

Psychology and Counselling

Lesson 1

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Stress

Aim

Recognise the nature of conflict as well as social and societal pressure in relation to stress, and how stress impacts all people today.

STRESS

Hardly a day goes by without the feeling of stress creeping over us. Leading research from around the world has concluded that roughly 70% to 90% of visits by adults to primary care physicians are for stress-related problems. Stress is a contributing factor in a huge number of mental and physical health issues and diagnoses. This is why stress should be the first, or at least one of the early topics to dive into when discussing psychology and counselling.

There are many different conditions and situations which can cause stress. These include relationship demands, study demands, physical health problems, mental health issues, balancing work, family and social demands, traffic congestion, road rage, product faults, discrimination, tension related to growing up, and so forth. While some people have a stress management system in place, others simply 'keep on keeping on' or simply ignore the issue creating stress without stopping to consider the effects their daily stress is having on them. In some people, stress-induced adverse feelings and anxieties tend to persist and intensify. Learning to understand and master stress management techniques can help prevent the counter-effects of this indiscriminate and ubiquitous disease.

The Mind/Body Connection and Stress

In the discipline of psychology, stress is defined as the state of *psycho-physiological arousal*. It is virtually impossible to discuss psychological stress without describing the physiological state that accompanies it. The dynamics of stress demonstrate the close interaction between mind and the body in human behaviour. Thus, before we discuss stress, let us first briefly review the mind/body problem.

During our everyday conversation, we tend to use the term 'body' for all that is concrete and tangible about ourselves - the shape of our limbs, colour of hair, etc. The term 'mind', on the other hand, refers to the intangible part of our experience - the private storehouse of our emotions and thoughts. Thus, in our everyday life, we tend to use these two terms as though they refer to entirely separate entities which exist independently of each other. However, this is not the case. The mind and body are interrelated and highly inseparable! For example, a person who feels stressed exhibits both physical and psychological symptoms. Similarly, depression, which is characterised by negative thoughts and feelings, can cause tension in muscles which can lead to a sore back or headache.

Therefore, we must view stress or tension as a state of psychological and physiological arousal. As the Oxford Dictionary states, it is "a state of affairs involving demand on physical or mental energy".

When we encounter the term 'stress' in magazines and books it often really only refers to 'excess stress'. This can be misleading because people are always in a state of stress (arousal), it is just that it is often nominal. Psychologists are aware that extremely stressful conditions are detrimental to human health, but in moderation stress is normal and, in many cases, proves useful. Stress, nonetheless, is synonymous with negative conditions.

We use the term 'distress' to indicate negative stress, which can lead to harmful effects, such as being fired from one's job. The term 'eustress' is used to refer to positive arousal which provides a healthy challenge, such as being promoted in one's job.

The level of stress differs from one individual to another. Certain individuals experience more stress than others (e.g. a job promotion may cause eustress for most people but for some it could cause distress). The level of stress also changes over time - you might be experiencing less stress now than you did a year ago.

A person can be in a state of low arousal or high arousal. Some people tend to be one or the other most of the time. This is characterised by someone who needs more sleep - they tend to be more relaxed (low arousal), most of the time. An extreme case would be someone who lacks energy (lethargy) and fails to notice much of what is happening in their immediate environment.

People who are generally in a high state of arousal are those who can't help but wake early, who are full of nervous energy, and perhaps tend to fidget and move about. In an extreme case, this person might jump at the slightest sound. There are of course others who fall between these two extremes, being in a moderate state of arousal. The group to which a person belongs is closely related to the functioning of their nervous system - how fast impulses travel from one neuron to another. This is largely inherited.

A temperamental or emotionally unstable person has a high level of tension, and a low tension threshold. They can react fast to stimuli and can become easily angered in response to just one wrong word. Effective behaviour of people with low tension thresholds can be easily disrupted by stressful situations. Conversely, a person with a low level of tension and high tension threshold is slow to respond to environmental stimuli, does not become angered very easily, and can generally bear a lot of stress before effective behaviour is disrupted.

There has been a lot of research into the relationship between effective behaviour and stress. Research results show that when stress level is low, a person's performance level is low. As the amount of stress increases, the performance level also increases. However, if the stress level becomes too high, the performance level again decreases. We can thus assume that an individual who has moderate stress will cope better than a person who has a very high, or very low, stress level.

While complex tasks such as solving mathematical equations are performed well at a moderate stress level, it has been found that more physically demanding tasks, such as high jumping or marathon running, are more effectively performed at a high stress level.

