

Managing Emotional Symptoms of Stress

The EAP
is a **free** service
for you and your
eligible family members.

All EAP services are
**completely
confidential.**



You have much more control over your emotional state than you probably realize. What and how you think determines in large part what and how you feel; what and how you feel colors what and how you think. Getting control of your thoughts changes the way you feel,

and getting control of your feelings alters the way you think. The techniques we describe here help you manage this complex equation.

You can use some of these techniques by yourself, but you may need help with others. Since many techniques involve relaxation, they tend to lower your metabolic rate and general level of physiological arousal. They may interact with any prescription medications you are taking for a seizure, cardiovascular, diabetic, or endocrine disorder. Be sure to check with your physician before using them.

Emotional Release

You don't want to get rid of emotions, you just want to manage and get them under control. A three step method of emotional release has helped many of our clients. The first step is to identify exactly what it is you're feeling and label it. Emotions often defy description, but try. Building a better emotional vocabulary makes it easier. Write down as many adjectives as you can for anger, anxiety, and depression. Use a thesaurus, get words from friends, family, and co workers. Sort your words in order of intensity. Learn to examine your emotional state and attach a label that describes it with some degree of accuracy.

Next, experiment with thoughts that increase the intensity of the emotion you're feeling. Then try thoughts that will reduce that intensity. Rate the intensity level of your emotions on a one to ten scale. Learn to raise and lower your level with your thoughts.

Learning to release emotions is the third step. This can happen in a number of ways such as acting them out, talking them out, or thinking them out. Shouting, crying, or being fearful takes the edge off your feelings, allowing you to think more clearly. You can talk about how you feel with a friend,

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family member, or counselor. Sometimes, images and thoughts can release you from emotions.

Try crying in a hot bath when you feel sad. It's a good way to release your depressive symptoms. Some people act out their frustrations and anger by shouting into the wind or beating a pillow. Some clients express their fear and anxiety with pat phrases like "Oh, my God." or "Oh, oh." In releasing your emotions through talking to other people, be sure you don't act out the emotion toward them. Try to stay calm and talk to them rationally about how you feel. A word of caution, we are not advocating expressing feelings irresponsibly, just to get them off your chest; nor are we suggesting you wallow in your feelings indefinitely.

The intensification and expression of feelings is one aspect of learning to manage strong emotions and getting them under control. If you learn how to intensify emotions, you can also learn how to decrease or to transcend them. When you do, you will feel more in control and can choose the emotional option that fits the specific time and place.

Here are a few rules to remember about releasing feelings:

- Mean what you say, say what you mean, but don't be mean when you say it.
- Don't break things that don't belong to you.
- Don't hit other people.
- Don't hurt yourself (physically or with drugs, food etc.).
- Use a little judgment when in public.

Self-monitoring

Relate your thoughts to your emotions by keeping track of what you're thinking about when you feel them. Try to make

connections between your thoughts and your emotional symptoms. Sort out your irrational thoughts and counter them with rational ones. Irrational thoughts can lead to irrational behavior.

Taking Quiet Time For Yourself

Set aside quiet time for yourself every day. Do it regularly, don't wait until you're anxious, angry, or depressed. It doesn't have to be a lot of time, twenty to thirty minutes is enough. Pick a place where you can be by yourself, undisturbed.

One of our clients chose his lunch hour as his quiet time and spent it in his car in the company parking lot.

Deep Breathing

There are few self-regulatory exercises as calming as deep breathing. Deep breathing improves the efficiency of your cardiovascular system in delivering oxygen to your body including your brain.

Try the "one, two, three" deep breathing exercise we teach our clients. In a seated position, place your elbows on your knees, lean forward, and place your chin in your hands. Now, breathing through your nose, take three deep breaths holding each one for a slow count of three. Lean back and continue to breathe slowly and deeply through your nose as you let yourself calm down and relax.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

It's impossible to be relaxed and emotionally tense at the same time. They are mutually exclusive. PMR is a powerful technique not only for releasing muscle tension and becoming aware of your body, but also for releasing emotional tension. It involves tensing and relaxing muscles in a progressive series and takes about twenty minutes to complete. It is often taught as an introduction to biofeedback, and self-hypnosis autogenic imagery.

Visual Imagery

As you relax using PMR, conjure up images of emotional release. Try different images until you find one that appeals to you. Often feelings cannot be put into words. Instead they come out through our imaginations. We fantasize scenes that never happen; what we wish we could have said to the boss, what we should have done to forestall some tragedy. Sometimes the visual image is the memory of a real event that keeps recurring, a "flashback".

You can change your images to either increase or decrease the intensity of your feelings. You can use visual imagery when you are ready to let go of your anger, anxiety, or depression. One client, tired of being angry at her landlord, imagined putting her anger in a black balloon and letting it float away. It got smaller and smaller as it soared into the sky.

Professional Help and Assistance

Counseling

Counseling is generally much more short term than psychotherapy and is limited to specific problems and issues. Counselors are more likely to offer advice and assistance in direct problem solving.

Make your first session a trial interview. Find out something about the therapist's approach, orientation, training, background, and experience with problems like yours.

Whatever the approach, it has to feel right to you and you have to trust your therapist. If the approach doesn't make sense, or you don't feel comfortable with the therapist, try another one.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Your EAP can assist you and help connect you with a counselor in your area. You may also be eligible for free sessions. Call Cascade, your EAP provider for additional information.

