

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support



www.swanseacarerscentre.org.uk

Introduction

Swansea Carers Centre aims to promote positive wellbeing and help improve the mental health of carers who may struggle with the stresses often encounter while caring for others. Caring for others can be extremely rewarding, however, it can often take a toll on a carers physical and mental wellbeing.

We recognise all carers are different, have different experiences and their caring roles are unique. Swansea Carers Centre support carers through a personalised approach to their individual needs. Confidential counselling service from our professional in-house counsellors, peer support groups where like-minded carers can come together, share experiences, and support one another. Activities and educational groups for access to information to help carers identify helpful coping strategies to deal with care related issues such as managing stress, emergency planning, difficult decisions about care, and exploring plans for our futures in “life after caring”. Sign posting or referral to internal and external resources are available for carers who require additional support maintaining an effective caring role. Support for Young Adult Carers (16-25yrs), Older Adult Carers (50yrs plus), inclusive support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) carers and carers juggling employment, childcare as well as their caring role.

One-to-one support, face to face, over the telephone or via email contact is available.

Contact us on 01792 653344 Monday - Friday 9am - 8pm

Email: admin@swansecarerscentre.org.uk

For a full list of projects available, please check our website and social media pages.

www.swansecarerscentre.org.uk

@SwanseaCarers





Mental Health

When we consider “Mental Health” it is common for people to automatically focus upon the well-known, well publicised conditions such as Depression, Anxiety, Bi-Polar Disorder or Schizophrenia. Although these are indeed widely recognized and commonly diagnosed mental health conditions, society often overlooks the fundamentals of mental health and the most common mental health issue.

Mental Health is an individual's capacity to feel, think, and act in ways to achieve a better quality of life while respecting personal, social, and cultural boundaries. Mental health is associated with several lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, work, substance abuse, social connections, and interactions. Impairment of any of these are risk factor for a mental disorders, or mental illnesses.

The most common and often overlooked Mental Health trait??



What is stress?

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response, and it prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives.

Everyone experiences stress to some degree. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Coping styles and symptoms of stress also vary from person to person.

Not all stress is bad. The fight-or-flight response, also known as the acute stress response, is the natural, physiological reaction that occurs in the presence of something that is terrifying, either mentally or physically.

This response is triggered by the release of hormones that prepare



our bodies to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety.

Over development of these “stress hormones” in prolonged periods of stress however can be very harmful.





We all experience stress to some degree. We have different experiences of stress and stressors that cause it. We may react differently to stressful situations or have different ways to cope with the stresses we encounter. Those who are providing care for a friend or family member with a long-term illness can experience what is known as “Chronic Stress” or “Carers Stress”. Carers Stress can affect people of all ages.

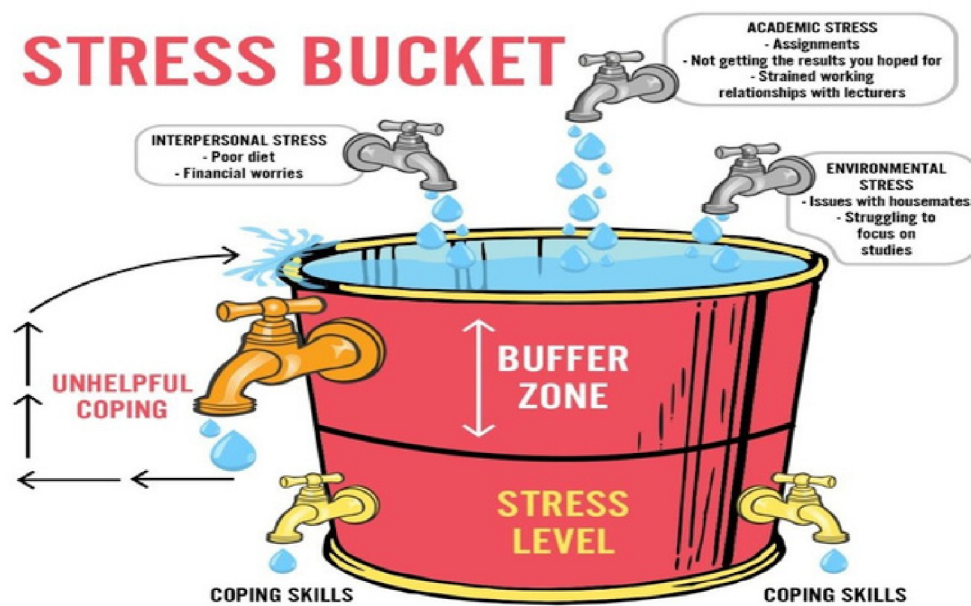
Stress or Carers Stress can:

