

Managing Teenage Stress

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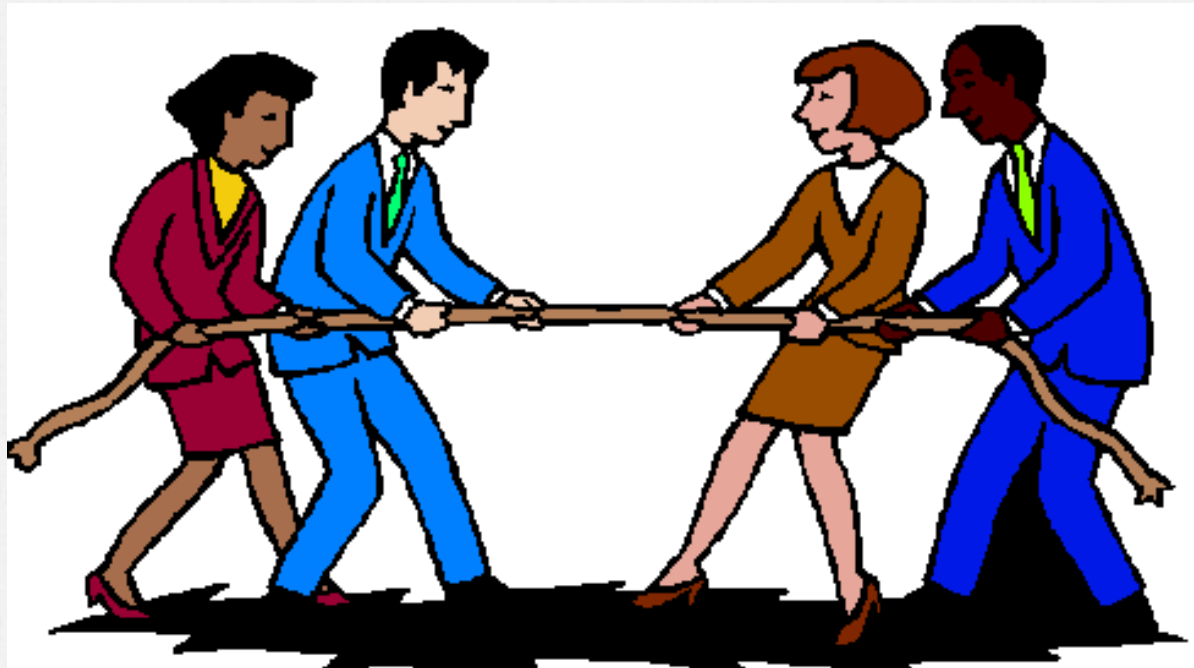
Agenda

- o Defining Stress
- o Bio-Psycho-Social Model of Stress
- o Signs of Stress
 - o Case Study
- o The Perception of Stress
- o Immediate Strategies
- o Personality and Coping
- o Long-Term Strategies

What is Stress?

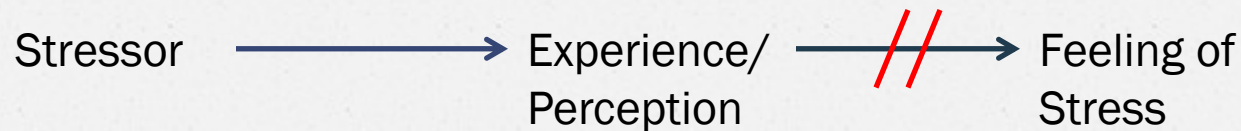
- o A negative emotional experience accompanied by changes in:
 - o Biochemistry
 - o Physiology
 - o Cognition (the way we think)
 - o Behaviour
- o These changes are attempts to alter the stressful event or to accommodate it

What is Stress?



