

Stress, Wellbeing and Self Care



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Self Care

Introduction

Work in any profession can be stressful and it impacts not only your work but also your happiness and the quality of your life.

Pressured, tired and worn out, unable to switch off, the constancy of worry, and sleep disturbance are common stress experiences. At the more intense end of the scale people speak of feeling sick when on their way to work, feeling exhausted or shattered, and consumed by what's happening. Incredibly, even in these circumstances, many can still keep doing good work. Stress, if not handled well, takes its toll, and there is an end to how long it can be sustained without consequences. Not surprisingly, in some cases stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and burn out.

In a survey I conducted of 160 workers across business and the helping professions, 70% reported experiencing a stress symptom at a significant level in the last two weeks. It appears that this is not just short term stress. 70% also reported experiencing moderate or higher levels of stress over the last 6 months.

You function at your best when you are well in yourself.

The challenge then is 'how do you keep refreshed, vital and positive in your work and your life?' How do you build an inner foundation so that you are strong, clear and well in yourself? Is it possible to not only protect yourself from stress, but to have significant credit in your wellbeing bank account so you can bring your best to your work and life?

Most people know that it is important to look after themselves, but it isn't quite as easy as that. The demands in life are such that 'the ten top tips for beating stress' aren't enough. It's not that there is something wrong with you or with the tips. Rather, *it's because the situations we are in exert a significant pull away from wellbeing.* The nature of the space stress puts us in, combined with a lack of knowledge and skills, means that we can come up short of ideal in our self care.

Thankfully, there are significant things we can do to respond to stress better and to build our wellbeing.

The benefits are great. When we have fuel in the tank, our lives and our work go so much better. When we have capacity, strength and positive energy to draw on, it means we can bring our best to what we do. With resilience we do much better when things get pressured. With greater fullness, freedom, and joy we live a more expanded life.

These benefits influence not just the present, but the way our life unfolds, and they ripple out to positively touch those we have contact with.

Aims

Through understanding how stress and wellbeing operates, and developing your skills, you can not only respond better to the pressures you face, but it also enables you to grow and flourish.

This self care e-book is packed with information that will help you to take care of yourself better. I encourage you to experiment and play around with the ideas. Each of us operates differently so feel free to adapt what you find in this manual so that it fits you.

You will learn...

- Information that will help you understand how stress and wellbeing operate
- What provides a strong foundation of wellbeing so we have what we need on board to meet the challenges and pressures.
- How to identify when things are starting to get shaky and what to do when this happens
- Heaps of techniques and strategies to better deal with stress, and to build wellbeing.

Whether you are going from struggling to ok, ok to good, good to great, or great to flourishing, understanding the principles behind stress and wellbeing provides a strong foundation for making real improvements.

Quick Stress Assessment

Let's begin by having a look at the stress in your life.

Out of 5, with 1 being low and 5 being extremely high what was your level of stress
over the last 2 weeks 1 2 3 4 5
over the last 6 months 1 2 3 4 5

What symptoms of stress do you experience, what happens when you get stressed?

What proportion of your total stress load would you attribute to work? _____%

What are the sources of stress in your work? Think of the daily things and the more major things. (after you've finished you might like to check out the list in appendix 1)

What are the sources of stress outside of work?

How effectively are you responding to your stress? (1 is low, 5 being high)

1 2 3 4 5

Comment.....

What are the most worthwhile improvements you would see in your life if you reduced your stress through better self care, and improved your wellbeing?

3 Types of Self Care

Repair

You see your wellbeing go down, you start to become stressed, you get worn out and cranky, your tolerance drops, you get consumed by things that are pressuring you.....you get the picture! So you decide to do something to stop the slide. This is Repair Self Care. When the damage gets beyond your ability to tolerate the cost, it's when you are most likely to act. A common difficulty is that we can tolerate a lot so we put up with how things are for a long time before we act. Partly this can be because the nature of the stress response clouds and limits our ability to respond.

Describe a time when you took action because you noticed your wellbeing had dropped. What did you notice, what did you do, what happened from there?

Maintenance

This is about how we keep ourselves operating at our present level. It protects against our wellbeing dropping. You will already be doing things to look after yourself and have lots of things you can build on. These are important. We often don't notice many of the things that we already do, or dismiss them as not being significant, which can weaken their potency. Maintenance self care builds resilience to help you cope when the pressures come.

What are you doing already that is maintaining where you are? Think of the small actions you take.

