

Impart Volunteer Development #3



Volunteer Self-Care

This session has been designed to give the volunteers a better understanding of the importance of self care and how it relates to the work that we do in Impart.

Volunteer Self-Care

For this session, Narash, Impart's head of volunteer development, gave the volunteers a talk on what it means to care for yourself and how that fits into the work you will do as a volunteer in Impart. He introduced the different kinds of stress, the different levels of stress we can experience and their consequent effects, as well as different ways to manage and regulate the stress we experience. He shared about resilience, regulating distress, as well as self-care strategies and psychological building blocks that form the basis of our ability to self-regulate. Caring for and keeping ourselves well regulated enables us to do the work that we do in a sustainable manner.

This document contains some notes from the session. For a playback of the session, click [here](#).

Wishing you well,
Impart Volunteer Development Team

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Co-Regulation or Co-Escalation?

We are invested in journeying alongside the youth in hopes that they learn self-regulation and learn to care for themselves; this is central to healing from trauma. In this context, it is important to ask yourself if you are co-regulating or co-escalating -- have you received enough care (from yourself) to be able to give care without burning out? Or are you giving care in an unsustainable manner?

Types of Stress

Acute Stress

Short-term stress that comes from obvious triggers.

Examples include deadlines, or, in context of volunteering with Impart, your youth not showing up for a session, or asking to cancel the session after you've arrived.

Episodic Stress

Similar to acute stress, but it happens more frequently.

Examples include having to deal with your period on a monthly basis, or, in context of volunteering with Impart, needing to prepare content for your session with the youth on a weekly basis.

Chronic Stress

Grinding stress that wears people out day by day; often comes from ongoing issues.

Examples include ongoing issues you face at home, at work, or in your interpersonal relationships. It can include regular bullying, and verbal and/or physical abuse.

Eustress

"Positive" stress - aids us in motivation, performance and well-being.

Examples of eustress, depending on whether you feel good learning to do these things, can include learning to ride a bicycle, or learning to crochet, or learning to cook.

