



# Stress Workbook



Resilience Training Program

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The logo for Community Victoria features the text "Community Victoria" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The text is centered within a horizontal band that has a wavy, water-like texture in shades of blue. The band is wider than the text, creating a sense of depth and movement.

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## **Relaxation and Stress**

### **Stress Learning Objectives:**

1. Have a critical understanding of psychological stress and distress
2. Have an awareness of how psychological distress can greatly affect healthcare professionals
3. Understand how stress can affect your perception of the present moment

4. Develop an appreciation of what common triggers cause you stress and psychological distress in your life, and how you can identify and manage them.

### **What Is It?**

The physiology behind the human stress response is a little complicated to explain here. Nevertheless, it is a complex process whereby the body automatically releases a combination of hormones and neurotransmitters to prepare the body to go into the 'fight or flight' mode. This serves a protective function. However, humans have become particularly good at reacting to potentially inert events with this stress response. In order to survive, mechanisms which enhance the body's ability to deal with potential dangers (such as lions and tigers) and threats (such as infections) have evolved.

Situations that are 'stressful' such as a traffic jam are clearly neither a danger nor a threat, an inconvenience at most. Becoming stressed under such circumstances is a result of a learned response. We have been conditioned to respond to a myriad of situations with unwarranted stress. Stress can also be a product of past events and future possibilities. The anger and frustration of past events that we are unable to let go of can have constant repercussions in the present. Anxiety and apprehension generated over possible future occurrences also project back into the present experience, such as staying up all night worrying about an exam or job interview in the morning.



### **Why is stress bad for you?**

A little bit isn't! Many people function well, especially in terms of producing something for a deadline, under a little stress. However, long-term exposure to low levels, or just short term exposure to high levels of stress can really take its toll on the body.

It is widely accepted that stress exacerbates a great many medical conditions, and it is argued that it may in fact be the direct cause in many others too. Stress is a fact of life, and it would be impractical to avoid everything that caused you the slightest amount of stress. It is important to note how you respond to it. Some stressors, such as a presentation may elicit behaviour such as biting your nails. Whilst this is self destructive, it is not going to cause you any long-term

harm. However, if your response is to tend towards violence or panic then the longer-term implications are not so good. Therefore, stress in itself may not be particularly bad for you, but the way in which you react to it may be.

By being aware of this and that our mind is worrying away unnecessarily, we have the potential to control the way in which we manage feelings from the past and apprehension of the future in order to achieve a better control of our stress levels. Having a level of control over stress has numerous benefits to our physical and mental health, which highlights the importance of cultivating an awareness of how our mind creates stress.

**Top Tip:** Keeping a Stress Diary can help you to get to grips with the common causes of 'Short-Term' stress in your life as well as provide insight into how you react to and cope with them. By writing the details of these events down, you can analyse the feelings associated

with the event and manage them. This is an important stage in learning to respond differently to similar events or to avoid them all together.

Try filling it in over the next week or two. This will help you evaluate what can be a key trigger for stress in your life. Repeat the exercise again in several week's time to see how things have changed.

**KEY POINTS:**

1. Stress is physiological and some helps motivate us
2. Psychological distress disproportionately affects healthcare professionals, increasing risk of psychological morbidity
3. We can control our thought processes by developing a meta-awareness so as to prevent rumination and reduce the impact that stress has on our experience of the present moment

4. By keeping a stress diary, we can develop an awareness of the common triggers that cause us stress in our lives and learn to manage, or avoid them.



## **My Resiliency Plan**

From this workbook I will include the following into my resiliency plan:

- Things I want to remain aware off as I build my resiliency preparedness.



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