Growth

This is about building your capacity. When your wellbeing is high you are at your best, moving forward in what you do, and you have that 'something extra' that you bring to your work and life. Growth Self Care is those things you do to build your base level of wellbeing and performance.

How would you like things to be when you are at your best in yourself? Describe all the positives both at work and outside of work. How would you respond when difficulties or problems present?

Understanding Stress

We all experience stress differently, and things that might stress you, might not stress someone else. Stress is our individual response to a perceived pressure. Things that can affect the stress we feel are

- Our personal makeup – e.g. maybe you are naturally positive, maybe you are sensitive and feel things deeply, maybe you are practical and just get on with things. Your expectations, values, beliefs, culture etc all play a part.
- The nature of the situation – how impactful it is, how chronic and long lasting, how complex or difficult.
- The amount of internal and outside resources and support available
- Your overall stress load and vulnerability.
- Our history - how sensitive or resilient you are to that type of stress. For example if it triggers a previous stress or vulnerability, you may have a heightened experience of the stress. If it is something you have overcome in the past, it may not affect you as much.
- The context – e.g. how other people are responding around you, your role in the situation e.g. as a worker/a friend.

Think of something that was stressful. List all the factors that influenced the impact of the stress on you.

Stress warning signs

What are the first signals that you are starting to get stressed?

Further ways to understand and assess your stress

1. How does the stress you are experiencing affect your

Emotions

Thinking

Behaviour

Physically

Spiritual/sense of meaning/values

2. In which of these areas would it be good to target your self care efforts?

3. How would you describe it? Is it a weight, a cloud etc, e.g. it is like my heart is wounded. Is the impact dull, sharp? How far does it get in to the core/inner part of you, how much does it stay on the outer reaches?

4. What phase are you in? – just been affected by it, has been there for a while? Are you making headway, going down, lost, got a handle on it etc.

5. Draw or depict your 'stress journey' for a particular situation including when it started, what happened then, what were the contextual components, on what levels it affected you.

7 common effects of problematic stress.

We experience stress in different ways. Here are 7 common experiences of stress when it becomes problematic. Knowing what is happening can give us a greater sense of control. If we can counteract these experiences we go a long way to minimizing the negative impact of stress. They aren't in any particular order.

1. **Constricting/Tightening/Rigidity** – we tighten up and hold on. We have reduced emotional, mental, behavioural flexibility so it is more difficult to change or move between things. Our awareness and ability to respond narrows and our world constricts, usually around the thing that is stressing us.
2. **Wound up/can't switch off/worry and anxiety**. We are going at a fast pace inside and can't find the off button. We are trying to find some sort of completion or answer or resolution by going over things, but can't stop, even when it's not useful to continue.
3. **Thrown/fragmented/shattered/all over the place** - We are not centred or together. We lose our inner stability, We become fragile.
4. **Worn out, tired, 'thin', depleted** - our batteries are low or empty. No fuel in the tank. Our get up and go has got up and gone.
5. **Caught up in the stress** – if there's no space between us and the stress it's hard to get a clear perspective on what's going on, and it's difficult to act.
6. **Heaviness and pressure** – it feels like a burden or weight which dampens down your experience. You carry it around with you, or experience it as a something that's surrounding you.
7. **Blocked/Fog/Immobilized** – when you go to act you can't and it is if your thinking misses the target, or you lose focus. Something is in the road between you and what you want, or something holds you back. You can't think, feel, move, or act. A feeling of separation, it seems like something is between you and the world/life.

Using the 7 experiences of problematic stress, how would you describe a recent experience of stress? Are there any other descriptors you would use?

Stress Responses

Fight – overcome the situation, work through it, meet the painful thing head on

Flight – remove ourselves from the situation, distance ourselves

Immobilized – an inability to act. We are stunned and maybe frozen, unable to take action.

Tend and Befriend – look for safety in connection and relationship. Look after others and/or befriend others. This could include towards a person who is the source of the stress.

Which one do you tend to adopt most? Is it different for different situations? If so, how?

Some specific types of stress

Vicarious trauma – exposure to stressful things through the experience of someone else who is stressed or traumatised. The stress you feel is because of your distress. Although you are exposed to the upsetting or distressing situation, you are not a participant and therefore do not have the ability to take direct action about it.

