

Natalie Gupton, MPA, CFRE
Dr. Kristie Guffey



STRESS MITIGATION **WORKBOOK**

Adapted from 2016 SafeSpot.org





SOUTHERN
EXTENSION
RISK
MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION

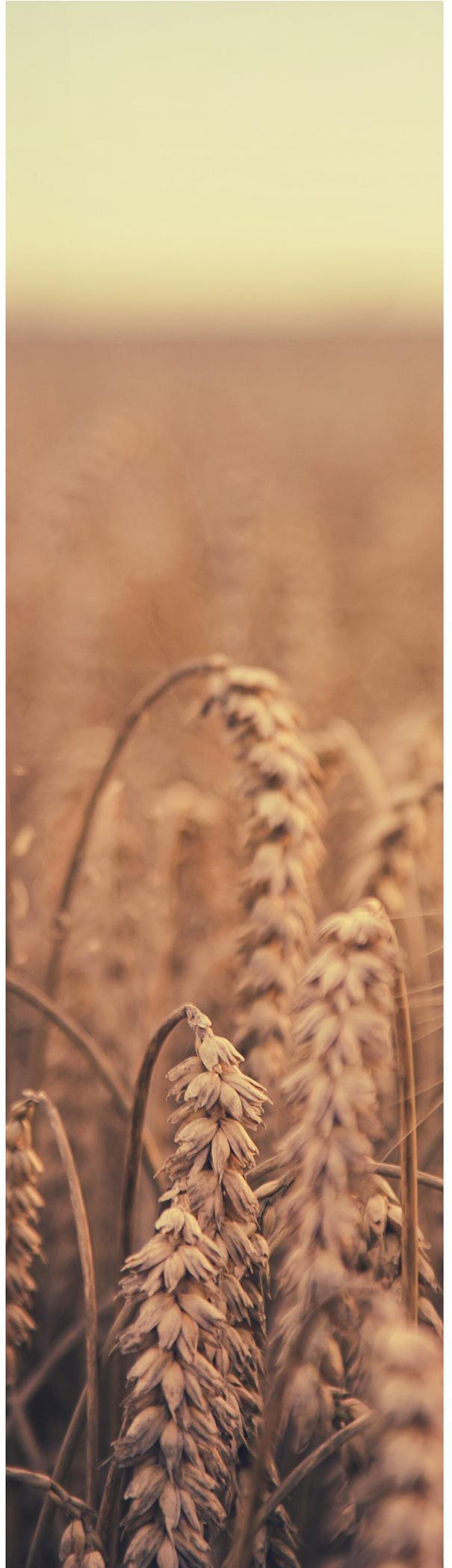


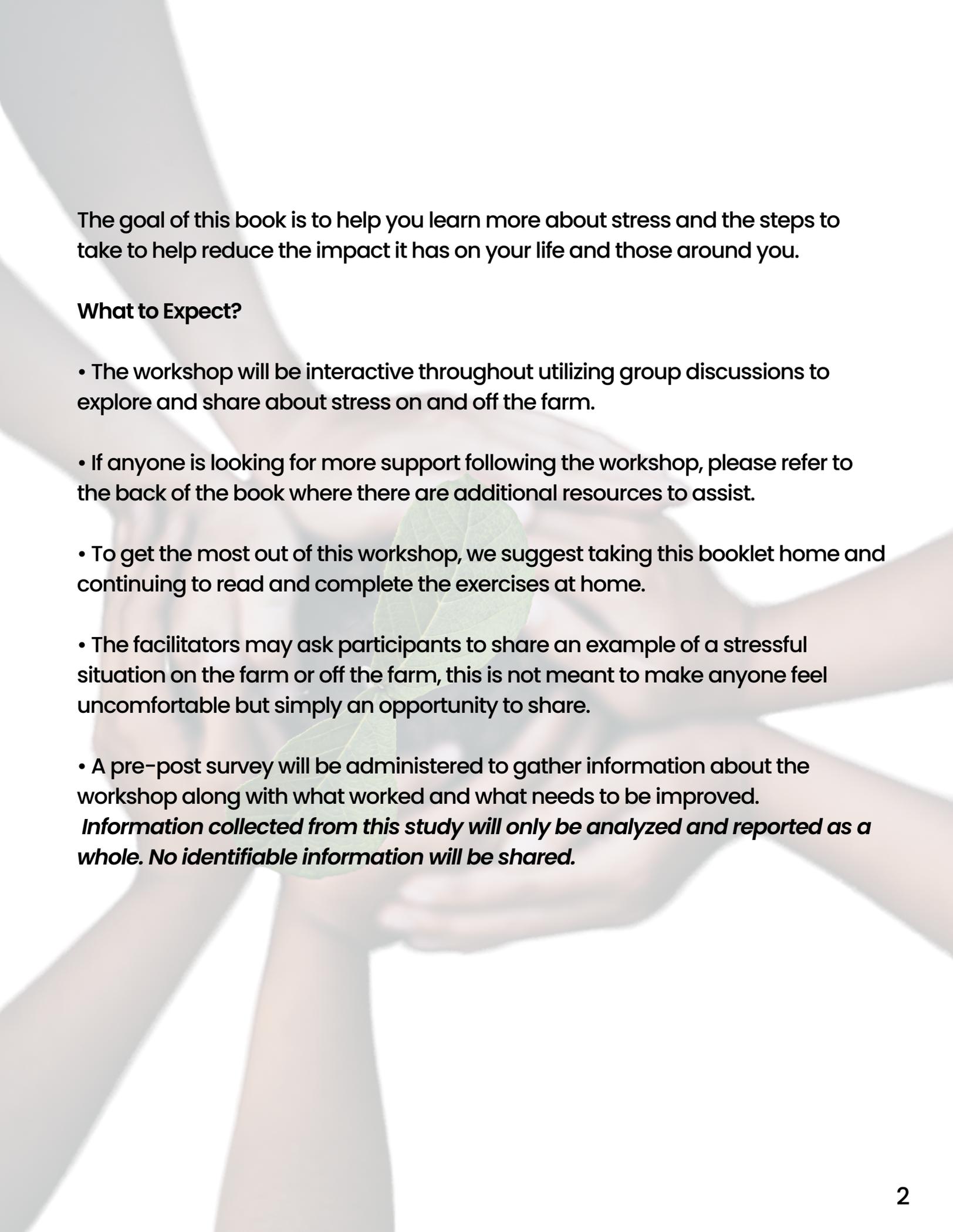
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The goal of this book is to help you learn more about stress and the steps to take to help reduce the impact it has on your life and those around you.