Biological Response to Stress

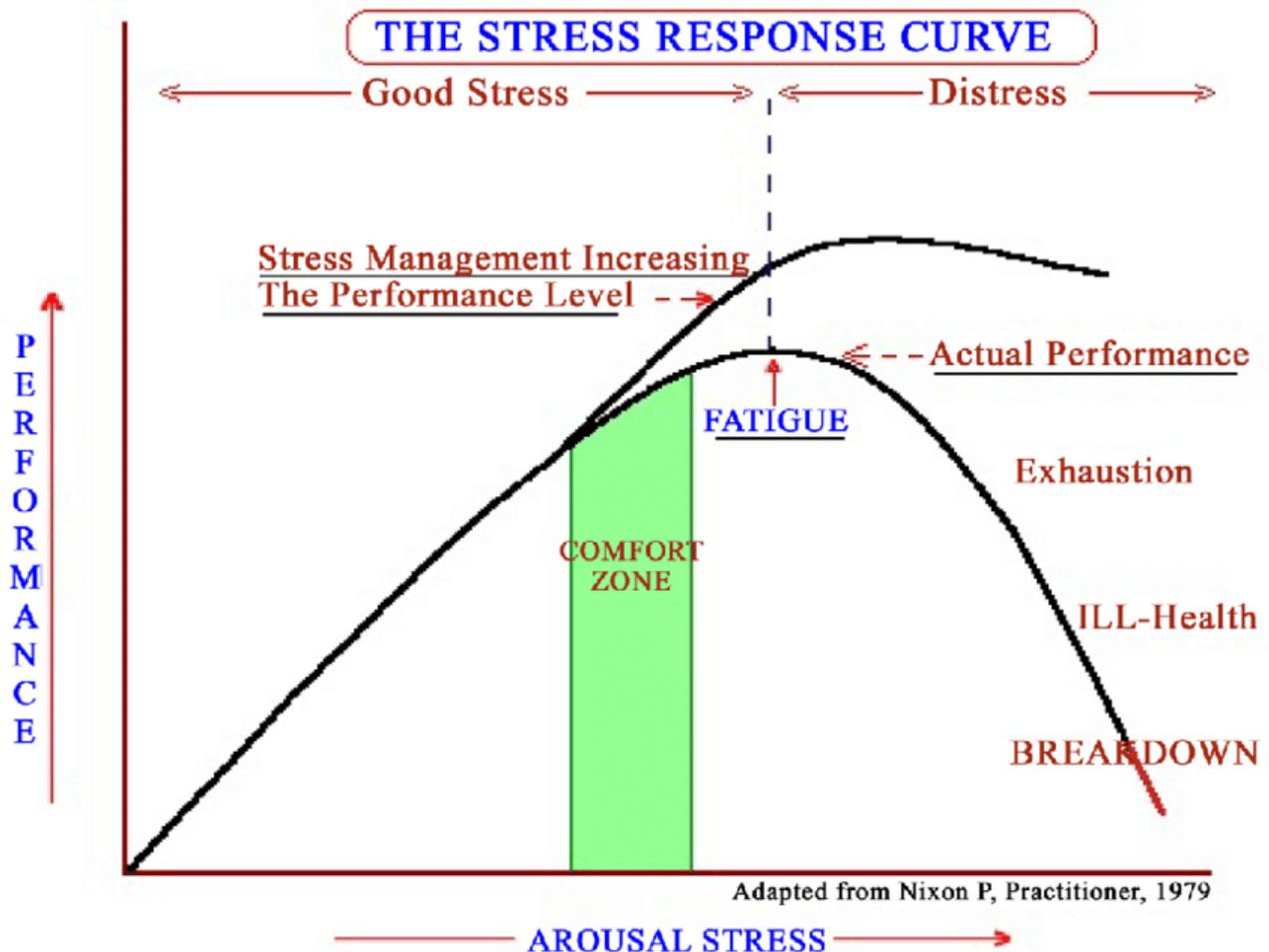
The body responds to stress, and attempts to regulate it with certain systems in stressful situations.

Regulating Distress & Building Resistance

Stress Curve



When you experience little to no stress, you experience calm. In extreme cases of little to no stress, you might even experience boredom. As the level of stress increases, the level at which you are able to perform also increases, all the way to an optimal level of performance. This is correlated to a healthy amount of eustress for your individual person. At this point in time, you feel energised, focused, and the work you're doing feels effortless.



As you continue to experience stress over time, even if it is eustress, you can become fatigued. When you experience exhaustion, your performance starts to dip. A dip in your performance is an indication that you're heading towards exhaustion. If stress levels persist, you could put yourself in a position where your health starts failing. In extreme cases, you may breakdown or burnout.

Ultimately, learning to manage your stress will push your performance up at higher levels of stress, helping you stay out of the distress zone. For the purposes of this talk, stress management can be understood as self-care.

I.M.P.R.O.V.E.

- **Imagery:**

Picture a safe place. Many people have different safe places. It could be a place in nature, a forest, a waterfall, a mountaintop, or anywhere you feel particularly comfortable. Breathe consciously, and try to think of the pain and discomfort drain out of you.

- **Meaning:**

Try to find the meaning, value, or purpose in the pain. Latch onto the meaning, and zone into it. If there is meaning to the pain you're going through, this might help with regulating distress.

- **Prayer / Practice:**

Opening your heart to a supreme being and/or gaining mastery over a new skill through practice might help with distress.

- **One Thing in the Moment:**

Focusing all your attention on and consciously choosing to be present for a single thing can help increase levels of calm for some people.

- **Vacation:**

It is important to take breaks. They can be short breaks, like taking smoking breaks, or going on a quick walk, or reading a book. They can also be longer breaks, like going for a silent retreat, or a staycation, or unplugging from your devices for a few days.