How to Recognise Stress

It is important to recognise whether you, someone you know, or a client, is under stress. Often, when under the influence of a stressful condition the body reacts to it internally as well as externally but the person fails to recognise the symptoms of stress. This also happens when the causes of stress are there long enough that people get used to them. The body may signal that it is stressed or that something is wrong, through symptoms such as:

- Heart palpitations
- Dizzy spells
- Tight and sore muscles
- Various body pains and conditions
- Blurred vision
- Inability to eat or over-eating
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Unexpected emotional reactions

It is important for individuals to remain attentive to such symptoms and to have a stress management system in place to counter the adverse effects of stress.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BODY WHEN WE EXPERIENCE STRESS?

Although physiological and psychological states are very much interrelated, it is much easier to deal with each of these separately.

The Physiological Response

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) will prepare the body for emergency situations. This is known as the 'fight or flight' response i.e. the body becomes ready to run or to fight. The sympathetic division of the ANS increases our level of arousal (i.e. heart rate increases, blood pressure is raised, adrenalin is released, etc.) and motivates us to act with alertness and speed. The parasympathetic division of the ANS relaxes us after the state of

emergency has disappeared.

During physiological arousal, the pituitary gland releases glucocorticoids. These hormones stimulate the liver to increase blood-sugar level, so that the body has energy for quick action. The pituitary gland also releases adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) which stimulates the adrenal gland to release adrenaline (also known as epinephrine) into the bloodstream.

The adrenal glands play a particularly important role in determining an individual's ability to cope with stress. Adrenaline causes constriction in the stomach and intestines (taking appetite away), and increases the rate of heart beat. No doubt you have experienced this state of tension, when your stomach becomes tight and your heartbeat faster and seemingly louder. The secretion of adrenaline excites the sympathetic system that in turn leads to even greater secretion of adrenaline. Thus a closed system of excitation and arousal is formed. This closed system is one reason why the level of excitement takes a while to disappear, even after the cause of the excitement has gone.

The adrenal gland also releases noradrenaline (also known as norepinephrine). Noradrenaline, like adrenaline, prepares the body for fight-or-flight by ensuring adequate blood supply to muscles.

The preparation of the body by the autonomic system is called the 'alarm phase'. This is followed by the 'resistance phase'. The body can resist the tension because its defence powers have been called into action during the alarm phase. The body later returns to a normal unexcited state. Certain physiological functions however, continue to perform at a high level. As a result there will be increased secretion by certain glands and organs (such as digestive juices that can lead to ulcers or diarrhoea).

If a new stressor occurs, such as an infection, the body cannot always defend itself as efficiently as it did during the alarm phase. If the individual is subject to continuous stresses, they reach a point of exhaustion, where the defensive powers of the nervous system collapse. The body's immune system becomes depleted, and illness can ensue. If exhaustion continues for too long, a person might suffer mental illness or a breakdown (a kind of psychological death). In extreme instances, it can cause death.

Stress can cause:

- Headaches/migraines
- Irritable bowel syndrome/stomach ulcers
- Eating disorders
- Allergies
- Insomnia
- Backaches
- Frequent cold and fatigue

Stress can contribute to diseases such as:

- Hypertension
- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Heart ailments
- Cancer

If the cause of stress does not disappear for an extended length of time, the actions of the autonomic system and adrenal glands are prolonged. The pattern of preparation for emergencies can, in effect, trap the person's life in its closed circuit, so the person becomes a victim to an unyielding level of stress.

Chronic & Acute Stress

Chronic stress occurs where an individual is subject to successive stress-producing events e.g. someone living in a relationship with a violent partner. While violence might only occur occasionally, its prospect is always close at hand.

Acute stress arises from more catastrophic events which are sudden and immediate (e.g. death of a spouse or child, personal injury or illness, divorce, etc.). In this case, even though the actual cause of stress could be sudden and short-lived, its effects could persist for a long time.

Not all stressful events have a dramatic effect. However, there are certain life events which have a mild stressful effect which you might not be aware of. For instance, the addition of a new member to a family, a job promotion, change in diet or sleeping pattern, or even the Christmas season can cause minor stress. Minor stressors or "hassles" are not catastrophic, but can be damaging because they are persistent and cumulative (i.e. if they recur over a long period, they can produce an accumulation of stress; and because they are related to insecurities, we don't usually share the burden which they produce).

ERIKSON'S THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was born in Germany. He was a post-Freudian psychoanalyst. He accepted Freud's ideas as basically correct, as well as modifications to Freudian theory concerning the ego which were added later by other Freudian theorists e.g. Anna Freud and Heinz Hartmann. However, Erikson was more concerned with the influence of culture and society on human behaviour than most Freudians. Erikson focussed on the fact that we are all social beings, so our psychological attributes cannot be treated as isolated phenomena.

