



External and Internal Triggers of Stress

Stress reaction we inherited from our ancestors because of its protective nature. At that time, stress reaction was vital to survival and physical safety. In the classic “fight of flight response” where adrenaline, cortisol and other stress hormones are mediated our predecessors are either defended themselves or flee. We experience the same reactions today. When a stressful event occurs as traumatic, body and brain respond immediately, often with negative emotions. So it's good to know how to recognize our external and internal sources of stress.

Module	Submodules	Group size	Duration
• Awareness	• Social Support	• Individual • Small group	• 60 - 90 min

Summary

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Keywords

Stress, triggers, reactive nervous system, burnout, long-lasting stress

Aims

To understand how stress shows up, how stress reactions are triggered and in which way the inhibitors of stress can be recognized.

Participants

The activity is suitable for both, individual and group work (Small group between 7-12 participants).

Description

I. External stressors

- a. Take a sheet of paper and write down five categories. Then under each one list the sources of stress in your life.
- b. Monitor yourself through the day (week); notice when you get upset and what triggers the stress. Add this to your list.
- c. Notice and write down (add to the list) all the irritations and hassles you deal with each day.
- d. Now pick up one physical stressor you can change or eliminate. Take an action!
- e. Then choose the social stressor, take a concrete step to minimize its impact on you.

II. Internal stressors

- a. Next time you have a stress reaction step back and analyze your thoughts about the situation.
- b. Identify your self-talk and ask "Why is this a problem for me? What is upsetting me?"
- c. Then go deeper and ask yourself:

- What from my past does this remind me of?
- What fears, beliefs, insecurities may be here in this situation?
- Is my self-esteem feeling threatened?
- Am I feeling intimidated?
- Am I feeling rejected?

Wrap up; these insights are very helpful in understanding stress reactions.

III. How can I Resource myself?

Critical in helping stress and trauma symptoms is actually learning to identify one's resources. The following chart invites you to indicate your triggers and what connections you can find to resource yourself.

Example: (choose one trigger from your list);

- **I am aware that I freeze when somebody is yelling at me.**
- **My triggers are:** Angry person yelling on phone.
- **My resources are:** Disengage with the person and take a belly breath.
- **I get there by:** remembering to breathe and not taking angry person personally.

Find at least 5 triggers and search for relevant resources.

If you are doing this activity as a group activity session each of the participants can present one of his triggers together with the short resource plan. The facilitator/trainer can write down on poster possible resource collection.

We conclude the activity with a discussion and feedback from the participants.

Material

paper, pencil or pen, flomasters

Method

Self-learning, self-awareness technique, interview method, discussion, experiential learning.

Advice for Facilitators

Because it is rather complex exercise it is necessary to prepare its implementation. The trainer

(leader of the group work) should be experienced and have enough skills to work with the small group and its dynamics.

Source (APA)

Adapted from: Mischke-Reeds, M. (2018). *Somatic Psychotherapy Toolbox*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & media, Inc.

Handouts

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Contributor

Integra Institute (Sonja B. Eisenreich).



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