

WEEK 4: STAYING PRESENT WITH PAIN, DIFFICULTY, ILLNESS AND STRESS

MTPC PATIENT WORKBOOK WEEK 4: STAYING PRESENT WITH PAIN, DIFFICULTY, ILLNESS AND STRESS

Home Practice:

Formal Practice:

- Practice sitting mindfulness of breathing for 30-45 min daily using recordings provided

Informal Practice:

- Identify your own warning signs for stress, and see if you can become aware of moments of stress, and of stress reactions and behaviors during the week (for example: feeling stuck, numbing, feeling a loss of control, and shutting off)
- Practice at least 1 informal practice each day
- STOP ACHE GO – **Allowing** what you notice to be there, **Anchoring** in breathing
- Recall “This too shall pass” with unpleasant, pleasant, and neutral sensations and experiences.
- Mindful Walking

Required Handouts:

- Mindfulness of Breath (20 & 45 min) & Mindfulness of Sound (10 min) Guided Recordings
- Understanding Our Experiences of Stress on the Body
- 3-Minute STOP-ACHE-GO Breathing Space

Poem:

Unconditional by Jennifer Welwood

Optional Handouts:

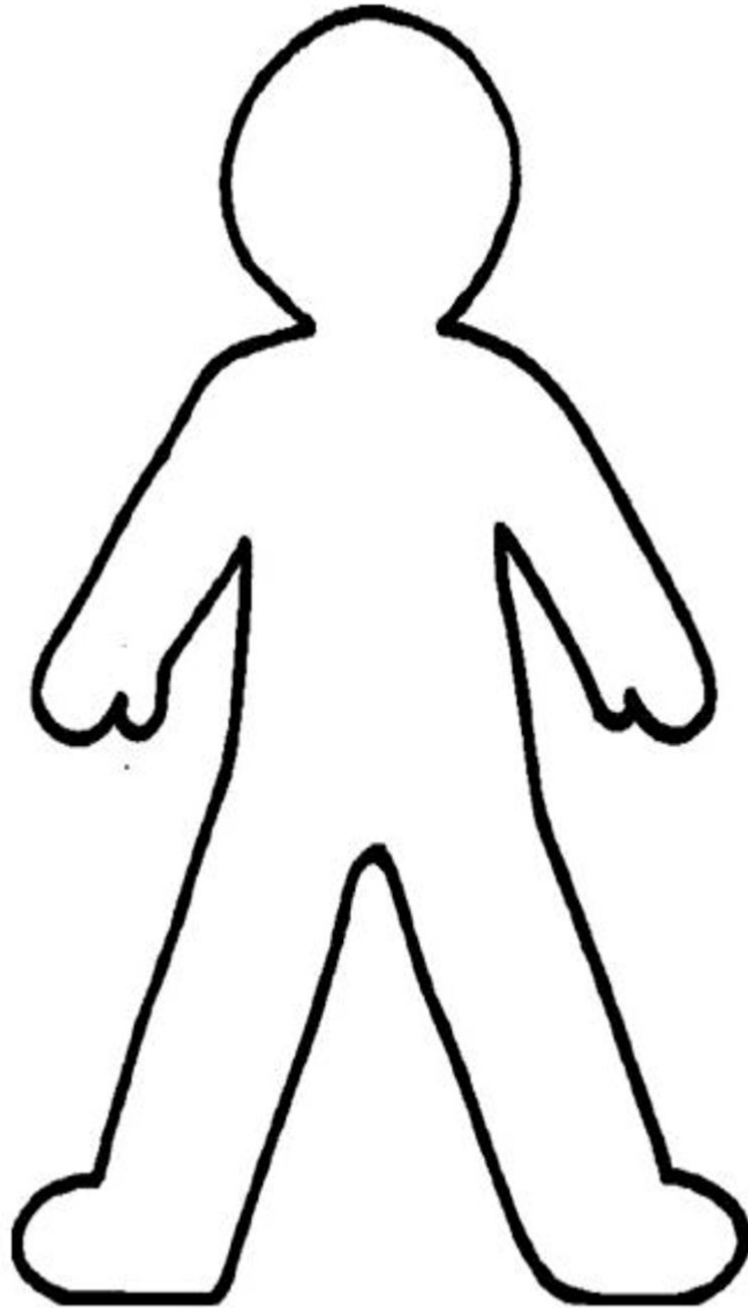
- Physiological stress slides and Stress Diamond of Experience
- Physical Barometer for Emotions
- 4 C’s of Chronic Illness

Unconditional Jennifer Welwood

Willing to experience aloneness,
I discover connection everywhere;
Turning to face my fear,
I meet the warrior who lives within;
Opening to my loss,
I gain the embrace of the universe;

Surrendering into emptiness,
I find fullness without end.
Each condition I flee from pursues me,
Each condition I welcome transforms me
And becomes itself transformed
Into its radiant jewel-like essence.

