

## MODULE 2C

# LIFESKILLS SUPPORT GROUP

## HOW TO HANDLE THE TOUGH STUFF

### STRESS REDUCTION

**GOAL:** This module is designed to help participants deal with stress in their daily living. They will learn stress reduction techniques that meet their personal style and comfort.

**OBJECTIVES:** Participants will be able to:

- list potential areas of stress in their lives
- learn how to use relaxation techniques
- develop a healthy eating and exercise plan
- identify possible supports in their environment

**MATERIAL:** Handouts: Stress Reduction, Relaxation, Exercise, Eating Right, Eating Right Reduces Stress, Things To Put In My Stress-Quake Bag

## STRESS REDUCTION

In today's world who has been able to escape the effects of stress? Perhaps there are some good things to say about stress, but one has to really think hard to come up with it. One thing we know that when we are under stress, it sure feels good when the stress is relieved! The problem is, it goes away to return again another day. Life on the planet inevitably means we have to deal with stress. What matters then, is how we chose to deal with it. Yes, we have some choice. We can let it grow bigger, by not attending to it, and end up with more stress, or we can tackle it before it escalates.

There are a number of things we can do to prepare for stress and navigate through it once it is upon us. Preparing for stressful times may be as simple as having an earthquake bag prepared. Instead of an earthquake, we are preparing for a stress quake. What do we put in the bag? Perhaps we should start with things that have a calming effect upon you. How about a nice luxury bath with everything arranged and ready to be pulled out when needed? You could have your favorite magazines ready for that time when you don't want to think about the problems anymore and you just want to fade into a good book or magazine. Put that in the bag. Another suggestion would be to find your favorite photos and have them ready to pull out and enjoy in the quiet of an evening. These can bring fond memories of a time perhaps less stressful. There may be friends that are soothing and able to offer a good word, or sound advice; put a reminder of that person's telephone number in your bag. There must be more things you can think of that helps to settle your nerves, during stressful times. Jot it down and place in your stress-quake bag for times of emergencies. Mark "open with care."

Traditionally, we know that there are relaxation and breathing exercises that also help with stress reduction. Don't forget the part that exercise plays in the form of a walk. Lastly, eating right can us build reserves when our bodies are tired or weary. There are things to do to combat stress, and just knowing that somehow feels good. To not do anything, is a poor choice.

## RELAXATION

We know that it is good for us to take time to relax, but we often don't know how to go about it if we have only a few precious minutes during the day. When we feel stressed, it is good to know some ways of relaxing. A good relaxation exercise is designed to help our bodies relax and reduce stress. Below, is an exercise of relaxation that can be done at work or when you can catch a few minutes in your day.

**Breathing:** It is important to breathe fully, from your stomach and not from your chest. In order to make sure you are breathing from your stomach, place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Notice where your breathing originates; begin deep breathing exercises from the stomach.

**Loosen Muscles:** We may not be aware of muscle tightness in various parts of our bodies. In order to increase awareness and to know how to loosen tight muscles, it is recommended that we first tighten each muscle and then release the muscle.

**Relax The Mind:** It is helpful to take your mind off the stressors that you may be facing by relaxing your thoughts. It is typically recommended that you concentrate on a pleasant scene, one that is soothing and relaxing. Take a few minutes to concentrate on this positive image.

## EXERCISE

Questions to answer before you begin:

(1): Think of different ways you would like to exercise if you could find the time; would it be biking, walking, jogging, swimming, or athletic games?

(A): Would you prefer to have a partner or go solo?

(B): What time of the day fits best with your schedule?

(C): Do you have any medical considerations?

(D): How long would you exercise (minutes/hours)?

Where would you exercise?

Lastly, in viewing your calendar and considering your health when do you think you could begin?

Remember, walking has been generally a safe way to begin an exercise program, if you have not had an established routine.

(2): Exercise not only helps our bodies to be stronger and function better, it is also a good stress reducer. Science has pointed out that we have opiate receptors in the brain that when released by exercise, makes us feel good; these hormones are called endorphins. These natural opiates are released in response to pain and vigorous exercise. They are jokingly called a “natural high.” Some people keep exercising in order to feel good from this endorphin release. This explains the “runners high,” and the indifference to pain some injured athlete’s have.

## EATING RIGHT

Like relaxation and exercise, eating right is important for overall health and stress reduction. Our bodies are energized by the right kind of food, and we can often ward off some ailments with good eating choices. There are some differences in food preference that may be determined by ethnicity and culture. It is therefore important to design a good nutritional plan around foods that are not only healthy but also tailored to individual taste buds.

Food has many meanings that we learn as early as childhood, and some of these traditions have not served us well in our adulthood. For example, we are told “Eat everything on your plate, kids are starving in other countries.” While this advice meant well, it very well could contribute to overeating.

As a nation, Americans are experiencing a rise in the rate of obesity, and related health concerns such as type 2 diabetes. Conversely, we are a culture that promotes standards of beauty based upon youthfulness and slim figures. More pressure is placed on females to conform to this standard at younger ages. At the same time we have exploded in our offerings of junk food. Fast food eating establishments can be found on almost every corner of some neighborhoods. We are indeed in a conflict with our messages and reality when it comes to food.

In relation to stress levels, a proper diet can be an important key to feeling better. Sleeping better and eating properly will help our bodies to function better.

## ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE USE/ABUSE ISSUES

Stress is an unpleasant experience and it requires that we do something to relieve it. Sometimes we try to ignore problems and at other times we may prematurely jump in and try to fix it. When drugs or alcohol enter the picture, the results are often more problematic. Escaping from our problems through altering our state of consciousness is a way of not dealing with the issues of life directly. When we are under the influence of drugs or alcohol we may feel better temporarily, but soon when the effects wear off, we find that the problem is still there. Perhaps under the influence we have said or done something that makes it worse; affecting our relationships, employment, our health, and finances. We may even incur legal problems that carry long term implications.

### TIMES WHEN I HAVE USED ALCOHOL OR DRUGS TO DEAL WITH STRESS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## THINGS TO PUT INTO MY STRESS-QUAKE BAG

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.