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Secrets to Building Confidence at Work

Training and talent can help you do your job well and keep you moving forward in your career. But your performance can take a nosedive when your self-confidence is on the skids.

The following suggestions can help you restore and increase your on-the-job self-confidence.

Do your homework

Learn as much as you can about the subject at hand—whether you're giving a speech, asking for a promotion or making a sales call. You can't be over prepared when your performance is on the line.

Analyze your mistakes

Knowing what went wrong and what you can do to keep from making the same mistake again can help you turn a negative situation into one that boosts your confidence in your problem-solving abilities.

Don't take the easy way out

One reward of taking risks is an increased potential for higher achievement. Ask for added responsibility when given a choice between maintaining the status quo or doing something more.

Always act confident

Do your best to dismiss your fears if you're worried a speech, meeting or sales presentation will bomb. Force yourself to smile and shake hands firmly. Walk with your head up and your shoulders back.

Prioritize your tasks each day

Daily to-do lists are a must, but to really take control of your day, you should complete tasks in order of priority. Completing one high-priority assignment will boost your confidence more than doing four or five low-priority ones.

Make change a positive

Welcoming instead of fearing change makes it easier to identify the advantages and opportunities presented by new responsibilities and directions.

Keep a list of accomplishments

Refer to the list when your confidence needs a lift. Items to include: a major project you completed on time and under budget, a successful meeting you conducted, a reorganization of your filing system or mastery of a new computer program.

Post your goals where you can see them

Keeping them in front of you increases your chances of internalizing and achieving them. Setting goals and meeting them creates a pattern of success you can build on.

Stay calm when speaking with others

Rehearse difficult negotiations ahead of time. Excuse yourself if you are unable to control your emotions during a discussion.

Be responsible for your actions

Making yourself accountable for your failures also makes you responsible for your successes. If you take responsibility for your actions, you will believe that your hard work and intelligence—not luck—led to your achievements.

Avoid negative self-talk

Pay attention to your inner dialogue and replace negative comments with positive ones. For example: When your inner voice says, "I've got so much to do, I'll never get this assignment done on time," replace that thought with "I'm capable of focusing my energy on the task at hand and completing it in a timely fashion."

Don't be afraid of nervous energy

Butterflies in your stomach and a racing heart are your body's way of preparing for a challenge; they're confirmation that what you're about to do matters.

Compete against yourself

Assess your workplace performance for the past year. Then establish some specific goals for the year ahead. For example: increasing sales by 10 percent, getting to work on time every day, returning all your phone calls within 24 hours or completing routine administrative tasks 20% faster.

Keep your life in perspective

Maintaining a healthful balance between your personal and professional lives can help you weather a workplace crisis because you're less likely to define your self-worth by how well you do your job.

Avoiding Financial Trouble

These simple suggestions will help you stay out of financial hot water.

1. Create a realistic budget and stick to it. This means periodically checking it and readjusting your figures and spending habits.
2. Don't impulse buy. When you see something you hadn't planned to buy, don't purchase it on the spot. Go home and think it over. It's less likely you'll return to the store and buy it.
3. Avoid sales. Buying a \$500 item on sale for \$400 isn't a \$100 savings if you didn't need the item to begin with. It's spending \$400 unnecessarily.
4. Get medical insurance if at all possible. Even a stopgap policy with a large deductible can help if a medical crisis comes up. You can't avoid medical emergencies, but living without medical insurance is an invitation to financial ruin.
5. Charge items only if you can afford to pay for them now. If you don't currently have the cash, don't charge based on future income -- sometimes future income doesn't materialize. An alternative is to toss all of your credit cards in a drawer (or in the shredder) and to commit to living without credit for a while.
6. Avoid large rent or house payments. Obligate yourself only for what you can now afford and increase your mortgage payments

How to Use Your EAP

When help is needed call 1-800-433-2320. The intake coordinator will ask for your name, employer and a brief description of your presenting concern. If an emergency exists you will be given immediate assistance. If your situation is not an emergency, you will be offered telephone assistance and/or in-person sessions to complete an assessment and make a referral for treatment if needed.

Meetings with your counselor are completely confidential. Your employer will not know you have used the EAP. No one will be provided any information about you without your written consent. Exceptions would occur only in the event of you being considered dangerous to yourself or someone else.

At the first appointment you should be prepared to give the counselor some background information to assist in formulating an action plan. Many people find it helpful to prepare a list of things they wish to discuss at each session.

PORTLAND:
503-639-3009

SALEM:
503-588-0777

*If you live outside the
Portland/Willamette Valley areas, call
the toll free number listed below. You
will be referred to a mental health
provider in your area.*

1-800-433-2320
www.cascadecenters.com

only as your income increases. Consider refinancing your house if your payments are unwieldy.

7. Avoid cosigning or guaranteeing a loan for someone. Your signature obligates you as if you were the primary borrower. You can't be sure that the other person will pay.
8. Avoid joint obligations with people who have questionable spending habits -- even a spouse or significant other. If you incur a joint debt, you're probably liable for it all if the other person defaults.
9. Don't make high-risk investments, such as investments in speculative real estate, penny stocks and junk bonds. Invest conservatively, opting for certificates of deposit, money market funds and government bonds.
10. Find alternatives to spending money. For a friend's birthday, take her on a picnic rather than to an expensive restaurant. When someone suggests that you meet for lunch, propose meeting at the museum on its free day or going for a walk in the park. Instead of buying books and CDs and renting videos, borrow them for free at a library.

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