Empathic Stress – When your stress response is activated because we are exposed to someone who is uptight, stressed, or experiencing fear or trauma. An easy way of describing it is that we 'pick up' others stress or stress in a workplace. We may not be aware of this happening as it can be unconscious, or we may incorrectly think it is our stress rather than an empathic response.

Compassion Fatigue – Tiredness that comes from giving and being compassionate, whilst not getting the nourishment and restoration you need. Sometimes there are not people around who can give to you at the level you need, and sometimes it becomes difficult to receive even if it is available.

Values Fatigue – Your values are important to you and you are passionate about them. You feel deeply about what should be done from a heartfelt place. You believe people are important and it is hard when you see people hurt, disadvantaged or trodden over. There can be a sense that other people aren't coming from the same heartfelt place that you are and that it takes a lot of effort to keep your values alive in environments that are harsh and driven by power, politics, conflict, or are not value based.

Leader Fatigue – You are in a leadership position and hold responsibility and the emotional load. Whilst others may follow, they don't take similar responsibility. This can get tiring, especially when things are difficult.

Burn up – you just get worn out and depleted, but you are basically intact. Sometimes it's just an accumulation of things coupled with the amount of time that is there. At other times there is something specific that acts like a puncture in a tyre. This typed often needs a more targeted response.

Wounded – You've taken a battering or something has emotionally hurt you. You might feel heart-sore or battle scarred. It might be emotional pain, but it is very real and hurts like an inner wound.

Burn out – significant stress where your functioning and sense of meaning and purpose are significantly affected. It has far reaching consequences across your life and severely impedes your ability to function.

Building a strong foundation

There are 5 elements to building a good strong foundation on which your resilience, self care, wellbeing and growth are based. You will find that you are stronger in some areas than others, and some are more relevant to particular situations you come across in your life. Having a strong foundation provides the best conditions to grow and develop your performance at work and the quality of your life.

The 5 elements are...

Emotional Wellbeing

Emotional Wellbeing is about knowing what wellbeing is and how it builds and strengthens you, enabling you to be at your best. It's about developing the skills to build the type of wellbeing that fuels your life and helps sustain you when the pressure is on.

Being There for Yourself

Being aware of, and responding in positive ways to your needs. There's not a 'one size fits all' way of doing this, as we are all so different. It is important to know what works for you and to build the range of responses available to you as well as your skills and abilities in particular areas. It is often important to learn how to respond to ourselves with kindness, self acceptance, compassion, warmth, care and encouragement, as they are particularly powerful ways of helping you to positively transform your life.

Sense of self

Know and understand yourself, what strengthens you, what works for you, being able to embrace imperfections, failure and mistakes. Boundaries, being strong, steady and clear in yourself are all part of 'sense of self'.

Resilience

Resilience is about knowing how stress affects you and how to pick up the signals. Knowing what tends to trigger the stress response in you. Building and developing both internal and external resources and supports. Being able to get through difficult circumstances. Being able to pick yourself up when you get thrown in life.

Taking Action

We can have all the knowledge and understanding we like, but if we can't take actions that positively influence our lives, then we remain where we are. Taking Action includes understanding what we can change and what we can't change, building internal and external resources for change, how to approach things in a way to makes change more possible, and how to make decisions. Accountability and strengthening focus, minimizing the negative impact of distractions and finding ways through procrastination and inaction, are all part of Taking Action.

4 key self care skills are....

How to calm, and come back to home base so that you have some relief from the stress, and can respond to what's happening rather be caught up in it

How to nourish yourself so that you have what you need to meet the challenges and move forward in life

How to 'be there' for yourself so that you are on your side and not working against yourself

How to strengthen and grow yourself so that you are clearer, more centered, and have better boundaries

Wellbeing

When you have wellbeing you don't just *feel* better, you operate and perform better. Wellbeing and positivity has been linked to improvements in health, relationships, success, management and leadership, work performance, team performance, and resilience.

It is important to realize that wellbeing is not just a by product of these things, *it is an important active ingredient to creating them.*

Wellbeing is built. Reducing stress can allow wellbeing, but wellbeing does not automatically come when you take stress away.

Wellbeing specifically counteracts the negative effects of stress.

Stress narrows, constricts, tightens, fragments and depletes.

Wellbeing unwinds this, nourishing, repairing, restoring, broadening, building, and providing the wherewithal to cope with things and to move forward in your life.