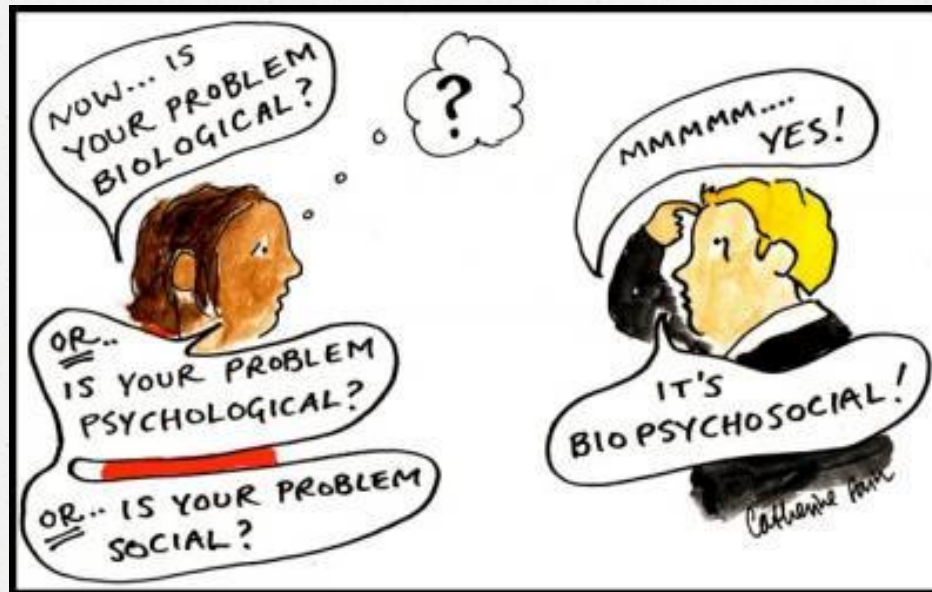
What is a Stressor?

- o A stressor is a stressful event that leads to the experience of feeling stressed



- o Person-environment fit with stress
 - o Do we have the resources to deal with the stressor?

The Bio-Psycho-Social Model of Stress



NOW... IS
YOUR PROBLEM
BIOLOGICAL?



OR...
IS YOUR PROBLEM
PSYCHOLOGICAL?

OR...
IS YOUR PROBLEM
SOCIAL?

MMMMM....
YES!

IT'S
BIO PSYCHOSOCIAL!

Catherine Anne

Fight or Flight

- o When we are faced with a stressful situation, we will either confront it or run away!
- o This is called the “Fight or Flight” response
- o **Caution!**
 - o If we are constantly “fleeing or fighting,” this can lead to exhaustion

Physiological Response

Stressful
Event



Hormones
Turned
“On”



Effects:

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Behavioural agitation ('on edge')
- Shallow breathing
- Wakeful sleep
- Increase/decrease in appetite

Long-Term Stress

- o Normally, the physiological stress response allows us to keep functioning in response to stress, but over time, problems may occur with:
 - o Immune system
 - o Depression
 - o Anxiety
 - o Etc.

What Stressors Do Teenagers Face?

- o Relationships
- o School/Academics
- o Extracurricular activities
- o Standardized Tests
- o Death in family
- o Peers
- o Bullying
- o Body Changes
- o Post-secondary and/or careers
- o New school and teachers
- o Work
- o Substance use
- o Gender identity
- o Puberty
- o Etc. etc. etc.

The Importance of Baseline

- o Baseline – a starting point for comparison
- o Important questions to ask:
 - o Is there a recent or sudden change in my child's behaviours?
 - o Is there a recent or sudden change in my child's emotional responses?
 - o Is there a recent or sudden change in my child's way of thinking (cognition)?

Cognitive Signs of Stress

Cognition = The way we think

- o Poor problem solving
- o Poor decision making or indecisiveness
- o Forgetfulness
- o Inattentiveness and/or distractibility
- o Loss of interest
- o Poor memory recall

Physiological Signs of Stress

- o Appetite change
- o Poor quality of sleep
- o Gastrointestinal issues
- o Reports of aches, pains, and stiffness
- o Reports of headaches
- o Illness

Behavioural Signs of Stress

- o Aggression (physical and/or verbal)
- o Lower patience and frustration threshold
- o Critical of others and/or of self
- o Physical agitation
- o Withdrawn and isolated
- o Avoidance
- o Loss of interest

Emotional Signs of Stress

- o Nervous and worried
- o Crying
- o Flat affect
- o Anger
- o Easily irritated and/or embarrassed
- o Emotional outbursts
- o Feeling overwhelmed

What Changes Should Parents Look For?

