

# UNDERSTANDING STRESS

## EMPLOYER DISCUSSION GUIDE

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- › Understand what stress is
- › Know that different levels of stress have different outcomes on your body
- › Understand how to reduce your stress response



### USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

#### Before Facilitating:

1. Watch video module yourself.
2. Familiarise yourself with the background information (on this page).
3. Familiarise yourself with the group questions (over page) and consider how you might respond to these questions yourself.
4. Allow 10-15 minutes for watching the video module plus exploring the group questions.

#### When Facilitating:

1. Inform the group of the purpose of the module and learning objectives. It can help to list the learning objectives on a whiteboard.
2. Have group watch the video module.
3. Ask group "comprehension" questions (over page) to ensure transfer of important information.
4. Ask group "deep learning" questions (over page) to generate group discussion.
5. Close the session by referring to the Closing Points (over page).

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Stress is a reaction to external pressure, which leads to a predictable psychological, physiological and behavioural response. Stress has a 'Goldilocks effect' - too little and you become bored, too much and you become distressed, but just the right amount can be motivating. The challenge is managing the stress response so it remains at an optimal level.

### THE STRESS RESPONSE

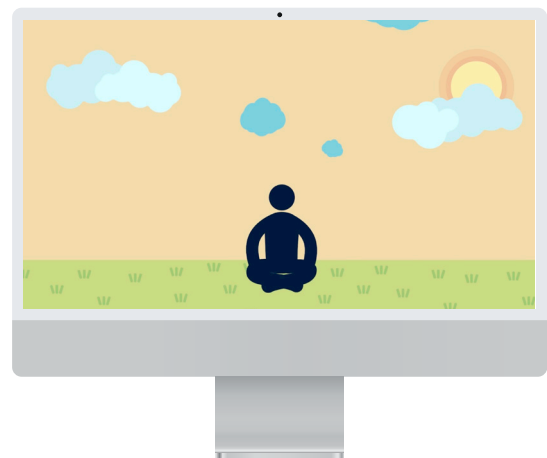
The body gets ready for 'fight or flight' in response to a perceived threat. This results in an increased heart rate, increased blood to muscles, increased alertness, and narrowed vision and hearing. Sometimes the brain can misinterpret stress symptoms as a threat in itself - and may end up triggering a further stress response. This is often referred to as a stress feedback loop.

### REDUCING THE STRESS RESPONSE

It is possible to break the feedback loop by changing the shallow, rapid breathing and racing thoughts associated with fight or flight.

There are many breathing exercises available to reduce the body's stress response. Focusing on slow, deep breathing encourages full oxygen exchange and can calm the stress response.

To prevent racing thoughts, informal mindfulness can be very helpful. This involves focusing all of the senses in the present moment. By doing this, distracting thoughts can dissipate at least momentarily, allowing the stress response to turn off and the relaxation response to begin.



## GROUP QUESTIONS

### Comprehension

Is all stress bad?

How can you reduce your stress response?

### Deep Learning

Can anyone give me an example of a time when they felt they were too stressed?

#### Follow up questions:

- › What did you notice about your body?
- › What did you notice about your emotions?
- › What did you notice about your thoughts?
- › How did this impact on how you interacted with others?

Can anyone give me an example of a time when they experienced motivating stress?

#### Follow up questions:

- › What did you notice about your mind?
- › Why was the stress motivating and not overwhelming?

Can anyone tell the group about a time when they used breathing exercises or mindfulness?

#### Follow up questions:

- › How did you feel afterwards?
- › Did it help you to relax?

### Closing Points

Everyone has an ideal level of stress that can optimise motivation and performance. However, it is important to turn off the stress response when it is not required in order to protect your physical and mental health. Deep abdominal breathing and informal mindfulness are two easy strategies to have in your toolkit to do this and elicit the relaxation response.

Sometimes we can use some help with these strategies. To access some support with stress, please start by speaking to your leader or reaching out to the EAP.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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