

Looking after yourself

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Looking after yourself

Time management

Effective time management has been shown to be useful in minimising stress and fatigue.

We only have a limited amount of time each day so it is good to be clear about how we want to use the time. Good time management means setting goals and planning to tackle the most important tasks first – not wasting time on low priority jobs or spending valuable time on things outside our control and which we cannot change.

Some strategies for managing time effectively:

To help you be in control of time rather than allowing time to control you, here are some time management tips:

First assess how you usually use time

- ❑ In order to manage time effectively, you need to know how you currently use your time. For a day or two, log all your activities and how long each one takes. Having done this, you can check for any parts of your day that could be managed better.

- ❑ Plan. Make time for planning. Ten minutes spent thinking about your day is well worthwhile. Make a list of all the tasks you need to do both trivial and major and cross them off the list when they have been completed. When planning your day allow time for interruptions and unforeseen delays and allow time between projects to catch your breath. Remember to plan time for pleasure, leisure and relaxation as well.

Prioritise all the jobs needing to be tackled

- ❑ Without setting priorities as to which job is the most important, it is very easy to rush about like a headless chicken without completing any of them and end up feeling exhausted. Or you may feel that there is so much to do that you become overwhelmed and do not get started on anything. Prioritise all the jobs on your list into four categories:

A = Absolutely essential

B = Better done today

C = Could wait

D = Delegate

Then tackle the high priority tasks first. If a job does not have to be done today it is all right to leave it for another more convenient time.

Learn to say No

- A great many people find it difficult to say no to requests and often take on more than they can cope with. Managing your time involves not taking on tasks that you do not have time to do, or setting limits as to when you could do the task. Learn to say “no I do not have the time” or “yes I can help you, but do not have the time until tomorrow”. Both these answers help you to be in control of your time.

Do not be a perfectionist

- Looking for perfection in yourself or others only invites disappointment and will increase demands on your time and

cause stress for all concerned. Remember that you can make a mistake and that “good enough” is good enough.

Do not put off decisions

- Unresolved problems and unfinished business are a source of tension and use up your energy unnecessarily. If you have time and all the facts you need, tackle the business now.

For a quick way to remember these time management strategies think of:

The 5 **P**s of time management.

do

PLAN, **PRIORITISE** and **PASS**

do not be a

PERFECTIONIST or a **PROCRASTINATOR**

How to reduce stress by learning to be assertive

One way to manage stress is to speak up and be assertive. People cannot read your mind, even though you wish they could. It is up to you to learn to be more assertive in order to meet your needs. Set limits. Take charge of your life where and when you can. Being assertive is about respecting yourself enough to state what you want from other people. It is also about respecting other people and their right to express their own needs.

If you've never learned this skill and are unsure how to be assertive, read on. Here is a step-by-step description:

Evaluate the situation

Do you really want to do what is being asked? Do you like the way things are going? Do you need to speak up because you are bothered? If you don't speak out, will you feel resentful, upset, anxious, down, etc.? Decide if this is time to speak up.

Timing is important

Decide when you need to address the issue. Should you speak up immediately or do you need time to think about how you feel and the consequences of addressing the situation? Perhaps you want to organise your thoughts or decide if you are reacting to the right issue. Perhaps you need to build courage. Knowing when to confront is important. For example, asserting yourself when your spouse is drifting off to sleep or confronting an alcoholic when he or she is not sober is seldom productive. Time your confrontation. Choose a moment that is conducive to being heard and getting a response.

Identify the problem

Be specific. Don't expect others to read your mind or magically guess your distress. Say exactly what the problem is and how it is affecting you.

Say how you feel

No one causes you to feel things. You allow yourself to feel things. Don't blame others. For example, instead of saying, “Why can't you do the filing!?” say, “I find it difficult to find things when the filing isn't done.” The purpose is to communicate the feeling (from your point of view) associated with the behaviour. Remember that it is important to listen to the other person's point of view as well.

State what resolution you desire

This is the tough but important part. You need to know what you want and what you believe would help the situation. For example, “I would like you to call me if you are going to be late. I hope you will try to make it home by 7 o'clock each evening.” It is important to communicate a solution or desire so that the other person has an idea of how to remedy the problem. This doesn't guarantee they'll do what you request, but at least you've communicated what would help. You can negotiate from there.