- Make it harder to relax, cause a range of harmful emotions, such as anxiety and irritability.
- Make it difficult to concentrate or cause us to over focus on negatives.
- We may experience headaches, muscle tension or other body pains.
- Stomach discomfort. We may find we lose our appetite or eat more than usual.
- Cause sleeping issues.
- Worsen pre-existing health problems.
- Increase our use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances.
- Worsen existing mental health conditions and start to have an impact upon our daily functioning (including home life or work).
- Cause an inability to function or cope that may require us to seek access to health care support.
- According to a UK-based study, almost two out of three carers of people with dementia feel lonely. Most of the carers in the study were family members or friends.

*For more advice about caring for Dementia, please ask about our
Dementia Project and Dementia Hub*

Identifying Stressors and Causes of Stress

A key part of overcoming Stress is being able to identify what causes us stress in the first place. A simple method for identifying our “Stressors” is by consulting the “Stress Bucket”.








The “Stress Bucket” principle may seem comical however, it’s a simple and effective way to explore our own personal “Stress Levels” and “Stress Tolerances”.

If we consider the Stress Bucket analogy, it demonstrates we all have things that cause us stress and over time cause our inner stress levels to increase. If left unchecked, this stress increases beyond our level of being able to cope with the stress. This then leads to “Overflow” or the troubles caused by unaddressed stress such as fatigue or emotional distress.

We may resort to Unhelpful Coping Skills such as avoiding family or friends, increased alcohol, tobacco, or the use of other substances. These may seem helpful in the beginning but over time cause problems of their own and eventually add to our overflowing stress as demonstrated above.

Being able to identify our stressors often (over time and with practice) can help us identify Helpful Coping Mechanisms or Skills that can “Drain” or reduce our stress levels so we are able to function adequately, maintain Good Mental Health and overall a Good standard of Emotional and Physical Wellbeing.

Top Tips for Stress Reduction

-  **Acceptance:**
Some things are out of our control. Change the things we can, accept the things we can't. Being able to identify the difference can reduce stress and promote good mental health.
-  **Connect with others:**
A good support network of colleagues, friends and family can ease stress and help us see things in a different way. The activities we do with friends can help us relax and relieve stress. Talking things through with a friend may also help us find solutions to our problems. *(For more information about connecting with likeminded carers, please ask about our Young Adult Carers, Male Carers or Carers Connect Projects).*
-  **Have some "me time":**
Many of us don't spend enough time doing things we really enjoy. Try setting aside a couple hours or even a couple of nights a week for some quality "me time". We are all entitled to that time for ourselves. Without it, how can we destress? *(For more information about support with getting some much needed "Me Time", please ask about our Time 4 You, Amser and Ty Conway Projects).*
-  **Exercise:**
Exercising doesn't make our stress disappear, but it can reduce some of the emotional intensity that we're feeling, clearing our thoughts, and letting us deal with our problems more calmly.
-  **Challenge yourself:**
Setting ourselves goals and challenges, whether at work or outside. Learning a new skill, language or participating in a new sport, can help us deal with stress and can help build our confidence. It can also make us want to do things and be active. *(For more information about support with learning new skills, please ask about our Inhouse Training Project).*

- ✔ **Avoid unhealthy releases:**
Relying on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as a way of coping might provide temporary relief, but in the long term, these crutches won't solve our problems and could just create new ones. It's best to tackle the cause of our stress.