UNDERSTANDING OUR EXPERIENCES OF STRESS ON THE BODY



3 - MINUTE STOP-ACHE-GO BREATHING SPACE INSTRUCTIONS

Preparation

Begin by deliberately adopting an upright and dignified posture, whether you are sitting or standing. If possible, close your eyes. Then, take about 1 minute to guide yourself through each of the following three steps (NOTE: The practices are presented in a linear, sequential way, but can be adjusted as needed. The STOP-ACHE-GO practice doesn't have to hit every single letter every time)

Step 1. Observing and Allowing

- **Slowing Down and Turning Towards the Present Moment Experience** (Fast/Sharp/Slow?)
- **Observe with Openness** by bringing your awareness to your inner diamond of experience, ask: **What is my experience *right now*? Allowing whatever you notice to just be there.**
 - What **thoughts** are going through the mind? As best you can, acknowledging thoughts as mental events, perhaps putting them into words.
 - What **emotions** are here? Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence.
 - What **body sensations** are here right now? Perhaps quickly scanning your body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing.
 - What **feeling tones** are here right now? Pleasant, Unpleasant, Neutral?

Step 2. Anchoring

- Now redirect your attention to focus on the physical sensations of the breath breathing itself.
- Move in close to the sense of the breath in the abdomen...feeling the sensations of the abdominal wall expanding as the breath comes in...and falling back as the breath goes out.
- Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out, using breathing to **Anchor** in the present. If your mind wanders away, gently escort it back to the breath.

Step 3. Expanding

- Now **Expand** the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression.
- If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, or resistance, take your awareness there by breathing into them on the in-breath. Allowing them to be there, "let me feel it."
- Investigating with **Curiosity** (maybe even saying to the area of unpleasantness "Let me feel this for just a few moments...or...Let me find out what you what me to know".
- Then breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the outbreath.
- As best you can, bring this expanded awareness into the next moments of your day.

The 3-min STOP-ACHE-GO Breathing space is a way to step out of automatic pilot and reconnect with the present moment.

Adapted from Teasdale et al. (2014)

WEEK 4 OPTIONAL HANDOUTS

PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS SLIDES

“Stress”

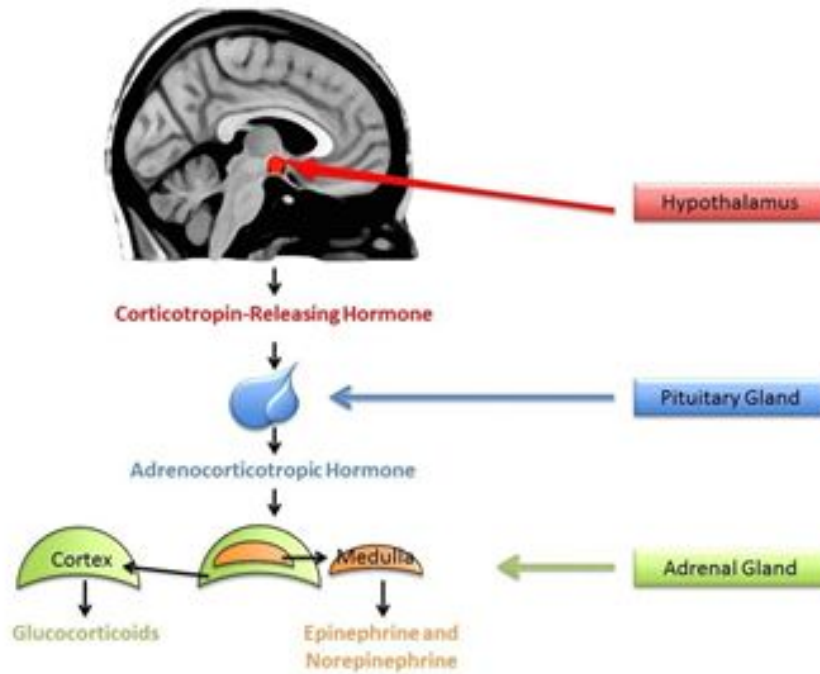
The word "Stress" often means the subjective emotional sense of pressure or strain that we feel when perceived demands appear to exceed our capacity to cope with them.

Stressor: anything that causes the release of stress hormones.

Stress response: a physiologic survival mechanism designed to prepare us for a challenge or threat to our safety and well-being.