Research shows that what makes the difference in life is not the presence of the negatives but the healing and nourishing presence of the positives. In one experiment researchers gave people the cold virus and looked to see who actually developed a cold. Surprisingly, what they found is that people's level of negativity didn't make a difference; it was the level of positivity that mattered. Those with low positivity got sick more than those with high positivity.

Similarly researchers looked at how people dealt with difficult situations. It wasn't the level of negative self talk or feelings; it was the level of positive experiences that gave the best indicator of who would cope the best.

Building wellbeing and capacity is essential in being able to respond to stress.

What is wellbeing?

Just as our experience of stress is individual, so is wellbeing.

What is wellbeing to you?

Describe a time you have felt a high degree of wellbeing, a peak experience.

Wellbeing is often portrayed as being the same as happiness. Whilst wellbeing includes happiness, it is just one of the possible elements.

Martin Seligman describes 5 types of wellbeing, and I've added having a positive connection with yourself. Rate your wellbeing for each of them, with 1 being low. Think about your everyday felt experience of each one over the last 2 weeks and base your rating on that.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Happiness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Connection with others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Connection with yourself | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Achievement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Meaning and purpose | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Flow/Absorbed in things
(getting lost in things you enjoy) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

There are four levels of wellbeing experiences.

Inactive/Understood Wellbeing

This is when you identify that you have wellbeing, but you don't actually feel or experience it. For example, in some of the research I have done people might say that their wellbeing is high in regards to connection with their family, yet they may not have had an actual experience of this in the last couple of weeks.

This can happen for a whole lot of reasons, and it doesn't mean the wellbeing is not there.

It does mean that you're not tapped in to it.

Surface level wellbeing

This is when you feel good on the surface, but it doesn't get any deeper. You register positive experiences, but they don't get in. It's not heartfelt, or it doesn't light up an inner response. These positive experiences don't nourish and sustain you.

An example of Surface Level Wellbeing was when I was walking out of the shops one day and there was a magnificent rainbow. A lot of other shoppers saw it but it hardly registered as they were too busy in the shopping experience, hurrying to get home to do everything that needed to be done. Their response was, if anything, a hurried 'that's nice'. The experience stayed on the surface.

Often that's because we

are in the everyday and caught up in what we have to do, or our level of stress that inhibits us feeling the wellbeing at a deeper level. Stress can have a similar affect to how soil can become water resistant in a dry period. The rain runs off the surface and doesn't penetrate the surface to get to the roots.

Heartfelt Wellbeing

Heartfelt Wellbeing is when you have a heartfelt sense of feeling good. In some small way you light up inside.

Let's take the rainbow example mentioned in the 'surface level wellbeing' section. Whilst some people hardly registered it, others would stop and you could see in their faces their joy and wonderment on seeing the rainbow. A deeper response was activated than the surface level responders. These people had a heartfelt response.



Heartfelt wellbeing

Barbara Fredrickson, a guru on wellbeing, calls these experiences 'heartfelt positive moments'. They're the times when you have a positive inner response - your heart lights up.

Sometimes it will be 'goose bump' strong with your heart singing, other times it will be quiet and gentle, like a breeze.

Core Wellbeing

Core wellbeing is a sustained feeling of wellbeing, that's not a response to something that's happened. You don't feel good *because* of something, though you could come up with lots of reasons why you were in a good space if someone asked.... you just feel good in general. Core wellbeing refers to your base level of being, and not just "I happened to wake up feeling good this morning" by chance.

With Core Wellbeing you experience things with greater richness. Life is in technicolour rather than in washed out colours, or worse still, greys. You naturally have a positive interest in life, and live life fully. You're not emotionally rigid, but flow through different emotions (both positive and negative) as life takes its course, all the while holding that underlying sense of wellbeing.