Erikson is perhaps best known for his work in developmental psychology and, in particular, for his stage theory of psychosocial development. Here he refined and expanded Freud's psychosexual stage theory of development. He regarded psychological development as a lifelong process beginning in early infancy and continuing into late adulthood.

For each of Erikson's stages there is a dominant social theme, or psychosocial crisis, which the individual is challenged to resolve before continuing a healthy pattern of development. These crises may be considered to provide further examples of universal life events which are stress-producing.

Erikson argued that development was governed by the 'epigenetic principle'. This principle asserts that personality development through eight stages is predetermined. How we progress through each stage depends on our success, or lack of it, in previous stages. We develop at a certain time in a certain order which is determined through genetics. If we interfere with this natural order of development, we will ruin our development. Imagine our development as that of a flower – genetically, the flower is pre-programmed to develop at a certain time in a certain order. If we were to try and make the flower grow a petal before it is ready, the flower may be ruined. The same can be said of our personalities and psychological development. Erikson would argue that if you were to encourage an infant to talk in sentences before it is ready to, you could cause psychological harm.

In his view, therefore, each stage of a person's psychological development involves an aspect of relating to others, and the way in which we cope with each theme has a profound effect on our general social being for the rest of our lives. Unlike Piaget's and Freud's stages, Erikson's eight stages extend from the cradle to the grave.

The crises or themes involved in each of Erikson's stages are represented by tasks which are psychosocial in nature. Each task is usually referred to by two terms which describes opposing conflicts that must be resolved. For example, newborn infants must resolve "trust vs. mistrust". They must learn basic trust, and this is attained through loving and caring parents. Similarly, a child aged about 6 to 12 years is tasked with "industry vs. Inferiority". They must learn to be industrious and the ensuing sense of competence is learned through the social interactions with the family and at school.

As noted earlier, each stage has an optimal time. A developing child should not be rushed towards adulthood, nor have their progress slowed down to protect them from the demands of life. If a stage is well-managed, the child will resolve the conflict favourably and come away with a 'virtue' or social strength. If they do not do well, they may develop 'malignancies' or 'maladaptations' which can endanger future development. A malignancy is the worst of the two. It involves adopting too little of the positive and more of the negative of the task. For example, a young infant may fail to trust other people. A maladaptation involves taking away too much positive and too little negative from each task. For example, the infant may develop into a person who trusts too much.

Freud argued that a child's parents influence his or her development dramatically. Erikson also acknowledged an interaction between generations, which he called 'mutuality'. That is, Erikson argued that children can influence their parents' development as well as the other way round. When children are born, this changes a

couple or person's life quite considerably and moves the parent(s) along their developmental path. Furthermore, a person may be influenced by grandparents and great-grandparents, and they too can be influenced by new additions to the family.

An Example of Mutuality

A teenage mother is still an adolescent. She may cope well with having a child, but she is still finding out who she is and how she fits into society at large. Let's say she no longer has a relationship with the father, who is also a teenager and also struggling to find out how he fits into society. Despite the parents' issues, the baby has straightforward needs like those of other young infants. One of these is that its parents will be mature enough to look after him or her, and another is that the mother will have the social support she needs. The mother's parents may help with social support. However, if they do, this is likely to throw them off their own developmental course. They will find themselves back caring for a baby when they had probably thought they had moved beyond that stage, and they may not be ready to become grandparents. They may find the new role very demanding and it may pose challenges to all involved. Their lives are all intertwined in a complex way and these interactions can have profound influences on personality and development.

Erikson's Psychosocial Stages

Erikson's greatest contribution to developmental psychology was to suggest developmental stages which start from birth and continue through to late adulthood. We do not stop developing, so it seems right to extend theories of development to cover our later years. These are Erikson's eight stages –

Stage 1 – Oral-sensory stage (lasting to around 12 – 18 months)

Psychosocial Crisis	Basic trust versus mistrust
Significant Social Relationship	Mother or mother substitute
Favourable Outcome	Trust and optimism
Unfavourable outcome	Mistrust, fear & pessimism

the task is to develop trust without eliminating the capacity for mistrust. If the parents can give a newborn a sense of continuity and consistency, the child will begin to develop a feeling that the social world is a safe place to be, and that people are reliable and loving. The child will learn to trust their own body and biological urges through the parents' responses. If the parents are inadequate or unreliable they may reject or harm the infant. If they attend to their own interests they may ignore the infant's needs, and the infant may develop mistrust and be suspicious or apprehensive around others. This doesn't mean that the parents must be perfect, but problems can arise if their interactions are inattentive or too attentive. For example, if parents are overprotective of a child and respond immediately each time the baby cries this can lead to what Erikson called a sensory maladjustment. The infant will be overly trusting, or even gullible, as they cannot believe that anyone would mean them harm. Even worse is if the child is tipped over to the mistrust side, where they may develop malignant tendency of withdrawal which is characterised by depression, paranoia and even psychosis.

