

Refreshers

Defining Stress

Identifying Sources of Stress

Recognizing Signs of Stress

Recognizing Signs of Something More Serious

Engaging with Community Members

Practicing Self-Care

How and When to Connect Others to Resources

Defining Stress

Most New Yorkers experience stress every day. While much of this stress can easily be managed, some stress is more challenging. When left unaddressed, stress can have serious health consequences.

There are different types of stress – basic stress, cumulative stress and traumatic stress – each with its own characteristics, symptoms, duration and treatment or therapeutic approaches. Learn more about the various types so you can help others identify and address their stress.

Types of Stress

Basic stress is a part of our daily personal and professional lives. This is the unavoidable stress we feel, for example, when getting cranky children ready for school, when stuck in traffic or when loud construction goes on for weeks next to our home.

Cumulative stress occurs when we experience multiple stressors at the same time and/or are constantly exposed to one or more stressors over time. Examples of cumulative stress include joblessness, economic instability and chronic disease. This stress affects our ability to carry out daily functions.

Traumatic stress can result from one or more events that threaten the life and/or well-being of an individual or community. Traumatic stress can be caused by violent attacks or natural disasters, losing a loved one, losing a job or going through a divorce. This stress, if unmanaged, often leads to other serious mental health problems, such as depression, PTSD and alcohol and substance use disorders.

Identifying Sources of Stress

Stress can sometimes be pinned down to one source, but people often experience multiple stressors at once. Members of your community may share some of the same stressors. Sources of stress generally fall into five categories:

Health and Health Care

- Access to health care
- Access to primary care
- Health literacy

Economic Stability

- Poverty
- Employment
- Food security
- Housing stability

Education

- Early childhood education and development
- High school graduation

- Enrollment in higher education
- Language and literacy

Social Context

- Relationships
- Social cohesion
- Civic participation
- Discrimination
- Incarceration

Physical Environment

- Access to healthy foods
- Housing quality
- Crime and violence
- Environmental conditions

Recognizing Signs of Stress

Knowing the signs (what others can see) and symptoms (what the affected person experiences) is the first step to managing stress. Recognizing the signs of stress can be difficult. People react to stressful situations with their bodies *and* minds, and in a variety of ways. It is important to remind people that there is **no right or wrong way to react to stress**.

Some common signs and symptoms of stress include:

- Headaches
- Tight shoulders
- Clenched jaw
- Racing thoughts
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Rapid heartbeat
- Lack of sleep
- Social withdrawal
- Changes in weight

Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Something More Serious

Signs and symptoms of more serious stress can include:

- Worsening of stress symptoms
- Worsening of existing medical or mental health conditions
- Trouble functioning or performing daily tasks related to work, school and home
- Exhibiting threatening behavior to oneself or others

Engaging with Community Members

When working with community members, follow these steps to provide judgment-free support and make sure they feel comfortable:

Invite the person to talk. Ask permission to start a discussion.

Listen first before expressing your point of view. Acknowledge the person's thoughts and feelings, even if you do not agree with them. Note: this does not mean you approve of their actions or are willing to do what they ask.

Encourage the person to direct the conversation. Do not feel the need to reply immediately; allow for some quiet. The person may break the silence and offer a solution.

Reflect on their words. Ask questions and restate what you perceive is being said.

Practicing Self-Care

Stress management starts with practicing self-care. Self-care is different for everyone and it may take some effort to find a strategy that works for you. Here are a few general techniques you can offer community members; encourage them to consider a holistic approach to self-care and incorporate a technique from each category:

Relax Your Body — Improve your sleep schedule, exercise (even for a few minutes), eat healthy foods, and drink enough water and/or herbal tea.

Relax Your Mind — Think positively, laugh more, make time for relaxation, learn and practice deep-breathing and mindfulness, or do something that you enjoy.

Additional Practices — Surround yourself with positive social support, spend time with people who care about you and whose company you enjoy; use problem solving techniques when faced with stressful situations, get organized and let go of stressors in your life — even a little bit.

How and When to Connect Others to Resources

NYC Well is a free and confidential resource available 24/7 to provide support for community members managing stress, depression, anxiety or drug and alcohol misuse.

Call 1-888-NYCWELL

Text WELL to 65173

Visit nyc.gov/nycwell



Additional resources can be found in the “Tools to Help You Help Others,” “Materials for Sharing” and the “Additional Resources” sections of this toolkit.