Development of a Stress Management Treatment Manual for Offenders Under Community Supervision

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Dedication

To my incredible partner, Annie, my perfect daughter, Summer and our entire family. Your love and enduring support have been astounding and this would not be possible without all of you.

Love you all and thank you.
Stress is experienced by everyone and can have a major impact on people’s lives. Stress management skills are essential in decreasing stress and help reduce an individual’s chances of health problems over prolonged periods of stress. During this placement stress management was identified by agency staff as a deficit for the offender population and an increase in stress management skills could potentially help agency clients attempting to reintegrate into the Kingston community. This thesis focused on the development of a manual to provide alternative and adaptive stress management strategies for offenders on parole in the community residing at the John Howard Society of Kingston. These techniques were selected based on empirical evidence supporting their use in reducing stress and they included journal writing, deep and slow breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation. The results of this thesis consist of the final product manual to be used at the John Howard Society. Changes to the manual were based on feedback received, however, this thesis focused mainly on the development of the manual and did not measure its efficacy. This was a major limitation to the thesis. Although, the manual’s adaptability and flexible techniques for clients is regarded as its greatest strength. A recommendation for future research would be the empirical testing of the manual to determine its efficacy of reducing stress in offenders on parole in the community.
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# Table of Contents

**Dedication** .................................................................................................................. ii  
**Abstract** ......................................................................................................................... iii  
**Acknowledgments** .......................................................................................................... iv  
**Chapter I: Introduction** ................................................................................................... 1  
**Chapter II: Literature Review** .......................................................................................... 3  
  - Effects of Stress ........................................................................................................... 3  
  - The Role of Perception ............................................................................................... 4  
  - Stress and the Offender Population .......................................................................... 5  
  - Stress Management .................................................................................................. 6  
  - Summary ................................................................................................................... 9  
**Chapter III: Method Section** ........................................................................................... 11  
  - Participants ............................................................................................................... 11  
  - Design ....................................................................................................................... 11  
  - Supporting Information ............................................................................................ 12  
  - Procedures ................................................................................................................ 12  
  - Informed Consent ..................................................................................................... 13  
  - Measures ................................................................................................................... 13  
**Chapter IV: Results** .......................................................................................................... 13  
  - Product ....................................................................................................................... 14  
  - Feedback and Changes ............................................................................................ 14  
**Chapter V: Discussion Section** .......................................................................................... 15  
  - Overview ................................................................................................................... 15  
  - Strengths ................................................................................................................... 15  
  - Limitations ................................................................................................................ 16  
  - Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation ................................................... 16  
  - Contribution to the Field of Behavioural Psychology .............................................. 17  
  - Recommendations for Future Research ................................................................... 17  
**References** ....................................................................................................................... 18  
**Appendix A: User’s Manual** ............................................................................................. 20
Chapter I: Introduction

Stress is more common and recognized today than ever before, and has become more widely accepted and discussed (Wallace, 2007). Antai-Otong (2001) supports this by stating that stress in today’s society is increasing, which can place significant strain on individuals, their families, and their communities. Stress is defined as a state of mental strain caused by events in a person’s life that can result in worry, anxiety, or anger (Wood, Wood, Wood, & Desmarais, 2008). Stress often arises from an individual’s perception of salient events or situations. However, even momentary life stressors, such as being stuck in traffic, can have a significant impact on health (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). DeLongis and colleagues (1982) classify these smaller life stressors as hassles. Interestingly, hassles may build up over time and, when combined, often have a stronger effect on health outcomes than do major life stressors (DeLongis et al., 1982). The ubiquity of daily hassles, which have the capacity for negative long-term consequences, suggest a need to increase stress management techniques to deal effectively with stress.

Lindsay, Paulhus, and Nairne (2008) emphasize the importance of every individual learning about stress and how to cope with it adaptively. The reality is that stress has been associated with a host of health problems including, but not limited to, heart disease, chronic pain, increased blood pressure, and cancer (Lindsay et al., 2008). An early study conducted by Holmes and Rahe (1967) concluded that a term of incarceration was the fourth most likely event to cause significant stress, as measured by the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). This relates to the current project, since a majority of residents served by the John Howard Society are offenders on parole. It should also be noted that divorce and marital separation were ranked second and third respectively on the SRRS, with job loss being eighth (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Holmes and Rahe’s findings are relevant to the offender population since finding and maintaining gainful employment, establishing and re-establishing strong family ties, and developing prosocial connections are both common challenges for many offenders and managing the stress resulting from these challenges is important for offenders reintegrating into society (Gurley & Satcher, 2003).

Many residents served by the John Howard Society are offenders on parole. For offenders, increasing stress management skills, coping techniques, and employable traits are all factors that can help to reduce daily life stressors (Gurley & Satcher, 2003). Employable traits can include, but are not limited to, organizational skills, interpersonal skills, and problem solving skills. An increase in stressors while trying to acquire employment, create prosocial connections, and develop financial stability may leave some offenders vulnerable to resorting to maladaptive coping techniques, such as abusing substances (Gurley & Satcher, 2003). Since substance use is a breach of parole conditions, this example of maladaptive coping can result in revocation of parole and re-incarceration. The purpose of this project is to develop a treatment manual that will assist offenders in developing stress management and self-care skills and, by doing so, increase their ability to successfully reintegrate into society.

These techniques include Deep and Slow Breathing (DSB), Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), journal writing, and meditation. Each of the techniques was found to
be relatively easy to learn and implement, and had to require very little financial, if any, investment on the part of the client. DSB is a relaxation technique that can lower body tension and help reduce anger (Busch et al., 2012). DSB involves taking several deep breaths over an amount of time (e.g., 5 minutes) (Busch et al., 2012). This slows down a person’s breathing cycle which allows the body to relieve tension that will help when feeling stressed or angry (Busch et al., 2012). According to Rausch, Gramling, and Auerbach (2006), PMR is a relaxation technique that allows a person to monitor and control the tension in their body. Managing tension is important when trying to reduce stress (Rausch et al., 2006). Similar to DSB, deep breathing is used as a key element in this technique (Rausch et al., 2006). Journal writing has been proven to be an effective method of reducing stress and involves logging and reflecting on personal feelings when trying to reduce stress (Cooper & Sloan, 2012). Cooper and Sloan (2012) found that people who do journal writing showed reductions in stress when compared to people who did not engage in journal writing. It is recommended to log journal entries 2-3 times per week (Cooper & Sloan, 2012). Meditation is similar to DSB and PMR techniques with a focus on breathing and comfort to relax the mind and body to help reduce stress (Coppola & Spector, 2009). Meditation involves sitting in a comfortable space and breathing deeply with eyes closed while focusing on clearing the mind of all cognitions (Coppola & Spector, 2009).

Overview

This thesis will explore the literature on the efficacy of managing stress through various best practice coping techniques. This will include the supporting research and potential strengths and weaknesses of each coping technique. Following the literature review section, the methods and procedures for creating the manual including the development, design, intended participants and settings will be outlined in the methodology section. The manual itself will comprise the results section. A review of each of the major changes to the manual, based on feedback from staff at the John Howard Society and the placement supervisor, will form the first component of the discussion section. Also focused on in this section will be limitations, future recommendations, challenges to service implementation, and the manual’s contribution to the field of behavioural psychology.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review will begin with general information about stress and its deleterious impact on individuals. The efficacy of managing stress through various techniques will be discussed, before focusing specifically on the efficacy of these techniques as they relate to offenders. A review of these topics will help to establish a rationale for designing a treatment manual to aid in managing stress for offenders under community supervision. Following this, the literature review will outline four best practice stress reduction techniques. The efficacy will be outlined for each of these four best practices. In addition, the strengths and limitations of each technique will also be discussed.

Effects of Stress

Situations are perceived differently by each individual, which can lead to a variety of different reactions to the same stressor or event by different people (Chipas et al., 2012). Despite each individual’s choice of how to deal with stressful events, Wood, Wood, Wood, and Desmarais, (2008) opine that everyone experiences similar stages of physiological reaction. These stages include the alarm reaction, resistance, and exhaustion phases. The alarm reaction phase is characterized by an increase in heart rate, respiration, and blood flow, wherein the body is in a constant state of readiness (Wood et al., 2008). The body is unable to maintain this level of physiological arousal indefinitely and, should this stress reaction continue, an individual’s body will shift to the resistance phase (Wood et al., 2008). The resistance phase is characterized by the body’s attempt to cope by remaining in a state of readiness while simultaneously lowering its arousal levels to allow the body to replenish itself (Wood et al., 2008). Lindsay and colleagues (2008) warn that in this stage the individual may develop physical and psychological health concerns that can become exacerbated if the stressful event is not adaptively coped with, and may lead to the final stage, exhaustion. This stage is the most dangerous since the body begins to shut down due to a continuous rate of energy depletion, which may lead to disease or death (Wood et al., 2008).