If the proper balance is achieved, the child will develop the virtue of hope i.e. the belief that when things are not going well, they will work out in the end. A child who is doing well at this stage will not be greatly upset by having to wait a moment for the satisfaction of their needs. As already stated, the child's parents don't have to be perfect, rather the child should believe that if their needs can't be met immediately they will be met soon. In this way, they trust their parents enough to work it out. This ability will help the child to get through disappointments later in life.

Stage 2 – The anal-muscular stage (lasts from around 18 months to 3 – 4 years)

Psychosocial Crisis	Autonomy versus shame or doubt
Significant Social Relationship	Parent
Favourable Outcome	Sense of self-control and self-sufficiency

Unfavourable Outcome	Over- dependency and lack of self-control
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The task here is for the child to achieve a degree of autonomy and to minimise shame or doubt. The parents or caregivers should permit the child to explore their environment, so they develop a sense of autonomy and independence. The parents should not push the child or discourage them. There needs to be a balance, with parents being firm but tolerant. This way the child learns self-esteem and self-control.

However, it would be easy for the child to develop a sense of doubt and shame if parents restrict their attempts to explore and be independent. They may feel that they cannot and should not act on their own. Therefore, parents should avoid laughing at a child's efforts to do something as they may end up doubting their own ability and even feel ashamed.

On the other hand, if a child is given too much freedom and no limits or if they are helped when they don't need help, this can give the child the impression that they are not very good at anything. For example, parents should learn to be patient and let the child put on their shoes, rather than assume the child can't cope and do it for them. Shame and doubt is inevitable and beneficial to a degree. Without it a child may develop the maladaptive tendency Erikson calls impulsiveness where, in adulthood, they engage in things without consideration of ability.

However, too much doubt and shame can lead to the malignancy called compulsiveness. The compulsive person may feel that their entire being rides on everything they do, so everything must be done perfectly. They must follow the rules precisely to avoid making mistakes, and mistakes should be avoided at all costs. The proper balance between autonomy, shame and doubt will encourage children to develop the virtue of willpower or determination.

Stage 3 – Genital-locomotor or play stage (lasting from 3 – 4 years to 5 – 6 years)

Psychosocial Crisis	Initiative versus guilt
Significant Social Relationship	Basic family
Favourable Outcome	Purpose and direction - ability to initiate one's own activities
Unfavourable Outcome	Lack of purpose and objectives, guilt about self-assertion, tendency to jump on the bandwagon

The child needs to learn to show initiative without feeling guilt. Initiative is a positive response to the world's challenges – taking on responsibility, learning new skills, having a purpose. Parents can promote initiative by encouraging children to try out their ideas, and accepting and encouraging fantasy, curiosity and imagination. This stage is concerned with play rather than education. The child is now capable of imagining a future situation that is not their reality now. Their use of initiative is an attempt to make non-reality a reality. If a child can imagine the future, they can be responsible and feel guilt. For example, if a two-year-old flushes a watch down the toilet, there are probably no "evil intentions" from the child. The object was there and it went down. If a five-year-old did the same thing, they may be aware that they did it on purpose and begin to feel guilty. They have begun to have a capacity for moral judgement.

Too much initiative and too little guilt can lead to the maladaptive tendency, ruthlessness. The ruthless person has plans and they don't care who they upset to achieve their goals. Their goals mean everything to them, and guilt is only for the weak. An extreme form of ruthlessness is antisocial personality disorder.

The malignancy associated with too much guilt is called inhibition. The inhibited person will not want to try things. Sexually they may be impotent or frigid.

A good balance at this stage leads to the psychosocial strength of a sense of purpose. Most people want to have a sense of purpose but they don't always realise that they can attain it through using their imagination and

initiative.