- o Poor judgment and decision making
- o Fatigue
- o Irregular sleep pattern
- o Changes in appetite (decrease or increase)
- o Emotional “ups and downs”
- o Anger and irritability
- o Loss of interest

What Changes Should Parents Look For?

- o Decrease in conversation OR increase in conversation focusing on stressful topic
- o Inattention/forgetfulness
- o Avoidance behaviours
 - o Example: Watching a lot more television than usual rather than studying
- o Withdrawal from activities
- o Substance use

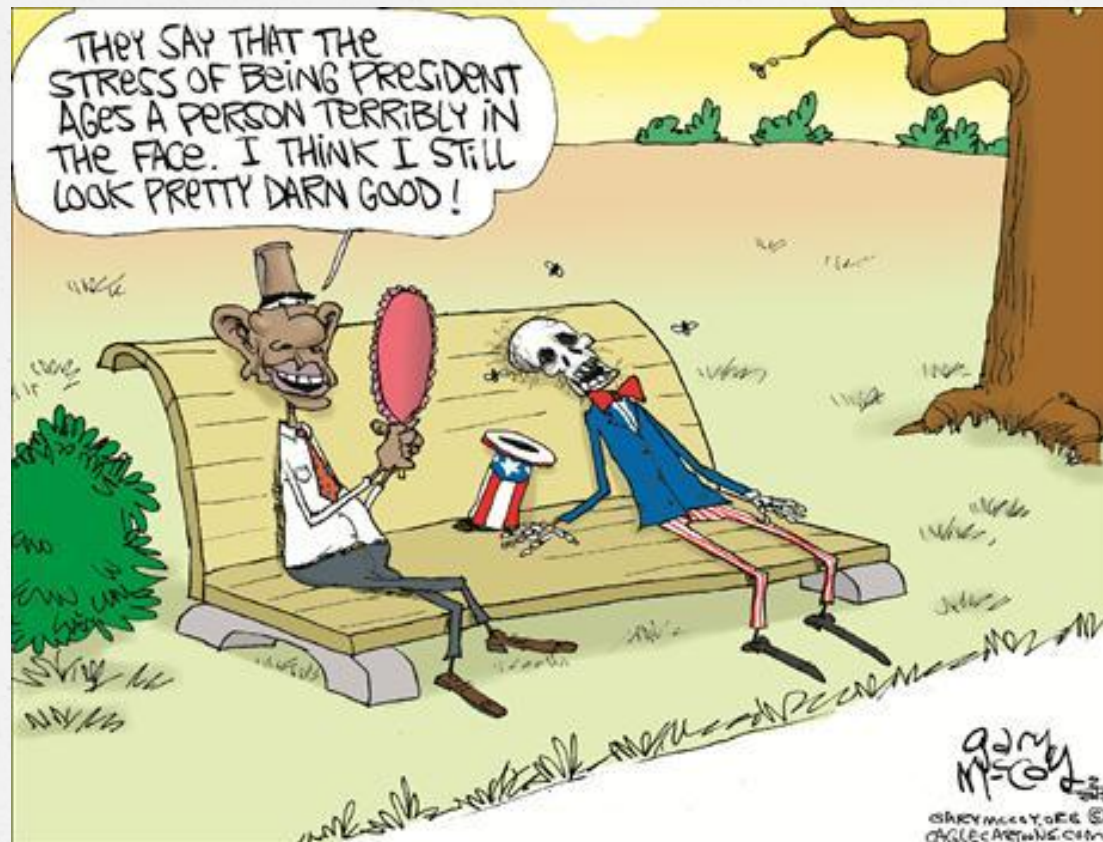
Case Study

Jamie, a 16-year-old female, is a student whose grades hover around 80%. At the beginning of the school year, she told her parents that she will be working harder this year because university and college is becoming more competitive. Whenever she has tests, she stays in her room for long periods of time and may even skip the occasional dinner to reportedly study. Even when she eats dinner with her family, she eats quickly and avoids conversations. She continues to go to hockey practice and piano lessons because she knows that extracurricular activities are important for her post-secondary applications.

