



Stress Management





Welcome to *UP Skills for Work!*

The program helps you build your skills for learning, work, and life, which include:

- Motivation
- Attitude
- Accountability
- Presentation
- Collaboration
- Time Management
- Adaptability
- Stress Management
- Reading
- Writing
- Numeracy
- Digital
- Problem Solving
- Confidence
- Communication
- Creativity and Innovation

These skills are used in nearly every job and in daily life. They also allow us to learn new skills and to adapt to changes. Improving your skills can help you to build a good life for yourself.

You can also take these courses on [ABCskillshub.ca](https://www.abcskillshub.ca)

This workshop

Stress is a normal part of life. But that doesn't mean it's easy to deal with! When too much stress builds up over time, it can affect our work, our personal lives, and even our health. Learning to deal with stress in a healthy way can improve our well-being, at work and at home.

In this workshop, we will explore what stress is and what it feels like. We'll talk about good ways to reduce and recover from stress. You'll have a chance to figure out some sources of stress in your life, and make a plan to deal with at least one of them.

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Icebreaker: Just breathe

What is your stress level right now? Is your neck tight? How about your jaw?
What are you thinking about?

Let's try this simple breathing exercise and see what happens.

Sit comfortably, and close your eyes.

Take a long, deep breath in, and let it all out with a sharp *hah!* through your mouth. Do it again, but this time breathe out with a long sigh: *haaaaaaaaah*.

Now, without trying to change your breathing, just pay attention to it.

Follow your breath as it comes in your nose, into your lungs, and flows out again. Imagine you can see it travel through your body.

Notice your ribs and belly as they lift and fall with your breath.

Just watch your breath flow in and out.

Do this for five breaths.

Open your eyes. Do you feel any different?

This quick time-out can be done anywhere. When we focus on our breath, it helps us become more calm, relaxed, and centred. It helps us think more clearly when we are feeling stressed.



Let's talk about it

- What did you notice when you were doing the breathing?
- Do you think this exercise would work better with practice?



What is stress?

Stress is the sense of pressure and tension we feel in our bodies and our minds from challenges in our lives.

Stress is a normal part of life. It can help us get motivated and stay alert. Have you ever heard someone say, “I work better with a deadline?” That’s because the stress of a deadline helps get them going.



Stress is the pressure and tension we feel from challenges in our lives.

What is stress management?

Since we usually can’t avoid stress, we have to learn to cope with it. Healthy **stress management** involves:

- being aware of your stressors and how they affect you
- taking steps to reduce stress when possible
- finding healthy ways to cope with, and recover from, stress



Stress management is how you let stress affect your work, life, and relationships.

A **stressor** is a thing that makes you feel stressed.



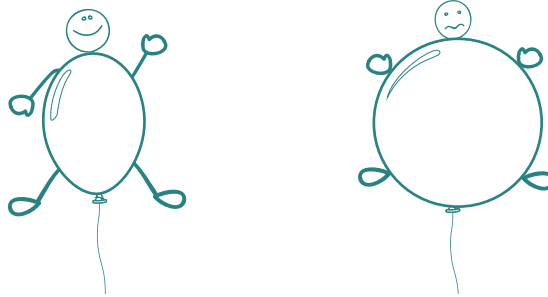
Let’s talk about it

- What does managing stress well mean to you?
- What do you do to manage your stress?
- What do you do to support other people in your life (friends, family, co-workers) when they are under stress?



Your stress balloon

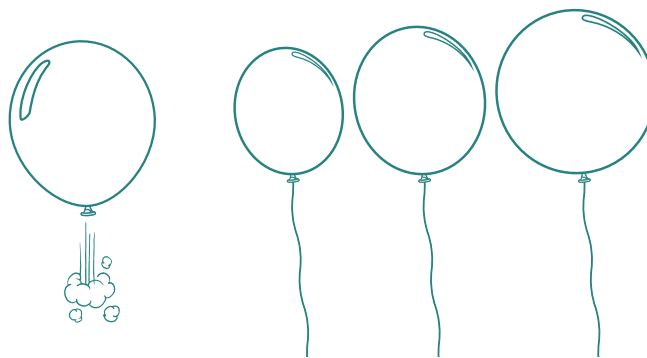
Imagine you are a balloon. Each stress in your life blows air into the balloon. At first, it's great. The breaths are making you expand and grow. But then they keep coming, stronger and faster. You become so stretched it's uncomfortable. Then it is tight and painful. You can't take any more! What will happen with the next breath?



When stress piles up, it starts an ugly cycle. Stress makes us less able to cope. Small problems, hurts or irritations seem much worse than they are. That turns up our stress level even higher.

How can you manage your stress?

Imagine you are a balloon again. You can either:



- Let some air out. You are reducing the level of stress.
- Become bigger or more elastic. You are increasing your ability to cope.

Stress management uses both of these strategies.



Stress management and you

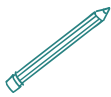
How are you doing with stress?

I handle stress well. Stress is usually not a problem for me.

I handle daily stresses okay but struggle when stress gets intense.

I feel pretty stressed out a lot of the time.

I'm having trouble coping with stress.