Stage 4 – Latency stage (lasts from around 6 – 12 years)

Psychosocial Crisis	Industry versus inferiority
Significant Social Relationship	Neighbourhood, school
Favourable Outcome	Competence in intellectual, social and physical skills
Unfavourable Outcome	Sense of social inferiority, lack of intellectual and social resourcefulness

The task in this stage is to develop a capacity for industry whilst avoiding excessive inferiority. Children must learn to tame their imagination and to focus on education and learning the skills society requires of them. The parents, family, teachers, peers and other members of the community are now brought into the child's social world. Children must experience success at school and elsewhere in their lives.

If a child is allowed too little success due to harsh teachers or peers, they may develop a sense of inferiority or incompetence. Additional sources of inferiority are racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. If a child believes that success is related to who they are rather than how hard they try, they may decide there is no point in trying.

Too much industry leads to the maladaptive tendency of narrow virtuosity. This can happen when children aren't allowed to be children but are pushed into competence without encouraging the development of broader interests. This may be witnessed in child musicians, actors, or prodigies. The malignancy here is called inertia, and is much more common in people with inferiority complexes. An individual may feel that they are not good at maths, sport or gymnastics, so they don't try anymore and become inert.

The balance at this stage is to develop the right amounts of industry and inferiority. That is, to retain a small amount of inferiority to remain sensible. This gives people the virtue of competency.

Stage 5 – Adolescence (lasting from puberty to around 18-20 years)

Psychosocial Crisis	Identity versus role confusion
Significant Social Relationship	Peer groups and models of leadership
Favourable Outcome	An integrated image of oneself as a unique individual
Unfavourable Outcome	A confused identity, easily influenced by others, conflicting behavioural roles

The adolescent task is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. Ego identity means a person knows who they are and how they fit into the rest of society. The adolescent moulds themselves into a unified self-image that is also meaningful to their community. Good adult role models, open lines of communication and a mainstream adult culture that the adolescent respects are important for this to happen.

A society should also provide rites of passage, which are accomplishments and rituals that allow its members to distinguish between a child and an adult. For example, in more traditional societies, an adolescent boy may be required to leave his village for a while or seek an inspirational vision. In other societies, there may be symbolic ceremonies or educational events e.g. leaving school. Without this, a child can have role confusion about their place in society and the world.

Too much ego identity can mean that a person is so involved with a role that there is no room left for tolerance. Erikson calls this the maladaptive tendency of fanaticism. A fanatic will think their way is the only way. A lack of identity may be even more difficult. Erikson referred to this as the malignant tendency of repudiation. The adolescent will repudiate their membership in the adult world, and their need for their own identity. They may join groups that provide them with an identity, for example, religious cults, militaristic organisations, groups

founded on hate, and so on. The adolescent may become involved in destructive activities, such as taking drugs or alcohol or withdraw into psychotic fantasies.

Successful negotiation of this stage gives people the virtue of fidelity. This means the ability to live by the standards set by society, and to display loyalty. This doesn't mean blind loyalty, but instead refers to people loving the community they live in and wanting it to be the best it can be. Fidelity also means the person has found a place in the community and will contribute towards that community.

Stage 6 – Young adulthood (18 – around 30 years)

Psychosocial Crisis	Intimacy versus isolation
Significant Social Relationship	Partners in friendship and sexual relationships
Favourable Outcome	Ability to form close and lasting relationships, to co-operate and share resources, also to make career commitments
Unfavourable Outcome	Social and personal isolation, fear of intimacy & sharing

The adult stages are less clear than the children's stages and people may differ from each other more dramatically. In young adulthood, the task is to achieve intimacy rather than isolation. Intimacy is the ability to be close to others as a friend, lover and participant in society. A person knows who they are and does not need to fear "losing" themselves as adolescents might. Fear of commitment at this stage is a sign of immaturity. However, this may not be so obvious these days since in many societies people delay getting married and having families until they have progressed in their career or purchased a property.

The young adult does not need to "prove" themselves so much anymore. Some young adults may not feel the need to be in a relationship, whilst others may try to establish an identity through being in one e.g. "I'm her boyfriend". So, two independent egos can form something that is larger than each of them individually.

For young adults living in a modern westernized culture, there is often an emphasis on a career, urban living and relationships. However, mobility and the nature of modern life can make it hard for people to develop intimate relationships. This can mean that people often move throughout their lives and do not develop a sense of community. Erikson refers to promiscuity as being the maladaptive outcome at this stage. This is the tendency to become intimate too freely and easily, and without any depth of intimacy. This does not just mean physical intimacy. It can include friendships or relationships with neighbours and friends, as well as with lovers.

The malignancy here is called exclusion. This is the tendency to isolate yourself from friendships, community and loving relationships, and also to develop a "hatefulness" to compensate for your loneliness. If you are able to negotiate this stage successfully, you will develop the virtue that Erikson calls love. Love means being able to put aside differences and antagonisms through "mutuality of devotion." This means loving friends, neighbours, lovers, co-workers, and so on.