- **Encouragement:**

We might be very hard on ourselves, and look quickly to criticize ourselves for our shortcomings and mistakes. Contextualise the expectations you have for yourself in the bigger picture and use this to enable positive self talk. Putting blame on ourselves for circumstances that are out of our control is stressful; narratives such as "The youth I'm working with doesn't want to turn up for our sessions because I am not good enough" can be reframed to look like "I have done my best on my part, and it already matters enough that they have this option available to them."

Three Facets to Resilience

- **Recovery:** Recovering from setbacks
- **Resilience:** Remaining unchanged and steadfast in different circumstances
- **Reconfiguration:** Changing what you do based on different circumstances

Self-Care Strategies

Introducing good self-care strategies into your life and forming habits around them means that you are less likely to default on your health and ability to care for yourself, even when general stress levels increase.

Good Sleep Habits

Sleep is one of the fundamental self-care strategies. Some of us need more sleep, and some of us need less sleep. If you can, find out how much sleep your body naturally needs by going to sleep at a reasonable time and letting yourself wake up naturally. Use this information to accommodate your body's needs. Ask yourself questions like: Do I feel rested when I wake up? Keep track of your quality and quantity of sleep so you know when your sleeping habits are starting to slip, and work around that.

Nutrition

What kind of food am I eating? Food like junk food is inflammatory, and eating them in excess can negatively impact your health. Google terms like anti-inflammatory food, or speak to Narash for more food tips (disclaimer: he is not a nutritionist).

Exercise

Are you exercising at least thrice a week? What are you doing for exercise? Try to keep track of and calibrate the amount of time you spend moving your body to the amount of time you need to spend moving your body.

Social Connections

What kind of social needs do you have, and what kind of people energise you? You can build robust systems of mutual care with family members, friends, mentors, etc. Certain people and certain relationships are often predisposed to meet certain needs in our lives. Rely on others and allow others to rely on you with certain (sometimes unspoken) boundaries and expectations in place.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness exercises such as meditation can help center and ground ourselves. Some people meditate while on the move, in public transport. There are free apps like headspace that can help you meditate. Meditation can be simple, like being conscious of your breathing. You can also look to more complex forms of meditation, like inner child meditation.

Journaling

Writing important (or unimportant!) things down on a daily basis can help. Some people use their journals to keep track of their stress levels and other habits. Beyond just being a tracker, though, journaling helps you see what particular stressors are prevalent at which points in time, or what has restored energy and motivation to you when you're feeling distressed. If you're not sure what you're feeling, Narash recommends you use an emotion wheel to pin down the way you feel.

Enjoying Nature

Find places around you in Singapore where you can go to enjoy nature. Being in nature and looking around at greenery has a calming effect on you.

Psychological Building Blocks

Understanding the psychological building blocks of resilience allows us to use them as indicators for whether we are able to remain resilient under higher levels of stress. Having more of these psychological building blocks in place will allow us to remain resilient during periods of high stress.

High Self-Esteem

Confidence and assuredness in yourself.

Flexibility

Stress makes us inflexible when it comes to exploring other perspectives or alternatives. The ability to make changes or accommodate different perspectives in times of stress is an indicator of resilience.

Strong Relationships

Good, strong, high-quality interpersonal relationships.

Spiritual Freedom

The ability to freely express your spirituality or spiritual desires.

Positive Coping Strategies

The aforementioned self-care strategies are a part of this! We hope that has expanded your repertoire of coping strategies.

Emotional Regulation

How you sleep, eat, rest, help with basic emotional regulation.

Mindfulness

See above.

A Non-Judgemental Mind

Applying harsh judgements on yourself that are disproportionate to the circumstances generates stress. Cultivating a non-judgemental mind allows you to gain greater perspective over things and rescript narratives that chip away at your sense of self-worth, allowing you to come to terms with your insecurities or trauma.

Professional Quality-of-Life Measure

The ProQOL measure gives you a sense of how satisfied you are doing what you're doing. How do your Compassion Satisfaction levels compare with your Compassion Fatigue levels? When you experience compassion fatigue, are you experiencing burnout or are you experiencing secondary trauma?