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The Stress-Less Program

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Summary

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The Stress-Less Program

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Stress-Less is a program composed of techniques and procedures for treating the causes and symptoms of stress. These methods have been successfully applied in clinical private practice settings.

Business, industry and major corporations are increasingly recognizing the importance of implementing a stress-reduction program as a preventive cost-effective measure for their annual operation. Reductions in employee absenteeism, reductions in medical insurance premiums due to reduced insurance claims, as well as the lower cost of training new replacement personnel are the most clear cut, clinically established reasons for instituting a stress-reduction program. Additionally, increased productivity and heightened awareness and alertness from personnel are some of the further benefits anticipated from this training.

Stress-Less is a flexible, comprehensive and cost effective program and can be considered an employee benefit. The training materials may be adapted to general employee populations; middle management or executive level personnel as well as community based health delivery systems.

Several program designs are possible, from a one-day a week training for 10 weeks to a two-day intensive program, to a six-month program utilizing semi-automated, take home tapes.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Any kind of excitement, speeding up of bodily processes, or generalized arousal, would be labeled as “stress” by physiologists. This physiological state provides the individual with emotional and physical readiness and a body that is prepared to act. The specific bodily signs that accompany this state of arousal are: an increase in muscular tension, heartbeat, respiration, blood circulation and hormonal secretions as well as a mental state of heightened-sensory awareness and alertness.

The activation of the stress response can have a positive and productive purpose when coupled with various task demands. Examples of performance oriented goals which benefit from a certain level of stress are bargaining in a business-negotiation, running a race or meeting a deadline.

However, most of the publicity and concern surrounds the negative side effects of stress. Current clinical literature cites a variety of sources for stress-related-problems. They range from noise levels and overcrowding associated with modern, quick paced work environments to personal lifestyles that involve self-destructive thinking and-action patterns. Examples of the many disorders of a physical and psychosocial nature that have been correlated with stress are: headaches, asthma, sleeping disturbances, stomach and ulcer disorders, hypertension, insensitivity and unfriendliness, diminished productivity and drug and/or alcohol abuse.

HOW DOES STRESS CAUSE ILLNESS?

One idea is that physiological disorders are more likely when the activation of the stress response occurs without a *complete* release of mental and, or physical tension. The repression or partial discharge of this state prevents the body from returning to a state of homeostasis or balance. This prolonged and persistent state of physiological arousal without sufficient release stresses the body’s functions and depletes the body’s ability to have the energy available to combat disease and other necessary functions. These effects combined contribute to a lower threshold for disease and therefore, a greater incidence of physiological disorders.

WHAT TRIGGERS STRESS?

Any physically or emotionally uncomfortable situation or any threatening, challenging or unanticipated happening, whether “positively” or “negatively toned” (a promotion or a job loss) can be an effective trigger for stress.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF STRESS?

We identify three sources of stress.

Type 1: External Stressors

These include

physical stimulus stressors, such as high noise levels, improper lighting and overcrowding;

psycho-social stressors, such as home life and support systems (friendships and interpersonal relationships); and

socio-economic stressors, such as career, financial and security motivated concerns.

Type 2: Internal Stressors

These include: philosophies, ideas, emotions and physical health

Type 3: Habit and Addiction Patterns

These include, alcohol and drug abuse, food and other “addiction” disorders.

The Stress-Less Program is aimed primarily at Type 1 and Type 2 stressors, although some positive effects have been found in the area of Type 3 problems and behaviors.

TWO UNDERLYING CONCEPTS OF THE STRESS-LESS* PROGRAM

Body and Mind

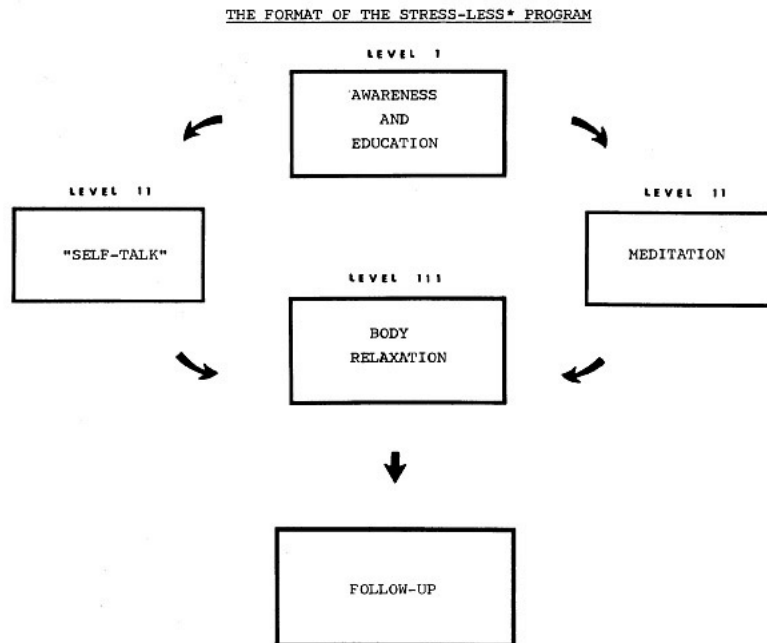
The inter-relationship between the body and the mind is continually evidenced in the nature and symptoms of the negative side effects of stress. Consequently, education and awareness of the body/mind relationship and the ability to identify sources of stress form the essential foundation of the Stress-Less Program.

