

Mindful Monday, June 29, 2020

"It's not the load that breaks you; it's how you carry it"

- Lou Holtz

In previous posts we have talked about the importance of self-care and being aware of what you need. This week we revisit that subject with new and simple tools.

The graphic at the left from the Canadian Red Cross highlights the different types of stress you may be experiencing. When considered together, the combination of stressors creates a "load" on your system. When the load is too high, it is important to act so the load can be managed. Remember that stress is not inherently good or bad, but it is omnipresent. Having an awareness of the stress we are experiencing and our response to it is important. In fact, *"when we choose or are able to view our stress response as helpful, we create the biology of courage"* (Kelly McGonigal, PhD)

To moderate our load, the Red Cross encourages us to Look, Listen, Link and Live. Definitions and examples of each can be seen on the left.

To help you Look, Listen and Link, complete a simple self-assessment (also from the Red Cross) that will help you identify signs of stress and how you are feeling as well as pinpoint links to support you. This document is included as a separate PDF. Also, if you are interested, the complete Canadian Red Cross Psychological First Aid Guide can be found [here](#).

You can use these tools individually, or they can be used within your teams or families to start conversations and create strategies around stress and coping.

There are two additional resources we have shared previously that are relevant to this topic as well. Both are Ted Talks approximately 15 minutes each.

Kelly McGonigal: [How to Make Stress Your Friend](#)

Guy Winch:

[Why We All Need To Practice Emotional First Aid](#)



PSYCHOLOGY FIRST AID SELF-CARE

MANAGING YOUR STRESS ALLOWS YOU TO MAINTAIN YOUR HEALTH AND CONTINUE TO HELP THOSE AROUND YOU.

Note: Day-to-day stressors can be caused by both positive and negative experiences!

Types of Stress:

- DIFF-TO-DIFF:** New challenges that require job-relevant abilities for sustained performance.
- CUMULATIVE:** Ability to do the same things over and over again, even if you're happy to do them.
- EXTREME/TRAUMATIC:** Death of a loved one, an accident, or a natural disaster.
- VICARIOUS:** Witness of trauma that happens around you, or hearing about it.

BURNOUT: When we are unable to cope with the stress of a situation for many situations, have exhausted all our healthy coping strategies, or ignore the warning signs, we experience burnout. This usually happens slowly and goes unnoticed until suddenly all energy and willingness are gone. We do not immediately recover from burnout; it takes time and rest to recuperate. If left unattended, the effects of burnout get progressively worse.

COMPASSION FATIGUE: Another result of stress for many people (particularly those in the humanitarian field) who hear stories of tragedy and loss is compassion fatigue. This includes feelings of:

- Helplessness
- Hopelessness in one's work
- Negativity toward those impacted
- Self-doubt
- Incompetence

LOOK: Look out for sign of stress within yourself. Do you get headaches? Are you short-tempered? Do you feel sick or nauseous?

LISTEN: Listening to yourself is about self-assessment & awareness. Are the signs telling you to take a break? Have you noticed a change in yourself?

LINK: Linking is the action you take to ensure your needs are met. It might be a coffee with a friend, finding out more information, or engaging a service.

LIVE: In this context, "live" refers to a balanced, content state of being. It is the start (before something happens) and the eventual place you journey back to afterwards.

Common signs that indicate stress can include:

- **PHYSICAL** signs (e.g., stomach ache, tiredness, headaches)
- **MENTAL** signs (e.g., difficulty concentrating)
- **Emotional** signs (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger)
- **SPRITUAL** signs (e.g., loss of faith)
- **BEHAVIOURAL** signs (e.g., nervousness, an increased use of alcohol or drugs)
- **INTERPERSONAL** signs (e.g., withdrawn, in conflict with others)

Once you recognize the signs of stress, it's time to check in with yourself. Acknowledge where you are mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Make no assumptions as to how you are feeling.

The Self-Care Plan contains 2 questionnaires: one to assess day-to-day stress levels and one to assess cumulative stress levels. You can record your answers in the Self-Care Plan PDF.

Your links are the resources within your support systems:

- **SELF:** individual actions to help cope with stress. For example, going for a run, listening to music, or writing in a journal. This system also includes the things we have that make us feel safe, such as housing, job security, or money for necessities.
- **RELATIONSHIP:** healthy, trusting relationships with family, friends, colleagues.
- **COMMUNITY:** connect with your neighbourhood, clubs, find support in your workplace (colleagues).

The eventual goal of looking, listening, and linking is to return to living. Certain experiences may impact us in challenging ways. Activities you can do to decompress:

- Rest, restful activities
- Focus on your accomplishments and take time to reflect on your experience
- Use calming strategies (e.g., meditation)
- Monitor yourself (and team members) for signs of stress
- Attend peer support or team meetings to debrief, reflect, and share feelings
- Take care of yourself after experiencing stress.

COPING: If you are in a stressful situation for a period of time, ensure you have coping strategies in place. Some example strategies include:

- Take breaks
- Develop realistic work expectations
- Listen to and support your team
- Maintain healthy habits (e.g., eating, sleeping, exercising)
- Practise stress management techniques (e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness)
- Maintain healthy relationships
- Ask for help if you need it!

PERSONAL FACTORS: Identify Personal Factors that may keep you balanced, healthy and functional during stressful times (complete exercise in Self-Care Plan PDF).

Provided by COVID-19 Mental Health & Mental Performance Taskforce Pandemic Response Group | Source: Canadian Red Cross

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NOTE: A copy of this graphic is attached to the Mindful Monday email (Red Cross Self-Care). The attachment allows you to zoom in and read the sections that are difficult to read in this version.