

Managing Stress

**NASBO Analyst Professional Development Seminar -
Niagara Falls, NY**

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About me

- Born and raised Idahoan
- Farm family
- Former Assistant to the Chief of Staff - Office of Governor Dirk Kempthorne
- Associate Professor of Counselor Education, Gonzaga University
- From Burnt out to SIZZLING!



Today's Plan

- Defining stress
- Understanding our nervous system and activators
- Going within
- Managing stress
- A challenge

Turn and Talk:

Which picture reflects how you feel when you think about your stress?



STRESS

Stress is a normal physiological or psychological response to internal or external stressors. Stress involves changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave (American Psychological Association, 2018).

- Around **75%** of Americans reported to the American Psychological Association that they experienced a physical or mental symptom of stress in the last month (APA, 2022).
- People with work-related chronic stress have a **50%** increased risk of cardiovascular disease (Vancheri et al, 2022).

Types of STRESS

Acute: Short-term, positive or negative

- Singing karaoke
- Disagreement with a friend

Episodic Acute: Experiencing acute stress on a regular basis with little or no time to relax, calm, or regulate in between experiences.

- Common in some professions such as law enforcement

Chronic: Long-term stress that goes on for weeks or months.

- Toxic work environment
- Financial problems
- Threats to physical safety in the home

Cleveland Clinic, 2025

Consider

How is your stress....

Impacting your daily life and functioning?

- avoiding places and people
- withdrawal
- not engaging in activities you enjoy
- irritability
- drinking, gambling or other behaviors in excess
- over/undereating
- strained relationships
- decreased production at work



Impacting your physical health?

- headaches
- fatigue
- hair loss
- dizziness
- racing heart
- muscle and jaw tension
- digestive issues



Simplified Polyvagal Theory

How our nervous system responds to emotional regulation, social connections, and fear responses.



*Relaxed -
social connection,
creative, curious.*

**Ventral Vagal
State**



*Mobilization -
fight or flight.*

**Sympathetic
State**



*Immobilization -
shutdown, freeze, fawn.*

**Dorsal Vagal
State**

Adapted from Polyvagal Institute



**Ventral Vagal
State**

*Relaxed -
social connection,
creative, curious.*

What others see.

- Focused
- Friendly
- Connected
- Kind
- Reflective
- Collaborative
- Curious

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings:

- Peaceful
- Safe
- Encouraged
- Engaged

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings In your body:

- Bubbly
- Airy
- Light
- Radiating
- Sparkling

Adapted from Polyvagal Institute



What others see.

- Yelling
- Hitting
- Blaming
- Aggressive
- Reactive
- Criticizing
- Demanding
- Tears

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings:

- Afraid
- Anxious
- Stuck
- Unloved
- Misunderstood
- Pressured

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings In your body:

- Hot
- Tight
- Tense
- Knotted
- Pounding
- Burning

Adapted from Polyvagal Institute



What others see.

- Fidgeting
- Unfocused
- Avoiding
- Procrastinating
- Running
- Disengaged

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings:

- Restless
- Pre-occupied
- Overstimulated
- Stretched
- Scared
- Anxious

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings In your body:

- Scattered
- Buzzing
- Queasy
- Breathless
- Dizzy

Adapted from Polyvagal Institute



Dorsal Vagal State

Immobilization - shutdown, freeze, fawn.

What others see.

- Isolating
- Hiding
- Unresponsive
- Zoning out
- Scrolling
- Not completing work
- Exhausted
- Disconnected
- Unengaged

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings:


- Lonely
- Terrified
- Desperate
- Hopeless
- Overwhelmed
- Abandoned

What's behind the behavior?

Possible feelings In your body:

- Dull
- Hollow
- Empty
- Flat
- Numb
- Knotted

Adapted from Polyvagal Institute



Am I doing enough at work and at home?

headaches

Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines.

sleepless nights

What activates you?

Where do you notice it in your body?
How does it show up?

Share with a person at your table.

**When we are activated, we are less patient,
kind, creative, thoughtful, or
solution-focused.**

Going within: 8 Dimensions of Wellness



Adapted from Sweeney & Witmer, 1991

Reflect:

Which areas are going well for you?

Which areas would you like to focus on?

How does this impact the way you show up in your work, relationships, and community?

Managing Stress

Name it.

Be deliberate with your language.

Control what you can.

Access your trusted social support.

Remain consistent with the habits that make you whole.

Have grace for your human-ness.

Adapted from the American Psychological Association

Name it.

I'm worried I will never get the hang of this.

I'm stressed by the pace of my work.

I'm underappreciated.

I'm nervous about asking for flexibility in my schedule.

I'm apprehensive about that that meeting next week.

I would like to make stronger connections with my co-workers.

If you are a leader, **co-regulate** (share your calm) with others.
One of these + how can I help/what do you need from me right now?

Be deliberate with your language.

Avoid creating and joining tornadoes.

Control what you can.

Create routines that provide structure.

Sample evening:

- Plan meals
- Set out clothes
- 5 minute tidy
- Gas up/charge your car
- 5 minute brain dump of all the things you are thinking about/need to do/or stewing over

Schedule something to look forward to in the future.

- Dinner out
- Weekend getaway
- Quiet morning on the porch tomorrow morning

Access your trusted social support.

- We aren't meant to operate alone.
- Identify thought partners and confidants who will see and hear you.
- Seek professional support.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Remain consistent with the habits that make you whole.

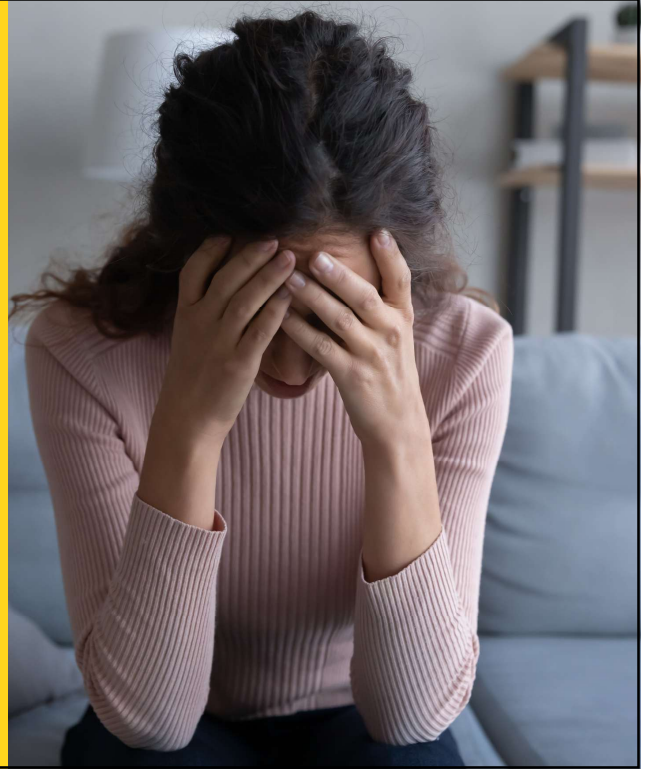
Need more in your toolbox?

- **Push, Pull, Dangle**
- **Grounding activities**
- **Laughter**

Being Human

What activates me?

- Winter in Spokane
- Catastrophizing
- Poor customer service
- Problem-saturated conversations
- Packing lunches
- Gas stations



Challenge!

Choose a note card and envelope.

Take a few moments to reflect on our discussion and your Wellness Wheel.

Commit to one strategy for managing stress.

Write your future self a note, checking in on your wellness.

Place the note in the envelope, seal it, and address it to yourself.

Leave it at your table.

You will see this again.



THANK YOU

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