' stress levels and also to get them to begin to look at what they can and cannot control.

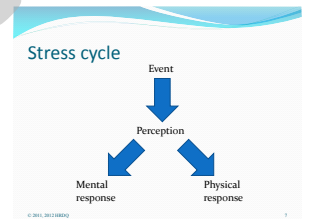
1. Allow several minutes for participants to complete.
2. Then spend a few minutes reviewing as a group.
3. Ask: "Of the statements you gave a five to, which ones are under your control and which ones are out of your control?"
4. Circle the items you can control and put an X on the ones you can't control.

Reviewing the stress cycle

No matter what the trigger is, stress follows a basic pattern. The stress cycle begins with an event. This is followed by your perception of that event and lastly, your mental and physical responses.

Emphasize that the event itself is not the stressor; it is your reaction to it that causes stress. This will be illustrated on the next page, the section on perception.

Your perceptions fuel mental and physical responses, which are discussed in detail in the next pages.



Have participants complete their own stress cycles using the empty boxes at the bottom of the page.

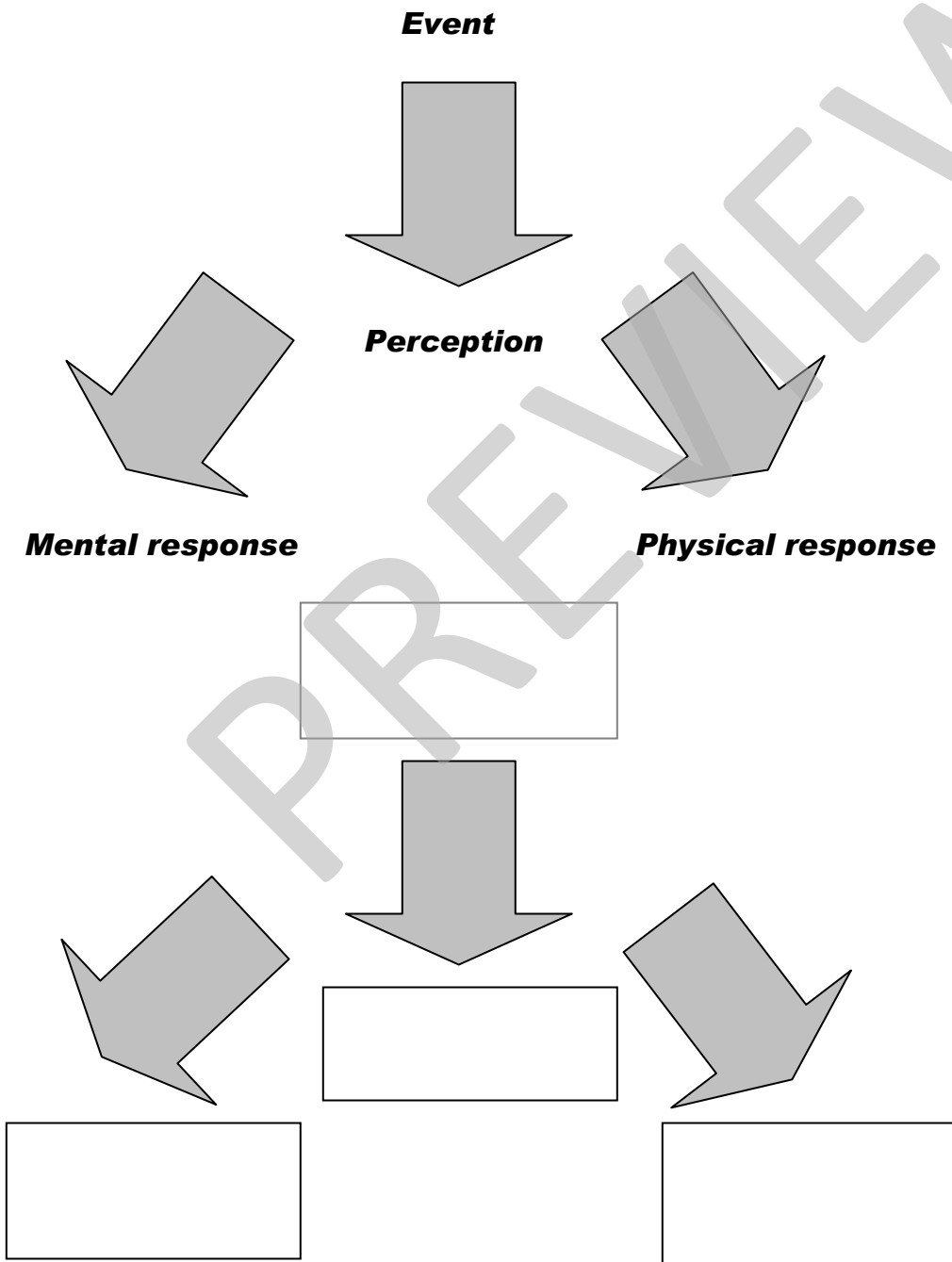
Use your own example or the following to get them thinking.

