

Managing emotions and stress: Facilitator manual

Somedays we are in a good mood, somedays, in a bad mood. We are human beings after all and emotions are part of us. Positive emotions, such as joy, happiness and excitement, bring glints of light to our lives. Negative emotions, such as sadness, anger and hatred, bring gloom and darkness.

Discussion Question:

Have you experienced times when you were gripped by anger, guilt, sorrow, or jealousy? When you were bothered about something, you could not think, work, eat, or sleep?

Weighed down by negative emotions, our mind is unable to function rationally. Our thoughts are stuck with the incidents or events that jolt us into despair.

We also develop negative feelings towards others and ourselves when the demands from people around us, especially our family, become too much to bear. We are put under emotional stress.

Possible sources of Negative emotion:

Family, peer and school exert the strongest influence on a teenager's life. The family, however, plays the most important role because teenagers depend on their parents for financial and emotional support. They also learn about the world and themselves through the eyes of their parents. We also develop negative feelings towards others and ourselves when the demands from people around us, especially our family, become too much to bear. We are put under emotional stress. Unhappiness Managing emotions and stress Interestingly, adolescence is also marked by frequent conflicts with parents. Most people attribute the conflict to the "generation gap".

Both parents and teenagers are right, the gap between them merely represent the different outlook of their time. Adolescents, in the journey of growing up, are often caught in the conflict of values, that is, between what parents tell them as right, and what their peers are doing. They tend to be confused, and lost, and begin to rebel. Some of them turn to drinking, smoking, or drugs in order to find a way out, and some opt to end their lives because they cannot resolve the emotional impasse and stress.

Prolonged negative emotions and stress can harm our mental and physical health, threaten our relationships with others and affect our lives profoundly.

1. Managing emotions

We cannot avoid conflicts and problems, and therefore, negative emotions. What we can do is shorten the amount of time we experience negative emotions and reduce their harmful effects on us.

a. Recognise the emotions in you : Self-awareness

Be aware of our emotions is the first step towards managing them, rather than allowing emotions to control us.

The strong emotion can be anger, hatred, or love that burns in your chest. Once you trace back to the root, you will find the seed, the incident or the person that roused the strong reaction in you.

b. Analyse how it affects your behaviour

Once you are able to move out of its grip, and “see” yourself in the particular situation clearly, you are mostly likely to realise that the problem is not as bad as you think. Negative emotions have the power to trap us in a cage and exaggerate the impact of a problem, a criticism or a conflict. Critical thinking helps us gain control over negative emotions and bring us out of the cage.

The direct confrontation of the negative emotion enables us to “see” what it is that’s bothering us inside. Attending to this emotion will give us the knowledge and “power” to overcome it. You can let it out of your system by talking with a good friend or someone you trust. Whatever you do, try to recognise the distressing feeling inside you. Do not ignore it or resist the emotion because if you do, you will be trapped for a long time.

Scenario

For instance, the teacher in your class has made a nasty comment about your homework, saying you are a “bad boy.” You know you are angry with the teacher but you cannot help feeling upset. Everyday, the flame consumes you. You cannot concentrate on that subject or the subjects taught in other classes. What are you going to do? If you go on like this, you will fail the final exam in a few weeks’ time. Now ask yourself what this anger has done to you. Your emotion has taken control and put you in a cage. You cannot focus on your studies or do your homework. You have learnt nothing in the past few days. By allowing your anger to burn inside you, you will reinforce what the teacher is saying about you. You are proving the teacher right, that you are not capable of studying and doing your homework! Isn’t that the case? If you are able to pause and take a look at the harmful effects, you will learn to take positive actions. Prove the teacher wrong, you are not a bad boy. The moment you turn the situation around, you have won over the negative emotion, and done something really good for yourself.

Scenario 2

Emotions are, however, not always negative. Love is a strong emotion too. For instance, Kama is in love with a girl in his village. He gets up the guts to walk up to her one day, and suggests, haltingly, that they meet under the community center on Saturday afternoon. When Atieno, the girl, worried about what other people may think, says:

“No!” kama’s world is crushed. He feels completely dejected, and is burned with pain inside him. He cannot get his mind off atieno, she is really beautiful and charming... The more he thinks of her, the more pain he feels. Atieno’s rejection is the source of his pain, which becomes a negative emotion. The

pain is a mixture of shame and not getting what he wants. Some boys take to drinking to drown out the pain. Is it a permanent solution? Drinking will not help you turn atieno's heart towards you.

If you care about atieno why not find out from her friend why she is rejecting you? Perhaps it is not because she does not like you, but because she is too shy to sit with you at the community center and invite teasing from other villagers.

However, there is also a chance that atieno does not like kama at all, and does not want to lead him on. If this is the case, atienos will have to ask himself:

“Do I care about her? If I care, and I claim to love her, I will respect her decision.

