



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.

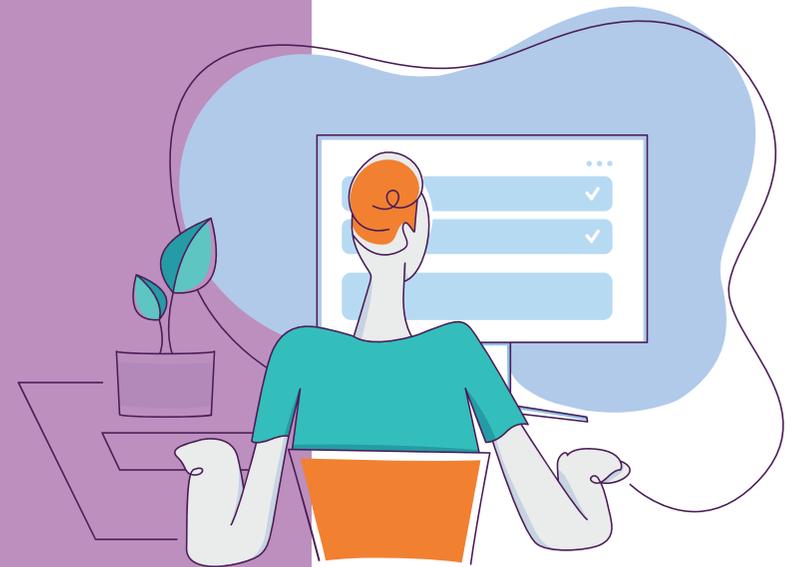
Adapted from Mental Health First Aid England, this is an effective tool that could help your team to better support each other through stress.



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Updated in March 2021*

PREPARING FOR YOUR SESSION

- Allow 30-40 minutes for this exercise - it's perfect for a lunch and learn or team building session
- Complete your own stress container first so you can explain it to others
- It might be wellbeing week at work, or you might just want to take some time out 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 people feel comfortable and explain what's going to happen, mentioning any support that's available afterwards



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



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3. Name common sources of stress

Ask your group to share some and write them all on a shared screen. 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

STARTING
YOUR
SESSION



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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

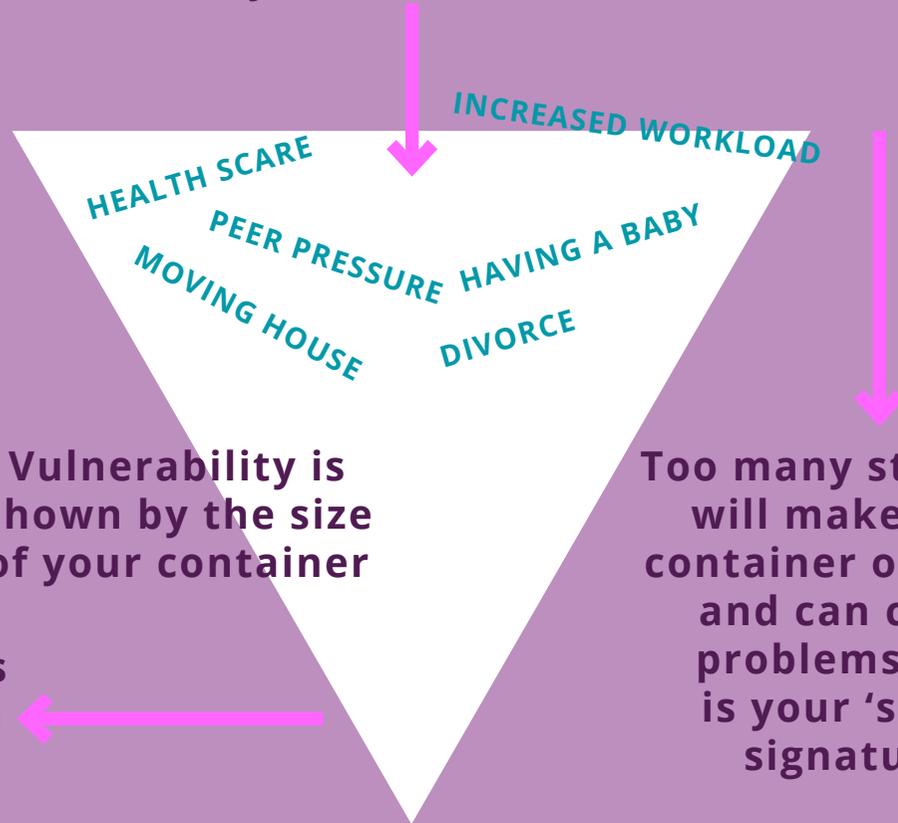
STARTING
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INTRODUCING THE STRESS CONTAINER

Stress factors fill up your container



HEALTH SCARE

INCREASED WORKLOAD

PEER PRESSURE

HAVING A BABY

MOVING HOUSE

DIVORCE

Vulnerability is shown by the size of your container

Too many stressors will make your container overflow and can cause problems: this is your 'stress signature'

Coping mechanisms release stress from your container



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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 to ask yourself *"am I coping?"*

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

Healthy

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.

