



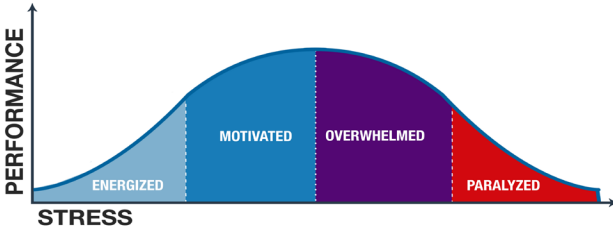
MANAGING ANXIETY

It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it. ~ Hans Selye

Have you been busy lately? Do you ever get so stressed that you become overwhelmed or paralyzed? Stress is the biological, emotional, behavioral, and social response to a real or imagined event. When anxiety and stress are low, motivation and performance levels remain low as well. Some stress can be motivating. As stress and anxiety go up, performance levels also rise, but only to a certain point. Increased stress causes a tipping point, and more anxiety beyond that point actually decreases performance levels. In fact, under high levels of stress, performance plummets and people may feel paralyzed and shut down.

Being able to quickly identify the cause of stress and rapidly develop a stress management plan is a vital skill to master.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STRESS



COPING WITH STRESS

Most people spend their time and attention trying to manage specific problems, but spend little effort managing their own emotional reactions to stressful situations. Most things in life are made up of two parts: controlling emotions and managing stress. If you're driving on snow and ice, you must control your driving and manage your anxiety. If you are seeing your probation officer, you are careful in your conversation and manage your anxiety during the conversation. Most people pay little attention to their own anxious thoughts and have far too little skill managing their stress effectively. You must be both problem-focused and emotion-focused. Both are important, and both can be improved.

THREE SKILLS TO MANAGE STRESS

1. STAY POSITIVE

Write a list of positive characteristics, attitudes, personality traits, and attributes you possess. Regularly review this list to increase your self-esteem and act as a defense against stress, and worry. Worry is often filled with negative thoughts about

the future and negative statements about your inability to handle it. Practice speaking positively to and about yourself to increase self-confidence. Use positive self-talk to manage your mood and attitude as you approach difficult or worrisome situations, keeping your strengths and abilities in mind.

2. INCREASE SELF-CONTROL

Developing self-control allows better management of your mood and behavior. You cannot control other people, every situation, or someone's reaction to you. But you can control your disposition, attitude, and character. Keep a positive, upbeat, and optimistic attitude. Practice making decisions. Decide to look for work, pay a bill, and work your recovery, rather than living life feeling forced or coerced. Smile, laugh, and enjoy your life. Be known for having the best attitude and great character.

3. BE PROACTIVE IN SOLVING PROBLEMS

Most situations become worse when you procrastinate or avoid them. Develop your goals and stick to your plan. Having goals allows you to stay purposeful in your actions. Many situations become worse when you procrastinate, adding to your stress level, and leaving you feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Not every problem or difficulty can be solved. But almost nothing can be done unless you take responsibility for your own actions. Blame-shifting and excusing your behavior will not allow you to focus energy on solving problems. Focus on what you can control, not what you cannot.

UP FOR THE CHALLENGE

Stressful situations cannot be eliminated, but anxiety and worry can be managed. Progressive muscle relaxation, guided meditation, and deep breathing exercises are all ways to pro-

duce a relaxation response. Controlling your own mood and attitude is possible and can be increased with practice. Identifying problems that can be eliminated, solved, or managed is also a skill to be developed. Face challenges head-on with confidence, knowing you are strong, and fully able to manage any and all stressful situations when they come.

A TIME TO REFLECT

1 In what ways have you found stress to be energizing or motivating?

2 Think back over the last few months. Have you found yourself overwhelmed or even paralyzed? What stressors are overwhelming to you?

3 Seeing yourself positively can increase motivation. List several positive statements you can use to manage your mood and attitude as you approach a difficult or worrisome situation.