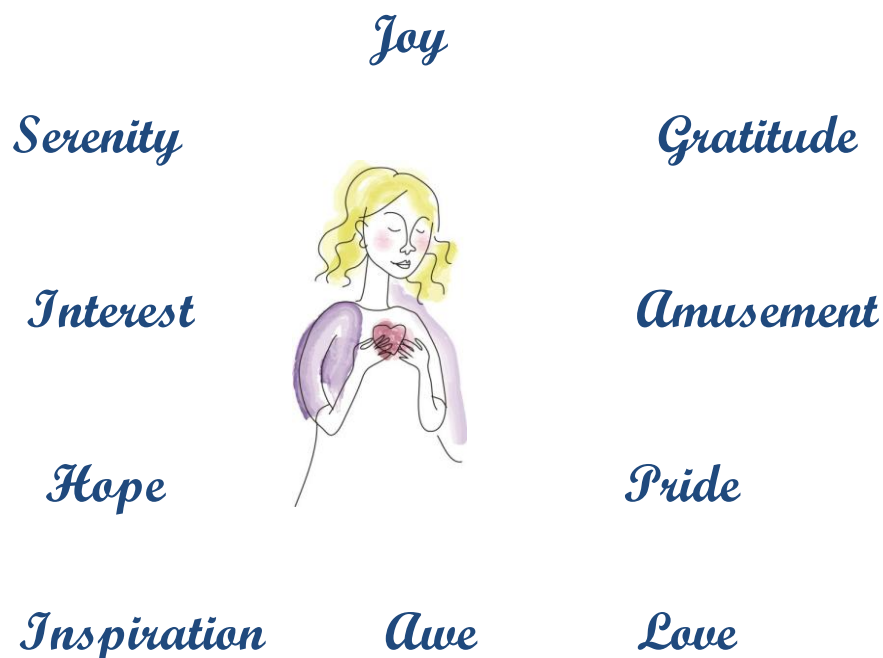
And because you just feel good, and your 'inner well' is full, you bring that capacity and positive sense of feeling good to your life, your relationships, and your work.

How to build Wellbeing

An underlying sense of wellbeing, where have a positive outlook, feel good, and have emotional reserves to bring to life, is built by accumulating individual heartfelt positive moments.

Developing nourishing and positive experiences is a key ingredient to experiencing the many benefits of wellbeing.

Barbara Fredrickson, lists 10 different types of positive moments. They are



Self Care Skills and Techniques

This section has a range of tools and techniques to help you wit respond to stress, build wellbeing and take care of yourself.

Feel free to modify and personalize them so they work better for you.



Awareness

Building awareness is about being clear on what is happening, how you are reacting, and what you want to be different. Awareness is done with kindness, honesty and courage. Often gentleness is the go, but sometimes we do need something to jolt us out of the place we are in. There is a difference between 'knowing about something' and awareness. Awareness includes a degree of being present to it, and facing towards it, without getting caught up in a reaction about what it might mean. For this type of awareness to occur it helps to have a degree of inner stillness and safety.

Transitioning

We are constantly moving between tasks and activities – we move quickly between activities, particularly at work, and need to adjust to each new situation. As we do this we transition from one to another. This is a process and it can take time for us to make the adjustment. For example, when you get home it can be hard to switch off from being in 'on the go' work mode.

The effect of being in a situation can stay with you, and you can leave a bit of your energy with what has happened. New situations can bring additional effects. Each one on their own may not be significant, but they can add up.

You can consciously leave an activity and orientate towards the next one. Having a moment of clear space in between the leaving and reorienting helps in resetting your system.

Take time to 'leave and arrive' and to clear yourself of the accumulated effects of your day. You can do this through a conscious process in your mind e.g. bringing the bits of you back to yourself and giving back the energy from previous activities back where it belongs, or through an activity e.g. Exercise, being out in nature, the drive to and from work. For some people when they walk out the door after leaving work it is symbolic of leaving work behind. This can be difficult if you are on call, or take work home with you, and when it often takes a bit more conscious effort and skill to do.

Managing energy

Life is not a marathon, rather a set of sprints. Taking short regular breaks is the foundation of managing your energy. For breaks to be effective you need to switch away from the 'state of being' or 'space' you are in. Changing your environment, your focus, going for a walk, being aware of something else are all tools or vehicles that help you do this. Rest is important if you wish to be at your best.

Your energy and focus is at its best in blocks of time rather than changing from one activity to another or multi tasking. Keeping times where distractions are minimized is useful.

Open loops

Open loops are thoughts and feelings that seem to go round and round in your head, and often stay when you have moved to a new situation. You can identify them, write them down or journal them. Try making a list of them, separating them into ones you can do something about and ones you can't. Then identify if there is anything you can do immediately, next couple of hours, next day or so, next week etc. You can 'put them in their place' e.g. you don't belong here so even though you're here I'm not going to pay attention to you. You can set aside a specified time to think and worry about them as much as you want to. e.g. between 7.00 and 7.30. This helps contain it for some people.