Even though shame is a difficult emotion to overcome, kama's is better off confronting his own feelings, finding out his positive attributes, to balance up the deep sense of rejection that erodes his self-confidence. Kama will then realise that it is only one incident in his life, however painful. She will always have a chance to encounter another girl who likes him equally later on. Hope keeps Kama alive! And hope usually comes through!

c. Take actions to respond to your emotions

Creative thinking

There are many ways to respond to your emotions and you should apply them according to the situation. One way to go about it is to share with a friend or a family member you trust most. Sharing itself is a process of clarifying how you feel, and understanding your emotions. The advice and counseling from your friends usually has a positive effect on you.

Whatever way you choose, it is very important to solicit help in this process. We are all social animals. Love, comfort and support do wonders for us. By isolating yourself, and wrestling with emotions all alone, you are wasting the most precious asset all human beings: sharing. Many people hesitate to share because they are ashamed of revealing what they feel inside. Some believe that it is immoral to reveal their true feelings because their feelings are immoral... All this boils down to fear: fear of how other people may judge you, and fear of offending god by thinking in a certain way. Fear cripples us.

Sharing often brings you a new perspective, and helps you look at your problem from a different angle. The ability to discover another way of looking at the situation is creative thinking. Being creative is not just about being artistic

2. Managing stress

A life without pressure and challenge is not a productive life. We can unleash the hidden energy in us and achieve superb performance only when we are stimulated. Such stimulation is called stress. There are positive and negative stresses. or innovative, that is, creating an image on canvas or creating a kite. Creative thinking is a state of mind, and it can be applied to every situation and incident you encounter as you grow up.

Pressure is a good thing when it serves to challenge our limits, increase our capacity to undertake responsibility and meet demands imposed upon us everyday. A person who idles away his or her energy may feel sluggish, languid, and lousy stemming from the lack of purpose, and hope. However, when

pressure or responsibility goes beyond reasonable level, we will be put under tremendous stress, mentally and physically. When we are stressed out, we are unable to achieve high-quality performance, and our health deteriorates.

What can be done to help manage stress?

- a. Recognise the source of your stress
- b. Analyse how it affects your life
- c. Take actions to reduce the sources of stress

Life is full of demands and responsibilities. While we want to do our best, we also need to know our limits. We have to learn to love ourselves, and heed the call of our anxieties. That is, being alert to the time we have reached our limit, getting frustrated, resentful, and feeling down. We should not hesitate to tell others and ask for help bravely. It takes courage to say: "I cannot do it, can you help?" Help will usually come, only if you ask, and ask intelligently!

Coping with stress

1. What are the symptoms of stress?

Facilitators can help participants identify **physical signs and symptoms** of stress, including but not limited to: increased heart rate; pounding heart; sweaty palms; tightness of the chest, neck, jaw and back muscles; headache; diarrhoea; constipation; urinary hesitancy; trembling, twitching; stuttering and other speech difficulties; nausea; vomiting; sleep disturbances; fatigue; shallow breathing; dryness of the mouth or throat; susceptibility to minor illness, cold hands, itching; being easily startled; chronic pain and dyspnoea.

Emotional signs and symptoms of stress include, but are not limited to: irritability, angry outbursts, hostility, depression, jealousy, restlessness, withdrawal, anxiousness, diminished initiative, feelings of unreality or over alertness, reduction of personal involvement with others, lack of interest, tendency to cry, being critical of others, self-deprecation, nightmares, impatience, decreased perception of positive experience opportunities, narrowed focus, obsessive rumination, reduced self-esteem, insomnia, changes in eating habits and weakened positive emotional response reflexes.

Cognitive/perceptual signs and symptoms of stress include: forgetfulness, preoccupation, blocking, blurred vision, errors in judging distance, diminished or exaggerated fantasy life, reduced creativity, lack of concentration, diminished productivity, lack of attention to detail, orientation to the past, decreased psychomotor reactivity and coordination, attention deficit, disorganisation of thought, negative self-esteem, diminished sense of meaning in life, lack of control/need for too much control, negative self-statements and negative evaluation of experiences.

Behavioral signs and symptoms of stress include: increased smoking, aggressive behaviors (such as driving), increased alcohol or drug use, carelessness, under-eating, over-eating, withdrawal, listlessness, hostility, accident-proneness, nervous laughter, compulsive behavior and impatience.

Dealing with school work

1. Do you have problems at school?
2. Are you worried about your exam results?
3. Do your classmates feel similar ways about school? Do you share your thoughts with them?
4. What can you do to improve school performance?

Teen suicide

1. What prompts young people into the decision to end their lives?
2. Why can't they ask for help when they are in trouble?
3. If you were in the same situation, what would you do?