What to Expect?

- The workshop will be interactive throughout utilizing group discussions to explore and share about stress on and off the farm.
- If anyone is looking for more support following the workshop, please refer to the back of the book where there are additional resources to assist.
- To get the most out of this workshop, we suggest taking this booklet home and continuing to read and complete the exercises at home.
- The facilitators may ask participants to share an example of a stressful situation on the farm or off the farm, this is not meant to make anyone feel uncomfortable but simply an opportunity to share.
- A pre-post survey will be administered to gather information about the workshop along with what worked and what needs to be improved.
Information collected from this study will only be analyzed and reported as a whole. No identifiable information will be shared.

Lets explore how your behavior and the way you think can influence the stress in your life. We will look at problem-solving skills to help you deal with the stress in your life.

Exercise

1. The first step is to access where we are now in our lives, so how is life for you?

How is life right now?

On a scale of 0 _____ 10
Bad Great

What is happening in your life that contributes to the feelings you have about your life right now?
A great exercise to explore more is to write down the positive as well as negative thoughts right now?

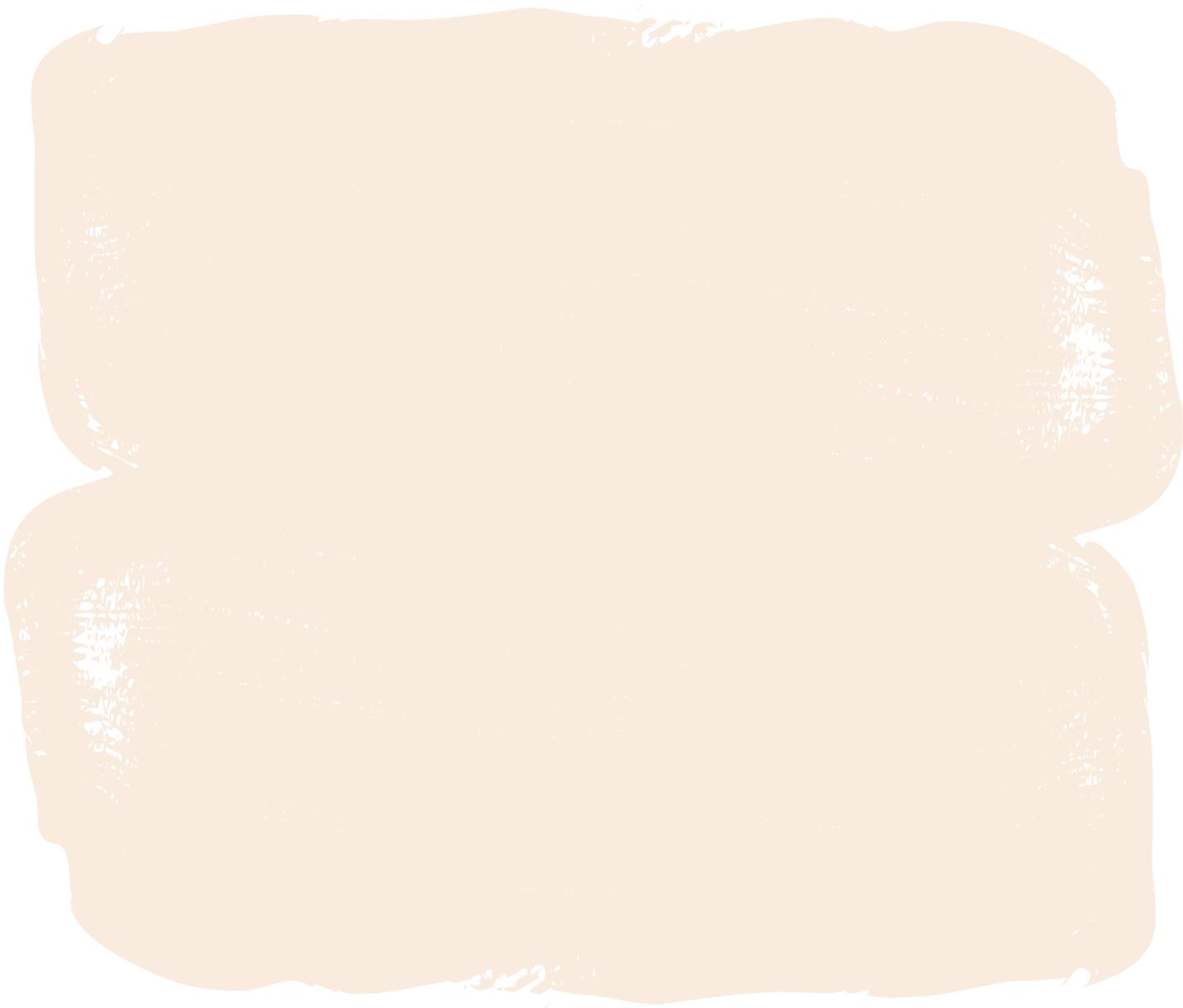


Exercise

2. Where would you want/need to be on the scale for your life to be good enough?

0 _____ 10
Bad Great

What would you do differently that would let you know you had reached this point?



What is Stress?

- It is normal
- Everyone experiences it
- It happens to us all
- Stress motivates some

Common misconceptions about stress:

- When you are stressed, you know exactly what is causing the stress
- Anxiety and stress are signs of mental illness
- Strong people do not have stress

Stress can be helpful but also can harm.

HELPFUL: If you are up against a deadline to get your farm tags in, the stress can lead you to get to the courthouse on time and pay your farm tags. Your body reacts with the tension and drives you to get the task done.

HARMFUL: If you worry over a blight on your vegetable crop and it causes you to become physically sick, and you become so overwhelmed to the point of being unable to deal with the situation.



The Fight or Flight Response

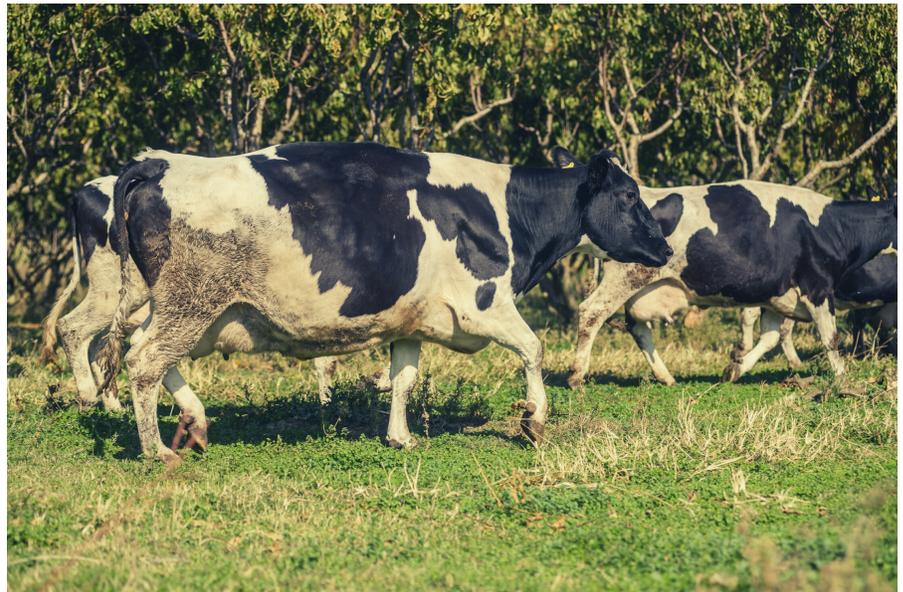
A lot of times when we are feeling stressed out, we can feel overwhelmed and not understand where the feelings of stress are coming from nor determine exactly what is causing the stress. We also have difficulty in identifying what is going on in our body or confuse that with stress.