- ✔ **Help others:**
(GOOD DEED OF THE DAY DONE!!) Evidence shows that people who help others, through activities such as volunteering or community work, often become more resilient. If volunteering is too much, try to do someone a favour every day. It can be something as small as helping someone cross the road or going on a coffee run for friends or colleagues. *(For more information about Training or potential Volunteering opportunities, please ask about our Inhouse Training and Volunteering Projects).*

- ✔ **Work smarter, not harder:**
Working smarter means prioritising our work, concentrating on the tasks that'll make a real difference first. Leave the least important tasks to last. Accept that we don't have time for everything.

- ✔ **Healthy Diet:**
The benefits of a healthy diet are huge. Providing the energy and nutrients we need to keep active throughout the day while ensuring that we remain physically and mentally healthy far into the future.

- ✔ **Stay Hydrated:**
Hydration impacts the brain, as well as the body. Research has shown that even mild dehydration may have a negative impact on mood and may heighten anxiety.



The Importance of Good Sleep Hygiene

This is an essential part of maintaining good physical and mental wellbeing. Poor sleep can lead to numbers of physical and mental side-effects.

Healthy Sleep Tips

- ✓ **Good Sleep Routine:**
Maintaining daily consistency where possible is important. Waking at the same time each day can help also with a daily activity.
- ✓ **Exercise By Day:**
Daily exercise is important for maintaining good physical and mental wellbeing. A walk outside by day maybe all you need to benefit your sleep by night.
- ✓ **Healthy Diet:**
Diet is a key part of healthy living. Avoiding fatty or spicy foods at evening times can help regulate gut health as well as a good night sleep.
- ✓ **Avoid Stimulation:**
Avoid stimulating drinks such as caffeine, energy or sugary drinks before bed. Avoid alcohol and nicotine where possible. Avoid the use of electrical devices such as mobile phones, tablets and television before bed or in the bedroom.
- ✓ **Relaxation Before Sleep:**
Unwinding before bedtime is key. Avoid work related activities or heated topics of conversation. Relax, listen to calming music, have a warm bath/shower, meditate, or read a book to aid readiness for sleep. Mindfulness and breathing techniques while in bed can be soothing and aid sleep.
- ✓ **Good Sleep Environment:**
Your bedroom is for two things... sleep and intimacy. If you work from home, avoid working in the area where you sleep. Keep your bedroom clean and comfortable. Consider investing in a comfortable mattress and blackout curtains if possible. Try to block any external distractions with the use of an eye mask, ear plugs or white noise e.g. a fan.



A Grounding Technique To Destress Before Bed

Find yourself a comfortable spot, at home or your own special safe place and try the “5,4,3,2,1 Technique”. You can even use this helpful Mindfulness Technique in times of panic to aid “Grounding” and overcome feelings of distress.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise

	Name 5 things you can see
	Name 4 things you can touch
	Name 3 things you can hear
	Name 2 things you can smell
	Name 1 thing you can taste

Ever wonder what would happen if you consider a Carer Contingency Plan?

I am a Carer

I have completed an Emergency Planning Form which can be found:



Care continued with peace of mind!!

Breathing Exercise for Stress

This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic. It only takes a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly and you can use this as a relaxation technique as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing, sitting in a chair that supports your back, lying on a bed or even comfortably on the floor.

Make yourself as comfortable as possible. Try to loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing if you can.

If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms facing up. Let your legs be straight. (Alternatively: bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor).

If you're sitting, place your arms on the arms of the chair.