Physiological reactions are not the only consequences of stress; psychological reactions often also follow prolonged stressors (Lindsay, Paulhus, & Nairne, 2008). The emergence of various psychological reactions supports Chipas and colleagues’ (2012) argument that stress does not always produce general reactions. Intense emotions such as fear, grief, sadness, and anger are all common reactions to various stressors individuals can experience (Lindsay et al., 2008). Stress can lead to feelings of anxiousness, feeling emotionally drained and can contribute to a depressed mood; if the stressor is severe enough or prolonged, it can lead to psychiatric disorders such as depression (Lindsay et al., 2008). Despite some of these negative repercussions of stress, Lindsay and colleagues (2008) state that stress is not always negative. They emphasize potential positive implications of successfully managing a stressful event. Individuals who are able to resolve their stressful events in an adaptive way often develop confidence in their ability to manage various stressful situations (Lindsay et al., 2008). This is relevant to this project since the manual is being designed to help offenders learn to manage their stress.
The Role of Perception

According to Sutin, Costa, Wethington, and Eaton (2010), the way people make sense of stressful events can have an impact on their self-rated health and psychological distress. Sutin and colleagues (2010) identified turning points and lessons learned as two ways in which individuals try to maintain continuity of the self. A turning point is any stressor that an individual appraised as an event that is a major life change, such as the death of a family member (Sutin, Costa, Wethington, & Eaton, 2010). A lesson learned is a stressful event that the individual identified as a chance to learn something about themselves; a salient example of a lesson could be a way they learned to cope with the stressor. They conducted an experiment to determine if either of these interpretations (turning points and lessons learned) would affect individuals’ self-rated health and psychological distress by having participants complete various stress measures at baseline and again at a ten-year follow-up. Sutin and colleagues (2010) found that individuals who perceived a stressful event as a negative turning point reported greater health problems and psychological distress compared to those who perceived the event as a positive turning point. No significant differences were discerned as a function of lesson learned (Sutin et al., 2010).

Since the aforementioned results point to a relationship between perception of stress and self-reported health symptoms, it is important to explore the impact of perceptions of a stressful event on an individual’s health status. Keller et al. (2012) conducted a study examining level of stress, the perception of the influence of stress on health, and health and mortality outcomes. They hypothesised that the perception of stress can be equally consequential to a person’s health as the level of stress experienced; this may be due to the reality that the perception of stress is unique to the individual experiencing it. It is possible for an individual to perceive the stress they are experiencing as more significant than it actually is. This can lead to a misconception of the effects on their actual health. Conversely an individual who is better able to appraise their higher levels of stress will have lower levels of perceived stress (Keller et al., 2012). Accordingly, this study provides evidence that the impact of a stressor may be moderated by how an individual appraises a given stressor.

Wood and colleagues (2008) define cognitive appraisal as an individual’s ability to evaluate a stressful event and assess their available resources (i.e., social support, energy, skills, morale) when trying to resolve a stressful event. Keller and colleagues (2012) gathered data from the 1998 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and National Death Index (NDI). They found that people reporting both high stress levels and high perceived stress may be at a higher risk of premature mortality compared to people who reported either high stress or high perceived stress, but not both. Individuals who reported high stress levels and high stress perception increased their risk of premature death by 43% (Keller et al., 2012).

Chipas and colleagues (2012) conducted a study examining the relationship between stress experienced by post-secondary students and their perceptions of stress, and found significant differences across gender and ethnicity. Females experienced more
stress and had a higher perception of stress than their male counterparts. It was also documented that participants of African American and Hispanic American heritage reported higher levels of stress compared to Caucasian students (Chipas et al., 2012). It should be noted that a limitation of this study was the small sample size. Furthermore, the results may not be generalizable to our population of interest (i.e., offenders). However, these findings help support the importance of the manual’s ability to be flexible to each user’s needs since some populations may experience more stress than others.

**Stress and the Offender Population**

While stress is a common experience for everyone, it can be argued that offenders have additional stressors (i.e., attempting to re-connect with family members, securing and maintaining gainful employment, adhering to parole conditions). Moreover, offenders, as a general population, are known to manage stressors poorly (Gurley & Satcher, 2003). Maladaptive coping mechanisms include substance abuse which, if detected, can directly sabotage an offender’s reintegration as may lead to parole revocation and incarceration. A majority of offenders face many significant life stressors such as rekindling relationships with family, establishing financial stability, obtaining employment, developing prosocial peer relationships, all the while adhering to parole conditions.

Gurley and Satcher (2003) conducted a study comparing male offenders under supervision (under one year) who had used substances versus those who had refrained from substance use to better understand stress levels. Participants were given the Stress In My Life survey to assess their stress levels in five domains: family, financial, employment, peer, and social. Each of the aforementioned domains were measured by self-report on 22 5-point Likert-scale items, with higher scores indicating greater severity of stress related to each item. Substance users reported higher levels of stress as compared to their non-substance using counterparts across all domains of stress. This finding highlights the importance of improving stress management in offenders, which is the aim of this project, since substance using offenders self-reported higher levels of stress and tend to cope in dysfunctional ways (i.e., substance use).

King and DeLongis (2014) conducted a study investigating the influence of rumination and withdrawal on marital functioning and work stress. Withdrawal is a maladaptive behavioural coping technique that involves a state of isolation with a lack of interpersonal contact (King and DeLongis, 2014). Rumination, on the other hand, is a maladaptive cognitive coping technique that involves continuous and repetitive thinking about one’s issues, usually with a pessimistic bent (King and DeLongis, 2014). Participating couples consisted of one working and one non-working spouse (working defined as full-time or full-time equivalent—four shifts per week—employment). Data was gathered through online questions, three times daily for the working spouse and twice daily for the non-working spouse. All questions were from abbreviated the Perceived Stress Scale (PPS-4), a four-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PPS). King and DeLongis (2014) found that when the working spouse responded to work stress with interpersonal withdrawal, it would negatively affect their non-working partner, resulting in marital strain. While rumination did not appear to have the same negative impact on the non-working spouse as interpersonal withdrawal, the cumulative effects of
these two maladaptive responses caused the most marital tension. These results evidence the impact of maladaptive coping on interpersonal relationships.

Sheidow, Henry, Tolan, and Strachan (2014) explored the relationship between family functioning and exposure to stress. Urban families often live in very stressful environments that involve poverty, criminal activity, and community violence on top of their regular life stressors, which increases vulnerability to developing mood and anxiety disorders in children and adolescents (Sheidow, Henry, Tolan, & Strachan, 2014). Families experiencing monetary difficulties may be more affected by stress since they have fewer financial resources to allot toward various services (e.g., a psychologist or social worker) in trying to resolve stressors (Sheidow et al., 2014). Participants in this study were adolescent males and their families from the Chicago Youth Development Study (CYDS). They utilized a longitudinal approach where participants were interviewed by highly trained staff over five years using various instruments, including the Family Assessment Measure, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL). Sheidow and colleagues (2014) found that stronger family functioning had a mediating effect on the stress experienced from daily hassles, while poor family functioning played a role in the development of negative psychological consequences. The authors also established that youths from families that displayed stronger cohesion and structure with adaptive parenting practices demonstrated less internalized problems than youth from families with dysfunctional or strained relationships. This underscores one important reason for offenders to reconnect with family members, which is for them to receive support in reintegrating into their community.

Stress Management

Managing stress adaptively is an important component in maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Wallace, 2007). Findings from Gurley and Satcher (2003), and King and DeLongis (2014) suggest a need to better utilize adaptive stress relief techniques. Wood and colleagues (2008) discuss the idea of emotion-focused coping as a stress relief technique that can help change emotional reaction to stress. Antai-Otong (2001) also emphasizes emotion-focused coping techniques as an approach when a stressful event is perceived as overwhelming. Emotion-focused coping focuses on modulating the emotions generated from stress, allowing individuals to appraise the stressful event as less threatening or challenging (Antai-Otong, 2001). Some emotion-focused techniques that can help reduce stress include journal writing, Deep and Slow Breathing (DSB), Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), and meditation.

