

# Stress Less



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## **Patient Manual for the Stress Management Group**

**C.L. Franklin, S.A. Corrigan, S.A. Repasky, K.E. Thompson,  
M. Uddo, and J.L. Walton**

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Created by a grant from the Department of Veterans Affairs South Central (VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC). For copies of this manual, contact Dr. Michael Kauth at [Michael.kauth@med.va.gov](mailto:Michael.kauth@med.va.gov)

# Session 1

Defining Stress =

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Is it possible to Stress Less? Yes

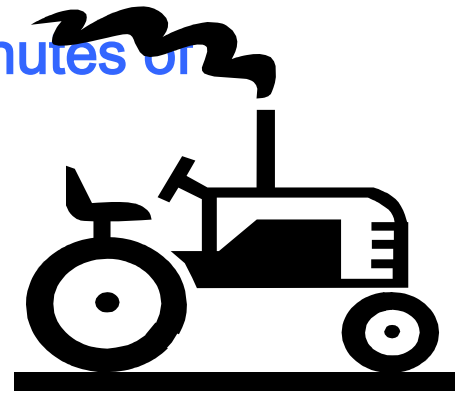
Why Manage Stress?

Posttraumatic **STRESS**

Disorder

## If our body is an engine...

that idles on high & we are able to reduce the idle of our engine, even for a few minutes or every day, what happens?



# THE LONG & SHORT OF IT...

<u>Consequences</u>	<u>Short Term</u>	<u>Long Term</u>
<b>Physical</b>		
<b>Emotional</b>		
<b>Behavioral</b>		

# SUDS

## Subjective Units of Distress Scale

**S**ubjective = personal, individual

**U**nits = measurement

**D**istress = upset, suffering (anger, sadness, nervousness)

**S**cale = amount, level, degree

What is the SUDS? This is a way for you to communicate with yourself and others about how you are feeling. Saying “I am a 5/10” is more specific than saying “I feel ok.”

### From Zero to Ten.

**10** = The most distress you have EVER felt (total panic/worst mood).

- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6 = Extremely upset (furious/terrified/very sad); Hard to control emotions.
- 5
- 4 = Some Distress (irritated/ bummed); Emotions are under control.
- 3
- 2
- 1
- 0 = As relaxed as you have ever been. No distress at all.

# Calm Breathing

The tools taught in this group will help you reduce your stress reaction.

**Calm Breathing** is the most important of these tools and can be used on its own to decrease anxiety. This is a skill that you must learn over time...you need to practice!

## The Purpose:

Slow down breathing

With practice, decrease anxiety

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take a *Normal* breath in through your nose with your mouth closed.

2. Exhale slowly with your mouth closed.  
On exhaling, think your soothing word  
(            ) very slowly.
3. Count slowly to 4 then take another  
breath.

Practice calm breathing several times a day. Take 10 to 15 breaths each time you practice. Remember, the more you practice, the better this new coping skill works!

# How can Relaxation help me?





Anxiety is a learned response.

Relaxation is a skill.

To learn this skill, practice is required.

During relaxation, it is normal to experience changes in your mood. You may also notice a difference in way your body feels.

**The Goal of Relaxation: Feeling Calm  
while you are AWAKE!**

# Deep Muscle Relaxation

WHY? When people feel anxious or frightened, they get stirred up inside. For example, they may begin to sweat. Their heart might race. Breathing may get faster. People may also experience muscle tension. This tension will, in turn, lead them to become more anxious.

**GOAL:** The goal of relaxation is to help you become more aware of this tension when it happens so you can reduce it as fast as possible.

**How?** By tensing your muscles and relaxing them you will begin to notice how different it feels when you start feeling more stressed.

