

Staff Meeting 2 Speaking Notes

Mental Health Literacy

Understanding the Stress Response

Discussion can be led by counsellor, administrator or staff that attended the GOTO training.

1. **Prior to discussion, have staff fill out quiz on “What is your stress mindset?”**
2. **To debrief quiz review attached power point which includes video “ Make Stress Your Friend”**

Power Point Review

SLIDE ONE –

- Stress doesn't have to be all bad. In fact, it isn't. We can frame things in “**growth mindset**” and look at stress as a stimulus to change, like motivation. (Carol Dweck)
- The stress response drives learning. We don't always get things correct the first few times we attempt - stress is a necessary biological component to help us focus and overcome difficulties.
- Stress can be an ally.
- Many people are familiar with the stress response “**fight or flight**” and often less discussed is another stress response: “**excite and delight**”. Our response to stress helps us solve problems, leading to adaptive solutions.

SLIDE TWO – show Kelly McGonigal Video – Make Stress Your Friend (approx. 15 minutes)

Discuss and Review video highlights

- Understand the Stress Response, its purpose and its various levels
- Interpret the stress response as positive, not just negative (**Fight/Flight**).
- Stress can be a challenge to be faced. A problem to be solved.
Stress encourages us to: Rise to the challenge (**Challenge Response**)
Connect with each other “**Tend and Befriend**” Shelly Taylor PhD
Learn and Grow
- Stress can help us identify the problem that needs to be solved. Consider how to solve the problem. Seek assistance and help of others.

Kelly explains that the energy you get from stress fires up your brain and gives you the resources and concentration to focus more quickly and attentively on your physical surroundings. You're able to identify what is really important and other less important priorities drop away. And the motivation boost from a chemical cocktail of endorphins, adrenaline, testosterone, and dopamine, helps you protect the people and communities you care about

and importantly gives you the courage and confidence to do so. Some scientists call this the **“excite and delight”** side of stress.

You don’t have to shut down when you feel pressure. It’s possible to open up and use the energy of stress to become more interested in what’s going on. The **“excite and delight”** response also involves cortisol and adrenaline, you feel the same level of alertness and awareness as you do in fight or flight.

But rather than narrowing your focus, you choose to open up, to be curious.

Marilee Adams, PhD, calls this a **“learner mindset.”** When we’re faced with a situation we don’t know how to handle, we start asking questions. Its opposite is a “judger mindset”: We see something unfamiliar or threatening and make quick judgments — no questions asked. This is the default of the fight-or-flight response, in which hormones limit our perception of the bigger picture.

If you adopt a learner mindset, a challenging situation can become an opportunity to learn or experience something new. If you’re ill, for example, you can view your symptoms as a chance to listen to your body instead of as signs of your demise. Or if someone is being aggressive toward you, you could ask yourself what’s going on with that person, rather than reacting defensively. This might lead to compassion instead of more anger.

Curiosity expands your options for how to solve problems — and often resolves them more quickly and easily.

Once you’ve developed a habit of being interested, you can use all the best parts of the stress response — alertness, energy, focus — to have new kinds of experiences, ones in which you use your excited energy to expand your abilities and ideas, instead of shutting down.

Asking yourself these questions can help you shift into excite-and-delight mode:

- What’s really happening here?
- What else might be going on that I’m not seeing?
- What’s interesting about this situation?