Salmon (2001) discusses the effects that physical exercise can have on stress, anxiety, and depression, and offers a unifying theory of several cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. Physical exercise can have positive effects on an individual’s cardiovascular system and help cope with physical disorders like diabetes; however, the benefits of physical exercise can also expand to reducing psychological symptoms of stress (Salmon, 2001). Salmon (2001) reported that individuals who self-reported high levels of physical activity showed better mental health (i.e., lower levels of depression and anxiety) and lower emotional distress. A positive correlation between self-reported physical activity and fewer anxiety and depressive symptoms experienced was also
found. This can be related to Keller and colleagues’ (2014) point about the way individuals perceive stress. As mentioned previously in Keller and colleagues’ (2014) study that the way individuals perceive stress can have an impact on their health; therefore an individual may be better able to appraise a stressor with exercise as a complement allowing them to better manage their stress.

Although spontaneous exercise has shown some effect in reducing depressive symptoms, there was no use of a definitive formal exercise training program used as an intervention for depression in this study (Salmon, 2001). A central limitation to using an exercise intervention is the emphasis on an individual being able to function well enough to exercise, and to have the time and motivation to follow through; this is an issue since one of the diagnostic requirements for depression includes functional impairment (Salmon, 2001). It could be argued that exercise on its own would not be an effective intervention. Salmon (2001) indicates that, exercise on its own, would not meet the immediate needs of an individual with depression, making it difficult for an exercise intervention to be effective. The use of exercise interventions to target anxiety has also been met with similar results (Salmon, 2001). Anxiety appeared to decline following implementation of a jogging program; Salmon (2001) concluded that further research could potentially produce better results for both interventions.

Finally, Salmon (2001) discussed the effects of exercise training on stress, comparing the differences between laboratory stressors and real-life stressors. Laboratory stressors were defined as any stressor that is more predictable, while the context of real-life stressors are stressors that are more spontaneous in nature. Experimental studies with laboratory-induced stressors have resulted in inconsistent findings when using exercise programs aimed at reducing the impact of stress on individuals (Salmon, 2001). Salmon (2001) explains that the overgeneralization of stressors and a tendency to regard some stressors as interchangeable may explain the inconsistency since people have unique responses to stressors. Real-life stressors have shown more consistent relationships between higher exercise levels demonstrating lower stress levels and fewer psychological illness symptoms when compared to individuals who do not exercise (Salmon, 2001). Gerber and Puhse (2009) support this where they indicated that individuals who reported higher levels of stress also reported having more health concerns. However, a weakness to this model is that self-reporting and spontaneous real-life stressors can be subjective and hard to control for (Salmon, 2001). With this in mind exercise was not chosen as a viable coping technique for the manual, since many residents at the John Howard Society lack the motivation to exercise and many are experiencing anxiety around released back into the community. Therefore, encouraging them to leave the residence to exercise may be perceived as an additional stressor, which would be antithetical to the purpose of this project.

Blanco and Robinett (2014) investigated the effect of leisure activities as a coping technique in reducing stress. They interviewed male college students about their leisure activities, and also asked participants to report on the effect that the activities in which they engaged had on their stress. Blanco and Robinett (2014) found that participants were using leisure time as an escape-oriented coping mechanism. Participants reported that by using leisure to distract from stressors it allowed them time to replenish their own resources (i.e., physical and mental energy) to work toward resolving their stressor. However, not all leisure activities were prosocial in nature. For instance, some
participants reported substance use as a leisure activity that reduces stress (Blanco and Robinett, 2014). Although leisure time can be and often is used in adaptive ways, abusing substances is not a viable option for residents at the John Howard Society.

Some of the research investigating the utility of journal writing suggests it is an efficacious technique for reducing stress (Cooper & Sloan, 2012; Sgoutas-Emch & Johnson, 1998). An advantage of journal writing, as identified by Sgoutas-Emch and Johnson (1998), is that it requires little training and is simple to engage in. These authors conducted a study comparing the anxiety levels of two groups of undergraduate students, one group instructed to journal their frustrations, thoughts, and feelings, and the other group not instructed to do so. The authors found that participants in the group that journalled expressed lower levels of anxiety than the group that did not journal. The efficacy of journaling was measured using the Journal Efficacy Scale (JES), a self-report questionnaire designed to measure fluctuations in anxiety and understanding of their college course content. Results showed that those who journaled reported lower levels of stress and also performed better in their undergraduate statistics course compared to the group that did not keep a journal (Sgoutas-Emch & Johnson, 1998). This finding is relevant since many offenders can easily engage in this activity (i.e., it requires no training), and research suggests it is effective in reducing stress. A limitation to this study is the target population of the study, college students, does not coincide with the intended users of this manual.

Cooper and Sloan (2012) authored a systematic literature review investigating whether expressive writing has the capacity to lower rumination. Their review linked ruminative thoughts to clinical depression ranging from moderate to severe. The importance of this finding is further emphasized by King and DeLongis’ (2014) assertion that rumination and anxiety can have an impact in multiple aspects of an offender’s life. Overall, Cooper and Sloan (2012) concluded that writing was effective in reducing symptoms of depression.

Busch and colleagues (2012) investigated DSB as a relaxation technique to potentially reduce tension, depressed mood, and anger (Busch et al., 2012). This study specifically investigated the effects of DSB on autonomic activity, pain perception, and mood. Two types of DSB were used, attentive and relaxing, with the former requiring stricter concentration and attention compared to the latter. The relaxing DSB was associated with an increase in pain threshold and a significant decrease in skin conductance levels. While the attentive DSB was not associated with a reduction in pain threshold or skin conductive levels, both forms of DSB resulted in improvements in anger, depressive mood, and tension (Busch et al., 2012). Overall, these findings suggest that DSB can be an efficacious technique for this manual as it aids in the reduction of various stress indicators.

Coppola and Spector (2009) conducted a study evaluating the effect of Natural Stress Relief (NSR) meditation on stress and self-actualization among 31 participants. Data regarding anxiety was obtained using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) questionnaire at three time-points (1 week pre-test, right before first session and the last after four weeks of practice) of the NSR meditation intervention. The Short Index of Self-Actualization (SISA) was administered as a measure of self-actualization at the beginning and end of the intervention. The results concluded that NSR meditation significantly reduced anxiety while also significantly increasing self-actualization.
Consistent with the results of this study, meditation emerges as an adaptive technique to include in the manual aimed at reducing stress.

Rausch, Gramling, and Auerbach (2006) conducted an experiment investigating the effects of PMR on stress. Participants were asked to practice PMR for 20 minutes and, following this, they were shown a series of emotionally-laden pictures on slides before practicing PMR for an additional 10 minutes. Slides depicted human trauma and the aftermath of trauma. At each stage the participants filled out measurement questionnaires, including the STAI, Cognitive Anxiety Scale, Smith Somatic Stress Symptoms Scale-State, and the Demographic Questionnaire. Rausch and colleagues (2006) found that PMR was effective in reducing participant anxiety. The efficacy of PMR in reducing anxiety, as demonstrated in this study, suggests PMR may be an efficacious technique for offenders who cope with multiple life stressors.

Similar efficacious results were also found in a study by Dolbier and Rush (2012), who explored the use of Abbreviated Progressive Muscle Relaxation (APMR). Participants, who were college students, were asked to complete a single 20-minute session of APMR and were then administered several stress detection measures. These measures included the PPS-4 and the Endler Multidimensional Anxiety Scale (EMAS-S). Results of the study indicated that students who utilized APMR achieved higher levels of relaxation and experienced a lower impact from stress (Dolbier and Rush, 2012). This study is salient to this project as it reinforces the idea that PMR and APMR are easy to use and adaptive coping techniques.

Summary

Stress is an important phenomenon to understand and manage adaptively in order for people to navigate their way through daily hassles and stressful events that inevitably occur for us all (Antai-Otong, 2001; Lindsay et al., 2008; Wallace 2007; Wood et al., 2008). The effects of stress can be harmful and potentially result in severe physical and mental health issues if left unchecked (Lindsay et al., 2008 and Wood et al., 2008). It is also important for individuals to be mindful of the way in which they perceive stressors and their ability to overcome stressors; this is because perceived stress can have a harmful effect on a person’s mental and physical health (Keller et al., 2012; Sutin et al., 2010). This literature review also established that offenders struggle to cope adaptively (Gurley and Satcher, 2003). This is of particular importance in light of King and DeLongis’ (2014) and Sheidow and colleagues (2014) results which indicate that stress can have harmful effects.

