

STRESS MANAGEMENT – Distressing Thoughts

The first thing when we discover that we are overly stressed is to decide if we want to stay stressed.

STEP 1: As yourself – “Do I want to stay stressed?” If your answer is yes, then ask yourself, what will this do to my BREATHE (*see impact of stress worksheet*) if I choose to stay stressed? How will it impact each area of my BREATHE?

If you decided you don't want to stay stressed, move on to the next step 2.

STEP 2: Deep Breath. If you want to feel less stressed, the next thing to do even if it is only for a few minutes is calm the body with some deep, slow breathing. NOTE: This doesn't really help with how the stress is impacting your emotions and behaviors but it can help you calm down so that you can think more clearly.

STEP 3: Discover how you are reacting to the stress:

(a) What is the stressful situation. _____

(b) How does my body react to the stress? _____

(c) How does the stressful situation or event cause me to feel? _____

(d) What behavior changes have I made because of the stress? (e.g., not socializing with friends, sleeping more, increase in watching TV). _____

(e) What thoughts are automatically coming into my mind when I think about this stressful situation?

What you have listed above are often called “automatic thoughts” or as I like to refer to them as our distressing thoughts. These are the thoughts that our mind throws at us automatically when we are experiencing stress. After identifying all the distressing thoughts we are having, the next step zero in on the most distressing thought - the one that is causing you the most stress.

Step 4: How much do you believe that thought? _____

0 = I don't believe it at all.

10 = I believe that thought to be 100% true.

Step 5: Examine the Evidence for our Thoughts. Most of the time our thoughts that our mind is throwing at us are partly true and partly distorted in a negative way. Let's look at the evidence that your thought is true or false.

(a) Write some facts that are TRUE about your thought. _____

(b) Write some facts that are NOT TRUE about your thought. _____

STEP 6: How much do you believe your distressing thought NOW? _____

0 = I don't believe it at all.

10 = I believe that thought to be 100% true.

By examining what is true and what is false about your distressing thought, did your belief in that thought change?

Step 7: Rewrite your original thought to be more accurate thought.

Look at that new thought now that it is more accurate assessment of what is going on. How does that thought make you feel after completing this exercise? Might it be good to remember that our mind can throw us thoughts that are not 100% and that believing the thoughts can cause us to feel more stressed, anxious, or depressed? It might be also good to remember that you can do something about those thoughts. You can examine the distressing thoughts and re-write the thoughts so that they are more accurate allowing you to feel some relief.