Event: Boss yells at you.

Perception: Boss wants to fire you.

Physical response: Heart pounds, hands go numb, face flushed.

Mental response: "He is unfair and never listens to my side of the story."



Defining mental responses to stress

Most people assume that the only mental response to stress is negative. However, positive responses are possible and appropriate as well.

Negative responses	Positive responses
Worry	Security
Fear	Confidence
Frustration	Composure
Anger	Calmness



Your perception is communicated to you through your self-talk. Ask: Which is more automatic, negative or positive? Most people will answer negative.

Individuals can choose to respond positively or negatively. Self-talk is defined as the mental responses that play in our head. Your perception is communicated through your self-talk. In other words, it is what we say to ourselves about the event. Self-talk can be either positive or negative. Examples of each are listed below.

Using negative self-talk

Rigid vocabulary can be thought of as polarized thinking: things are either one way or the other; there is no middle ground. This type of thinking is unproductive when trying to minimize stress.

- ◇ Should, shouldn't, can't, must, always, never, everyone
- ◇ "Why me?" and "This is awful."

Three types of habitual thinking typically are used when a person is under stress.

1. Obsessing — unable to let go.
2. Overanalyzing — unable to think about any solutions.
3. Catastrophizing — where one stressful event spills over to the rest of your life and makes everything seem awful.

Understanding how moods affect stress

When you are in a good mood, life is great and stressors seem more manageable. On the other hand, when you are in a bad mood, minor annoyances aggravate you and stress sometimes overwhelms you. The truth is that life is seldom quite as bad as it looks when you are in a bad mood. Complete this self-assessment to gain awareness about moods.

Mood self-assessment

1. How aware are you of your moods?

- very somewhat very little

2. Are others aware of your bad mood before you are?

- yes no

3. What triggers your bad mood?

4. When you are in a bad mood, how do you act?

- irritable impatient sarcastic critical
 cynical indecisive rush to judgment

5. When you are in a bad mood, what seems different?

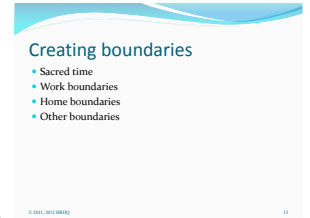
- molehills become mountains
 people are unreasonable; slight criticisms become huge insults
 work or home conditions become unbearable
 impersonal realities such as traffic or cancelled meetings are taken personally

6. What can lift your mood?

Creating boundaries

Creating boundaries allows you to maintain more control of your life by creating reasonable perimeters. Stress can be greatly reduced by communicating the established boundaries to colleagues, friends, and family.

Sacred time	
Where:	When:
Work boundaries:	
Example: No phone calls between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.	
Home boundaries:	
Example: No loud music on the stereo after dinner.	
Other boundaries:	
Example: No more than one volunteer activity per week.	



1. Allow time for participants to complete these tables.
2. Tell them to identify where and when they have sacred time. They will need to set clear boundaries around this time to protect it.
3. The next page will provide tips for communicating the boundaries you have set.

Saying “no” diplomatically

Saying “no” to the boss

- ◇ Dovetail your “no” with a priority. Example: “Right now I’m working on that committee to find a new facilities manager and I’m afraid if I take on something new, it won’t get done on time. However, I’m willing to do this new project. Which do you prefer?”

Cutting people off with finesse

- ◇ Establish time limits up front. For example, “I have five minutes” or, “I have to leave at 4:30 sharp.”
- ◇ Don’t be afraid of being abrupt when the time is up.

Saying no to time hogs

Your stress level will be significantly reduced if you control your participation in events that simply take up time with little in return. These events are referred to as time hogs. The list below provides suggestions on how to avoid this type of time-waster.

- ◇ Avoid meetings, appointments and social events that you know will be a waste of time. Send a substitute whenever possible.
- ◇ If you are obligated to attend, focus on ways to improve the meeting or event. For instance, meet someone new and expand your network or build a relationship with them.
- ◇ Use signals to indicate that you cannot be interrupted.
- ◇ Humorous signs:
 - “Don’t even think of knocking!,” or “I’m a nerve ending about my deadline, please don’t interrupt.”
 - Props: red flag, upside-down name plate, plant.
 - Nonverbal cues: no eye contact, back to aisle or door.
 - If someone interrupts anyway, stand up and walk them away from your space as you talk.