By simply pausing and reflecting, we can identify the normal reactions of the body to stress: butterflies in the stomach, shortness of breath, a tingling feeling, and tension in the back of the neck and shoulders.

As humans, we respond as animals do. Think of your blue heeler when he hears a strange noise. He freezes on the spot, his heart rate increases, neck and shoulder muscles tense up. This is a completely normal response to stress and you may recognize it when you are feeling stressed. It is also known as the FLIGHT OR FIGHT RESPONSE. The freeze response commonly occurs when in shock or experiencing extreme stress. These reactions are also known as the adrenaline response.

The fight or flight response can also arise from a psychological threat. The way we look at and understand what is happening around us influences how we react to it. We may be sitting at home worrying about an argument we had earlier in the day. Sitting at home we are under no threat but our body will still respond because of the way we are thinking. We would describe this as unhelpful because there is no physical threat in that moment.

Stress is a normal reaction and you can learn ways of controlling it.



What Contributes to Stress?

ANYTHING CAN CAUSE US STRESS! It depends on how we look at the situation and our understanding of what is happening.

The things that contribute to our stress can fall into two categories: internal stressors and external stressors.

Internal Stressors – There can be things going on inside of us that can cause us to experience stress.

External Stressors – There are also things going in the world around us which can cause stress.

- Mind Traps: Unrealistic expectations, taking things personally, exaggerating
 - Negative Self-Talk: Pessimistic, over analyzing, criticism toward self
 - Lifestyle Choices: Lack of sleep, taking on too much, using drugs and alcohol
- Stressful Personality/Behavior Types: Perfectionist, pleaser, perfection

External Stressors

Daily Life: mom stresses, dad stressed, losing your keys, tire goes flat, radiator hose busts, no rain, too much rain, market prices are low, politics causing issues with global trade, bureaucracy, too many regulations.

Major life events: Divorce, death, loss of job, baby, marriage, etc.

Internal Stressors

Heritage, tradition, generational farm, imposter syndrome, how we talk to ourselves, and how we respond to life events.

Stress and Learning

There are things throughout our lives which can cause us stress. We learn from past experiences either helpful or unhelpful coping skills. Unhelpful coping skills can stay with us until we challenge them and develop more helpful ways of coping.

Examples of major life events which can cause stress are:

Leaving school



Death of someone close



End of a relationship



Moving house



Becoming a parent/
children leaving home



Moving or losing a job



Bad health or the
ill health of someone close



Healthy coping strategies can help us move through this time in our life i.e. looking after yourself, sharing how you feel, making time to relax