None of the above. Here's my situation:



Let's talk about it

- What are some stressors in your life right now?
- How would your life be different if you felt less stressed at home?
At work?
- Can you think of some kinds of stress that can have a good impact
or that can be enjoyable?



Mapping stress

When you are under stress, how does that feel? Let's think about your most common stress symptoms.

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- **Have you ever noticed where you feel stress in your body?** If so, where do you feel it? Describe the feeling.
- **Have you ever noticed that your thoughts change when you're under stress?** If so, can you think of some of the thoughts you've had? What kinds of things do you say to yourself?
- **What about your emotions?** Have you noticed what kind of emotions you feel when you are stressed?
- **How does stress affect your behaviour?** Have you noticed any ways that your behaviour might change when you are stressed?



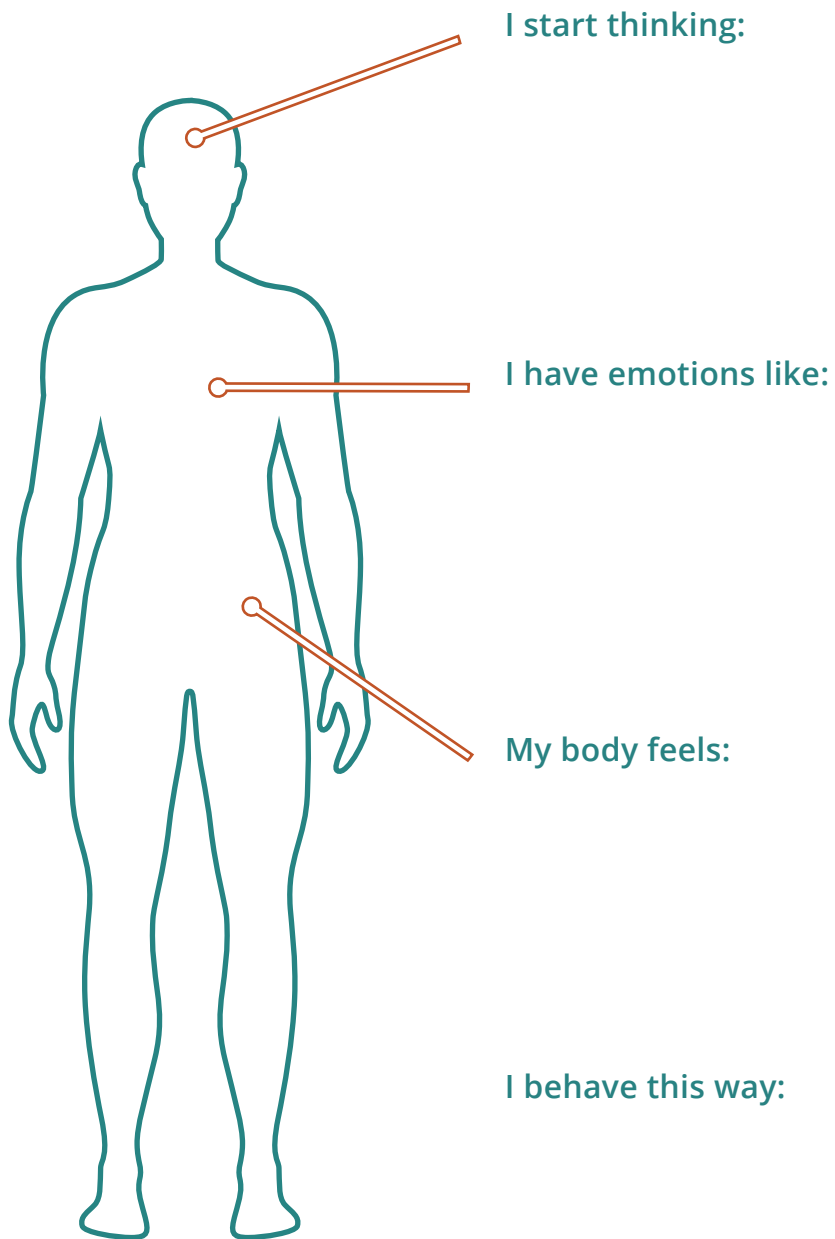
The biology of stress

Stress begins in the body. When we sense a threat, our bodies release hormones that get us ready for action. This stress response puts our bodies on "high alert" and can save our lives in an emergency.

But when severe stress continues for a long time without a break, high levels of stress hormones can be harmful. They can cause problems like stomach upset, high blood pressure, headaches, anxiety, chest pains, and memory problems.

On the figure below, write in the symptoms you have noticed in your body, in your thoughts, in your feelings, and in your behaviour.

When I'm stressed ...





Stress and mental health

The stress we experience and how we are able to cope with it has a big impact on our **mental health** and well-being. Working on your stress management is one important way to take care of your mental health.



Mental health means how well we're able to cope with the stresses of life, whether they have to do with work, family, friendships, or other relationships and events in our lives.

But sometimes the stress is too much. It can continue with no relief and get more intense. It can get to the point that we are no longer able to cope well. That is when stress may be harming our mental health. If the stress becomes very severe, we may need to reach out for help.