Findings from Gurley and Satcher (2003) and King and DeLongis (2014) suggest a need to better utilize adaptive stress relief techniques. Although the literature identified physical exercise (Salmon, 2001) and leisure time (Blanco & Robinett, 2014) as efficacious methods for reducing or managing stress, the limitations of these techniques as they apply to offender populations suggest that they are not viable coping techniques for residents at the John Howard Society. Journal writing is an efficacious coping technique that is both easy to learn and implement for offenders (Cooper & Sloan, 2012; Sgoutas-Emch & Johnson, 1998). PMR is both easy to learn and implement, and is effective at adaptively reducing anxiety, which has been identified by staff as a common complaint of residents at the John Howard Society (Rausch et al., 2006; Dolbier & Rush...
DSB was a technique selected to aid in stress reduction and reduce depressive mood and anger (Busch et al., 2012), but also served as a complement to PMR and journaling by providing a technique that offenders can use anywhere and at any time when PMR and journaling may not be accessible and/or practical. Meditation was selected as a final coping technique for its efficacy at reducing stress while also promoting self-actualization (Coppola & Spector, 2007).

Based on this literature review, a manual will be developed to provide offenders with psychoeducation about stress, its short- and long-term effects, and a step-by-step guide of how to use stress management techniques to assist with their reintegration into their community. The John Howard Society of Kingston has several community resources and referrals agencies for offenders and non-offenders alike; however, there is no dedicated stress management resource for the residents to use on their own time that they can use independently as their needs and schedules dictate. This project aims to fill that void through the creation of a manual that promotes autonomy through the use of easy-to-follow techniques that will assist them in managing stress in adaptive ways. It is hoped that this manual, which will be developed as part of the author’s field placement, will increase stress management and aid in the community reintegration of offenders on parole in the Kingston community. However, an evaluation of the effectiveness of this this manual as a stress management intervention is beyond the scope of the current study. Instead the manual will be used by staff at the John Howard Society to assist future clients.
Chapter III: Method Section

Participants

This manual will be designed as a compilation of best practices according to the relevant literature; therefore, no human participants contributed to the creation or participated in the selected interventions. That being said, the manual will be designed to be utilized by a target population that would benefit from the interventions compiled in the manual. This target population is adult male offenders above the age of 18. These individuals are offenders who are attempting to reintegrate into the Kingston community.

As previously stated, stress affects each person differently; therefore, there are no set criteria regarding which participants would benefit from using the manual. Ideally this manual should be used by individual offenders who have a lack of stress management skills or who demonstrate maladaptive coping to stress. Such maladaptive coping may include poor sleeping habits, aggression towards staff or residents, or a noticeable increase in smoking. These maladaptive coping techniques are often identifiable by John Howard Society (JHS) staff.

Users of the manual should be based on a case by case basis, identified by JHS staff or the offender themselves. Selection can be determined by staff observation, resident self-identified needs, or to assist with parole conditions. Parole conditions can include various appointments with other agencies as part of their parole conditions, such as meeting with mental health workers. The manual may be used to assist with parole conditions if the stress experienced by a resident is interfering with their ability to remember and make appointments or in other areas of their life.

Design

The manual will be created by the author as part of an applied thesis in the Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology degree program during a 14-week field placement and finalized during the ensuing winter semester at St. Lawrence College. Stress management skill building is the primary focus of the manual, with an additional emphasis on psychoeducation. The manual is intended to provide reintegrating offenders with easily learned stress management techniques that may increase their insight into the causes and consequences of stress and the importance of adaptive coping techniques. The manual will allow users to access and use adaptive coping techniques outlined with instructions and suggestions on how to use each different technique. This format was selected based on an identified need by the agency to assist offenders manage their stress when reintegrating into the community.

With respect to implementation, the manual is meant to complement JHS services provided by case managers in reintegrating offenders. Due to limited resources staff, it would be unrealistic to expect staff to provide constant support to offenders around the clock. The practicality of being able to use the manual and the skills described in the manual on their own has the capacity to increase an offender’s self-efficacy, tolerance for stress, while simultaneously helping the staff member to support their client. The manual is easily accessible to both staff and offenders, and the techniques are described in a very straightforward way, making them easy to learn and implement. Part of the instructions
in the manual will be for offenders to personalize each technique so that they may maximize the benefits of the manual. The simplicity of the instructions will also allow the staff to provide assistance to offenders since minimal training is needed and it can adjust to staff schedules.

Ultimately the setting in which the techniques may be used is decided by the user. However, quiet and comfortable places that will not provoke stressful reactions, such as an offender’s room or one of the private rooms in the JHS offices are ideal. A benefit of the techniques outlined in this manual is that they may be used in a variety of situations and settings. The manual is intended to be used individually by the offenders themselves, although it would be possible to seek staff assistance with the exercises.

Finally, the frequency, intensity, location, and duration of each session should be determined by the user and shaped around their own schedule and abilities. Consistent with this idea, the manual will contain session duration and frequency suggestions rather than pre-determined constraints as a way of being more user-friendly.

Supporting Information

In addition to the literature review, additional sources will be consulted during the manual’s development. A contribution was provided from JHS staff including the Residential Case Manager and the Manager of Justice Services. Agency staff provided support for a manual to assist reintegrating offenders with stress management. This support included encouragement for the project and continued feedback on the manual during its development after field placement completion. It was determined that such a manual may be a valuable resource considering the heavy workload of residential program staff.

Additionally, community and publicly accessible information and resources were also used and modified by the author for this manual. Some of the aforementioned resources and information were obtained from the college supervisor for this project who is also a staff member at the Intermediate Mental Health Care Unit (IMHCU) at Millhaven Institution. Each of these contributors were asked their permission for their provided information to be used in this project, to which no objections were raised. All additional personal communications have been summarized in Appendix A.

Procedures

Part I: Introduction and Stress: This part of the manual will cover the psychoeducation portion of the manual. Part I will focus on educating the user about stress, the positive and negative effects of stress, as well as adaptive and maladaptive means of coping. Depending on the user’s reading ability this section should take 10 to 15 minutes to read. Note. Content and design. Adapted from Blanco and Robinett (2014); Keller et al. (2012); Lindsay, Paulhus, and Nairne (2008); Salmon (2001); Wood, Wood, Wood, and Desmarais (2008).

Part II: Journal Writing: This part of the manual will provide explanations, instructions, and recommendations about journal writing as an adaptive coping technique. Recommendations will be suggested on ideal frequency, location, and duration. Note.
Content and design. Adapted from Cooper and Sloan (2012); Sgoutas-Emch and Johnson (1998).

Part III: Deep and Slow Breathing: Part Three of the manual will provide users with a rationale and instructions on how to properly utilize deep and slow breathing. Consistent with the approach of Part Two, recommendations on frequency, location, and duration will be provided. Note. Content and design. Adapted from Busch et al. (2012).

Part IV: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR): PMR will be described and step-by-step instructions will be provided to help guide the user through this technique. Again recommendations will be provided; however, PMR is a more structured technique than the techniques in Parts Two and Three. Therefore, it is expected that users follow the recommendations more closely for this intervention. Note. Content and design. Adapted from Dolbier and Rush (2012); Rausch, Gramling, and Auerbach (2006).

Part V: Meditation: The final part and technique in the manual will provide psychoeducation on the benefits of self-actualization of meditation, as well as its ability to assist with reducing stress. As with all previous parts, instructions, recommendations, and explanations will be provided to assist users to properly implement this technique. Note. Content and design. Adapted from Coppola and Spector (2009); Rausch et al. (2006).

Informed Consent

Due to the nature of the project, and consistent with established policies regarding offenders and confidentiality of both JHS and Correctional Service Canada (CSC), no informed consent procedure was deemed necessary.

Measures

Testing the efficacy of the manual is not within the scope of the current project. However, feedback will be sought from staff to help ensure the language of the manual is appropriate for the intended population, and to help increase the usefulness of the manual. Revisions will be made following this feedback and in concert with discussions with the college supervisor. This is meant to help ensure that user-friendly language is used for offenders and that the manual is as helpful as possible.
Chapter IV: Results

Product

The final version of the manual can be found in Appendix A.