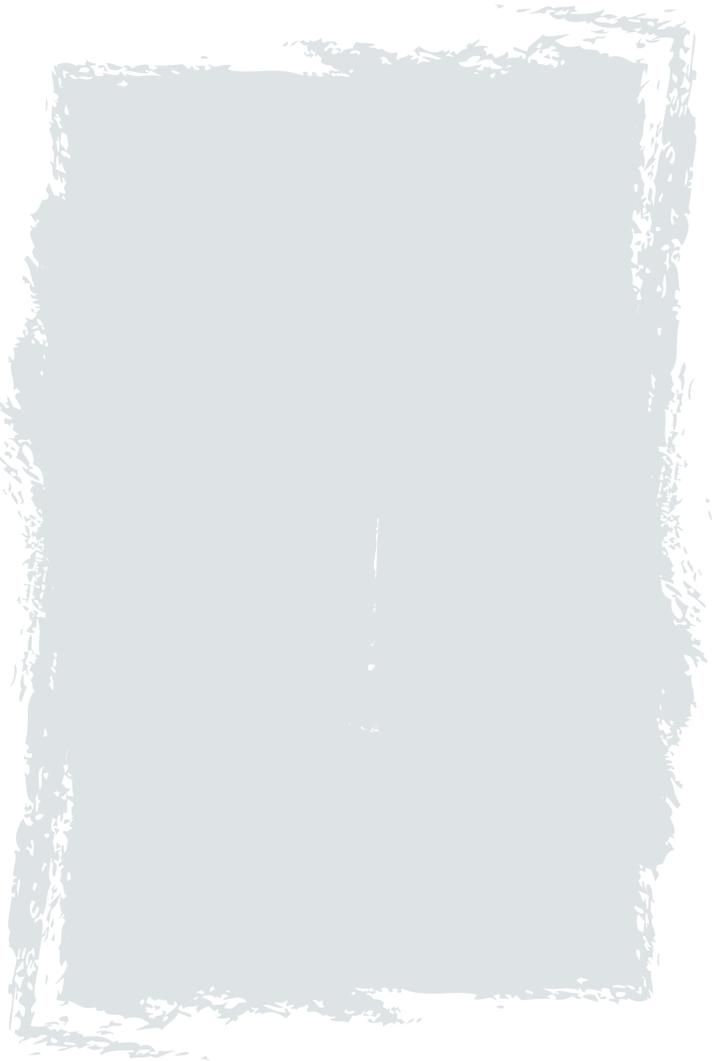
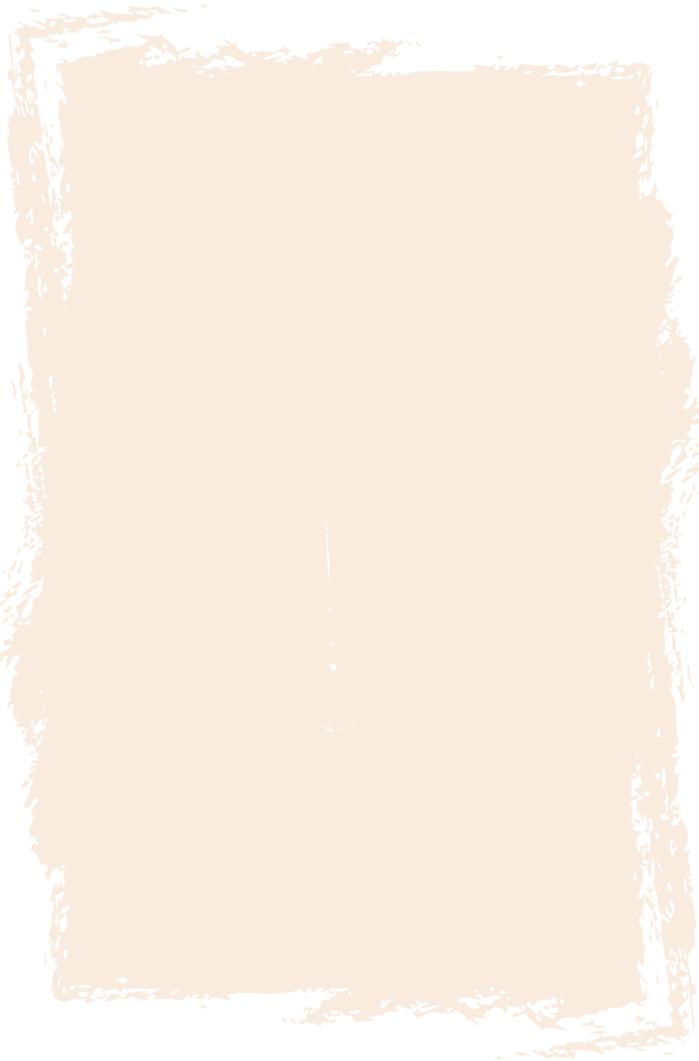
Unhealthy coping strategies may make us feel even worse, i.e. self-medicating with alcohol, not eating, smoking too much, drinking caffeine – all worsen the body's response to stress.



Exercise 3

Use this space to take a moment to reflect about anything in your life – now or in the past – that might have caused you stress.

Using the boxes below record whether these stressors internal or external



Now think back to one life event that you have experienced in the past that you were able to manage well (watch out for your negative self-talk when doing this exercise as it may blind you to your many successes):



What did you do that allowed you to manage the situation?



What would others see you doing that told them you were managing it?



How Can Stress Become a Problem?



Stress is very unhelpful when:

- It occurs repeatedly
- There is no threat or what if
- Won't let go

Stress is very unhelpful when it restricts our life. The earlier example of avoiding flying highlights how stress can lead us to avoidance

Stress is very unhelpful when it affects our performance, as when dealing with difficult situations when it comes to succession planning. The fight or flight response kicks in and our ability to focus, concentrate and speak clearly can be affected.

Stress is very unhelpful when you start to worry about your body's reactions to stress. Sometimes we recognize tension when feeling stressed. However, we might not recognize this as a normal stress response and start to imagine the worst i.e. "I'm having a heart attack". The more we can recognize the normal stress response the less likely we are to worry about it.

Stress is very unhelpful when it is severe and long lasting. The longer we feel stressed the more likely we are to begin to avoid the situation or people we identify with as causing the stress.

REMEMBER
Stress is a very common problem and it consists of a lot of emotions and feelings. The longer you ignore it the bigger a problem it may become.



How Stress Can Affect You?

Stress affects us in 4 ways:

1. The way my body works
2. The way we behave
3. The way we think
4. The way we feel

By understanding how stress affects us, we can learn to recognize the signs (triggers) and try to deal with them before feeling overwhelmed. Start to be curious about what makes you tick without judging yourself. Notice:

- How you behave in situations
- How you feel about situations
- What you think of situations and
- How your body responds in situations



Exercise 4

Think of these triggers and write them down, once you write them down think of how you reacted and how stressful they were for you.