Tips for assertive communication

When we communicate assertively we say what we mean and mean what we say by giving clear, straight-forward messages.

Be direct

If something is to be said don't beat around the bush, get on and say it. Avoid preambles like 'I know your busy but...'. This gives the other person the opportunity to anticipate what you're going to say and adopt a defensive or dismissive attitude. It is far more effective to directly state what we are trying to get across to someone. However, that doesn't mean we have to be rude, abrupt or tactless. It merely means that we give the impression of having considered what we want to communicate. This gains the respect of others as it prevents misunderstanding. Be appropriate and be sensitive to the person you are communicating with

Take responsibility

'I think...'; 'My opinion is...'; 'My understanding is...'. Are statements of ownership and are more effective ways of getting our view across than 'You are...' or

'That's not right...'. Which are all blaming and critical statements. We all have our own opinions but ours is not the only one.

Remain calm and in control

It's difficult to be assertive when you are feeling tense. Taking deep breaths and letting some of the obvious tension drain from you will help.

Be willing to listen

Mutual respect is a vital aspect of assertiveness. Listening to other people's points of view is as important as expressing our own views of the situation.

Next time you feel stressed because you failed to be assertive, practice this skill. It will get easier the more you do it. The result will be a happier you!

Taken from Perfect Assertiveness: All you need to know to get it right the first time. By Jan Ferguson. Random House Business Books, 1996.

Gloucestershire Mental Health Toolkit – Looking After Yourself

Saying "No"

Most of us have difficulty saying "No" to people. It's great when people are obliging towards each other, saying yes to a request and meaning it. But there is a price to pay for saying yes when we really mean no. Apart from the practical issues of time management or creating more work for yourself; the big price of not saying no is reduced self-worth and feelings of stress and/or anger and resentment.

Why saying "No" is so difficult

We are conditioned to consider other people. Even as children we were told "Don't say no to me". Making a child feel guilty or bad. "No"

can subconsciously fill us with guilt, dread and foreboding. It is a natural human disposition to please others rather than disappoint them. Remember the feelings that saying "No" raise are not necessarily still relevant to you – the adult – who can rationally decide whether 'yes' or 'no' is an appropriate response to a request from your colleague, your patient, a member of your family or a neighbour.

How to say "No"

Remind yourself every now and then that:

- ☑ You have the right to say no, without feeling guilty.
- ☑ It is ok for other people to say no to you.
- ☑ Saying yes when you mean no may reduce your feelings of self-worth.
- ☑ It's better to say no at the start rather than let somebody down later.
- ☑ Saying yes to extra work or obligations causes you stress
- ☑ Taking on too much might lower your standard of work or mean that the important people in your life don't get their due attention.
- ☑ It might not be such a big deal for the other person to get a "no" response.
- ☑ Being respected and respecting yourself is more important than being liked.

The process

- ☑ Try saying no in a casual or impersonal situation where you might usually just drift into a yes.
- ☑ If your immediate response is to hang on to this before being nice takes over: remember what the cost of saying yes might be.

- ☑ Be firm but polite.
- ☑ Give a reason for your no response if you feel it's appropriate, not an excuse as it can be insulting hearing that someone doesn't respect you enough to be honest.
- ☑ If you need time to think say "I'll get back to you later" and make sure that you do.
- ☑ Ask for more information. How long will it take? Is there anyone else who could do this for you?
- ☑ Use body language and your voice to show that by saying no you are not being hostile, to demonstrate that you mean what you say and are not going to be manipulated.
- ☑ Stay calm and relaxed – drop your shoulders and breath deeply so that your voice and pace remains assertive, not aggressive or passive.
- ☑ Think it through – by listening to the other person you might actually realise that you want to say yes after all. It is perfectly all right to change your mind, *if you are doing so out of choice.*

Like most things saying no becomes easier with practice. Learning to say no in an assertive and non-aggressive manner helps to ensure that your stress levels remain manageable and that you respect yourself enough to know what your limits are.