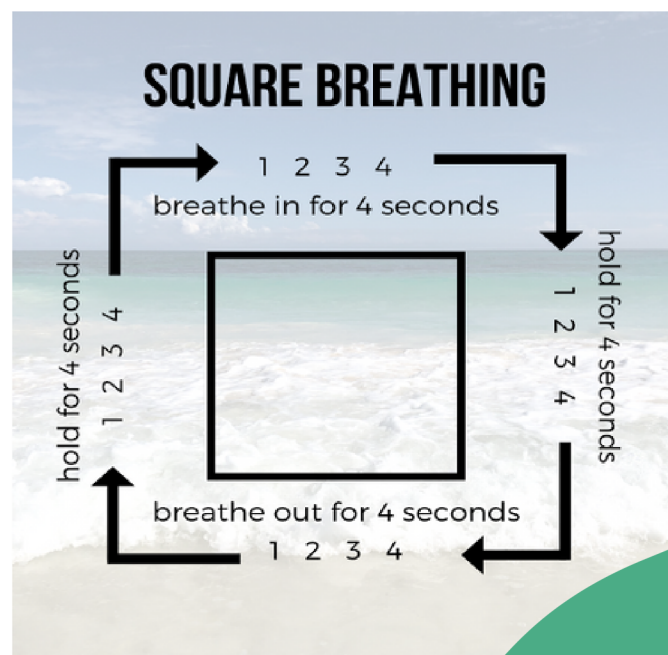
If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. In either of these positions, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

Comfortable?

Now?

Let's begin...

- Breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, (try this without forcing it).
- Breathe in gently. Counting steadily from 1 to 4 as you inhale.
- Holding in the breath for another count from 1 to 4.
- Then let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 4 again as you exhale.
- Holding again for another count of 1 to 4.
- You may not be able to reach 4 at first but can work towards it.
- If you find this helpful, Keep doing this for at least 4 minutes.



Mind, Body And Spirit

(Thoughts, Emotions and Behaviour)

When we think about Stress, it's important to consider the impact it has on our Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviour as each component can impact the other. As shown below:



Stress or high levels of stress can have a negative effect on our thoughts. These thoughts in turn become negative and ultimately can heighten our stress. Example: Burning food.

“I can’t believe I burnt that food” >> “I’m terrible at cooking” >> “I’m useless.”

Breaking The Cycle

The earlier we can highlight these negative thoughts the better. We do this by process of the 3 C's:

Catch: Acknowledge the negative thought.

Challenge: What is the evidence to support this thought? What is the evidence against this thought?

Change: Develop the alternative positive thought to help reduce our stress and promote our confidence.

“I can’t believe I burnt that food”

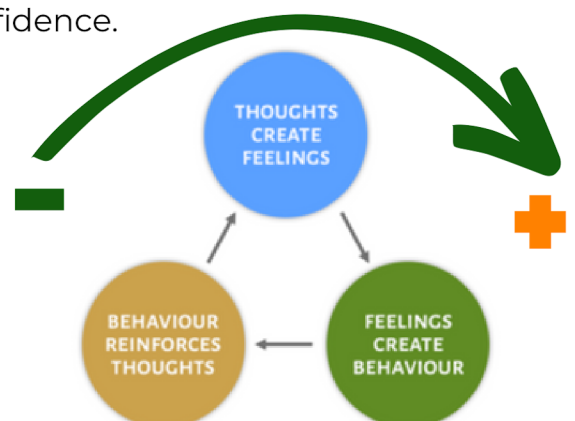
>> “I’m terrible at cooking”

>> “I’m useless”

Catch >>>> Challenge >>>> Change

“I burnt it, so I’ll make something else”

>> “I’m a good cook” >> “I’m useful”



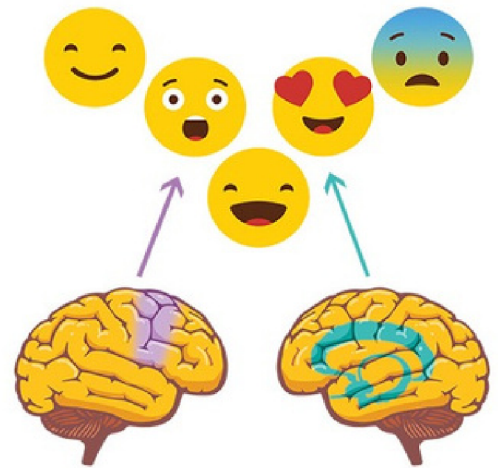
Emotions

When encountering high levels of stress, we experience a variety of emotions but are these emotions unhealthy?

