

ADDRESS YOUR STRESS!

A great group wellbeing exercise

Here's a simple wellbeing exercise to get you and your team to 'address your stress'. It'll help you to tune into your everyday stressors, understand what your stress signature is and identify what you can do to better manage everyday stress.

Adapted from Mental Health First Aid England, this is an effective tool that could help your team to better support each other through stress.

PREPARING FOR YOUR SESSION

- Allow 30-40 minutes for this exercise - it's perfect for a lunch and learn or team building session
- Book a room somewhere where people will feel comfortable
- Complete your own stress container first so you can explain it to others!

INTRODUCING YOUR SESSION

- It might be wellbeing week at work, or you might just want to take some time out to get together as a team, but it's a good idea to give some context as to why you're doing this exercise now
- Be mindful of each other. Talking about stress can be triggering, so make sure you're in a comfortable environment and explain what's going to happen, mentioning any support that's available afterwards

STARTING YOUR SESSION

1 Begin with a question

Ask your group what stress means. Their answers might be:

- It's your body's response when it senses danger
- We all experience stress and need it to function
- When stress interferes with our lives it becomes a problem
- Too much stress for too long can make us ill
- If left unaddressed, stress can cause mental health issues like depression or anxiety



2 Share some stress stats

1 in 6

employees will experience anxiety, depression or stress related to work

526,000

people experienced work-related stress, anxiety or depression in 2018

12.5m

working days were lost due to work-related stress, anxiety or depression in 2017

3 Name common sources of stress

Ask your group to name some and write them on flipchart paper. Here are some examples:

LIFE

- Leaving home
- Getting married
- Having children
- Relationship problems
- Health scares
- Physical illness
- Accidents
- Bereavement
- Legal issues

HOME

- Housing problems
- Social isolation
- Unemployment
- Adjusting to new environments

WORK

- Starting a new job
- Coping with an increased workload
- Poor relationship with colleagues
- Redundancy or fear of it

PHYSICAL

- Late nights
- Lack of routine
- Poor diet
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs

EMOTIONS

- Peer pressure
- Conflicting values or beliefs
- Coping with uncertainty

4 Talk about stress behaviours

Ask your group how they'd know if they were under too much stress and what behaviours they'd expect to experience? Some ideas are:

EMOTIONAL

- Being irritable
- Feeling tearful
- Having arguments
- A loss of humour or confidence

BEHAVIOURAL

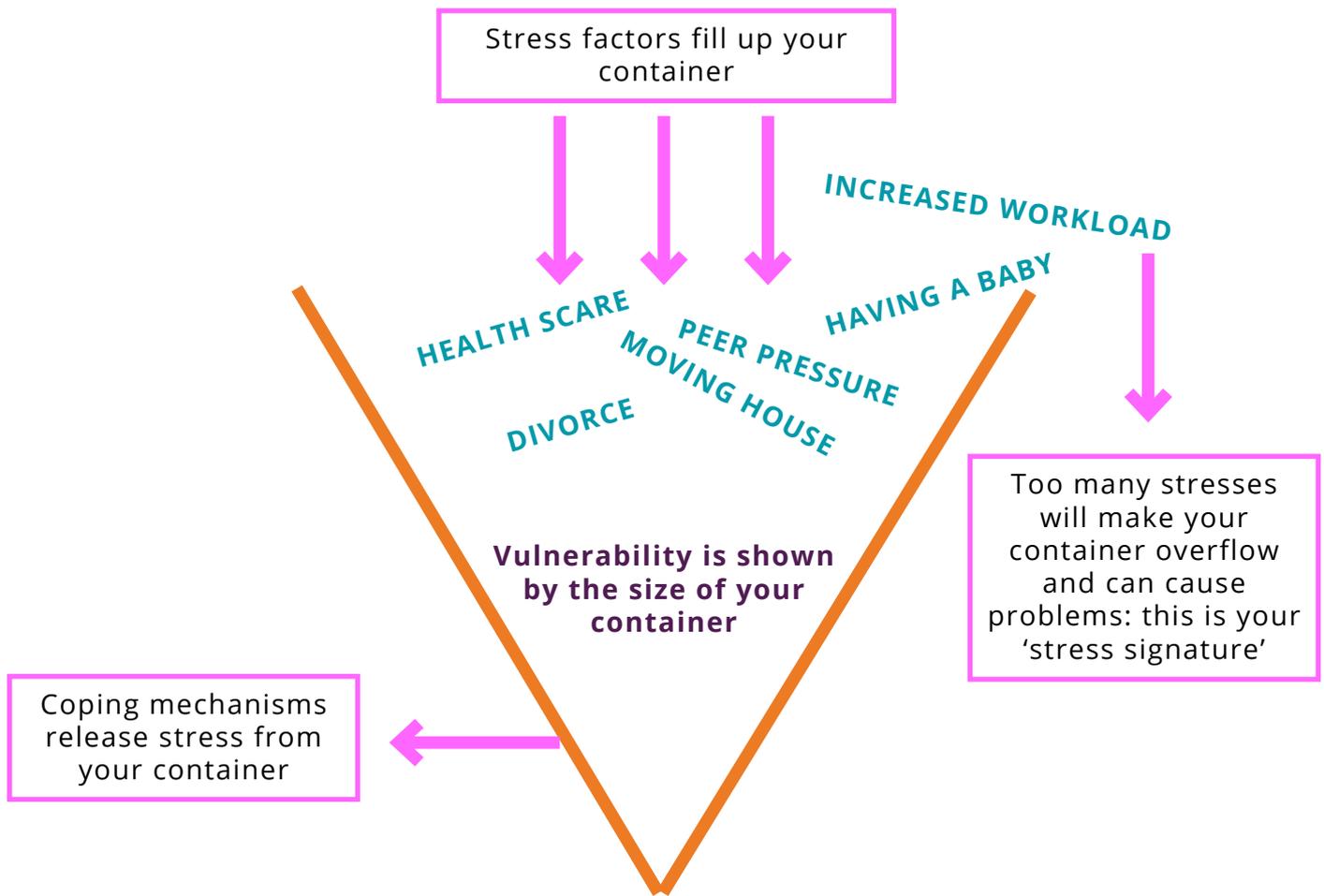
- Consuming more alcohol, caffeine or cigarettes
- Being indecisive
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Unable to remember things correctly