Feedback and Changes

The manual was reviewed by JHS staff in order to obtain feedback on readability, formatting, content, and appropriateness for the agency and its clients. Feedback for the manual, in general, was positive. The readability was gauged to be at an appropriate level for clients to understand, contingent on a client’s fluency in English. The content of the manual was also approved for the agency and its client population, this was based on each techniques ability to be completed by clients while still following agency rules and procedures. Overall, the manual was determined to be acceptable and usable by agency standards, the techniques were practical, and addressed a common need for the population served by the JHS.

Some changes were made to an earlier draft of manual based on agency recommendations. “Examples of Physical Symptoms” was combined with “Examples of Various Symptoms” chart to avoid confusion and improve readability by keeping all the symptoms on the same page. In the “How our thoughts Impact Stress” section more detail was added into the example to help illustrate how one of the characters was able to adapt to their stressor. Examples were added to Exercise 1.2 to help illustrate how to complete the task. Additional information on how caffeine can affect different people and the negative effects of smoking were added to the healthy eating and smoking sections respectively in the “Self-Care” portion of the manual.

Examples were added to Exercise 1.3 to help illustrate how to complete the task. It was suggested that the manual also include additional YouTube video links to help provide supplemental instructions to the manual. Therefore, video links were added in the DSB, PMR, and meditation sections of the manual. More examples of different mantras were added in the meditation section. Some minor formatting revisions were suggested and subsequently completed for the “What is Self-Actualization?” section to help improve readability.
Chapter V: Discussion Section

Overview

Managing stress was identified as an important client need by staff at the JHS. Consistent with this need, the purpose of this thesis was to provide alternative and adaptive stress management strategies for offenders on parole in the community who are residing at the JHS of Kingston. These techniques were selected based on empirical evidence supporting their use in reducing stress. These techniques were journal writing, DSB, PMR, and meditation. Journal writing involves logging and reflecting on personal feelings. DSB is a relaxation technique focused on controlled breathing. PMR is a relaxation technique focused on the difference in states of muscle tension compared to muscle relaxation. Meditation is a technique that combines breathing control and muscle tension with a focus on clearing the mind. These techniques were compiled into a self-care client manual to be used by offenders with the hope of increasing or improving their stress management skills. The final version of the manual was given to staff at the JHS to be used by residents on parole. The intended audience of this manual is adult male offender parolees residing at the John Howard Society. The manual is designed for personal use. Each strategy was adapted for use by offenders by using simple step-by-step instructions and by encouraging users to adapt each strategy to their own preferences, thereby encouraging their participation. Feedback was sought from and provided by agency staff. Revisions to the manual stem from agency and college supervisor feedback, which are discussed in depth in the Results chapter.

Strengths

A primary strength of this manual was that the strategies used are based on empirical evidence supporting their effectiveness in reducing stress. These strategies include journal writing (Cooper & Sloan, 2012), DSB (Busch et al., 2012), PMR (Rausch et al., 2006) and Meditation (Coppola & Spector, 2009). This strength is supplemented by the manual’s creation being a collaborative effort between author and agency staff, who are well-versed in working with this population on a daily basis. This is important as it helps ensure that the manual is a resource adapted to the unique needs of the target population, helping to ensure it has a positive impact. This ensures the manual is a user-friendly and easy-to-use resource for offenders to use and customize to their specific needs. This is an important strength as it allows the users to become involved in the process and help dictate their own implementation of the manual. A strength identified by the agency supervisor was the manual’s use of appropriate language and that the manual would be suitable to the needs of the clients at the JHS. The manual also requires very little to no supplemental resources, making the techniques easily accessible and extremely cost-effective. This is important as simpler implementation can reduce the stress of using the manual and increase motivation to remain engaged and complete the techniques.
Limitations

A major limitation of this manual is that the strategies suggested have not been empirically evaluated with the target population (specifically JHS residents). While testing with JHS residents was never within the scope of this project, it is unknown at the current time if the techniques offered are helpful. Despite positive feedback gained from agency staff regarding the manual’s perceived helpfulness, there is still a need for proper empirical evaluation, which will be discussed further as a topic for future research.

Another limitation can be found in the lack of offender involvement in the manual’s creation. The manual was developed based upon literature of stress management techniques after agency staff identified stress management as a client need. While steps were taken to convey techniques in a way that can be understood by residents of the JHS, namely by seeking feedback from staff who work with this population, residents themselves were not included in this process. Even though the manual was based on empirical evidence, motivational interviewing a widely used technique with this population, was not implemented in this manual. This manual also requires users to be literate in English as there is currently no other language versions available.

Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation

At the Client Level

A significant client-level challenge in the community corrections field is client motivation. It can be very challenging to motivate clients to change and actively participate in their Correctional Plan. Accordingly, motivational interviewing techniques are often used with this population to increase offender engagement. This is particularly challenging since unmotivated clients rarely make progress or experience successful outcomes.

At the Program Level

A major challenge to programming at this placement is participation. The clients are male offenders on parole in the community. Due to this, there is no requirement for them to participate in any programming. This is a challenge as often clients may not want to participate in any extra programming and there is no external obligation or incentive. This can often be a result of a lack of internal motivation for change in this population. Also, the possibility breach of conditions could lead many involved in a program back to incarceration, thereby raising attrition, which could make maintaining a program or group and/or evaluating it difficult.

At the Organization Level

A major challenge at this agency is a lack of resources. This agency’s biggest challenge is a lack of staff and funding to provide more services. This is a challenge since it is increasingly difficult to provide more support and counselling to a large number of clients with a small staff. This can be compounded by some clients continuously utilizing agency resources for non-essential errands.
At the Societal Level

Stigma is a significant challenge faced by clients at this agency. This stems from a commonly held view among some in society that criminals are criminals and can never change. This can lead to people developing a just-lock-them-up-and-throw-the-key-away mindset. Stigma from members of society and self-stigmatization can both prevent clients from receiving support in the community and can also lead them to isolate themselves, which may interfere with their Correctional Plan and jeopardize successful community reintegration. While this challenge will not likely be fixed in the near future, and never entirely eliminated, it is a challenge that agencies such as JHS must work to reduce while helping clients transition back into community living.

Contribution to the Field of Behavioural Psychology

This thesis contributes to the behavioural psychology field by providing a resource of empirically-validated techniques designed to help improve stress management skills and psychoeducation in offenders on parole in the community. This is important as it may support offenders in community reintegration. This thesis also contributes to the trend in the behavioural psychology field by providing strategies to a vulnerable population that may allow them to better manage themselves in stressful situations, promoting their autonomy. This is achieved by the manual’s aim of trying to increase offenders stress management skills to help them learn alternative means of coping when faced with difficult situations.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted in the limitations, there are some identified areas to be addressed in future research. The first being the use of offenders in the manual’s development process. This thesis’ scope was the development of the manual. A future step should be to test the efficacy of the manual by measuring progress of offenders using the techniques in the manual. Another recommendation is to implement a means of empirically testing the efficacy of the techniques in increasing stress management in offenders on parole in the community. This could include offender feedback and pre/post testing to evaluate offenders’ skill acquisition. A potential research design could be an experimental method using one control group and a treatment group. The treatment group could be assigned a single or multiple techniques from the manual and be compared with the control group. This could potentially identify the efficacy of the manual. Testing of this manual could contribute to future stress management practices for this population.
References


Appendix A: User’s Manual
Stress Management Guidebook
User Manual

Developed by: Rick Abrams
Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology
St. Lawrence College
## Table of Contents

**Part I: Introduction & Stress** ................................................................. 23
  - Introduction ......................................................................................... 24
  - Information about Stress .................................................................. 25
  - Effects of Stress ................................................................................ 26
  - Stress Management ........................................................................... 28
    - Exercise 1.1: Identify Stressors ....................................................... 29
    - Exercise 1.2: Rating Stressors ......................................................... 31
  - Stress Management: Reducing Stress .............................................. 33
    - Exercise 1.3: Coping Techniques ..................................................... 35

**Part II: Journal Writing** ...................................................................... 37
  - Journal Writing .................................................................................. 38
    - Example 2.1: Journal Entry .............................................................. 39
    - Exercise 2.1: Journal Writing ............................................................ 41

**Part III: Deep and Slow Breathing** ................................................. 43
  - Deep and Slow Breathing ................................................................. 46
    - Exercise 3.1: Deep and Slow Breathing .......................................... 47

**Part IV: Progressive Muscle Relaxation** ......................................... 48
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation ......................................................... 49
    - Exercise 4.1: Progressive Muscle Relaxation ................................... 50

**Part V: Meditation** ........................................................................... 52
  - Meditation ......................................................................................... 53
    - Exercise 5.1: Meditation ................................................................. 54

**References** ........................................................................................ 55
Part I: Introduction & Stress
**Introduction**

This manual is designed to be used by residents of the John Howard Society. This manual may have been recommended to you by John Howard staff, or you may just want to look at some helpful strategies for dealing with stress. The techniques that will be discussed in this manual are not just for when you are stressed at the moment; they can also be used for relaxation.

