



Signs of Stress



Content on this side is intended for the educator's reference. The information on the back can be photocopied and shared with clients.

Objective: Clients will better understand the physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms of stress.

Audience: This tool is applicable for any client, but especially those who say they feel overwhelmed or who display unhealthy strategies for coping with stress.

Estimated Time: 10-15 minutes

Educator Instructions: Use this tool to facilitate discussion about the different ways the body reacts to stress. To introduce the topic, use the example provided under Discussion Starter or come up with your own example. Then ask your client to identify some physical, emotional, or cognitive signs they experience when they are over-stressed. Refer to the Managing Stress tool to challenge clients to identify healthy ways they can respond to stress.

Discussion Starter: Why is it important to pay attention to signs of stress? Just like a car that is running out of gas or needs attention, our body also signals us when we need to take care of ourselves. These signals are sometimes called "stress signals." Different people have different signals. For example:

- Linda is a school teacher who has four children. When she experiences too much stress, she sometimes feels so tired that she goes to bed at 6:00 p.m.
- Ken has two jobs and is dating Linda. When he experiences too much stress, his stomach becomes so upset that he sometimes misses work.

Ken and Linda both have a lot of responsibilities that can cause stress. Both have different stress signals that affect them in different ways. How they deal with stress may also affect how they react to each other. What are some ways that your body responds to stress? How does your partner respond to stress? It is helpful to first understand how we react to stress in order to find healthy ways to deal with it on our own and together with our partner.

Follow-up: If you have another visit with the client, ask how he or she has been handling stress since your last discussion. Use the opportunity to discuss healthy coping strategies (see Managing Stress tool). For example, what are some changes they have made to cope or what are some changes they could make to help them cope with stress?





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We know that we have to fill a car's gas tank before the gauge is on empty. The gas gauge is a signal that it's time to stop and get more fuel. As well, when cars hit potholes or curbs, tires get out of alignment and the car has trouble driving straight. A shaky wheel is a signal that alignment is needed. When oil is left unchanged for a long time, it causes other parts of the car to not work and break down. Odd noises under the hood, trouble starting the car, and sometimes smoke are signals that maintenance is needed.

Just like a car, our bodies also signal when we need to take care of ourselves. These signals are sometimes called "stress signals." We sometimes experience physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral signs.

What are some things that happen to you when you are stressed?

Physical

- Headache
- Body aches
- Heart pounds and breathe fast
- Upset stomach
- Feel very tired
- Not hungry
- Want to eat all the time
- Muscles tighten up

Emotional/Mental

- Worry something bad will happen
- Feel helpless or overwhelmed
- Feel frustrated
- Become moody or grouchy
- Cannot concentrate
- Think people are disappointed in you
- Have trouble remembering things
- Get nervous and can't relax

Other "stress signals" you experience:

What are some ways your partner and your partner's body responds to stress?

Feeling stressed is not a bad thing. In fact, sometimes it can push us to do well or do something positive. But, sometimes how we respond to stress can harm us and could hurt others whom we care about. When we feel stressed, the first step in handling our stress is to understand how it makes us feel. Help those you care about, and who care about you, understand your stress signals.

When you start noticing your stress signals use healthy coping strategies to make yourself healthier.

When you are healthy, your relationship with others will be healthier!