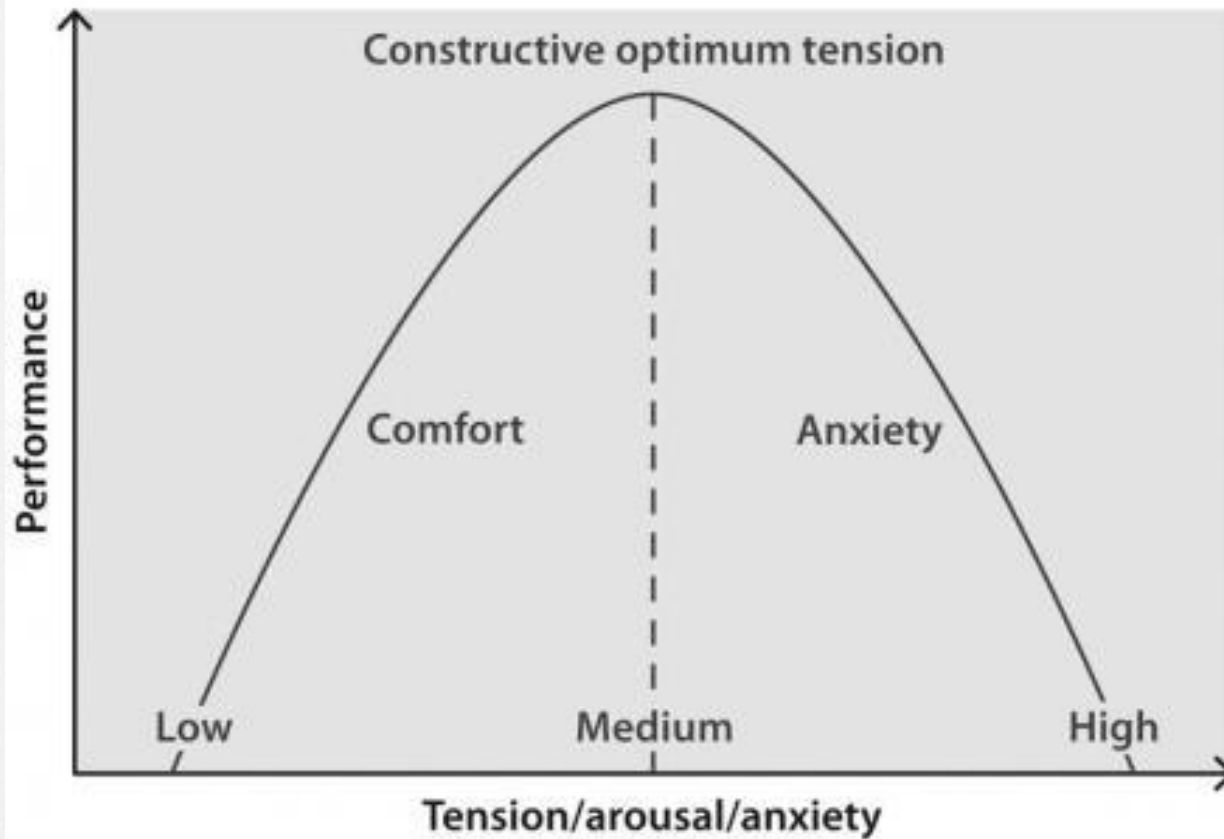
Case Study Continued

She does not look physically tired and appears to have more energy since she rushes through her chores. Jamie is usually quite vocal when sharing her opinions but when recently (and repeatedly) asked for input about a future family outing, she has shrugged and exclaimed “I don’t know and I don’t care!” Her parents stated that Jamie’s sleep schedule has been irregular since the school year started. She will sometimes go to bed at 10:30 pm and wake up at 7 am while in other instances, she will go to bed past 1 am, have difficulty waking up, and take 2 hour naps after school.