We all feel stressed at times and this manual was designed to help you learn about stress and ways we can reduce it. This manual will talk about what stress is, how it can affect us, and some ways we can try to reduce it. The manual will explore four separate stress reducing techniques: Journal Writing, Deep and Slow Breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Mediation. You can skip to any of these sections if you have already tried them before or choose based on what you may find interesting.

Even though this manual has laid out instructions to follow, when completing these techniques it is very important that you feel comfortable. Feel free to change any of the techniques or instructions to what best helps you complete techniques and/or reduce your stress. You do not have to complete all of the techniques outlined in this manual, however, you are encouraged to consider each one. If you do choose to complete all the sections you do not have to complete it them any particular order or all at once. You may decide to comeback to this manual later and complete different sections at different times.

It is important to remember that this manual and the ideas discussed inside are personal to you and it is advised that you take proper steps to keep it in a safe place so others do not invade your personal thoughts/feelings.
Information about Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is the reactions people feel when they face any challenging or threatening event or situation. These events and situations are called stressors and they can come in many forms. Stressors can be thoughts that bother us, daily hassles, daily things that happen that upset us or significant life events.

Examples of Common Stressors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Daily Hassles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling down or empty</td>
<td>- Waiting in line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Constant worrying</td>
<td>- House cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>- Briefly losing something important (e.g. keys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling like you have lost control</td>
<td>- Missing the bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily things that can be upsetting</th>
<th>Significant Life Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Noise levels</td>
<td>- Losing your job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Crowding at home or at work</td>
<td>- Death in the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family-related stressors (e.g. relationship conflict)</td>
<td>- Divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Peer-related stressors (e.g. substance use)</td>
<td>- Marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is all Stress bad?

Not all stress is bad for people; sometime stress can have positive effects. Stress can create a boost of energy that can help people maintain alertness or motivation. An example of this could be a deadline at work. The stress of a deadline could cause a person to be motivated to reach their goal on time and to work more efficiently. In addition to alertness and motivation, certain stressors can cause people to feel excitement and can even improve a person’s performance, like during sporting activities.

Examples of Positive Stressors

| - Starting a new job                         | - Planning a vacation          |
| - Getting married                            | - Visiting family              |
| - Having a child                             | - Going to school              |
Effects of Stress

Physical Effects

Everybody experiences stress and we are all responsible for managing our stress when we face many difficult things in life. We are all affected differently and the way one person manages stress may be different from how others might manage it. However, we all go through the same phases when dealing with the physical effects of long-term stress. These phases include the alarm reaction, resistance, and exhaustion phases. A description of each of these phases is given here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alarm Reaction Phase</th>
<th>Resistance Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Increased heart rate</td>
<td>- Lower levels of arousal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased breathing</td>
<td>- Lower immune system response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased blood flow</td>
<td>- Increased likelihood of illness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this phase, one’s body is constantly on guard and ready. This cannot be maintained for large amounts of time. If this stress reaction continues too long, the body will shift to the resistance phase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhaustion Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The body begins to shut down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased risk of serious illness/death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dangerous lack of energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this phase, one’s body begins to shut down from a lack of energy. The risk of illness and death is higher because the immune system is less likely to successfully fight off colds or the flu.
Psychological Effects

Similar to physical effects, your experience of stress is your own; it is different than others and there are also many effects stress can have on anyone’s mental health. These effects can be seen in emotional, mental and behavioural signs. These signs can be very different for each person in terms of length and severity. Similar to physical effects, if these problems are not adjusted to in healthy ways by the individual or if they last too long, it can lead to more serious problems, like depression.

Examples of Various Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Signs</th>
<th>Mental Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling nervous</td>
<td>Lack of concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling sad</td>
<td>Poor judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>Thinking about everything negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling irritable (i.e., short-tempered)</td>
<td>Trouble with memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling drained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioural Signs</th>
<th>Physical Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty sleeping</td>
<td>Increased heart rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying away from other people</td>
<td>Increased breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to eating habits (eating more or less)</td>
<td>Dizziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased substance use (alcohol, marijuana, etc.)</td>
<td>Tense muscles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aches and pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Burnout

Burnout occurs when a person reaches a state where they are drained emotionally, mentally, and physically. Burnout often happens when someone experiences a stressful situation over a long period of time. Burnout is most commonly seen with people at work, but it can also happen to someone who continuously faces demanding challenges over a long time. Burnout can be prevented by properly managing stress to help maintain a healthy balance in your life.
Stress Management

What is Stress Management?

Stress management are the steps and activities that you can take to make things easier on you when you experience different difficult things. We all face difficult things in life, but some people face these more often than others. While none of us can fully control what happens to us or when, we are in control of how we react to these difficult things. This is exactly where stress management can help you and almost anyone else. Stress management works best when it is combined into your daily life – that way it becomes a routine. Any changes take time to learn and practice to have the best effects. This idea makes it important for stress management to be easy to learn and do throughout the day.

By developing healthy stress management strategies, you can learn to better spot what makes you stressed and how you can develop coping techniques to help manage your stress. This leads us to an important start to stress management: identifying what makes you stressed.

Identify Stressors: this is important so you can know what causes you to feel stressed, which can allow you to better prepare for or reduce the amount of stress you experience. When identifying stressors, it is important to look at how your mind and body react during different situations. Look for the emotional, mental, and behaviour signs that were mentioned before on page 5. Physical signs are also important to note when trying to identify a stressor.
Exercise 1.1: Identify Stressors

In the spaces below try and identify as many stressors as you can that you feel affect you. (e.g. Long waits at the doctor’s office, crowding on the bus, problems sleeping, etc.)

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5.____________________________________________________________________
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6.____________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
How our Thoughts Impact Stress

How we think about events in our life plays a big part in shaping the number and strength of the signs of stress (mentioned on page 5) that we will experience. This is called Stress Perception. Stress perception is how we judge the stressors we experience. Two people may perceive the exact same situations in very different ways, which is an example of different perceptions of stress. This would likely cause those two people, who experienced the same event, to experience very different signs of stress. Here is a better example…

Example of stress perception between Mike and Jenna.

Mike and Jenna are both in a line at the bank. They have to be at work in 20 minutes and the bank line is moving very slowly. Mike is constantly checking the time and getting very agitated as he waits. Mike keeps thinking he will be fired if he shows up late. His heart is racing at a mile a minute and he is beginning to sweat.

Jenna, on the other hand, is trying to stay in a positive light. Jenna knows that she needs to go to the bank in order to pay for the gas so that her apartment can be warm during the cold winter months. Jenna thinks positively and knows her boss will understand her situation. Jenna is able to stay calm, maintain a regular heartbeat, and not sweat. Jenna texts/calls her work to let them know about the situation. By doing this Jenna’s problem-solving helps her feel less stressed.

In this situation, even though both Mike and Jenna made it to work, Mike is more likely to be tired and to slow down during the day. This is because Mike spent a lot of his energy in the bank and now has less energy to give when he needs to do other things in his day. Jenna perceived that the stressor was not that serious to her, she was able to effectively manage her stress, and is better prepared to carry on with her day.
Exercise 1.2: Rating Stressors

Think back to when you experienced the stressors you wrote on the previous page. In the spaces below rate how stressful you think each stressor was to you on a scale of 1 (barely stressful) to 5 (extremely stressful). This will give you an idea about which areas cause you the most stress. (e.g. Long waits at the doctor’s office - 3, crowding on the bus - 2, problems sleeping - 5, etc.)

1. __________________________________________________________
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   __________________________________________________________

2. __________________________________________________________
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3. __________________________________________________________
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4. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

5. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
What is Self-Talk?

