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## **Ingredients for Emotional Wellness : Dealing with Stress in Family and Workplace**

***UWAS Dinner Talk  
20 Nov 2010***



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Dr Ong Say How

Consultant Psychiatrist



Learning to  
Deal With  
Stress Is Not  
Just knowing  
the ABCs.



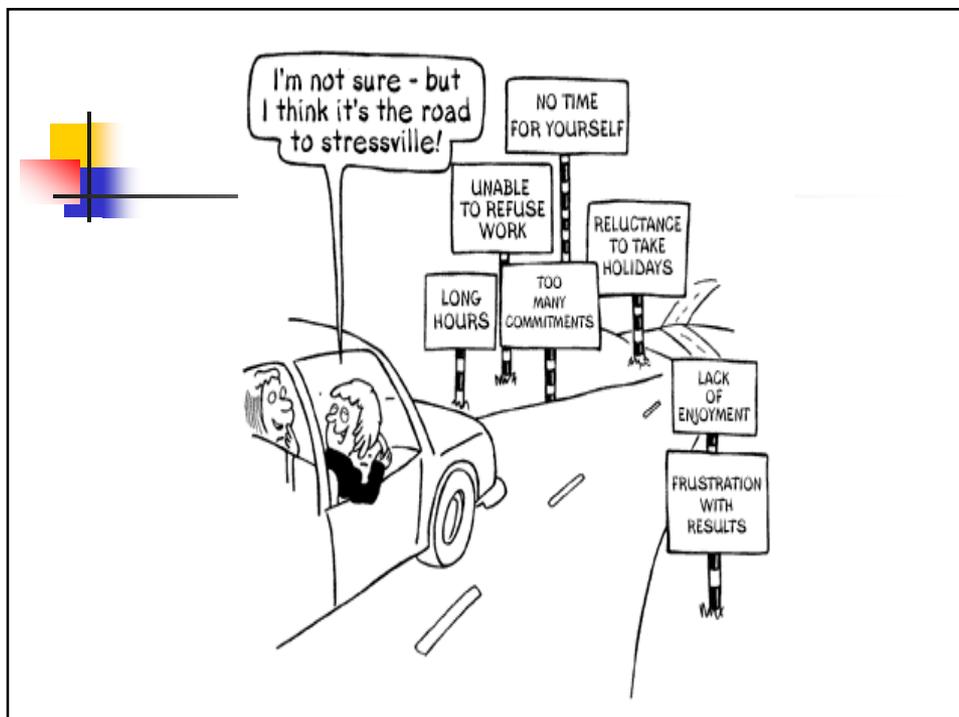
## HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOURSELF ?

“Know thy enemy, know thyself,  
a hundred battles fought, a  
hundred battles won.”

**Sun Tzu**

## Emotional Wellness

- Not merely the lack of emotional problems
- Rather the presence of positive attitudes and coping mechanisms



## RECOGNISING STRESS - Emotional reactions

- General irritability
- Feeling anxious for no specific reason
- Feeling sad
- Scapegoating
- Family tensions



## RECOGNISING STRESS - Physical symptoms

Headaches  
Breathlessness  
Giddiness  
Chest Discomfort  
Aches and Pains  
Insomnia  
Poor appetite



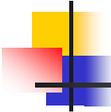
## RECOGNISING STRESS

- **Stress is a process that builds.**
- Intervene early
- Try to become aware of the signs that suggest the process has begun.



## Case Study 1

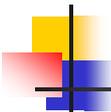
- **Tan & his wife found themselves arguing about things that happened days earlier.**
- **During the week, chores did not get done because of work, school and family schedules - clothes not washed, leaking tap not fixed and they had not bought groceries for the week.**



## Case Study 1

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- So the weekend was frantically spent cleaning up and finishing these tasks, leaving little time to do the things they enjoy as a family or for personal recreation. Tension mounted and by midweek, there was a conflict.