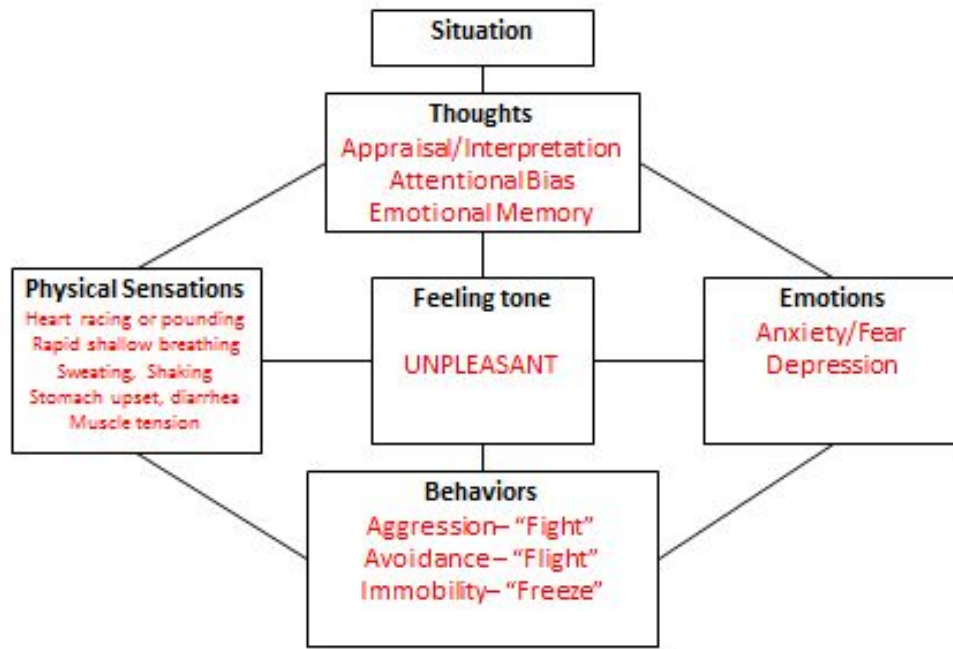
Stress reactivity: the tendency to perceive a stressor as a threat. With a low threshold for threat, perceived threats trigger a stress response. Stress reactivity is a disposition that underlies individual differences in responses to stressors and is assumed to be a vulnerability factor for the development of diseases.

Stress Reaction: HPA Axis



<http://neuroscience.nyu.edu/modules/1-gene/05-stress.html>

Stress Reaction and the Diamond of Experience



Effects of Stress Reactivity on Health and Well-Being

Musculoskeletal

Immune

Cardiovascular

Gastrointestinal

Dermatologic

Psychological

Other

THE PHYSICAL BAROMETER FOR EMOTIONS

FINDING WELLNESS AND BALANCE WHEN COPING WITH STRESS

If you have a barometer or have ever seen someone consult one, you will know that first you tap gently on the glass and then you look to see which way the needle inside the glass moves. If the needle moves up, the air pressure is rising and the weather will probably improve, and if the needle goes down, it may be going to rain. But things vary according to seasons, so it is quite complicated to predict the weather.

We can use our bodies in a similar way to give us very sensitive information about how things are for us, at any given moment.

Here is how you can do this:

1. Determine some part of the body – such as the chest area or the abdomen or somewhere in between the two – that for you is especially sensitive to stress and difficulty.
2. Once you have located this place it can become your “physical barometer,” and you can tune in to it, paying attention to sensations there regularly, at different moments, every day. If you are stressed, you may notice sensations of tension or discomfort. Depending on the intensity of the difficulty, these sensations may be strong or not so strong and may change as you pay attention to them. If you are experiencing ease and pleasure and then tune in, you may notice quite different sensations.
3. As you become more practiced at reading your physical barometer, you may find that you start to notice subtle variations that offer you detailed and early information about how you are feeling moment by moment, long before you are aware of this in your mind.
4. Any time you tune in to your physical barometer, if you wish, you can move to doing a breathing space to help you stay present with a difficult situation or with discomfort. Alternately, you may choose just to monitor the sensations in your physical barometer moment by moment and be with them just as they are... allowing things to be ... accepting as best you can how things are... and being with your experience moment by moment.

Adapted from Williams et al. (2007)

THE FOUR C's OF CHRONIC ILLNESS

Illness (mental or physical) can cause stress. The 4 C's listed below can contribute to the ongoing stress of living with an illness.

1. Lack of **Control**

- Lack of physical control

2. Lack of **Coherence**

- Who am I if I have this illness?
- How does this fit in with the story of myself?

3. **Confusion** of meaning

- What is my purpose now that I am sick?
- Why did this happen to me?

4. un**Certainty**

- How will this affect me and my future?

This stress can be increased when the commonness of these experiences are not acknowledged or when we find it hard to stay in the moment. When we forget that illness is a part of life for all people at some time or we resist this truth, then we add stress into other life domains as well. Recognizing that these are 4C experiences are ones that all people will feel at some point in their life, allows us to provide compassion to ourselves. These cause real suffering and yet we are not alone because the 4 C's will emerge in most people's life journey. Having an illness doesn't define us, but how we cope with the illness and the 4 C's that arise can prevent additional stress and establish our resiliency and clarity in our lives. Staying mindful without getting lost in self-criticism, panic, or depression can allow us to do what needs to be done to get better or at least direct what energy we have towards taking care of the things that are most important to us.

A fifth "C" is **Clarity**, which can arise when we have an event that helps us to realize what we truly value in our lives. In this way, illness can also be a gift helping us see more clearly how we should be organizing our lives.

"The secret of longevity is to get a chronic illness and take care of it."

Sir William Osler (Father of Modern Medicine)

Tasks of chronic conditions:

Corbin and Strauss delineate 3 sets of tasks faced by people with chronic conditions: (1) medical management of the condition such as taking medication, changing diet, or self-monitoring blood sugar; (2) creating and maintaining new meaningful life roles regarding jobs, family and friends; and (3) coping with the anger, fear, frustration, and sadness of having a chronic condition.