**PRACTICE!**

**Before you begin:**

1. Make sure you are in a quiet place.

2. Turn down the lights but do not turn them off.
3. Sit upright in a comfortable chair.

### Review:

Each set of muscles should be tensed twice

Tighten up your muscles at 50% -- don't strain

Don't tighten up any muscles where you have pain

Keep your muscles tight tensing your for 10 seconds

**Relax your muscles for 30 seconds after  
tensing them twice**

# Muscle Groups

- Clench your fists
- Bend your hands backward at wrists
- Flex your biceps muscles
- Push your shoulders back into chair
- Hunch your shoulders up toward ears
- Tilt your head to left shoulder
- Tilt your head to right shoulder
- With your head down, tuck your chin toward chest
- Press your head back against chair
- Take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds
- Tense your stomach by tightening your muscles as if hit in the stomach
- Wrinkle up your forehead and brow
- Close your eyes tightly
- Open your mouth wide
- Pucker up your lips
- Bite down slightly on back teeth
- Arch your back like a cat
- Stretch out your right leg and bend your toes back
- Stretch out your left leg and bend your toes back
- Stretch out your right leg and point your toes away from your body
- Stretch out your left leg and point toes away from your body

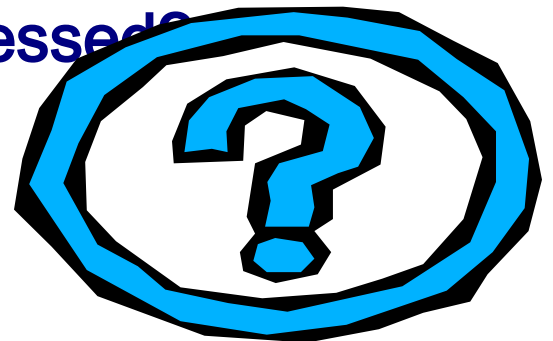
- Curl up your toes in your shoes



# Session 2

## Your Stress I.D.

What are the warning signs that let you know you are becoming stressed?



Physical Signs of Stress

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# Emotional Signs of Stress

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# Relaxation vs. Deep Relaxation

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## Deep Relaxation Decreases:

- Heart rate
- How fast you breathe
- Blood pressure
- Skeletal muscle tension
- Oxygen use
- Critical thinking
- Skin resistance
- Alpha wave activity in the brain



Why Practice? Regular practice of deep relaxation for 20-30 minutes a daily can

help you learn how to use these relaxation skills no matter where you are.

What does this mean? Your body will re-learn how to relax, so that it feels more relaxed all the time!

# BENEFITS...

1. Reduce feelings of anxiety\*
2. Prevent other issues from piling up
3. Give you increased energy so you can get more done
4. Improve your ability to think clearly and remembering things

5. Help you sleep better and feel less tired\*

6. Prevent physical problems

7. Increase self-confidence

8. Helps you get in touch with your feelings\*

*\*Symptoms of PTSD*

# ROAD BLOCKS

## *I don't have the time to practice.*

- Put practice relaxation sessions at the top of your "to do list" every day.
- Remind yourself that learning to relax will help you feel better.
- Remind yourself why you came in for help in the first place (you were stressed out) and what you hope to change (feel less stressed).

## *There is no place to relax at home.*

- Talk to your family about why you need quiet time. Share your handouts with them so they can understand how important this quiet time is to your recovery.

- Ask them to help you find a quiet place and not to bother you while you are practicing.

*This is slow & boring.*

- That is because you feel anxious and want to feel better NOW! It is good for you to slow down and it gets easier with practice.



***I feel more anxious when I relax.***

- This is normal...learning to relax takes practice!  
Shorten the time you spend relaxing and little by little work up to 20 or 30 minutes.

***I just don't have the drive to do it.***

- With practice you will start feeling less anxious.  
Feeling better will make you feel more like practicing. In the meantime, remember to act “as if” you feel like doing it.

# Visualization

Creating a positive mental picture in your mind is very relaxing.

Once you get a mental picture in your mind, you will feel like you do when you get caught up in a really good movie, fantasy, or daydream.

# PRACTICE!

## Before you begin:

1. Sit in a comfortable chair that supports your arms, hands, neck, & head.
2. Place your feet flat on the floor and uncross arms and legs.
3. Loosen tight clothing and remove your glasses.

