



# STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

## FACTORS IMPACTING WELLNESS

**Stress** is our response to anything that threatens our physical, emotional, or financial health or survival. A stressor is an event or series of events that harm or threaten people and cause them to respond. When we suffer from too much stress for too long, it is called **distress**. Persistent, extended periods of negative stress can precede other issues that impact mental wellness. It is often difficult for people to distinguish between depression and stress.

**Distress** is extreme anxiety, sorrow, or pain.

**Depression** is a disorder that affects the biochemical balance of the brain and causes symptoms such as low energy, sadness, physical impairment, low self-esteem, and problems with thinking. Depression may be diagnosed when multiple symptoms are present for more than two weeks.

**Anxiety** disorders are the most common of all behavioral health conditions. Anxiety includes fears, apprehensive mood, feelings of dread, and worried thoughts and behaviors. Some types of anxiety disorders include panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and phobias. Untreated anxiety can lead to depression, substances abuse, and poor self-esteem.

**Grief** is the pain we feel related to loss. The pain can be felt emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically. Grief can be experienced because of death, divorce, or any number of losses. It is important that we recognize grief as one of the emotions we may be experiencing during difficult times.

**Suicidal** comments should never be discounted. Always respond immediately. If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

## SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Stress can impact all aspects of life. Symptoms of stress can differ from person to person. It is important to recognize when you are feeling stressed before the stress becomes chronic.

EMOTIONAL	COGNITIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Moodiness, irritability</li> <li>▪ Anger</li> <li>▪ Feeling overwhelmed, lacking control</li> <li>▪ Difficulty relaxing, restless</li> <li>▪ Loneliness, avoidance</li> <li>▪ Feeling worthless, hopeless</li> <li>▪ Low self-esteem</li> <li>▪ Anxiety, panic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Forgetfulness</li> <li>▪ Racing thoughts, lack of focus</li> <li>▪ Constant worrying</li> <li>▪ Poor judgment</li> <li>▪ Pessimistic</li> </ul>
PHYSICAL	BEHAVIORAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lethargy, body fatigue, lack of energy</li> <li>▪ Headaches</li> <li>▪ Gastrointestinal issues (upset stomach, diarrhea, constipation, nausea)</li> <li>▪ Aches and pains, tightness in muscles</li> <li>▪ Chest pain, rapid heart-beat, short breathing</li> <li>▪ Frequent colds or infections</li> <li>▪ Loss of interest in activities</li> <li>▪ Nervousness, anxiety</li> <li>▪ Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing</li> <li>▪ Clenched jaw, grinding teeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sleeping too much or too little</li> <li>▪ Eating too much or too little</li> <li>▪ Procrastination</li> <li>▪ Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes</li> <li>▪ Nervous behaviors (nail biting, fidgeting, pacing)</li> </ul>

## POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- Persistent worry and fear
- Apprehension and uneasiness
- Avoidance of others
- Feeling sad
- Lack of interest or pleasure in activities
- Significant weight change or changes in appetite
- Problems sleeping
- Slow or fidgety body movements
- Low energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide
- Substance misuse
- Unexplained changes in physical appearance or behavior

### *IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE:*

- **Assess their risk of suicide or harm.** When helping a person through a mental health crisis, it is important to look for signs of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, nonsuicidal self-injury, or other harm.
- **Listen nonjudgmentally.** It may seem simple, but the ability to listen and have a meaningful conversation requires skill and patience. Listening is critical for helping an individual feel respected, accepted, and understood. Use a set of verbal and nonverbal skills such as open body posture, comfortable eye contact, and other strategies to engage in appropriate conversation.

- **Give reassurance and information.** It is important to recognize that mental illnesses and addictions are real, treatable illnesses from which people can and do recover. When talking to someone you believe may be experiencing symptoms of a mental illness, approach the conversation with respect and dignity and don't blame the individual for their symptoms.
- Encourage appropriate professional help.
- Encourage self-help skills and other support strategies. Individuals with mental illness can contribute to their own recovery and wellness.
- Provide a supportive presence and take steps to ensure their personal safety.
- Do not leave them alone without adequate support.
- Help them access needed care and match them with responsive services.
- Take the time to explain what has happened and what they can expect; repeat as necessary.
- Answer questions and reassure in a calm manner.
- Make every effort to reconnect with care providers and/or family.

### *PLEASE DON'T:*

- Force people to share their stories.
- Make statements like "Everything will be fine."
- Tell people what they should be feeling, thinking, or doing.
- Instill your personal beliefs on others.
- Make promises you can't keep.
- Criticize existing services or relief efforts.