The Perception of Stress



Yerkes-Dodson Law of Arousal



Acute vs. Chronic Stress

o Acute Stress

- o Stress that occurs daily
- o Minor stressors that motivates us to act accordingly
- o Get things done!

o Chronic Stress

- o Ongoing/prolonged stress that impacts life events by straining our coping capacities
- o Debilitates our ability to act accordingly

Acute = “Good” Stress

- Helps us survive
- Gets us to complete our daily tasks
- Helps us accomplish goals and challenges
- Boosts memory effectiveness
- Efficient heart functioning

Chronic Stress

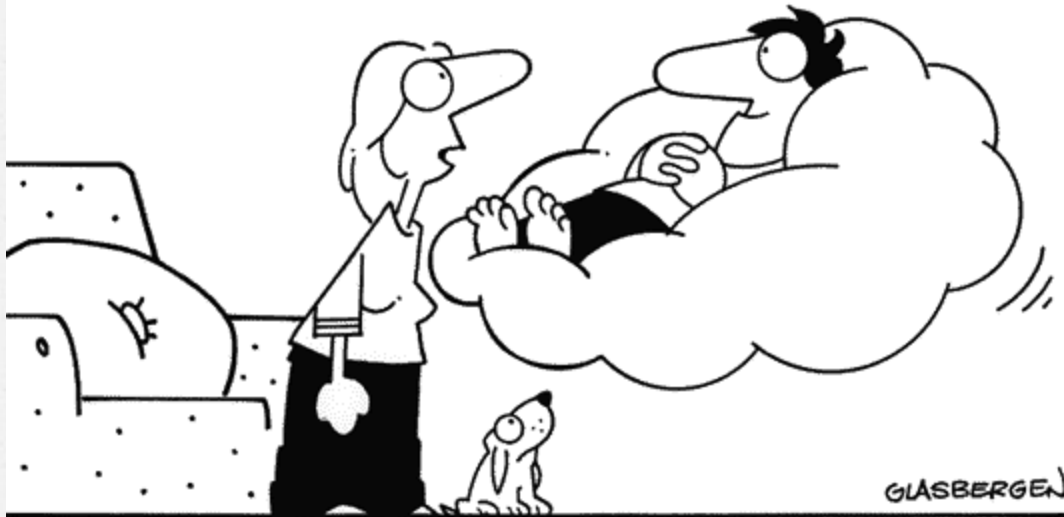
- o Important contributor to psychological distress and physical illness (~ 6 months)
- o Chronic strains lasting for more than two years is implicated in the development of depression
 - o Worse when stressors are perceived as uncontrollable
 - o Learned helplessness
 - o The body and mind are constantly hyper-aroused

How About Exams?

- o Is the stress brought on by exams considered 'good' or 'bad'?
- o For most, it is probably considered good
- o For some, it may be considered bad

Immediate Strategies

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**“You’re getting pretty good
at this stress management thing.”**

How Can We Help?

Time Management:

- o Provide a structured and predictable environment
 - o Use a visual schedule
- o Schedule work/study time as well as fun time
 - o Build in reward for completing tasks
- o Schedule exercise time
 - o E.g., going for a walk, skate for an hour, etc.
- o Avoid unnecessary stress
 - o Temporarily pare down to-do list
 - o Teach child to say “no” if they often take on too many responsibilities

How Can We Help?

Communication:

- o Be assertive by respectfully sharing your thoughts and observations as the parent
- o Be compassionate and empathic while listening to their concerns
- o Keep communication lines open
 - o Help express the feeling rather than bottling it up
- o Talk about any future changes in routine
- o Take time outs together

How Can We Help?

Physical and Psychological Hygiene:

- o Exercise
- o Use a stress journal (see handout)
- o Eat a healthy diet
- o Relaxation and mindfulness practice – we will come back to this later
- o Establish a sleep routine

Sleep Is Important!

Practice a sleep routine:

- o Bath/shower
- o Warm drink (without caffeine)
- o Calm music*
- o Leisure reading
- o Gradual dimming of lights beginning an hour before bed time
- o Avoid screens 30 minutes before bed time
- o Avoid exercise immediately before bed time

Sleep is Important!