## Family stress - What's That?

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- Tension that arises from demands or pressures on family to **change**
- One person's life affects the other
- Signs : Arguments, some members become withdrawn, marital discord, taking out on children, spend less time with family, staying back more at work

## Family life cycle

- Couples
- Preschool
- School age
- Adolescent
- Launching
- Empty nest
- Retirement & aging



## Family Stressors

- Emotional problems
- Sexual difficulties
- Financial strains
- Job changes
- Physical losses
- Things that just don't get done

## When stressors pile up

- Accumulation of unfinished tasks which creates strain & tension that may lead to arguments



## Attention to Self

How well we care about ourselves determines how well we care for others

“ What you do unto others reflects how you feel about yourself ”

## Attention to Self

- Are they neglecting their own needs?
- Sometimes thinking about one's needs
  - guilt & suppressed anger → criticism, blaming → depression

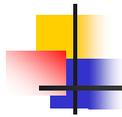
What are your needs?  
What are your priorities?



## Attention to Self

- List what you enjoy doing
- List time spent doing things during the week
- Compare list 1 & 2





- To remain healthy, the **SELF** does require attention
- Firstly, you must acknowledge and accept the legitimacy of providing care for **SELF**

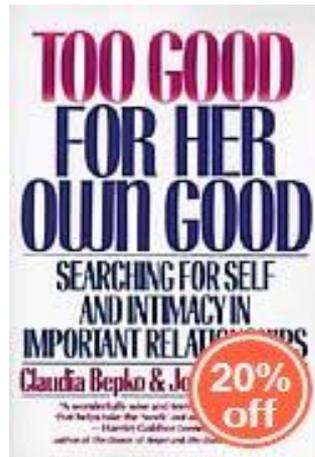


## How to do it?

- Sharing with important other(s)
- Making guilt-free time
- Giving yourself permission to enjoy without guilt. Be kind to yourself !
- Planning personal time
  - believing in the value of what you do
  - diversity, not boring
  - personal growth

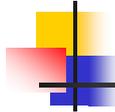
## Bedtime Reading...

- Uncover reasons why so many women work so hard to be good and wind up feeling so hopelessly inadequate
- Nurture others without ignoring their own feelings and needs
- Learn to make new choices for interacting with all the important people in their lives



## Case Study 2

- Lynn had a new boss with very different managing styles than the first
- Lynn felt "picked on" frequently by boss
- When given new tasks, Lynn felt that her boss was always "arrowing" her because she was not well-liked by him. Did tasks unwillingly.
- Decided to turn to alcohol after work to "forget about things". Also began to turn up late for work. Work standard dropped.



## **Work Stressors**

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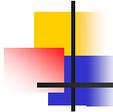
- Poor work environment
- Inadequate welfare for employees
- Erratic, disruptive shift work
- Long hours
- Excessive travel
- Work overload/underload
- Coping with new technology



## **Work Stressors**

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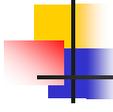
- Role ambiguity
- Role conflict
- Poor relationships at work
- Poor career development



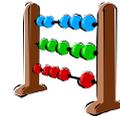
## 1. Time management



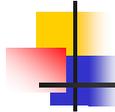
- List all tasks
- Assign order of priority
- Delegate work if possible
- Don't procrastinate on unpleasant tasks
- Leave space in between projects to unwind



## 2. Positive thoughts



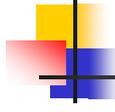
- It is not life events that make people unhappy or happy but how a person copes that makes the difference
- Think happy & be happy!
  - We can act ourselves into a frame of mind
  - Gratitude journal
- Know your limits
- Managing negative thoughts



## Managing negative thoughts

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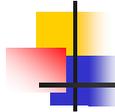
- Negative self-talk is automatic and can lead you to make false assumptions
- Negative thinking starts a vicious cycle; the more you have distorted thoughts, the more they grow and multiply



## Case Study 3

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Rachel is a Sec 2 girl came to see me in clinic. Plagued with low self-esteem and no close friends, she has been feeling depressed and cutting herself. She felt her parents favored her younger sister and brother. She failed her exams and felt that she was always a failure and that no one, including her parents, loved her.