## Choosing a special place:

When you create your mental picture, choose a peaceful place. Make sure to see, hear, smell and feel the things that would be in that setting.

# Session 3

## Understanding Anxiety

### Where does anxiety come from?

Anxiety is an extreme change of an alarm reaction your body naturally goes through in response to a threat. The fight 'or' flight response helps us to avoid threats of danger and ensure our survival. However, this can start to happen in situations we **think** might be dangerous whether it is true or not.

1. Avoidance. Avoidance is a learned behavior. Certain conditions (for example, people, places, things, thoughts) make us nervous. We learn to connect anxiety with that condition. When you avoid that condition, your anxiety decreases at that moment and you "learn" that avoiding the situation reduces your anxiety in the short term. This is how avoidance develops. In the short run, it is rewarding to avoid

facing things that cause us anxiety. However, in the long run, avoidance will increase your overall anxiety.

2. Thoughts. What you say to yourself can create and fan the flames of anxiety. Much of anxiety is created by thoughts beginning with “What if...”because this kind of thinking makes us expect the worse.

4. Bad Habits. Stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine increase anxiety. Most people get used to these substances and do not recognize how caffeine and nicotine affects their anxiety level...until they stop using them.

# 20 Positive Coping Strategies for Stress

## PHYSICAL & LIFESTYLE

Abdominal breathing  
Relaxation techniques  
Regular exercise  
Low stress diet  
Downtime  
Time management  
Sleep habits

## MENTAL

Challenging negative  
thoughts  
Distraction  
Acceptance  
Tolerance

## EMOTIONAL

Social support

Self-nurturing

Good communication

Assertiveness

Recreational activities

Humor

## SPIRITUALITY and ATITUDE

Working toward goals

Positive philosophy

Religious commitment

# Guided Imagery

Guided-imagery is a way of deliberately using an image to change how you feel, behave, and what you goes on in your body.

Guided-imagery is used by athletes to help them perform better. It is also used to treat a number of physical and mental problems.

Guided-imagery is used to treat anxiety by placing you in a state of deep relaxation. Then you learn to create a picture in your mind that improves your confidence in any number of situations (e.g., being



in a crowded place, having a heart-to-heart talk, speaking up in groups).

What should you imagine???

- upcoming difficult situations
- something you have been avoiding
- an important event

# **PRACTICE!**

## **Before you begin:**

- 1. Get into a comfortable position, with your head and neck supported.**
- 2. Be sure that where you are is quiet & distraction free.**
- 3. Know the situation you will be creating in your mind.**

## Steps:

First, we will use Sunlight Meditation to achieve a state of Deep Relaxation.

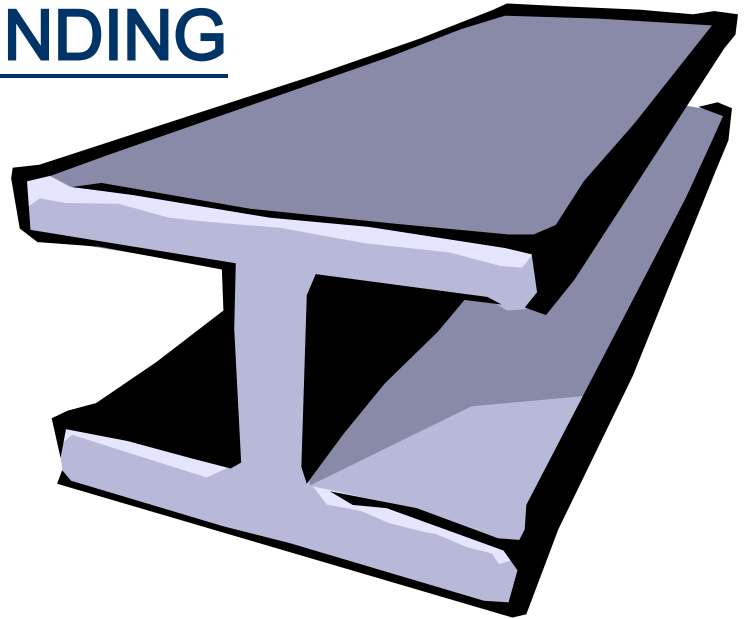
Then, we will use guided-imagery tools to improve self-confidence

# Session 4

## GROUNDING

### What is Grounding?

- Centering
- Looking outward
- Distraction
- Healthy detachment



### What does it do?

Grounding helps you shift away from negative feelings and thoughts. Some people think of it like changing the channel on a television—when you change the channel, you get a different show.