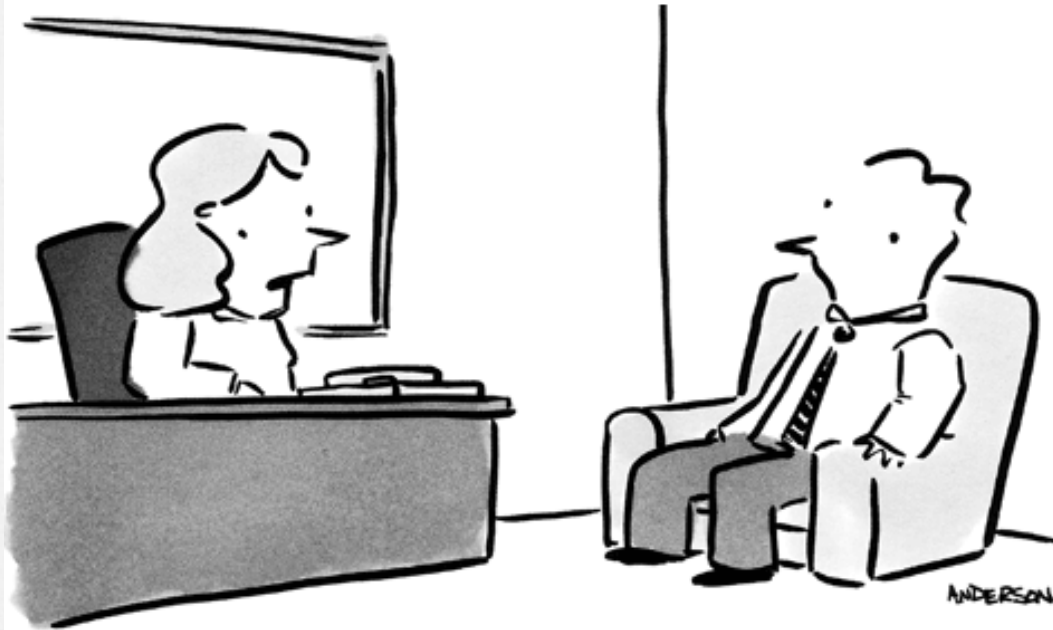
Sleep Management:

- o Only associate bed with sleep
 - o If lying in bed for 20 - 30 minutes and not falling asleep, get up and do something else until drowsiness sets in and try sleeping again – repeat if necessary
- o Have a pre-set wake up time and adhere to it even if feeling very tired
 - o Otherwise the sleep cycle may be severely disrupted

Appraising Stress

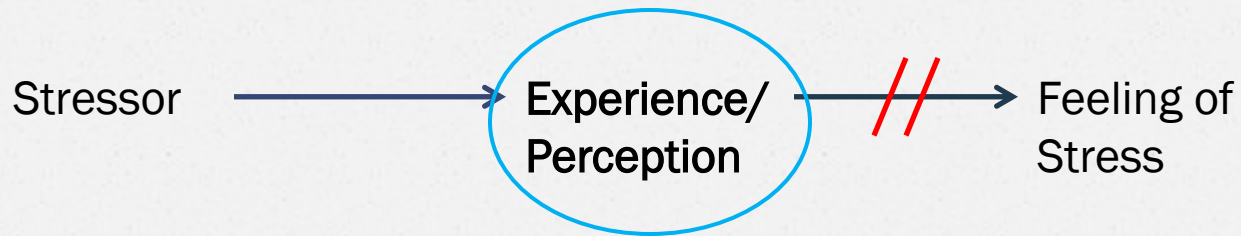
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"If you exclude job performance, you're doing quite well."

Perception of Stress (Re-visited)



Primary Appraisal of Stress

- o Actively judge whether a situation is positive, neutral, or negative
- o Is the event going to create loss and harm?
- o Is the event a future threat?
- o Do I perceive the event as a challenge?
 - o Is there any gain, growth, and mastery involved?

Secondary Appraisal of Stress

- o Constantly evaluate our ability to cope with the stressful event
- o In the face of stress, we ask the question, “What is at our immediate or future disposal that can help us overcome potential harm?”
- o So how can we try to change our perception to cope with exam stress?