0 _____ 10
Bad Great





Understanding How Our Body Responds to Stress

Typical physical symptoms of someone dealing with stress include:

- Heart Racing
- Palpitations
- Breathlessness
- Dizzy
- Lightheaded
- Shaky (arms, legs, body)
- Tense muscles
- Feeling both hot and cold
- Sweating
- Flushing
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Lack of Concentration
- Tired/Exhausted
- Brain Fog
- Unable to sleep

The more we recognize these symptoms, the sooner we can respond in a positive way.



Typical Behaviors under stress

Stress effects how we behave and how we respond to stressful situations.

Typical Stressful Behaviors:

- Putting things off
- Avoiding
- Biting nails, grinding teeth, popping knuckles
- Too many irons in the fire
- Unable to sit still
- Talking in excessive
- Start drinking and/or smoking
- Arguing with others
- Being coming concerned with safety



If we begin to notice that we are behaving in these ways, we can start to do something to reverse the effects of stress.

What behaviors are you aware of when you feel stressed?



What goes on in our minds when we are stressed

What goes on inside is just as important to pay attention to as is the physical when we are stressed.

Typical thoughts that go through your head when you are feeling stressed:

- I can't cope
- I am useless
- People are staring at me
- Things never go right for me
- What is the point
- If it weren't for bad luck, I would have no luck at all

Stress is often driven by how we think about the situation. The way we perceive our circumstances and the events that occur is largely how we feel about it.

When you are feeling stressed, what thoughts race through your mind?



The Last Aspect of Stress: Feelings

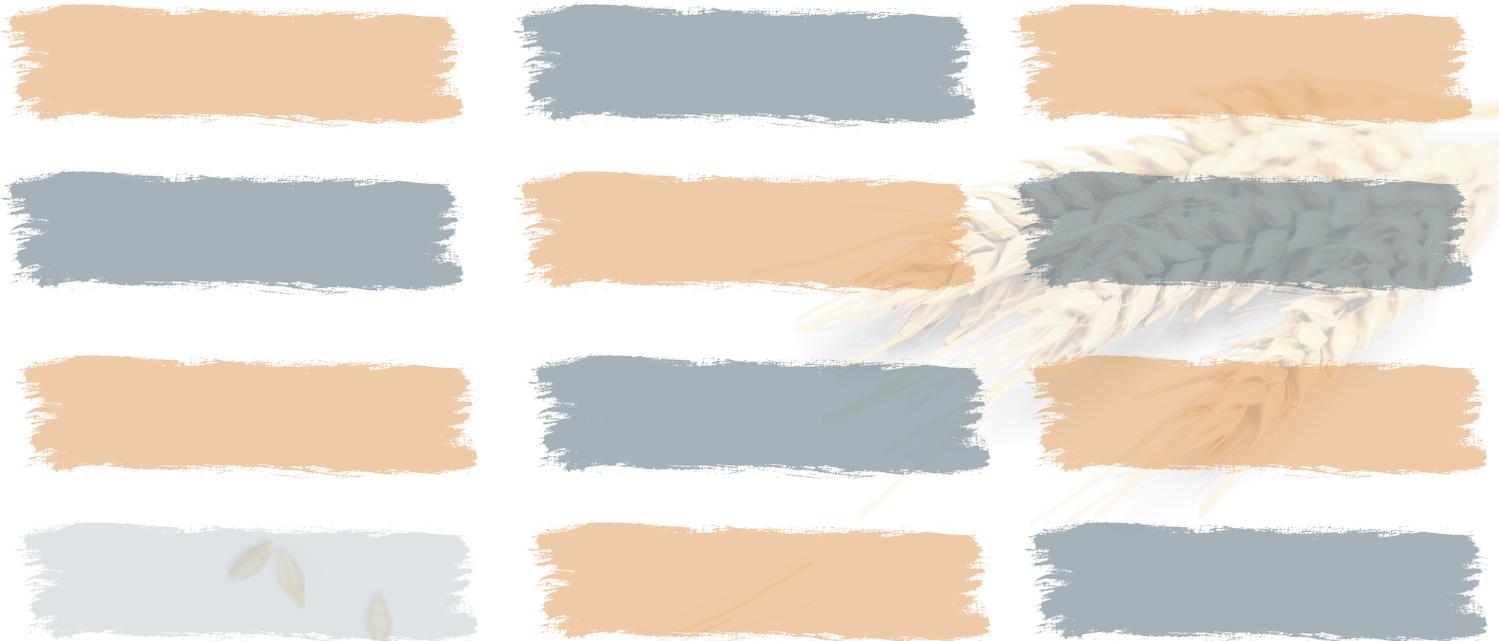
Our feelings and emotions can run through a wide range but here are some typical feelings:

- Sad
- Irritable
- Angry
- Hopeless
- Insecure
- Easily upset
- Anxious
- No motivation
- Little interest
- Fed up
- Feeling down and out