No. Not all emotion is unhealthy. We all have the right to feel the way we do when we encounter stressors in life. What we do with these emotions however is important to maintaining good mental health and wellbeing.

Healthy negative emotions: Concern, sadness, healthy anger or annoyance, remorse, regret, disappointment, healthy jealousy, and healthy envy. These can produce self-helping and community helping actions.

Unhealthy negative emotions: Anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, shame, hurt, unhealthy jealousy and unhealthy envy. These can produce constructive actions and result in inaction or destructive behaviour.



Behaviour

When considering our Behaviours, it is important to identify what helps us destress and what doesn't. It is also important to consider what is considered healthy and unhealthy to us as carers.

Healthy Behaviour: Connect with others. Allocate "Me Time". Exercise. Set ourselves "SMART" goals. Help Others. Work Smarter, Prioritising our work. Eat Well and Drink Well.

Unhealthy Behaviour: Isolation from friends and family (Too much time to think can be harmful). Taking our frustrations out on others or property (You might need them or it later). Relying on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as a way of coping. These crutches won't solve your problem. They might provide temporary relief but cause additional issues in the long term.



Life After Caring

When our caring responsibilities come to an end, it can be hard to know what to do next.

When we are used to thinking about the needs of someone else or others, it can be hard to stop and think about what we would like to do for ourselves.

Some people find that once they are no longer caring, exhaustion (both physical and emotional) catches up with them and they can feel unwell or run down for a while.

Having more time for ourselves may give us the well-deserved opportunity for a much-needed rest, or it can leave us feeling lost and uncertain, with time on our hands to fill.

Consider discussion with loved ones / the person we care for in advance. Identifying some practical steps going forward in our caring roles can help gain perspective for likely or potential situations we'll face in our caring roles. It can also prepare us for some eventualities or a completely new chapter of our lives once our caring role ends.

Some practical matters must be dealt with sooner than later. Making sure we are claiming the right benefits for our situation when we are no longer caring and dealing with possible changes to our housing situation is advisable.

Making decisions about other aspects of our lives can be done gradually and over time and when it feels right.

Whatever the reason for our caring role ending, we may go through a form of grief as we miss the person and the intense relationship develop while caring for them. It is normal to feel bereft and feel anxious about our futures.

A bereavement, the loss of a loved one especially can be one of the hardest things anyone has to cope with. There are often many practical things to deal with in addition to our grief and we often feel different emotions in response to our loss.



Bereavement



Swansea Carers Centre

At Swansea Carers Centre, we provide pre-planning support and advice to aid Carers consider all aspects of their caring role such as the loss of a loved one and “life after caring”.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing project aims to provide individualised support at these difficult times and refer to inhouse or external services to make this time more manageable.

Contact our team on:

Tel: 01792 653344 (Monday – Friday 9am – 4.30pm)

www.swanseacarerscentre.org.uk

Swansea Bay University Health Board

In addition to the Swansea Carer Centre, Swansea Bay University Health Board, have a dedicated Care After Death Service. Their team are on hand to support with all practical matters, such as death certification, and can also help carers find the right support during a bereavement if needed.

The Care After Death Team are available to contact 6 days a week, Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.30pm, and Saturday 9.00am to 12.00pm.

Their team can be contacted on:

Main Office: 01792 703327

Morrison Office: 01792 703114

Email: SBU.CADC@wales.nhs.uk

Neath Port Talbot Office: 01639 683139

Singleton Office: 01792 285818

Cruse Bereavement

Grief is a natural process, but we know it can be devastating. Cruse are specialist bereavement experts who have experience in all types of loss and can offer support however and whenever a death has occurred.

Tel: Swansea 01792 462 845

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Email: crusecymru@cruse.org.uk

www.cruse.org.uk/



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