PHYSICAL

- Constant tiredness
- Frequent headaches or upset stomach
- Lack of care over appearance



5 Introduce the stress container



How does it work?

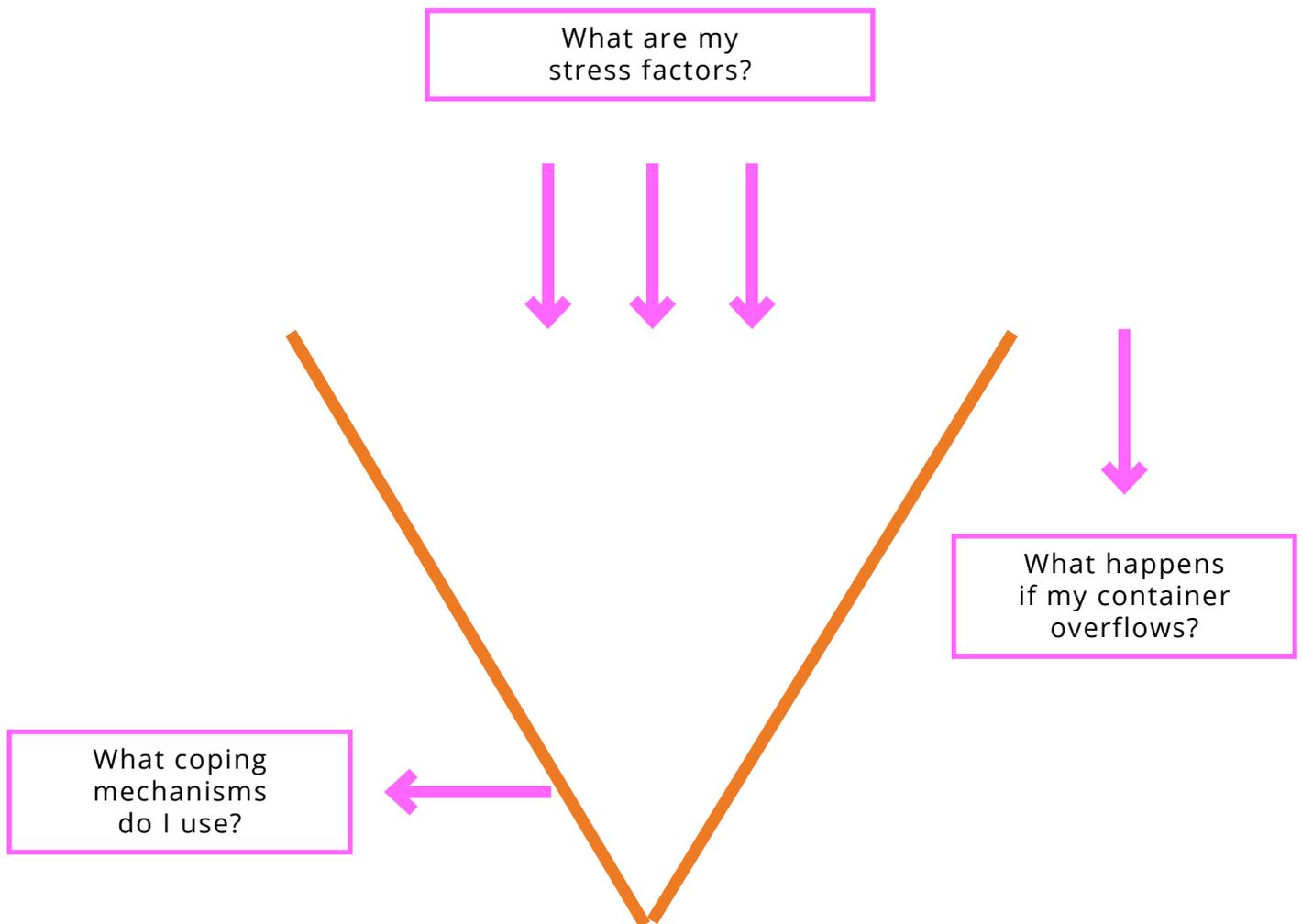
The size of your stress container is dictated by your tolerance to stress. If you have a high tolerance, you're likely to have a big container that can hold lots of stress factors. If you have a low tolerance, your stress container will be smaller. Thinking about your stress container helps you to not only understand your stress but the stresses that your colleagues feel - and it helps you ask yourself "am I coping?"