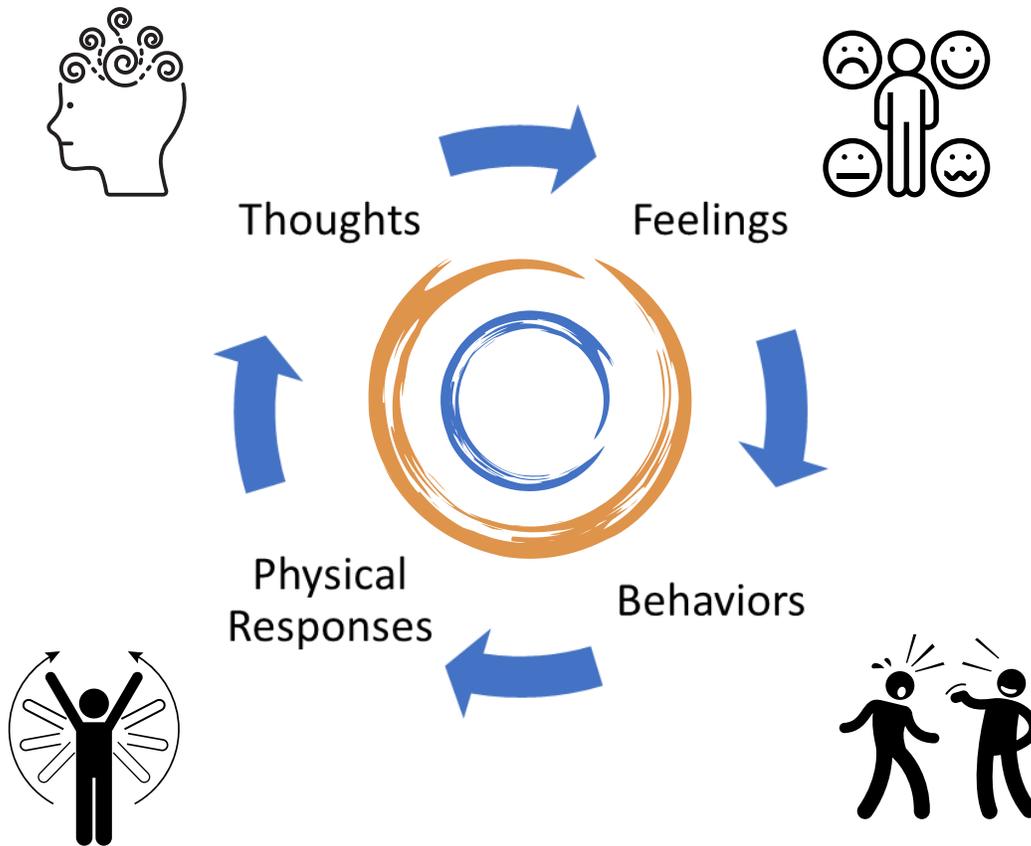


There could be many more types of feelings and emotions when we feel stressed, these are just a few.

What emotions do you recognize in yourself?



The Vicious Cycle of Stress

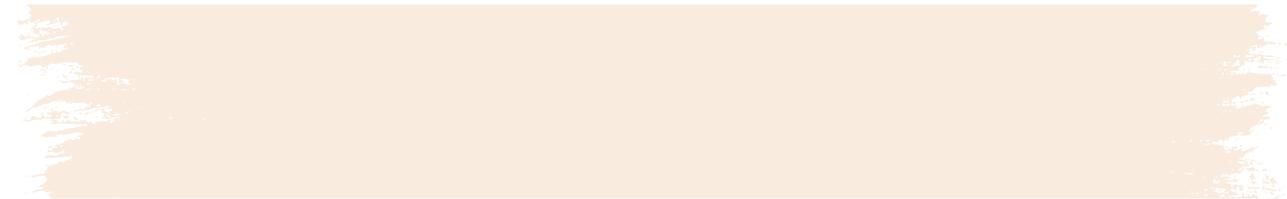


This cycle shows the relationships between our thinking about stress, feeling stressed, then our body responds to the stress and we then behave a particular way to the stress. When there are similar occurrences that are stressful, it perpetuates the stress cycle further. Our goal is to identify how we deal with stress, what is normal and what is unhelpful, and find ways to handle the stress in a positive way.

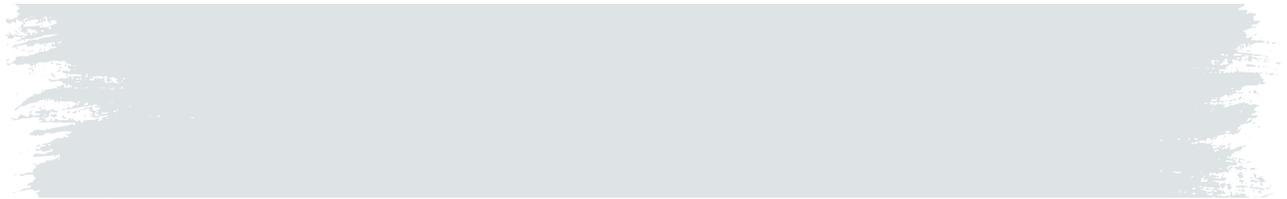
Exercise 6

Think about the last time you were stressed and let's walk through it.