Guiding values and principles

These are the things that are important to you, it is what you give worth to. Examples include things like 'honesty' and 'integrity', as well as things like 'not having to be serious all the time', just wanting to 'be' rather than feel that you or the situation should be different. Values have a context, for example you might value work, but if you are interrupted by work at home (even it is by thinking or worrying about it) then the value of home and personal life, and of not being interrupted, becomes more important.

If you are thrown by stress, then coming back to your values can be a way of stabilizing yourself.

Anchors – An anchor is something that helps hold you in place. Consciously aligning to your values and things that are stable and important to you can help you steady in stressful times, and provide direction and focus. Other people and things can also act as anchors to steady you. I often work with clients to establish 'reference points' to help get their bearings. What are your reference points and anchors?

What's my word - Choosing a word (or phrase) which identifies a key value, quality or thing you want to keep in mind, can help steer you through stressful times. In stressful times we need to keep things simple. Writing this word at the top of your page in your diary, or put it up on your wall, and repeating it to yourself, can keep it at the forefront of your awareness and help guide you as well as build that quality or response in you.

Locus of control – what do you have influence over, and understanding what you don't have a lot of control over. You can categorize these into 'no control/influence', some control/influence, medium control/influence, a lot of control/influence'.

Within this framework you can take on the role of a victim, powerless spectator, or an architect. What role do you tend to take on?

A useful series of questions are 'What can you do in the next 5 seconds, 5 minutes, 5 hours, 5 days, 5 weeks, 5 months about this?'

Attribution Style - is about how you explain something that has happened. Internal attribution style – it was because of me. External – something or someone else is the cause. The way you attribute meaning to something builds up your story about it. It is useful to look at this story and see if there are other ways of looking at it that work better.

Weiner's attribution theory

	Perceived locus of control	
	Internal	External
Attributions of no control	Ability	Chance/luck
Attributions of control	Effort	Task difficulty

Boundaries – This is about what is my stuff and what is your stuff, knowing what's good for you, and being able to establish, maintain and protect clear boundaries. Being able to freely choose, rather than be directed by 'shoulds' or other people's expectations. To get clarity some people ask themselves "Is this my problem?"

Energy drains and Energy Gains – Things that drain your energy can be activities you don't like, your level of organization because you can't find things and things aren't structured, or spending time in unproductive or negative conversations. You can't always change the things that are draining you, but you can minimize the effect they are having on you by establishing boundaries and learning skills.

Energy gains are those things that contribute positively to your energy. They nourish, sustain and build you.

A really useful exercise is to do an energy gain and drain audit. Look at all those things that energize you and give you a lift, strengthen you and you just enjoy doing. Then look at what it is you like about those things. For example you may enjoy swimming. What you enjoy about it could be the feel of the water, the fact that no one is disturbing you, the exercise, the people you swim with etc. Do this for each of the things you enjoy and see if you can identify any trends.

The same process can be used for 'energy drains'. Look at what depletes you, when your heart sinks, your enthusiasm drops, or when your energy lowers. Don't judge them, just notice and observe what it is specifically about those times that have the effect.

The information gathered on energy drains and gains is useful for understanding your needs, setting up a better balance of things in your life, and helping you take action towards the things that work for you.

Containment and de-escalation strategies – Activation is when your system mobilizes in response to a situation. Containing and reducing the level of activation can be achieved through things like debriefing, writing things down, setting aside a particular time to deal with it, consciously choosing not to follow things that will activate you, directing your attention elsewhere, and mindfulness. Try bringing yourself to the here and now by noticing what you can see, hear and feel. Breathing practices- Start small e.g. ask yourself, 'am I breathing?' Of course you are, but you want to bring it to the forefront of your awareness, orientating to your breath rather than the activation.

How to ground and centre – Breathing exercises – breathing evenly and smoothly works on a physiological level to calm and resource you. Body awareness - become aware of your fingers, then your hands and then expand awareness to the rest of your body. Put your feet firm on the ground; adopt a posture which has strength, ease and composure. Consciously bringing parts of you back to yourself, letting go of threads to other people and activities. Be conscious of being in your skin. Having times where you literally have your feet on the ground/the earth can do wonders. Many people find having a bath or shower helps, or even washing their hands. Others have a glass of water.

Take an 'awareness snapshot' when you feel grounded and centred. You can remember these times and anchor to them.

A subtle and quick way to ground and center when you are in the midst of something, is to soften and broaden your gaze and engage more of your peripheral sight. This has the effect of easing tension and centering yourself. It also broadens mental and emotional focus, and if with other people, your ability to listen as well.