Add your own best time management tips. Ask the group to share their ideas and tactics.



Connecting nutrition and exercise

Your body is more vulnerable when you are in a state of stress, especially in long-term stress. Pay special attention to how you fuel your body.

Some of the basic tenets of good nutrition and exercise are listed below. Though most of us are aware of them we do not always take the time to put them into daily practice.

Using nutrition

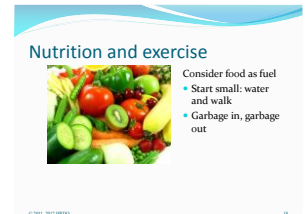
- ◇ Drink at least eight glasses of water a day to hydrate and flush your system. Also reduce caffeine intake.
- ◇ Limit fat to less than 30 percent of your total intake.
- ◇ Concentrate on eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- ◇ Multivitamins and other supplements (such as calcium) can be helpful; consult your doctor for specific recommendations.
- ◇ Snack on protein for energy: high-protein foods such as tuna fish raise your level of tyrosine, a brain amino acid.

Pick one item on this list that you would like to improve upon to help reduce stress.

Using exercise

- ◇ Exercise combats stress by revving up circulation, raising blood sugar levels, and sparking the production of endorphins (mood-elevating chemicals).
- ◇ A well-rounded exercise program includes three objectives: strength, flexibility, and aerobic capacity.
- ◇ As we age, our muscle mass decreases. Strength training is an excellent way to maintain or even increase muscle mass. Include daily stretching to prevent stiffness and inflexibility as you age.
- ◇ Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity three times per week; a daily dose is even better. Walking is one of the best forms of exercise to relieve stress.

Pick one item on this list that you would like to improve upon to help reduce stress.



Avoid preaching—most people know the elements of good nutrition and effective exercise. Focus on personal success stories (related to reducing stress through nutrition and exercise), and add any new research you have heard about.

Example: There is a reason so many people crave sugar when stressed. It has a direct effect on lowering stress hormones according to Elizabeth Bell, a neuroscientist at the University of California (San Francisco). Of course moderation is key, as too much could result in an unwanted side effect: obesity.

Mental strategies to combat stress

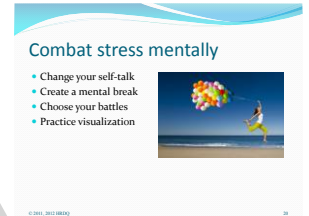
Changing your self-talk is one mental strategy to combat stress. Stop negative or stressful thoughts with a signal. Using a signal to stop negative thoughts provides a physical reminder. Gradually, you will eliminate your reliance on the physical signal and will simply redirect your thoughts. In the mean time, try some of the ideas listed below.

- ◇ Pinch yourself.
- ◇ Snap a rubber band around your wrist.
- ◇ Blink twice.
- ◇ Your idea: _____

Act “as if” is another approach to combat stress mentally. You become what you practice most, so the more you act “as if” you are not stressed, the more likely you are to feel less stress. This requires changing your self-talk from unproductive thoughts to more positive, problem-solving thoughts.

Create a mental break for yourself. Try some of the approaches listed here.

- ◇ Float on a cloud and look down at your situation.
- ◇ Use imaging.
- ◇ Practice patience.



Act “as if.” The concept of changing self-talk was discussed in Chapter 2.

Create a mental break.

Float on a cloud: The point here is to become objective—get outside of yourself to separate yourself from the situation.

Imaging examples: A mom whose kids are yelling in the back seat imagines she is driving a limo and closing the window between herself and the back seat. A manager who criticizes frequently imagines himself as a new employee and softens his criticism.

Mental strategies to combat stress

Using visualization

Use visualization to help remain calm. To set the stage for effective visualization, allow at least 10 minutes. Practice deep breathing and close your eyes to eliminate distractions. Put your mind in the most relaxing place you can imagine. Imagine the details of what you hear, see, feel, and smell. Create your own picture and sense all the details.

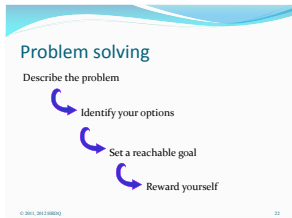
Allow that sense of relaxation to spread to the rest of your body. Relax your body; relax your mind. If you get distracted by internal or external factors (perhaps your own thoughts or a noise in the room) simply acknowledge the distraction and gently move yourself back to your picture. Allow yourself to become renewed and re-energized.

Example: Imagine riding on a cloud. The cloud feels soft, yet supportive. You feel the wind and sun on your body. You see fluffy white clouds, the sun and birds flying by. You look down and see the countryside—fields and houses and cattle. You hear the wind in your ears and birds chirping. You smell fresh air and the mist in the clouds.