Stage 7 – Middle adulthood

Psychosocial Crisis	Generativity versus self-absorption
Significant Social Relationship	Divided labour and shared household
Favourable Outcome	Concern for family, society and future generations
Unfavourable Outcome	Negative self absorption, lack of social awareness

It is hard to state the exact ages that this stage should occur at, but it is a period when many people raise children and so is usually between the middle twenties and late fifties. The tasks are to cultivate a balance between generativity and stagnation. Generativity is an extension of love into the future. It is concern for the next and future generations. A person is less "selfish" than one experiencing the intimacy of the previous stage.

Intimacy is a love between equals and is reciprocal. Generativity may not be reciprocated, or at least not strongly. For example, parents may not expect a “return on their investment” when they have children.

Having children is only one way of practising generativity. Other methods include teaching, writing, social activism, and so on. In other words, any activity which contributes to future generations and society more broadly may be included here. Stagnation is self-absorption, caring for no-one. A stagnant person will stop being a productive member of society. Erikson calls the maladaptive tendency, overextension. Some people try to be so generative that they no longer have any time for themselves. They don’t rest or relax. An overextended person will therefore no longer contribute well. They may belong to lots of clubs, have several jobs, and so forth but not have time to do any of them well. Rejection appears to be the malignant tendency. Too little generativity and too much stagnation means the person is no longer participating or contributing to society.

At this stage, people may develop a “midlife crisis”, where they focus on their lives and why they are doing what they do. They are focussing on themselves and why they are doing it, not what or who they are doing it for. As they get older, they may panic at getting older and for not accomplishing what they wanted to in their youth. They may try to recapture their youth. For example, they may quit boring jobs, buy new, more fashionable clothes, start looking for another partner, and so on.

A person who is successful at this stage will have the capacity for caring throughout their lives.

Stage 8 – Late adulthood

Psychosocial Crisis	Integrity versus despair
Significant Social Relationship	Mankind or my kind
Favourable Outcome	A sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with one’s life, a willingness to face death
Unfavourable Outcome	A sense of emptiness and meaninglessness

This stage begins around retirement at around 65 years of age. If there were any children, typically they would have left home. Once again, there is no exact age that this stage takes place at. According to Erikson, it is a good thing to reach this stage. Older adults who do not reach this stage may not have successfully negotiated earlier stages.

At this stage, the task is to develop ego integrity with a minimal amount of despair. To begin with, there is detachment from society, from no longer feeling useful. Some people retire from jobs, others may no longer be fully caring for a family because their children have left home and they may find that their input is not required or requested. Also, the body can often no longer do the things it used to. Women will usually have gone through menopause, and men may experience problems with virility. There may be other health problems such as arthritis, diabetes, heart problems, cancer, injuries related to falls, and so on. Many of the person’s friends and relatives will die, and the person may lose their partner. They may begin to feel despair.

Some people may get preoccupied with the past in response to this despair, a time when they felt things were better. They may become preoccupied with their “failures” or bad decisions and regret that they did not change them. Some older people may become spiteful, paranoid, depressed, a hypochondriac or develop patterns of senility without physical reasons.

Ego integrity means the person has come to terms with their life and the imminent end of their life. They are able to look back at their choices and the way that they lived, and to accept it all. They also recognise that they don’t need to fear death. They realise that everyone makes mistakes and if they didn’t make those mistakes, they wouldn’t be who they are.

The maladaptive tendency is called presumption. This is where a person “presumes” their ego integrity without actually facing the difficulties of old age. The malignant tendency is called disdain – contempt of one’s own and other people’s lives.

Erikson said that someone who is able to approach death without fear has the strength of wisdom. He argued that it was important for children to see their elders not fear death, because in doing so they would not fear life.

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

There have been attempts to measure stress. Holmes and Rahe (1967) designed a social readjustment scale consisting of 43 life events which are each given a statistical stress rating. The higher the rating a person has, the more social readjustment they require. Their findings were based upon research conducted amongst personnel in the U.S. Navy.