Breathing– When stressed our breath becomes shallower and more irregular. In fact if you are relaxed and start breathing like this it will induce a state of anxiety. Gently softening and slowing your breath, and breathing deeper, utilizing the abdomen, will activate the parasympathetic nervous system (the one that calms us). Research suggests that slowing to 6 or more breaths a minute is particularly calming and restorative.

Physical Relaxation – there's heaps of free stuff on the web. Progressive relaxation goes through each part of your body and progressively relaxes it. Often exercise and movement e.g. stretching the body, can help promote relaxation, as well as relaxing music, massage, yoga.

Mindfulness – It can be hard to determine the direct mechanisms for how mindfulness (or meditation) practiced in one part of the day builds and benefits you, but none the less, it steadies, restores, energizes and strengthens you so you can approach things from a much better place in yourself.

In mindfulness you observe things for what they are, noticing them fully. Not thinking about the past, or worrying about the future, it's about being in the present moment. You can observe an object, what you are doing, what is happening around you, your feelings or your thoughts. See what works for you.

Some people suggest that naming what you are experiencing can help you focus. Others say it's better to not put any constructs around it and see it purely as if you have never seen or observed it before. However you approach it, it's a gentle process.

You can bring a quality to the observation, such as kindness, compassion, forgiveness, love. You can be aware of your values and what is important to you in the situation.

Exercise, diet, sleep – These are essential to wellbeing. It's important to get enough rest as this is where our bodies restore and replenish. Sleep before 12.00 tends to be where this happens the most.

Exercise has a whole range of benefits for your metabolism, general health and releasing tension, and the production of positive endorphins. Move and be active 150 minutes a week.

Diet – Reduce sugar, caffeine, alcohol and carbohydrates, especially when you are stressed. Increase protein and vegetables. Drink lots of water.

Taking Care of the Hurt – sometimes it is like we get wounded, and we need to look after the part of us that is hurt before we can use any other strategies. How you care for yourself, with an underlying sense of kindness, is important. Talking to someone who listens to you, respects, accepts and believes in you, can be really helpful.

Positives and Strengths – so often we identify the things that we wish to improve, the things that aren't working for us, the things that are wrong or could be wrong, the worries and the fears. This can inadvertently give greater power and space to them. Noticing the positive things and the things that nourish you is important. Spend time with people who believe in you. Identifying your strengths and qualities and times when you have responded well to situations like this in the past helps you to access your inner resources, building your capacity to respond. You might like to keep a strengths journal or just take a few moments to recognize and remember the positive things, and anything you are thankful or appreciative of.

Acknowledging and promoting the positive – Build positive heartfelt moments into your life. Recognize and acknowledge positive responses and achievements. Helping others increases your wellbeing. Use gratitude/appreciation/thankful exercises. This is not ‘putting on a happy face’. For it to be effective they must be real and genuine experiences.

Self-compassion and kindness – looking towards a part of yourself, or the situation you’re in, with warmth, belief in yourself, encouragement, caring, kindness or love. This is the best place to see clearly what is happening, build yourself, increase internal safety, and to make better responses. People often suggest responding to yourself in the way you would like your best friend to respond to you.

Self-responsiveness is about how we respond to our needs and the things that come up for us. For example if we are angry, being able to respond to our anger, or the part of us that is angry, without getting caught up in it. Try saying to your anger, hurt, or fear “come with me and we will meet what is happening together”.

Nourish, Replenish and Resource - How do you resource and nourish yourself so your well is full? What things or activities or situations, fill your tank with high quality, good fuel. The energy drains and gains exercise is helpful here. If you currently lack things in your life that do this, sometimes because the ones you had don’t work for you any more, you may have to experiment with new activities.

Self-Acceptance and Self Love – accepting all the parts of you, knowing that imperfections, and mistakes, and inadequacies are part of being human, as are all the positive qualities and competencies you have. This is about being home in yourself, as you are.

Cognitive Responses – This is about seeing and making sense of what is happening. Plotting it out on a piece of paper, or explaining it to someone else can be useful for getting insight into what’s happening. Conceptually understanding what is happening for you, and in the situation, can help you have a greater sense of control and point to some practical ways of moving forward.

There is heaps of material on the internet that can help you look at how you are thinking, and if it is being useful to you. Looking at CBT approaches is a good place to start.