Useful resources

Books

Assertiveness:- the right to be you Claire Walmsley, BBC Publications.

Be Assertive: Beverley Hare, Optima.

Beating stress at work: Anne Woodham. Health Education Authority, 1995, ISBN 0 7521 0168 4.

Coping with stress in the health professions: Burnard P. 1991. Chapman and Hall. 196 pages. ISBN 0 412 38910 X.

Gifts Differing: Understanding personality types Briggs Myers I and Myers P. Davies-Black Publishing, California. 1995. ISBN 0 89106 074 X. (essential personality traits described by the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and their practical significance in daily life).

Handling Stress: The Open University. 1992. ISBN 0 7492 4702 9. 320 pages. (A pack for group work to teach stress reduction over six sessions).

I'm too busy to be stressed: Hilary Jones, Hodder and Stoughton.

Manage your Mind: Gillian Butler and Tony Hope, Oxford Publ.

Mental health and stress in the workplace: A guide for employers Cooper C, Cartwright S. HMSO, 1996. ISBN 0 11 321893 1. 24 pages.

OK 2 Talk Feelings: Jenny Cozens. BBC Books, 1991. ISBN 0 5633 6158 1.

Pressure at work: A survival guide for managers Arroba T, James K. McGraw-Hill Book company, 1992. ISBN 0 07 707560 9.

Staying fit at work: Penny Chorlton, Health Education Authority, 1995, ISBN 0 7521 0167 6.

Stress and employer liability: Earnshaw J, Cooper C. Institute of Personnel and Development, 1996. ISBN 0 85292 615 4. 150 pages.

Stress at work: causes, effects and prevention: – a guide for small and medium sized enterprises. Michiel Kompier and Lennart Levi, European Living Foundation, 1994. ISBN 9 2826 8594 2.

Stress Survival: Alex Kirsta.

Stress Survival Guide: Caron Grainger. London, BMJ Publishing Group, 1994. ISBN 0 7279 0879 0.

Stresswise: A practical guide for dealing with stress. Looker T, Gregson O. Hodder and Stoughton, 1989. ISBN 0 340 50371 8. 200 pages.

10 minute Time and Stress Management: David Lewis, Piatkus.

The complete guide to stress management: Patel C. Optima, 1989. ISBN 0 356 15641 9. 244 pages.

What Stress!: Davies M, Chambers R. Royal College of General Practitioners-expected publication early 1999.

Information taken from RCGP Information Sheet: Stress and General Practice No 22 October 1998. The full document can be accessed on the CD Rom enclosed with this Toolkit.

Careers books

Managing your own career: Dave Francis, Harper Collins, 1994 ISBN 0 00 638388 2.

Creating your career: Simon Kent, Kogan Page 1997 ISBN 0 7494 2040 5.

Audio cassette tapes

Coping with Stress at Work

Feeling Good – how to feel better about yourself (self esteem, assertiveness)

The Relaxation Kit

All from Wendy Lloyd Audio Productions Ltd,
PO Box 1, Wirral L47 7DD.

Self-Care for Professionals

British Medical Association Stress Counselling Service

Tel: 0645 200169

24-hr, free, confidential counselling service available to doctors, their families and medical students to discuss personal, emotional and work related problems.

Medical Defense Union

230 Blackfrairs Road, London SE1 8PJ

Tel: 0207 202 1500

Legal, medical and defense advice. Provides insurance cover. Ring above for more details.

National Counselling Service for Sick Doctors

Tel: 0170 935 5982

Confidential advisory service. Deals with concerns about own health or that of a colleague.

Royal College of Nursing – Direct

Tel: 0345 726 100

24-hr service for information and advice. Calls charged at local rates. Service is free.

Stress Management Training Institute

Foxhills, 30 Victoria Avenue, Shanklin Isle of Wight PO37 6LS

Tel: 01983 868166

Relaxation tapes and leaflets; contacts for relaxation classes, professional training in stress management and relaxation.

Helpful information sheets regarding stress and general practice can be downloaded from the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP)

website: www.rcgp.org.uk

or

email: info@rcgp.org.uk