

Summary Sheet

# Dealing with stress in the family

CALD



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All families experience some stress. Sometimes it is major, like deaths of family members, natural disasters or wars. Other times stress is quite minor, but causes us discomfort because it is repetitive, irritating and frustrating. Every person responds differently to stress.

## Understanding stress

Stress is your whole response to things that happen around you. When something happens your body reacts physically, you have certain thoughts, you feel particular emotions, and all of those link together so that you behave in certain ways.

The more stress you experience over time, the more effort it takes to deal with it. If you are continually exposed to stressful events, your health is likely to suffer in the long term. Therefore, you will benefit from doing what you can to lower the level of stress in your life.

## Recognising what stresses you

The program facilitator will talk about examples to help you identify what stresses you, and how you usually react to stress.

## Managing stress

### Building up your resilience to stress

A balanced lifestyle helps build up your resilience so you can cope well with stress. What makes up a balanced lifestyle is different for each person. Areas of your lifestyle to think about include:

- individual activities
- family activities
- leisure activities
- work
- contact with friends
- community involvement
- spiritual or philosophical pursuits
- physical or health promoting activities.

## **Taking action to avoid stress triggers**

There may be some stress triggers that you can avoid. For example, if you find taking your children shopping stressful, perhaps you can plan to have someone mind your children while you go (and perhaps do the same for them in return). You might be able to use this strategy for major shopping trips and take the children when you only have a few things to buy. Avoiding the trigger, even on some occasions, is still a good thing for your health.

## **Changing stress triggers**

Now that you know what your stress triggers are, you might be able to change them in some way that means they are no longer stressful. Remember what you learned in Module 4 about planned activity routines for high risk times.

## **Using relaxation skills to reduce emotional reaction to stress triggers**

Your response to stress may include unpleasant emotional reactions. These usually mean that you can't think clearly or do things well. If this goes on for long, you feel worse and worse. Learning relaxation skills helps you remain calm in situations that are stressful, which means you don't end up feeling stressed. The key steps to learning how to relax are on the next page.

## **Using your relaxation skills in real life situations**

When you know a stressful situation is likely to come up, or when you feel yourself beginning to have an unpleasant emotional reaction, use your relax signal. As you feel yourself starting to get angry or anxious, take a deep breath, breathe out and say "relax" to yourself.

## **Changing your thinking in reaction to stress**

Most of us are quite good at telling ourselves how bad a situation is and actually making ourselves more stressed. What we say in our own heads has a big impact on how we feel. Telling ourselves positive things instead helps us stay calmer and actually cope better with stressful events. Again, the more you practise, the better you get.

## Key steps for relaxation

1. Organise your day so that you have 15 minutes to learn and practise your relaxation skills.
2. Select a quiet part of your home where you will not be interrupted for the 15 minutes. Turn the telephone off.
3. Lie down on the floor or recline on a comfortable chair.
4. Close your eyes.
5. Clench your left hand and tense all of the muscles in it. Make it tighter and tighter. Feel the tension in your fist. Hold that tension for about 10 seconds.
6. Take a deep breath, then breathe out as you say to yourself “relax”, and then let go of all the tension in your left hand. Concentrate on how nice it feels for your hand to be relaxed. Stay with that feeling for about 10 seconds.
7. Now clench your whole left arm and tense all of the muscles in it. Make it tighter and tighter. Feel the tension in your arm. Hold that tension for about 10 seconds.
8. Take a deep breath, then breathe out as you say to yourself “relax”, and then let go of all the tension in your left arm. Concentrate on how nice it feels for your arm to be relaxed. Stay with that feeling for about 10 seconds.
9. Repeat this cycle of tensing and relaxing muscles with other groups of muscles in your body. Do your right arm after you have finished with your left arm. Then do your legs, buttocks, stomach and neck muscles.
10. Don't forget to say “relax” to yourself as you breathe out and relax the muscle groups. This is important for later on.
11. When you have finished all of your muscle groups, just lie there and concentrate on how relaxed you feel, and how good it is. You might like to play some relaxing music, or imagine scenes of activities you enjoy; for example, a relaxing walk in the bush.