

Understanding Stress

(and what to do about it)

MYTH

Stress is bad
for mental health
& should be
avoided.

FACT

Most stress is
actually good for
us & avoiding it
can be harmful!

MENTAL HEALTH

is the capacity to
successfully adapt to
life's challenges. It
includes a wide range of
thoughts & feelings.

Good mental health isn't about avoiding or protecting ourselves from experiencing stress. We can strengthen our problem-solving skills & build resilience.

Not all stress is the same



Positive: Positive stress is short-term and it helps us adapt, learn & grow. Situations that cause positive stress (e.g., writing an exam, giving a presentation, calling someone you don't know) happen daily – often multiple times.



Tolerable: Tolerable stress includes situations where there is more serious impact (e.g., someone dying, parents' divorce). Tolerable stress can occur multiple times throughout our lives. As long as we have supportive relationships around, it is unlikely to have any lasting negative consequences.



Toxic: Toxic stress is prolonged and extreme (e.g., abuse, neglect, violence). Practical and professional supports may be necessary. Some people will go their whole lives without experiencing toxic stress.



Remember: Toxic stress is the only type of stress that's actually bad for us. Experiencing positive or tolerable stress can help us become stronger, healthier and more understanding human beings!

So what can we do?



Change how we think about stress. Reframe the stress response as our body preparing to tackle a challenge. Stop using the word anxiety when we mean stress response.



Choose a calming strategy to help face the stressor. Sometimes our stress response can feel intense (especially if our previous pattern has been to avoid it). Breathing or other strategies to lower our stress response may be helpful.



Engage in planning strategies to face the stressor (e.g., create a study plan for an upcoming exam, reach out for support, etc.). When we face the stressor & solve the problem, the stress goes away. We are left with new skills for the future. We have successfully adapted!

Check out
these videos to
learn more!

Stress Explained



Stress Explained:
Elementary Edition