Unhealthy

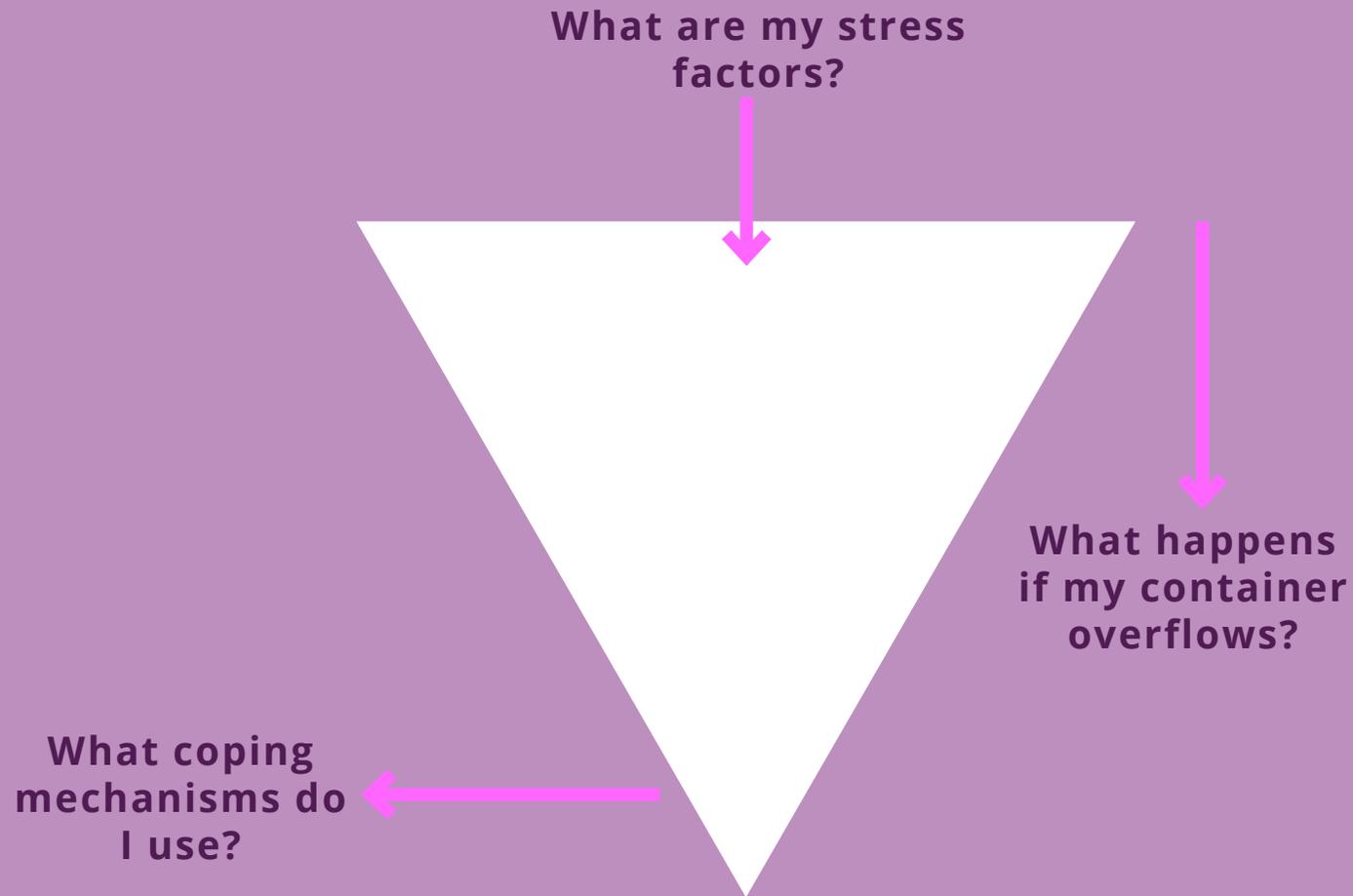
Coping mechanisms like not sleeping and drinking too much alcohol will prevent the stress from being released, so your container stays full. Everyone has unhealthy coping mechanisms, but balance is important to make sure our containers aren't full. You can learn healthy ways to cope though! Think about some of those and try to use them next time your stress container gets full.



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INTRO-
DUCING
THE STRESS
CONTAINER

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



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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?
- Did I feel rested when I woke up?
- How full is my stress container?
- Is there anything I can improve?
- Am I using healthy coping strategies? Are they working?