Self-talk are comments people say to themselves out loud and/or in their head. This is important since earlier in this manual it was pointed out that stress perception often plays a key role in how much stress a person experiences. We all do self-talk, a lot of the time we don’t even know it. There is both positive and negative ways that self-talk can affect how a person feels and reacts to stressors. If a person makes positive comments about themselves, it can be very helpful. On the other hand, many negative comments can make a person feel worse and have more stress. Here are some of the different effects that positive- and negative-self talk often have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Self-Talk</th>
<th>Negative Self-Talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Can increase motivation</td>
<td>- Can increase anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can increase confidence</td>
<td>- Feeling like a loss of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can help a person stay calm</td>
<td>- Can decrease confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can provide encouragement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of Positive Self-Talk
- “I can do this”
- “This isn’t impossible”
- “I am good at my job”

Examples of Negative Self-Talk
- “There is no way I can do this”
- “This is too much to handle”
- “I don’t know what to do”
Stress Management: Reducing Stress

Self-Care

Self-care is any activity that you do to try and improve your physical or mental health. Below are several common activities that you might do at different points of your day that can help manage stress in a healthy way.

*Exercise:* there are many known benefits to exercising. Exercise can also help improve our cardiovascular system and help reduce the likelihood of physical diseases like diabetes. Exercising at least 2 – 3 times a week for 30 minutes can show great improvements for most people. Exercising regularly may also have a similar effect on mood as an antidepressant medication.

*Healthy Eating:* similar to exercise, eating healthy can have several well-known benefits to your life. Healthy eating helps a body create more energy, which can fuel you when trying to manage stress. Caffeine can be used as a source of energy as well; however, too much caffeine can result in a person “crashing.” It should be noted that caffeine affects people in different ways. It is important to be aware of how much we ingest.

*Sleeping:* for many people, trying to get the right amount of sleep is very difficult. If a person gets the right amount of sleep, they will be well-rested and better able to deal with stress. Sleeping too little can cause a person to feel exhausted. You may have not known this, but sleeping too much can also cause you to feel tired. It is recommended that people get 8 hours of sleep, however, each person is different and they need to aim for the right amount of sleep that works for them.

*Leisure Activities:* It is encouraged for you to take breaks and do things that are enjoyable. Activities that people find enjoyable like relaxing, watching TV, going for a walk, etc. Taking breaks helps recharge a person’s “batteries.” It is important to take time to yourself to escape the constant pressure of trying to balance stress management and responsibilities.
Social Relationships: a strong support group of family and friends is important to give a person a place to turn for help when needed. Family and friends provide a place for someone to vent, gain advice, and can be trustworthy confidants. It is really important to build positive relationships with friends and family.

Spirituality: It can be very helpful for someone to get engaged with their spiritual communities if they have one. Examples of spiritual communities can include religions or Aboriginal traditions. A spiritual community can be another strong source of support for people. For similar reasons to family and friends spiritual communities provide similar benefits.

Smoking: smoking can give the illusion of causing you to feel relaxed and may be why some people reach for a cigarette to cope with stress. Smoking is not only dangerous to the health of the smoker in the long term as it increases risk for suicide, but smoking a cigarette causes immediate increases heart rate and increased blood pressure, which do not help in staying calm. Not to mention that smoking is also an expensive habit.
Exercise 1.3: Coping Techniques

If you’d like, you can compare your own stress management strategies with the ones mentioned above. How do these strategies differ from your own? In the spaces below you can list ways that you regularly deal with stress, and also how helpful they have been for you. (e.g. before I would just leave if the wait at the doctor’s office was too long)

1.____________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2.____________________________________________________________________
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3.____________________________________________________________________
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4.____________________________________________________________________
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5.____________________________________________________________________
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6.____________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
In the following parts of this manual, four stress management techniques are described in further detail. These techniques are all easy to do and can be added into your daily routine. Many people have found that these strategies work for them, and they’re presented here for you in the hopes that they might work for you to reduce your own stress. Feel free to use as many or as few of these strategies as you’d like.
Part II: Journal Writing
Journal Writing

What is Journal Writing?

Journal writing has been shown to be an effective method of reducing stress. It is easy to do and does not take many materials. Studies have shown that people who wrote in a journal felt less stressed after doing so. It is recommended to write in a journal 2-3 times weekly. However, entries can be made that are longer or shorter depending on your preference, and can be more or less frequent than the recommended 2-3 times per week; you should do what you find most helpful to you.

When writing, it is important to reflect on your feelings and to explore them as long as you feel safe and in control. Journal writing is private and nobody else need to read what is written if you don’t want them to. Consider writing about what stressor triggered the stress, how you responded, whether your response helped you feel better afterward, and how you felt about the situation as a whole. When writing about your feelings, you might consider writing about your feelings before and after the situation, and if there was anything you would do differently in the future.

Note: If at any point during your writing you need any assistance, please ask staff for help. They can help with writing or if you experience any issues writing about your thoughts or experiences.
Example 2.1: Journal Entry

Here is an example of what a journal entry could look like. Please note that this is just an example. There is no right or wrong way to journal, but it is suggested that you journal in a way that makes sense to you. You may want to use the below as a guide, or you might want to write more free flowing. Either way, the choice is entirely up to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>What I did</th>
<th>Did this help</th>
<th>My Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 03/15</td>
<td>I was driving to the grocery store and the traffic was moving really slow. People ahead of me kept braking. I noticed I was starting to get agitated and sweaty.</td>
<td>I got angry and started honking the horn.</td>
<td>This did not help lower my stress. Other drivers started honking their horns back at me.</td>
<td>I feel like this was not a good way to handle the situation. I just kept getting more stressed out when the other drivers started honking their horns at me. Next time I could probably try breathing first before I make any decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 1 (Date): in this section record the date.

Section 2 (Stressor): in this section you can describe the situation that occurred. What caused you to feel stressed in this situation? What changes in your body or thinking did you notice? Some examples of changes people often experience include feeling sweaty, having tense muscles, or having a headache.

Section 3 (What I did): in this section you describe what you did in response. What action or technique did you use to deal with this situation?

Section 4 (Did this help): in this section you can explain how effective you felt your response was. Did your response help reduce your stress afterwards? What happened when you responded the way you did?
Section 5 (My Feelings): in this section you can review the whole situation. Did you feel your response was helpful? How did this situation and its result make you feel? Would you do anything differently in the future?
Exercise 2.1: Journal Writing

If you’d like, for this coming week you can use the spaces below to fill out times when you feel stressed.

*Remember this is only a guideline and you can journal in any way that makes sense for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>What I did</th>
<th>Did this help</th>
<th>My Feelings</th>
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</table>


<table>
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<th>My Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: This example is just one of many ways we can journal. Another way we could journal is just to write on blank paper. This will allow you to be in control of what you want to write down and how you write it. Also be sure to keep your journal in a safe place. These thoughts are meant to be for you, keeping it safe will keep others becoming aware of your private thoughts. Below there will also be two blank pages for you to use how you would like.
Part III: Deep and Slow Breathing
Deep and Slow Breathing

What is Deep and Slow Breathing?

Deep and Slow Breathing or DSB is a technique that might help you manage your stress. DSB is a relaxation technique that can lower body tension and help reduce strong feelings, like anger. DSB involves taking several deep breathes, slowly, over a period of time (e.g. 5 minutes). When done properly, this slows down a person’s breathing cycle, which allows the body to relieve tension that often rises when feeling stressed or angry.

DSB is quick, easy, and can be done just about anywhere. To feel as relaxed as possible, it is recommended DSB is done in a place where you are comfortable, like your bedroom. DSB is a technique that can used to quickly respond when feeling stressed. If a person is outside and experiencing stress where may not have another person to help them or it might not be convenient to journal, DSB can be a healthy response that may help reduce stress.

When deep breathing, it is important to inhale deeply and slowly through your nose, hold your breath for a moment or two, and then exhale through your mouth. Following this breathing technique is called abdominal breathing, because you will feel the air filling up in your abdomen. Although we breathe naturally without any thought or effort, we sometimes do not take in oxygen in ways that fuel our body and brain. Deep and slow breathing is different from our normal breathing because it involves deliberately breathing deeply and slowly in through your nose, holding the air in your lungs for a few moments, followed by releasing the air slowly through your mouth. When done properly, it can be very helpful in reducing tension in the body.

Exercise 3.1: Deep and Slow Breathing

On the page below you will find guideline instructions on how to do DSB on your own.
Exercise 3.1: Deep and Slow Breathing

*Remember these are only recommended guidelines on how to do DSB. If you feel uncomfortable you do not need to continue. If the suggested times are too long or short and you have trouble breathing, stop and consider changing the times to your preference.

