



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership

STRESS AWARENESS FOR STUDENT LEADERS

Have you ever thought to yourself: "Oh, I'll think about that problem tomorrow?" Or told your friends "I work better under pressure when I know I have to write my research paper by tomorrow." Or have you ever been just a little bit apprehensive about going to the first organizational meeting of the new year as president? These are probably pretty common occurrences in the life of a student leader. All of these things could cause stress, be it positive or negative.

In order to learn how to effectively live with stress, you must first understand it, and how it affects each of us differently.

FACTS ABOUT STRESS

Stress is caused by how we respond to events, not by the events themselves. Each individual may respond differently to the same event.

Stress is inescapable. Trying to avoid it will create it.

Not all stress can and needs to be controlled. We need positive, high energy stress. We need to learn to control negative emotional and physical stress.

False perceptions are often stress-producing agents. Find out the facts before you get all stressed out about a situation.

STRESS INDUCERS

The preceding facts about stress should be kept in mind as you explore what things in a student leader's life may be stressful. These could include:

- ◆ Having a long, important meeting the night before a major exam.
- ◆ Juggling multiple priorities as a student: class, work, activities, relationships.
- ◆ Being away from your family support network, and trying to find a new support network.
- ◆ Winning an award as an outstanding student leader.
- ◆ Leaving the security of your friends and classes at school after graduation, and moving out into the "real world."
- ◆ Having your personal values tested (i.e., drugs, alcohol, etc.).

COPING WITH STRESS

- There are three basic approaches people use to cope with stress:
- ◆ Avoid
 - ◆ Suffer
 - ◆

HELPFUL STRESS

Stress gives you an extra burst of energy - more adrenaline enters the bloodstream, hearing and breathing rates increase, blood flow quickens and muscle strength improves. Harnessing the energy of occasional stress can help you meet physical challenges, solve problems, and reach goals.

HARMFUL STRESS

“Stress” comes from a Latin word meaning “to draw tight.” When there’s no outlet for this feeling of tightness, stress can be harmful. Chronic, unrelieved stress can cause headaches, backaches, loss of appetite, constant fatigue, depression, and some serious physical problems.

Manage

Managing stress is the best way to deal with it. Since stress is a holistic concept, involving the total self, it must be managed by a number of different techniques. These are as follows:

Stress Self-Analysis: Recognize what aspects of your life contribute to stress. If we reconstruct stressful situations, we sometimes see them from a different perspective and can better analyze our reactions and feelings.

Time Management: Prioritize your time so that you can take personal time to relax and socialize with your friends.

Relaxation and Massage: Slow down the body, physically and mentally. This involves meditation, mental imagery, progressive relaxation, and deep breathing. It could even mean a new hobby--gourmet cooking, oil painting, etc.!

Eat Right and Exercise: Good nutrition and exercise can help reduce tension. Try to stay away from a lot of sugar; that can provide a quick energy burst, but the end result is a depressant effect. Also, try to exercise at least three times a week for 20 minutes. This can include walking, biking, swimming; find an activity you enjoy and stick with it!

Sleep: Let the body re-energize; completion of dreams is important. Most people need 7-8 hours of sleep each night for optimal performance. Enough sleep means a better ability to handle stressful situations.

Stroke or Reward: Give yourself a reward for following the stress reduction techniques!

Remember that learning how to deal with stress is a very important skill. To live a healthier, happier life, you must learn to accept and cope with stress. Practice is the key.



Time Management

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement

*Additional resource handouts are available as well as consultation services.
For more information, contact the Student Activities Office in the Student Center at 465-4450.*