Learn – learn new skills and ways of doing things. Sometimes when we feel overwhelmed the problem is not just that it's too much, but that it's too much of the same thing. Broaden things out by learning something new.

Things don't stay the same and we need to adapt and grow to meet our changing life and relationships. As we learn it can all be a bit awkward until we incorporate the new skill into our repertoire, so give yourself time.

Developing support systems – sometimes we can't do it on our own, and having someone to talk to helps you recover from the toll the situation or stress has taken, work through what to do, release some of the pressure, and get emotional support to help resource you in moving forward. It is incredibly beneficial to have someone who believes in you, and is supportive of you. Putting routines and systems in place are a type of support. Also look at practical supports you can put in e.g. getting a cleaner if you can afford it, or calling on assistance from others.

Taking Action – problem solving, plotting it out and making a plan, setting goals that work for you, taking action steps and following through, doing a cost/ benefit or risk reward exercise, identifying and putting in resource requirements.

The Team

For people who work, you are often in a team and in an organization. How that team and organization operates plays a huge part to supporting a positive direction, or making it difficult.

You are an active part of the team and organization. Everyone contributes, everyone has responsibility. A positive, supportive team contributes so much to good outcomes.

What do you contribute and promote in your team? In what ways could your team encourage and support each other better? How could you and the team work towards a more positive environment that supports great outcomes.

Self-care keeps you refreshed, vital and positive in your work and your life. It helps you to respond to the damaging effects of stress, and puts credit in your wellbeing bank account so you can bring your best to your work and life.

Appendix 1 - Examples work related stresses

- Worn out
- Too much to do
- Too much responsibility or intensity in the work
- Other people/bullying
- micromanaged
- Compassion fatigue
- Feeling responsible for the outcomes, fearing you will not be able to meet them
- Not feeling good enough, fearing you will be found out as being incompetent
- Not feeling part of the work group
- Not acknowledged
- Too much admin/paperwork
- No support network
- Now way to let off steam
- Rigid work procedures
- Work too much, no work/home balance
- Home life impinges on work
- Lack of variety
- Other people wreck your work
- Not being able to work to your potential
- Insufficient resources to do the job
- Band aid work/Not able to help with underlying issues
- Burnout
- Vicarious trauma
- Office tension
- Angry/'difficult' clients
- Lack of teamwork and communication
- Organizational change
- Lack of job/role security
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Appendix 2 10 Tips to help you switch off

Finding the switch can be difficult! Here's a selection of tools.

1. **Good practice throughout the day** – I know you want a quick solution for whenever you get uptight, but the reality is that easing your thoughts and taking regular breaks throughout the day is the best strategy for helping to prevent it in the first place.
2. **Value something more/higher** – 'whatever I am doing at this moment is the most important thing to me right now'.
3. **Exercise** – including physical, stretching, yoga, relaxation exercises.
4. **Contain thoughts and worries** by setting aside a particular time to worry about them or work them out. Writing at this point can be helpful.
5. **Get structured and organized**. Write down things so they don't go round and round. Make a list of what you need to do, or your plan of how to approach your situations, even if you don't know what to do in the bigger picture.
6. **Practice meditation and mindfulness**. Just observe and name your thoughts and emotions and move on to something else – this may be a constant process, but sometimes the wanting to avoid the winding up that happens when things go around in your mind, intensifies the problem. For something different, even try welcoming them and seeing where they go. Or take them with you as you go about what you do. Lots of different meditations practices on the internet.
7. **Self compassion** – hold the thoughts, or the part of you that is experiencing them, compassionately or bring to them as much love or kindness as you can, because they are in pain or fear and need your care and attention.
8. **Say stop in your mind or imagine a stop sign**. Put a rubber band around your wrist and snap it so you feel a little pain. To be honest doing this has never worked for me, but may for you 😊.
9. **Anchor** to a place or time when you were centred, calm, steady or strong in yourself.
10. **Visually close off the open loops**, closing off the link to what's concerning you, and orientate to something in the present. You may need to do this repetitively!



What do you find useful?

Appendix 3 Self Care Action Plan.

1. In what area of my work/life is my greatest self care need

What immediate steps will I take to care for myself better in this area

What might get in the road of these steps and what can I do to limit these.

2. In what area of my work/life is my next greatest self care need.....

What immediate steps will I take to care for myself better in this area

What might get in the road of these steps and what can I do to limit these.