The scale is as follows:

LIFE EVENT	RATING
1. Death of a Spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital Separation	65
4. Jail Term	63
5. Death of a Family Member	63
6. Personal Injury/illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being fired from job	47
9. Marriage Reconciliation	45
10. Retirement	45
11. Change in Family Members Health	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual Difficulties	39
14. Gain of New Family Member	39
15. Business Readjustment	39
16. Change in Financial Status	38
17. Death of Close Friend	37
18. Change to different type of work	36
19. Change in no. of arguments with spouse	35
20. High Mortgage	31
21. Foreclosure on mortgage or loan	30
22. Change in work responsibilities	29
23. Child leaving home	29
24. Trouble with in laws	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse beginning or stopping work	26
27. Beginning or finishing school	26
28. Change in living conditions	25
29. Revision of personal habits	24
30. Trouble with boss	23
31. Change in work hours or conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
33. Change in schools	20
34. Change in recreation	19
35. Change in church activities	18
36. Change in social activities	18
37. Medium mortgage or loan	17
38. Change in sleeping habits	16
39. Change in number of family functions	15
40. Change in eating habits	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Christmas	12
43. Minor violations of the law	11

According to Holmes & Rahe, a person who has suffered a number of stressful events over the past twelve months with a cumulative rating of over 300 has two to three times the risk of developing an illness or stress-related problems compared to those scoring less than 300 points. However, you should consider that this scale was based upon the characteristics of a particular socio-cultural group; and relative ratings will be different for other such groups. Also, the data can only be considered correlational rather than causal.

While emotional stress may be the cause of an illness, it can also be a response to a real illness (i.e. stress is a complicating factor or a catalyst in most illnesses).

Relationship between Stress & Heart Disease

Research has shown a strong relationship between heart disease and a certain personality type called "Type A". Type A personality is described as highly competitive, and achievement orientated. The person with Type A personality tends to be easily angered; they find it difficult to relax and do nothing, or to appreciate things of beauty in their environment. They have a strong sense of time urgency, trying to do more in less and less time.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC SOURCES OF STRESS?

The main psychological events underlying stress are:

- Conflict
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Anger

Conflict usually occurs when a person experiences two goals which are mutually exclusive.

Types of Conflict

Approach - Approach Conflict

This occurs when you are attracted to two mutually exclusive goals (e.g. staying in your home city to complete studies or moving to another city to be with your partner).

Avoidance - Avoidance Conflict

This occurs when you are repelled by two forms of danger. You want to escape from both, but you can only escape from one (e.g. remain in an unhappy marriage where you have financial security, or leave the marriage and lose the financial security).

Approach - Avoidance Conflict

This occurs when a person is both attracted and repelled by the same objective (e.g. you want to leave your job to get a better job, but you are scared that by doing so, you might lose security and perhaps end up in a job with poorer prospects).

Such conflicts inevitably lead to frustration. Frustration in turn leads to anxiety, and anger. The way in which a person expresses their frustration depends upon various personality factors.

Why Do Some People Suffer More Damage From Stress Than Others?

Some people are more highly strung than others; but there are also other factors which influence the severity of stress.

Predictability

Experiments on both humans and animals have demonstrated that stress which one can predict is a lot easier to cope with than unpredictable stressors (e.g. if a close friend is very ill, you can prepare yourself for any consequences).

Control over duration

If a person can control the length of time which they are subject to stress, then it can be much easier to cope (e.g. if you are suffering stress at work, but are looking for a new job, you know that there will be an end to the situation).

Cognitive evaluation

The way you look at a problem can also ease the stress (e.g. if suffering exam stress, you could either think "If I fail it will be a catastrophe" or you could think, "If I fail, I can repeat the exam, and the second time round I will know what to expect").

Feelings of competency

If you feel confident that you can cope with a particular stress, you will cope better than if you feel overwhelmed and incompetent.

Availability of social support

If you know there are people available to help you, this makes stress easier to cope with whether you use their help or not. Research has shown that people with extensive social ties (family, religious groups, social groups, clubs, associations, etc.) tend to be less susceptible to stress-related illnesses, and more likely to live longer.

HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS

There are many different ways of dealing with stress. Some ways focus on relieving the symptoms and others focus on removing the causes of stress.

The most common way of dealing with stress is by using defence mechanisms, such as those described by Freud. Freud claimed that we have an id, ego and superego. The id is our unconscious self, motivated by pleasure. The ego is our day-to-day self which responds to situations. It is our conscious self. The superego is our moral self, our social conscience. Freud suggested we use defence mechanisms as a means of protecting the ego from unwanted thoughts or harmful realities.

Defence Mechanisms

Repression

Memories that cause anxiety are kept out of our conscious awareness as a means of protecting ourselves. This is also called 'motivated forgetting'. This involves repressing the chaotic desires of the id into the unconscious realm. Often these repressed desires will still find expression in dreams, slips of the tongue or psychopathological symptoms.