- Grounding can be done anytime & anywhere.
- Use it when ever you are faced with a trigger, become very angry, disconnect, or have a lot of emotional pain (SUDS = 8+ /10).
- Keep your eyes open, check out the room, and turn the light on.
- Focus on the present, not the past or future.

# Three types of Grounding

Mental: Focusing your mind.

Physical: Focusing your senses.

Soothing: Talking to yourself in a very kind way.

*You may find that one of these is more helpful to you than others; or you may choose to use all three.*

## MENTAL GROUNDING:

Play categories with yourself.

Describe your environment in detail.

Describe an activity in detail.

Use a safety statement : “My name is\_\_\_\_\_. I am safe right now.

I am in the present , not the past. I am located in \_\_\_\_\_. The date is\_\_\_\_\_.”

## PHYSICAL GROUNDING:

Run cool water over your hands.

Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.

Touch different objects around you.

Dig your heels into the floor.

Carry a grounding object in your pocket (a rock, ring, piece of cloth)

Stretch.

### SOOTHING GROUDING:

Say kind statements to yourself.

Think of favorites or something to look forward to next week.

Picture people you care about.

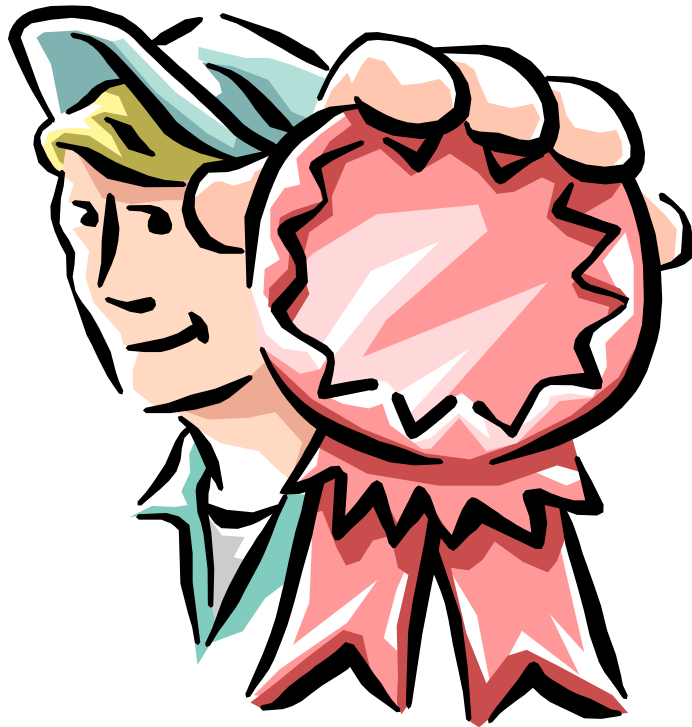
Remember a safe place.

Say a coping statement: "I can handle this. This feeling will pass."

# How to make grounding work for you...

- ✓ Practice as often as possible.
- ✓ Practice faster.
- ✓ Try grounding for a LONG time.
- ✓ Make an index card.

- ✓ Prepare in advance.
- ✓ Start grounding early in the negative mood cycle.
- ✓ Think about why grounding works.
- ✓ Don't give up!!!





# Stress Less

During the last month, you learned about stress and anxiety, the impact it has on your life, and ways to reduce and cope with it.

It is our hope that you will continue to use the calm breathing, relaxation techniques, and grounding to cope with anxiety and stress.

Please keep this manual and refer back to it, so you can review what you have learned in Stress Management.

Thank you for attending the STRESS LESS groups—we have enjoyed working with you.