## TIPS TO IMPROVE WELLNESS

- Laugh. The act of laughing can help ward off stress.
- Try to keep a positive attitude. You cannot control everything, but you can control how you respond.
- Read a book you enjoy.
- If you become too stressed, talk with a counselor.
- Get a medical checkup.
- Eat healthy (fruits, vegetable, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein).
- Drink four to eight glasses of water daily.
- Exercise at least 20 minutes daily (walk, swim, ride a bike, etc.).
- Get at least seven to eight hours of restful sleep per night.
- Take a relaxing bath or shower.
- Practice restful, deep, or slow breathing.
- Abstain from alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- Do gentle stretching during a break.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Spend time with the people you love. A support system may be helpful for managing stress.
- Do a hobby.
- Reach out to someone for support or help.
- Tell loved ones what you appreciate about them.
- Take regular five- to ten-minute breaks in your day to relax and recharge.
- Play with a child or grandchild.
- Reflect on and forgive yourself for mistakes.
- Do random acts of kindness.
- Express "thank you" to someone daily (send a note).
- Write down three things you are grateful for daily.
- Talk to others about their strategies.
- Take a seminar to learn new ways of handling issues.

## SELF-CARE TIPS TO COPE WITH GRIEF AND DISTRESS

- Face your feelings and label them as grief.
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.
- Maintain your hobbies and interests.
- Do not let anyone tell you how to feel, and do not tell yourself how to feel. Everyone experiences grief differently and on their own timetable.
- Plan ahead for grief “triggers.”
- Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected; when you feel healthy physically, you will be better able to cope emotionally.
- Either through thinking about past experiences or reading about coping strategies, determine some ways that are best for you to deal with these feelings.
- Limit your consumption of news.
- Get enough “good” sleep.
- Establish and maintain a routine.
- Avoid making major life decisions.
- Understand there will be changes.

## SELF-CARE TIPS TO BUILD RESILIENCY

Remain positive.

Establish realistic and achievable goals.

Strategies (plan ways to cope).

Identify (strengths).

Learn from experience.

Introduce (positive ways of thinking).

Enjoy (time for yourself).

Needs (take care of yourself).

Connect (maintain healthy relationships).

Embrace change (don't dwell on the past).

## ASSISTANCE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- Community resources: dial 211
  - Medical or life-threatening emergency: call 911
- Mental Health America: [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) or 855-879-5439
- National Crisis Text Line: Text “HOME” to 741741
- National Suicide Help Line: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273 8255)
  - Plain Communities Helpline: 717-989-8661
- Prevent Suicide Pennsylvania: [preventsuicidepa.org](http://preventsuicidepa.org)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Toll-free Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

## RECOGNIZING UNHEALTHY SUBSTANCE USE

When emotions and feelings become more than one can handle, sometimes people turn to drugs and alcohol. It can be difficult to distinguish normal moodiness or angst from signs of drug use. Possible indications include:

- **Problems at school or work**—frequently missing school or work, a sudden disinterest in school activities or work, or a drop in grades or work performance.
- **Physical health issues**—lack of energy and motivation, weight loss or gain, or red eyes.
- **Neglected appearance**—lack of interest in clothing, grooming, or looks.
- **Changes in behavior**—exaggerated efforts to bar family members from entering one's room, being secretive about where one goes with friends, or exhibiting drastic changes in behavior and relationships with family and friends.
- **Money issues**—sudden requests for money without a reasonable explanation, or your discovery that money or items are missing, have disappeared, or have been stolen from your home, indicating that maybe they're being sold to support drug use.

While these might be an indication, substance misuse can happen in complete absence of these signs.

## THE 5 Cs OF EMOTIONS

<b>Catch it.</b>	Recognize when you are having negative or unhelpful thoughts.
<b>Control it.</b>	Stop! When you find yourself thinking negatively, say STOP to yourself (silently) to stop the downward spiral of thoughts leading to sadness, guilt, anxiety, self-doubt, hurt, etc.
<b>Challenge it.</b>	Challenge what you are saying to yourself.
<b>Change it.</b>	Change the negative messages you are saying to yourself to more realistic/positive ones in order to bring about more pleasant and helpful emotions.
<b>Cherish it.</b>	Enjoy the moment and the feeling you have just created!

### ***COMMUNICATING WITH FARMERS UNDER STRESS***

This workshop is for anyone who works with agricultural producers and farm families and wants to learn how to manage farm-related stress and approach and communicate with those in need.