Displacement

This involves displacement of a disturbing emotion such as anger, from one person to another. Displacement reduces anxiety produced by the unacceptable wish, but at the same time it partially gratifies that wish. The basic emotion of irrational anger towards a parent (for example) cannot be removed. The individual will instead direct this anger towards another less important, less threatening person.

Rationalisation

This is when we pretend to have a socially acceptable reason for a form of behaviour that is actually rooted in irrational feelings.

Example: A person is angry with their mother and wants to avoid her. They then give a false reason for not going to visit her (e.g. it is too far away).

Projection

This is a particular form of rationalisation. It involves projecting our own undesirable characteristics onto someone else.

Example: You feel an irrational hatred towards someone else, and then tell other people that the person concerned hates you.

Reaction formation

This involves unconsciously covering up what you really feel by behaving in the opposite manner, without realising it.

Intellectualisation

This involves detaching one's self from deep emotions about an issue, by dealing with it in abstract and intellectual terms.

Denial

This involves simply denying that a situation or emotion is real. It is simple but extreme!

This is a defence most frequently employed by a person who has lost a loved one - they go through a period of refusing to believe that it is true.

Sublimation

This involves establishing a secondary socially acceptable goal that can be satisfied; instead of satisfying the primary (original) goal.

Example: An excessively aggressive person might satisfy their desire to kill by joining the army where it can be socially acceptable to kill.

Defence mechanisms all play the role of distorting reality to a greater or lesser degree, in order to get rid of anxiety-producing feelings. Nevertheless, they are necessary to keep our psyches from being overloaded with the *id's* irrational feelings. They can, however, be overused by certain individuals so that reality becomes distorted to an unhealthy degree.

The use of defence mechanisms is inevitable and necessary; however an individual can rely on them too much resulting in personality problems. Some healthier ways of coping with stress include relaxation exercises or meditation.

Relaxation or Meditation

Relaxation and meditation enhance our ability to cope with stress by increasing a person's stress-tolerance. Stress-tolerance is developed by learning to deal with frustration and conflict without becoming hostile, aggressive or anxious.

Reasoning It Out

Positive cognitive evaluation and problem-solving are other ways of dealing with stress. By changing the way they look at and evaluate a stressful situation, an individual's ability to cope with the stress can be increased.

Compassionate and Gentle Appraisal

If we feel stress, this can lead to losing our temper and setting an uncontrollable chain of events into action. In such situations, a person may cope with a 'time out' or 'redirection of attention' approach. Stop, focus on something different, take a deep breath, count to 10, or walk out of the room. All of these things can take you away from the immediate situation. This is part of learning to be assertive.

Laughter

- Laughter lowers blood pressure and reduces hypertension. It provides good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercise.
- Laughter reduces stress hormones (studies shows, laughter induces reduction of at least four of neuro-endocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopa, and growth hormone, associated with stress response).
- Laughter cleanses the lungs and body tissues of accumulated stale air because it empties more air than it takes in. It is beneficial for patients suffering from emphysema and other respiratory ailments.
- It increases muscle flexion, relaxation and fluent blood circulation in the body.

- It boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins (called gamma-interferon), and disease-destroying antibodies (B-cells).
- Laughter triggers the release of endorphins—the body's natural painkillers.
- Laughter produces a general sense of wellbeing.

(For more information look up laughter yoga).

Three common responses to stress are submission, aggression or assertion; and assertion is the healthiest response.

We can turn a stressful situation to our advantage, or protect ourselves from its bad effects, depending how we handle the situation. The choice is between becoming a slave to stressful situations or making the most of them.

SET TASK

Activity 1

Find someone you know who you suspect leans toward a 'type A' personality.

Talk to them to try to confirm if your suspicion is correct.

Note (write down) the ways in which they appear lean toward a type A personality.

Activity 2

Talk with someone who is suffering, or has suffered, from stress. This might be a friend, relative, work colleague, or anyone else you are able to find. Discuss their stress with them (current or past). Don't push them, but try to discern from what they are happy to tell you, whether their stress was (or is) chronic or acute.

Activity 3

Consider conflict which occurs in either a workplace or recreation situation you are familiar with. This might be a place where you work, or a workplace you visit frequently (e.g. a shop or office); or perhaps a sporting club, gymnasium or social group which you regularly attend. Make up a list of disputes or conflicts which you remember to have occurred in the past.

After writing these down, analyse the list to see if you can detect any patterns, obvious or not so obvious (e.g. perhaps a particular person or a particular issue is repeatedly involved in conflict situations).

Next time you visit the place; look out for signs of any common factors which you have identified.