Your coping mechanisms are the ways you relieve stress, but there are healthy and unhealthy ways:

HEALTHY	UNHEALTHY
<p>Coping mechanisms like getting enough sleep, seeing a friend and eating well are positive. They mean the tap at the bottom of your container will release the stress and you'll start to feel better.</p>	<p>Coping mechanisms like not sleeping and drinking too much alcohol will prevent the stress from being released, so your container stays full. Everyone has unhealthy coping mechanisms, but balance is important to make sure our containers aren't full. You can learn healthy ways to cope though! Think about some healthy ways you relieve your stress and try use them next time your stress container gets full.</p>



Now give your group five-ten minutes to complete their own stress containers:



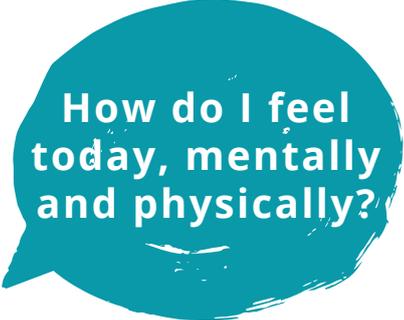
FINISHING YOUR SESSION



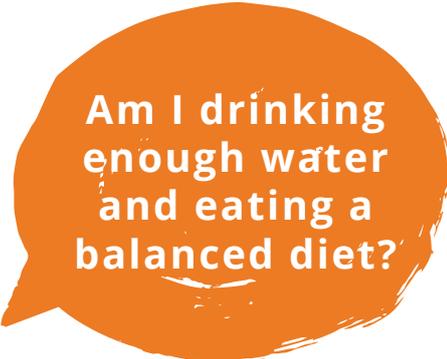
Once everyone has completed the exercise, you could have a discussion to encourage people to reflect as a team:

- What size is your stress container?
- Were you surprised by any of the stress factors that went into your container?
- What happens when your stress container overflows? What's your stress signature?
- What are your coping mechanisms?

You could agree as a team to check in with each other or yourself using some wellbeing questions:



How do I feel today, mentally and physically?



Am I drinking enough water and eating a balanced diet?



How did I sleep last night?



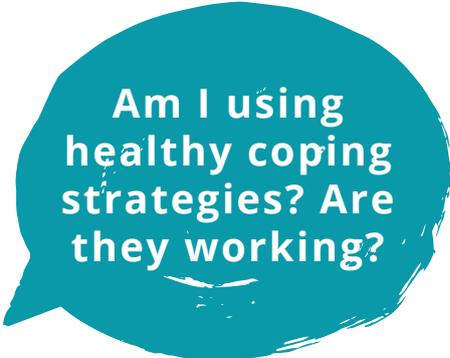
How full is my stress container?



Did I feel rested when I woke up?



Is there anything I can improve?



Am I using healthy coping strategies? Are they working?