Step 1: If possible, find a comfortable location and try to be seated. Make yourself as comfortable as possible. You can undo or take off anything tight, like a belt or your shoes. You can also choose to do this with your eyes open or closed, whichever feels more comfortable for you.

Step 2: Focus on your pattern of breathing.

Step 3: Find a spot on the wall or an object in front of you.

Step 4A: If there is a clock or a watch available, time your breathing for 1 minute.

Step 4B: If there is no clock available the goal is to get 7-9 breaths per minute (bpm). This is approximately 24 deep breaths.

Step 5: Begin deep breathing. Remember that this is done by breathing deeply and slowly in through your nose, holding the air in your lungs for a few moments, followed by releasing the air slowly through your mouth.

Step 6: Begin deep breathing again, aim for the same goal of 7-9 bpm.

Step 7: Stop deep breathing and breathe at your regular pace for 1 minute. Try to focus on the difference you feel between your regular breathing and how you feel when you are deep breathing.

Step 8: Complete 1 more cycle of deep breathing aiming for 7-9 bpm.

Step 9: Return to regular breathing and shake your arms and legs to release tension.

Step 10: Repeat this process as much as you find helpful.

This entire process can take as long or as little as you like. For some people, it can take 10 – 15 minutes to complete, but it can be less for others.

Note: If needed, below is a YouTube link to an additional demonstration of this exercise. It is ok to ask for help when trying to access this link on the internet. This link was active as of February 8th, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYQsRBNYdPk
Part IV: Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation or PMR is a relaxation technique that allows a person to monitor and control the tension in their body. Managing tension is important when trying to reduce stress. PMR is another relaxation technique that can be done easily and by yourself. Similar to DSB, using deep breathing is a key element to this technique. PMR combines the deep breathing skills learned from DSB and pairs them with tensing and relaxing muscles. Muscle tension is when someone tightens their muscles on purpose, holding it for a short period of time, before releasing them.

Muscle tension in PMR is divided into different muscle groups (e.g. hands, legs, shoulders, etc.). Each muscle group is targeted one at a time. It is possible to accidentally tighten another muscle group while trying to do your target group. For example, you may be focusing on your hands when your shoulders might also be tensing. This is okay and might even get better with practice, just try your best to focus on your current muscle group.

Like with DSB, PMR can and should be adjusted to fit your individual needs. A PMR session can be as long or as short as you want, as long as it involves some of the steps mentioned. For some, it may only be a few minutes, but for others it can last 10 or 20 minutes or even longer. The point is, the length is up for you to decide what works best for you. It is recommended that you find a comfortable place to do this exercise. You do not need to be stressed or anxious to do this exercise; you can do it anytime you feel like it. A lot of people find it helpful in relaxing just before bed, as an example. But, PMR can be an effective way of relaxing or practicing anytime someone has free time.

Exercise 4.1: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

On the page below you will find guideline instructions on how to do PMR on your own.
Exercise 4.1: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

*Remember* these are recommended guidelines on how to do PMR. If you feel uncomfortable you do not need to continue. These can also be adjusted by you in any way that works. These are guided instructions beginning at the hands and moving up through your arms, to your head, and your neck. The exercise will then go down your chest to your legs and ending at your feet. These are all recommendations that can be changed to best fit an individual’s needs. For example, you might want to skip a particular muscle group if you are feeling sore there or if you have an injury there that could be made worse by tensing. While tensing your muscles hold them for roughly 10 seconds. After that, release them for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Before you begin keep in mind that you may choose to do this in any order that feels most comfortable to you. You may also skip any steps you do not feel like doing.

**Step 1:** Find a comfortable area and set aside at least 15 minutes to fully complete this exercise. Make sure you are wearing comfortable clothing. Feel free to loosen tight clothing; if you’d like you can take off belts or shoes to be as comfortable as possible.

**Step 2:** Take 5 deep breaths. You can do this by breathing deeply and slowly in through your nose, holding the air in your lungs for a few moments, followed by releasing the air slowly through your mouth.

**Step 3:** Make a fist with both your hands, tighten your muscles and hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

**Step 4:** Bring each of your hands to touch your shoulders and flex your arms. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

**Step 5:** Straighten your arms and tighten your muscles. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

**Step 6:** Raise your eyebrows as high as you can so you fill tension in your forehead. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

**Step 7:** Wrinkle your forehead by closing your eyes and gently flexing your forehead. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

**Step 8:** Bring your chin to your chest until you can feel the tension in your neck. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.
Step 9: Raise your shoulders to your ears until you feel the tension. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 10: Push your shoulders towards your back, as if trying to make them touch together. Feel the tension in your back. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 11: Take a deep breath and fill your chest with air. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 12: Tighten your stomach until you feel tension. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 13: Straighten your legs, which will cause you to flex your leg muscle to feel tension in your upper legs. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 14: Put your feet flat on the ground. Point your toes up toward the ceiling until only your heels are on the ground to feel the tension in your lower legs. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 15: Return your feet to a flat position. Raise your heels off the ground so you are on the balls of your feet are on the ground and flex your lower leg muscles. Hold for 10 seconds then relax for 15 seconds and focus on the difference in how it feels between being tense and relaxed.

Step 16: Take 5 deep breaths. Feel the relaxation throughout your body. Feel if there is any remaining tension in any muscle groups. If there is, repeat that step.

Note: If needed, below is a YouTube link to an additional demonstration of this exercise. It is ok to ask for help when trying to access this link on the internet. This link was active as of February 8th, 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x3tl81NW3w
Part V: Meditation
**Meditation**

**What is Meditation?**

Meditation is a stress management technique that helps reduce anxiety. There are many different types of meditation. We will be looking at Natural Stress Relief or NSR. NSR is a quick and easy form of meditation that can be done individually and multiple times a day, if you feel up to it.

Meditation is similar to DSB and PMR with its focus on breathing and comfort to relax the mind and body in order to help reduce stress. Meditation involves sitting in a comfortable space and breathing deeply. A key component in mediation is a **mantra**. A mantra is any word or phrase chosen by you that is used to help maintain focus on your breathing. Mantras can be spoken out loud or silently to yourself.

**Examples of Mantras**
- I’m breathing in, I’m breathing out, or repeating the same word over and over (i.e., “calm”).
- Om Mani Padme Hum (The Jewel in the lotus within, Buddhism)
- Maranatha (Lord of the Heart, Aramaic)
- Om Shanti (Lasting Peace, Hinduism)
- My God and My All (Christianity)
- I am that I am

Meditation has also been shown to help increase **self-actualization** in people who practice meditation. Self-actualization is used to describe when someone is trying to reach their full potential. Self-actualization includes traits like creativity, focus, being alert, and feeling independent. Self-actualization can be helpful to people who are stressed as it can help them feel confident and motivated to make changes. Self-actualization and meditation help connect with self-talk that was discussed earlier. If self-actualization and meditation help increase a person’s confidence and focus, it will help with positive self-talk and avoid any negative thinking.

**Exercise 5.1: Meditation**

On the page below you will find basic meditation guidelines to use on your own.
Exercise 5.1: Meditation

*Remember* these are recommended guidelines on how to do meditation. If you feel uncomfortable you do not need to continue. Most meditation sessions take between 10 to 15 minutes. It is recommended to do it at least 3 times a week; however, meditation can be done every day or whenever experiencing stress. Feel free to modify this activity in any way that may help you the most.

*Step 1:* Find a comfortable place and set aside at least 10 minutes to complete this exercise.

*Step 2:* Get in a comfortable sitting position (e.g. on the floor, in a chair)

*Step 3:* Begin with 30 seconds of rest and silence

*Optional Step:* If you have relaxing music, start it now.

*Step 4:* Begin breathing deeply. You can breathe and your own pace or use the breathing technique learned in the DSB section.

*Step 5:* Begin saying your mantra either out loud or silently to yourself. Repeat this mantra at your own pace throughout the rest of the session.

*Step 6:* Focus your mind. Try to set aside your thoughts and focus on your mantra and your breathing.

*Step 7:* Continue this for the rest of the session until you are ready to finish.

*Step 8:* Slowly begin to shake out any remaining tension in your arms and legs and feel the relaxation.

*Note:* If needed, below is a YouTube link to an additional demonstration of this exercise. It is ok to ask for help when trying to access this link on the internet. This link was active as of February 8th, 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEzbdLn2bJc
References