Happy And Unhappy Events - What's The Difference?

We normally associate the correlates of stress to negative life events, such as divorce, death and job loss. Yet, a move to a better neighborhood, a promotion and significant increase in salary as well as the entrance into marriage can stimulate fears of inadequacy, performance anxiety, psychosomatic illness and drug or alcohol addiction problems. Within this analysis, we also know that a person can perform extremely well under the influence of negatively tinged or painful events and suffer the worst adjustment to pleasurable events.

The Stress-Less program recognizes this complexity in the human personality and the circular relationship between both pleasant and frustrating events. Therefore, we aim to diminish self-destructive emotional and action patterns whether their source is negative or positive.

FORMAT OF THE STRESS-LESS PROGRAM

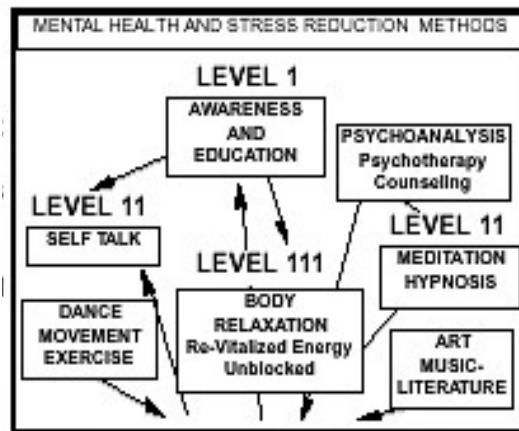


FORMAT OF THE STRESS-LESS PROGRAM

Level I: Awareness and Education

This portion of the program involves the presentation of the Stress-Less conceptualization of the causes and effects of stress. Through lecture and demonstration, the three sources of stress (external stressors, internal stressors, and habit and addictions) will be repeatedly demonstrated. Participants will be *trained to identify and differentiate* the sources of stress they are experiencing.

Level 11: “Self-Talk” and Meditation Procedures - Self Talk³



These methods show participants how thought patterns, (how we talk to ourselves), logic, and core beliefs increase the intensity, and in some cases entirely cause, stress reactions. Thus, participants will be shown how to organize their thinking in a new ways.

“Self-Talk” methods encourage a *realistic appraisal* of the causes of stress. They are therefore,

useful in combating stress caused by *external stressors*, since they support a “rational” approach to solving problems.

“Self Talk” training also provides the tools to challenge any added stress caused by the relentless and ever insidious problem of self-blame; the harsh self attack that is often associated with our view of how we are handling a situation or how we should have handled it or what we should have done to prevent its occurrence. In this regard, “self-talk’ methods can be continuously applied to *internal stressors*, especially any self blame thought patterns which increase, maintain, or cause destructive stress reactions. Our goal will be to have participants become able to identify and short-circuit these thought related sources of stress.

Level 11 and/or 111 – Meditation

These are non-verbal procedures for producing fast recovery to stress as well as a “quieter” mind, sharper senses and a state of alertness. These methods are especially useful in both their general effectiveness and their ability to be used in the work settings.

Level 111: Body Relaxation Procedures

These physical relaxation procedures involving *visualization*, *guided fantasy* and imagery provide temporary relief for body stored tension as well as the medium for *desensitization* to stressful ideas, images, and emotions.

Summary

In summary the Stress-Less program educates participants to identify the sources of stress in their lives, and then encourages them to help themselves by using verbal and non-verbal methods to reduce their stress.

The program orients participants towards the use and analysis of how they are talking to themselves, (“self-talk”), and teaches corrective stress reducing “self talk”, meditation, and physical exercise and relaxation procedures.

Philosophically, participants will be guided towards the integration of mental and physical life. Such attempts at healing the splits within us assist in diminishing the level of stress and optimizing enjoyment of a productive and satisfying home and work life.

Footnotes

¹ This paper is adapted from the original unpublished version. During the period of my life when this paper was written (1981), Gail Lashman and I were friends and partners. I was, at the time, a Post Doctorate Fellow and Research Director at Albert Ellis' Institute For Advanced Study In Rational Psychotherapy. I was a theoretical academic with an interest in experimentally based clinical applications. Gail Lashman, on the other hand, was entirely in the "real" world. She convinced me to apply my thinking to a "marketable project". The Stress.Less program for the corporate world was her idea. My thinking applied to this target resulted in the program. I drew on what I knew, created the concepts and categories, and she kept it focused on the corporate world. What resulted out of this push and pull dialectic was LL Associates and the Stress.Less Program.

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³The influence of theories of language and mind and the relationship between thought and emotion can be seen in the section on "self talk". There is a long list of contributors, but a few come immediately to mind, such as Luria, Vigotsky, The Kendlers, B.F. Skinner, Noam Chomsky, and Albert Ellis,