Review the steps for visualization. If time permits, allow participants to practice it. Guide them to a relaxed state.

Debrief by asking how they feel afterwards. Suggest they use this whenever they are feeling particularly stressed.



Describe the problem: This can be done effectively by asking questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. These will help uncover underlying issues such as perfectionism, inability to say no, unidentified priorities, etc.

Identify your options: What can you control or change regarding the problem? This is the time to brainstorm: write down all your ideas, even if they seem farfetched. Then evaluate each idea, and fine-tune the ones that seem most promising.

Set a reachable goal: Break it down into small steps that can be achieved.

Reward yourself: Acknowledge the work you put into reaching a solution. You can do this alone or involve others.

10 minutes

1. Tell participants to practice the four problem-solving steps using the space in the table.
2. Debrief when they have completed by asking what other insights they have on the problem after breaking it down into these four steps.

Solving problems

Having issues resolved will help keep stress at bay. Use the four steps listed here to address problems.

1. Describe the problem. "I do not have enough time."
 - ◇ Who is taking up your time?
 - ◇ What is taking up your time?
 - ◇ When is your time the most crunched?
 - ◇ Why do you feel squeezed for time?
 - ◇ How is your time being taken up?
2. Identify your options.
 - ◇ Do not answer your phone for three hours each day.
 - ◇ Get up a half-hour earlier each day.
 - ◇ Trade/barter tasks.
3. Set a reachable goal.
 - ◇ I will get up earlier twice a week.
4. Reward yourself.
 - ◇ I will drink gourmet coffee on the mornings I get up early.

Problem-solving practice

- | |
|---------------------------|
| 1. Describe your problem. |
| 2. Identify your options. |
| 3. Set a reachable goal. |
| 4. Reward yourself. |

Having a “no regrets” attitude

Avoid the “tomorrow trap” by developing a “no regrets” attitude. The essence of the “tomorrow trap” is postponing emotionally rewarding activities (that lower stress) in order to seek future rewards (such as more money, success, etc.).

Develop an awareness of the tradeoffs you are making between your current daily life and your ideal one, such as postponing a devotion to personal or family time in order to make more money.

Become conscious of situations where you may be depriving yourself of emotionally rewarding experiences.

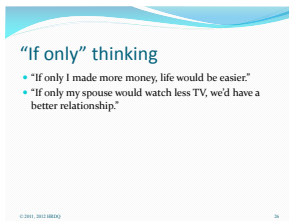
Make changes one small step at a time. Review the tips on setting boundaries.

Elements of a “no regrets” attitude

- ◇ Eliminate “if only, then...” thinking.
- ◇ Find something special in the ordinary.
- ◇ Live each day as if it were your last.

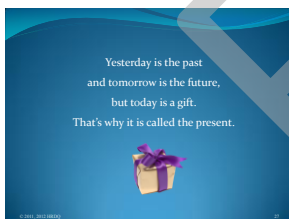
Examples of “no regrets” attitude

- ◇ Playing with your three-year-old for 10 minutes instead of doing the dishes.
- ◇ Spending \$30 less on holiday gifts and using that money to go to dinner with your spouse or friend.
- ◇ Actually stopping to smell the roses.
- ◇ Calling a friend instead of waiting for the friend to call you.



Provide examples of “if only” thinking and ask for examples from participants. “If only I made more money, life would be easier.” “If only my spouse would watch less TV, we’d have a better relationship.”

Remind participants that the best way to avoid regrets is to live in the present moment. That is not the same thing as saying and doing anything you want, which will cause more regrets than you can imagine. It does mean giving your full attention to whatever is at hand.



Course review

1. With the right tips and strategies you can eliminate stress from your life.
 True False

2. You ask a colleague to help you with a report. He completes his part, but it's not done to your standards and the deadline is in an hour. Identify what you can and cannot control in this situation.

3. What are three symptoms of burnout?

1.

2.

3.

4. List three steps for managing anger.

1.

2.

3.

5. It is okay to ignore rumors because they are seldom true.

True False

1. False. You cannot eliminate stress, but you can minimize its effects with the right tips and strategies.
2. There are many possible answers. Some suggestions include: you can't control the work your colleague already did; you probably cannot control your standards and perhaps loosen them; you can control whether or not you ask for help from that colleague again.
3. There are many choices including: exhaustion, avoiding others, accidents, making mistakes, missed deadlines, decreased productivity, mind wandering, clock watching, feeling you are not making a difference.
4. Three steps:
- Identify the underlying cause
 - Decide how to behave in advance
 - Talk directly to the person involved
 - Get help if unsuccessful
5. False. Rumors usually have some basis in truth and even if they're not true, ignoring them increases employees' stress.

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