Situation – What was going on around you?



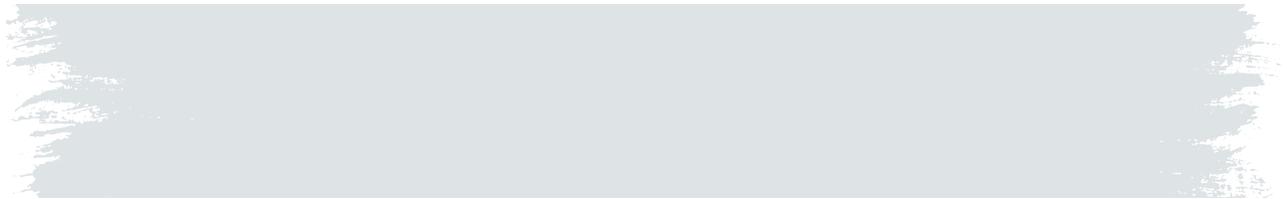
Thoughts – what was going through your head at that time?



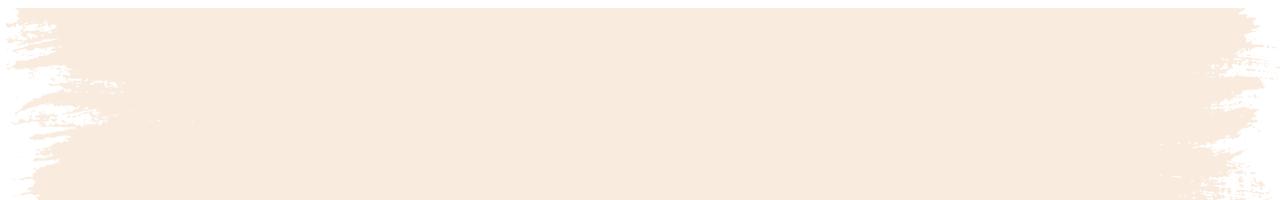
Feelings – how were you feeling?



Behavior – what did you do in response?



Body response – did you notice any tension, shakiness, sickness, etc?



Steps to Deal With Stress

First things first, tackling stress can seem a bit daunting but remember to take it one step at a time. Lifestyle changes can help address some of the issues with stress.

Food – we all know a healthy diet is key to a healthy lifestyle. Our physical wellbeing is linked to our emotional wellbeing. Some tips to assist are:

- Avoid drinks high in sugar and caffeine (especially in the evening)
- Eat fruits and vegetables
- Drink plenty of water – you should drink enough ounces to account for half of your body weight.
- Regular meals and do not skip out on any meals
- Plan ahead when you can to help grabbing junk food



Exercise – again this is something we know impacts our mood by working off the tension and anxiety.

- Use your smart watch, FitBit, or app to help get you moving
- Make small increments of time to stretch and move
- Pick something you enjoy, if you don't like lifting weights (don't do it)
- Track your steps and set goals



Sleep – too little or too much can impact how we feel. We each have different requirements for sleep. If you wake not feeling refreshed, ask yourself why? Here are some tips to aid in better sleep.

- Avoiding cigarettes and alcohol
- Relax before going to bed (find what works for you)
- Try to write down your worries, stressors on a piece of paper
- Try to avoid electronics
- Determine what works for you – change pillows, set sleep music to play, etc.



Controlling Stress

One of the simplest ways to control stress is breathing. Seems silly right? Research has proved that controlling stress through breathing exercises helps reduce the physical signs of tightness in your chest and difficulty breathing.

Steps

1. Slow down (catch yourself)
2. Breath out – push your abdominal muscles outward and empty your lungs
3. Breath in through your nose and out your mouth
4. Aim for ten deep breaths in 1 minute



Relaxation

Relaxation is a physical skill where we learn to identify and release physical and mental tension. It is a way for us to unwind. Relaxation is also described as an attitude where we take things in stride.

Before we can relax, we need to first identify the stress and notice when we are in the vicious cycle. Then, we can do something about it.

Determine what works best for you to relax. Sometimes it is as simple as taking time for yourself, watching your favorite tv show, reading a book, cooking, watching YouTube or Tik Tok.

Take a few minutes and think about the ways you relax. If you don't take time to relax, think about what stops you from taking time out. Write those down.

Relax

JUST
breathe

What stops me from taking time to myself to relax?



Internal Barriers:

**How they could
be overcome:**

External Barriers:

**How they could
be overcome:**



Support Network

1. Who is around you?
2. Who do you talk to?
3. Who can help you?
4. Who else could support you?