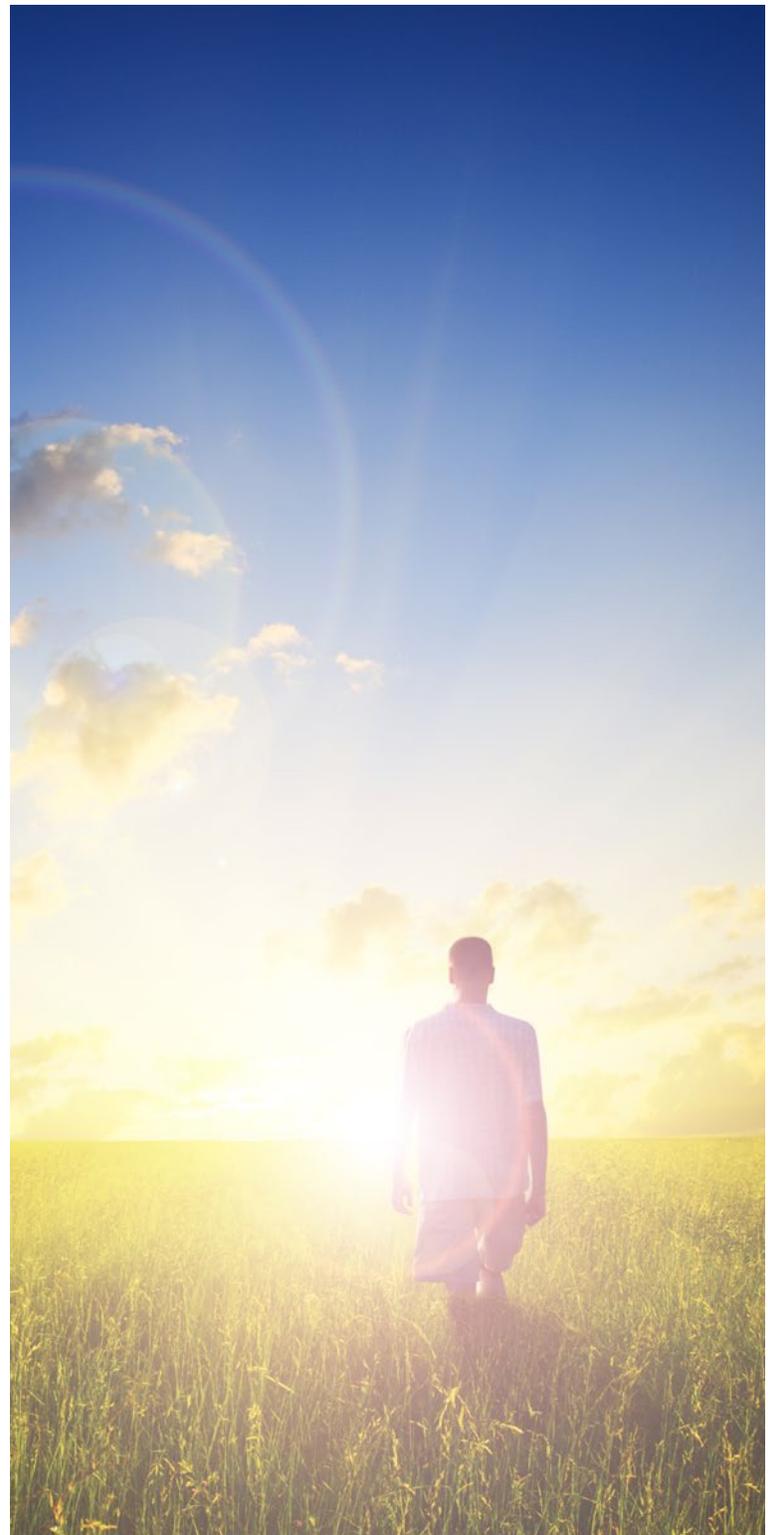
### ***WEATHERING THE STORM: HOW TO CULTIVATE A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET***

This workshop is for people and farm families who want to know more about managing farm-related stress and how to access resources. Learn how to:

- Increase awareness of rural stress issues and warning signs of stress challenges.
- Explore key stress issues and communicate about steps in managing stress.
- Discover and apply useful coping methods for responding to stress and improving wellness.
- Identify and access available resources and sources of support.

### ***MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID***

This course will teach you how to help someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. You will learn how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses in this eight-hour class. (You must attend the full eight hours to become certified.)



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