Personality and Coping

- o Pessimistic Explanatory Style
 - o Tend to ruminate about their misfortunes
 - o Will internalize the negative events in their lives as stable and global
 - o “This is bad luck”
 - o “Happens to me all the time”
 - o Associated with poor health and depression
- o ...how about Optimism?

Optimism

- Optimistic nature leads people to cope more effectively with stress and reduce the risk of illness
- Promotes more active coping efforts → Learning to problem solve
- More likely to find coping skills to manage stress and see stressful situations as a challenge rather than a threat

Optimism

- o Brings a feeling of control and sound decision making
- o Increase likelihood to seek social support and see the positive aspects of a stressful situation
- o By changing the way we see ourselves in a relationship with the stressor, we can change our experience and stress response
- o Overall health benefits

Tend-or-Befriend

- o In addition to fight-or-flight, humans respond to stress with social and nurturing behaviours
- o We respond to stress collectively, so how do we feel when we notice those closest to us are feeling stressed?

[TED Talk video on how our response to stress is shaped by perception](#)

Learning to Respond to Stress

- o The fight-or-flight response is an automatic and unconscious reaction by the primitive structures of our brains
- o We can make a conscious decision to do neither through the practice of mindfulness-based stress reduction practice (MBSR)
- o Rather, we can make a conscious decision to 'step back,' hold ourselves from automatically reacting, and exert control

MBSR

- By bringing awareness to the stressful situation, the situation has already been changed, just by virtue of not being unconscious and on auto pilot anymore
- Gives time to plan and problem solve
- Allows time to see the big picture before responding
- Also helps to realize that a past stressor is already in the past and helps us face the present moment that requires attention

Time to Practice

- Like anything else, such as playing sports or a musical instrument, practicing mindfulness stress reduction helps catch the stressful situations before we react to them

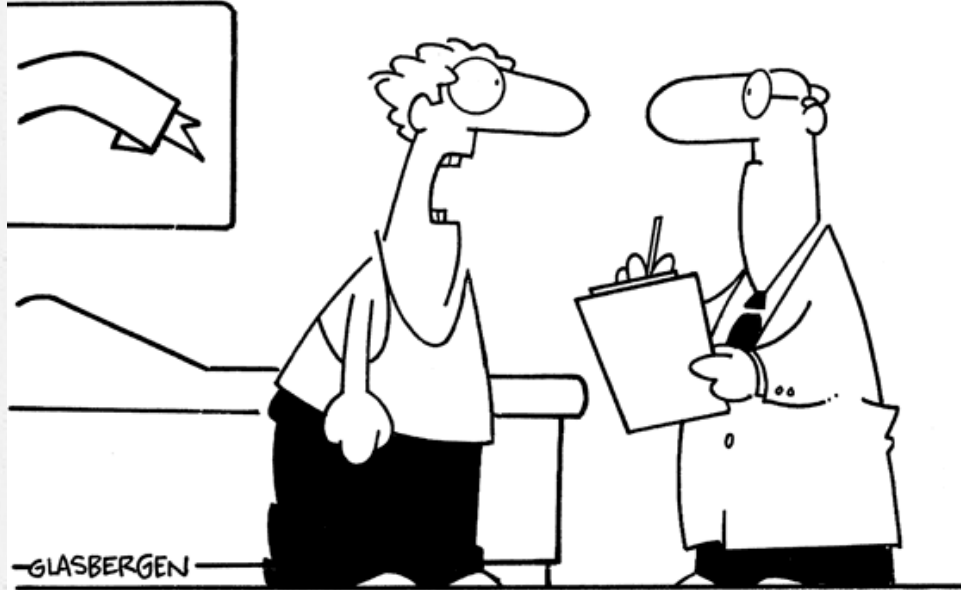


Conclusion

- o Stress is a multifaceted topic that impacts our bodies, minds, and environments that we live in
- o Best predictor for stress outcomes is how we perceive the stress
 - o If we can change our perception, perhaps the stressor will seem more manageable
- o As with most skills learned in life, we need to practice strategies on a constant basis

Questions/Comments?

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**“I’m learning how to relax, doctor —
but I want to relax *better* and *faster*!
I want to be on the cutting edge of relaxation!”**