## Negative Thinking

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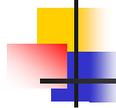
1. "I failed my exams" → "I am a failure, I could not even do the simple stuff"
2. "My mother chided me for disturbing my brother while he was studying" → "My mother never loves me. Why did she have me?"
3. "My only friend did not talk to me in school today" → "Everyone gives up on me. I am completely useless"



## How can I stop negative thoughts?

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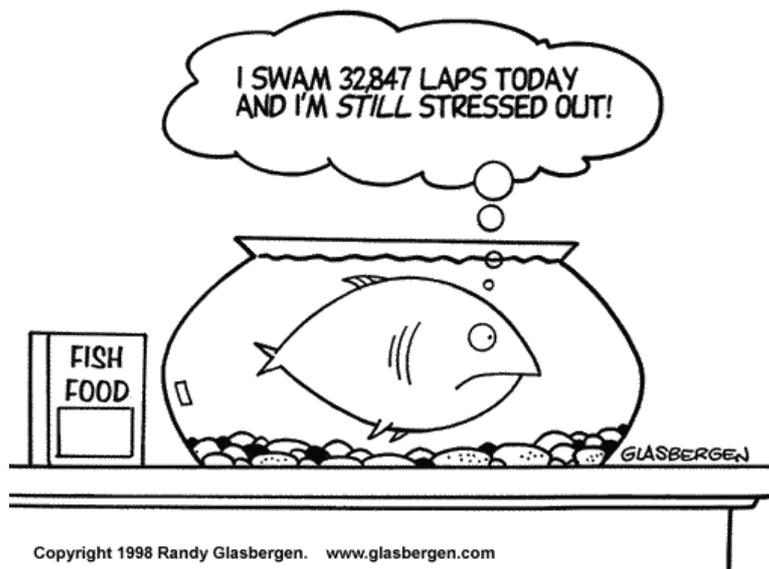
- 1. Write down the thought
- 2. Think about it for a minute and ask yourself these questions:
  - Is what I'm thinking really true?
  - Is it something that is out of my control?
- 3. Identify the negative thought and change it to a positive one



## 3. Physical



- Diet & exercise
- Get enough rest
- Seek work & leisure that engages your skill (challenge)
- Relaxation exercises



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## Relaxation exercises

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique - basic idea is to systematically train tensing and relaxing groups of muscles.



## Guided imagery



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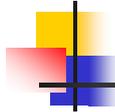


**“This is my relaxation tape—  
it’s the sound of ocean waves crashing  
onto the shore, snatching my boss’s body off  
his beach chair and carrying him out to sea.”**

## 4. Social



- Nurture your close relationship
- Communication
- Reach out to those in need



## 5. Spiritual

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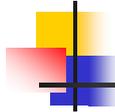
- For some, religion helps them to cope better with crises
- Faith provides a support community, a sense of life's meaning, feeling of acceptance



## Tips on Managing family stress

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- Prevent & recognize your own stress
- Increase family's flexibility
- Recognize life events and transitions that may cause stress
- Support one another
- Communication
- Look at problems together in a positive light



## Tips on Managing Work Stress

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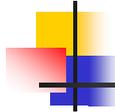
- Clarify organization's mission and goals
- Be orderly in work habits
- Determine priorities and stick to them
- Make a daily "to do" list to keep track
- Don't do things at the last minute if you can help it



## Tips on Managing Work Stress

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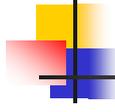
- Stick to a decision once it is made. Don't continue to worry about whether you might have done it better
- Admit you mistakes. Don't cover up.
- Correct the mistakes and get on with other tasks.



## Tips on Managing Work Stress

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- “Learning to live with other people is one of the most stressful aspects : good relationships between members of a group are a key factor in individual and organizational health”
- “In the end, all business operations can be reduced to 3 words : people, product and profits”

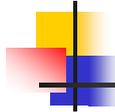


## Interesting Note

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“The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.”

Robert Frost



## Important Helplines

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1. S.O.S (24hr) – 1800-221 4444
2. Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) – 1800-283 7019
3. HELP Family Service Centre (for single parents and children) – 6457 5188
4. Tinkle Friend (children age 7-12 years) – 1800-274 4788



## Important Helplines

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5. Child Welfare Section (MCYS) – 1800-258 6378
6. Seniors Helpline – 1800-555 5555
7. AWARE – 6779 7137
8. Thirty-seven island-wide Family Service Centres – locate them at [www.mcys.gov.sg](http://www.mcys.gov.sg)



Life is like  
a Box of  
Chocolates.  
You never know  
what you  
gonna get...

The image shows a vibrant and diverse collection of food items, including fresh vegetables like carrots, tomatoes, and leafy greens, as well as fruits, meats, and prepared dishes. The text on the left is in a blue, sans-serif font. A small logo with a crosshair and colored squares is in the top left corner. The website address [forbis.com](http://forbis.com) is visible in the bottom right corner of the food image.