When you need help

How can you tell when “being a little stressed out” has grown into something more serious? Here are a few signs:

You feel anxious, angry, sad or hopeless much of the time.

You can't fall asleep or stay asleep.

You are exhausted, have aches and pains or feel sick.

You are less able to perform your regular duties at home and at work.

You can't enjoy things you normally enjoy.



Where to find help

If you are getting worried about the impact stress is having on your life:

- Talk to supportive friends or family.
- Talk with a leader you trust from your faith or cultural group.
- If your workplace has a union, talk to a union rep about your work stress.
- If your workplace has an employee wellness program, talk to a counsellor.
- Your community may offer a subsidized counselling program or support groups. 211 is a United Way service that connects people to local health and social services resources. You can call 211 on your phone to speak to an “information specialist,” or find the information online at <https://211.ca/>
- Talk to your doctor.



If you are in crisis:

- Call 911
- Go to the nearest hospital
- If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call or text 988. Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Your stress toolkit

Dealing with stress in the moment



Meet Amanita

Amanita works at a collision reporting centre. She meets with people who have been in minor car accidents and collects all the needed information and documents.

Usually she likes the job, but today is really difficult. The weather is stormy, so there are lots of accidents. Two drivers almost get into a fight right in front of her. On top of that, the computers keep crashing. The lineup of people is getting longer and longer. She hates the pressure of not being able to keep up. Her neck is so tense it's giving her a headache.

Then she loses the file she just finished that contains all the documents and information she collected for her report of an accident. She becomes frantic as she searches for it. A man comes up to the desk and says in a loud voice, "I've been waiting for ages. What's the hold-up?"

"Sit down and wait your turn like everyone else!" Amanita snaps.

She feels like she might start screaming at the next person who annoys her. "I've got to get a grip," she thinks. She takes a deep breath, apologizes to the man, and sits down to start his file. The file she thought she'd lost is on her chair! Once she has finished with his case, Amanita posts a sign: "Back in ten minutes." She needs a break!

She goes to the washroom, and then takes a few minutes to recharge. She works out the kinks in her neck. She shakes herself like a ragdoll to loosen up. Then she closes her eyes and imagines she is walking on a beach under a warm sun with the waves lapping her toes. On her way back, she reminds herself that all the drivers are stressed too. "We'll get through it together," she tells herself.



Let's talk about it

- Can you see any “early warning signs” that might have told Amanita she needed a break, before she was rude to the man?
- What strategies did she use to help herself recover and cope better?
- Can you think of any other strategies that might help with a situation like this?



Reducing stress in your life



Meet Luis

Luis works as an ambulance driver and some days are really rough. When he gets home his mind can't let go of all the trauma he's seen. He replays the scenes over and over in his head and can't relax. “It's like I'm still on high alert,” he says.

Swimming is his favourite activity for dealing with stress. When he gets home, he goes to the pool in his building and swims laps. “It's very calming,” he says. “The water washes away all the ugly and sad things I saw. I just focus on the swimming and by the time I'm done, I'm tired and way more relaxed.”



Meet Mona

Mona hardly has time to breathe. Two co-workers are sick so it's been hectic at work, and as soon as she gets home, she has to make dinner. Her daughter has a swimming lesson; her son needs help with a school project. The rest of the week is full too: parent council meeting one night, a church choir practice the next, and her son's birthday party on the weekend. That's a lot for a single mom to manage!

Mona can't change the stress at work, but she figures out how to do less at home. Choir makes her feel good, so she keeps it. But she decides to miss the council meeting. Maybe she'll order pizza that night, too. Now she has a bit of time to relax.



Let's talk about it

- Single parents don't have a partner to share the work at home, so life can become very busy. Can you think of other strategies that might ease the stress of a single parent?
- Taking our work home with us can add to our stress. Do work problems continue to bother you when you are at home? Do you have any strategies to clear your mind?
- Is there anything you can do to remove or reduce a stressor in your life?



Communication and stress

When we are too stressed, we are usually not at our best! That includes our communication skills. Under stress:

- Things that normally wouldn't bother us can really affect us.
- We may speak to people without thinking instead of considering our words carefully.



Meet Leroy

Leroy is a short-order cook. It's lunch hour, and everything is going wrong. They ran out of chicken patties. Someone dropped a tub of ketchup and it splashed all over everything. On top of that, Leroy is anxious about a meeting he has after his shift, to apply for a bank loan. He didn't sleep much last night, worrying about it.

The other cook, Trevor, is making things worse. Trevor has a habit of whistling off-key. It's loud and shrill, and it bothers Leroy. Then Leroy realizes he's just made the wrong thing. He turns to Trevor and yells, "Would you just shut up, man! I just messed up an order because of you! You never stop!"



Let's talk about it

- What do you think will happen next? How might Trevor respond?
- Trevor's whistling is not the main problem here, but it does bother Leroy. What would be a better way to ask Trevor to stop?



Tips for communicating under stress

When we speak in anger or frustration, it can block communication and make a stressful situation worse. The chart below lists some ways we might be tempted to react when we are stressed. Then it suggests a different approach that will likely work better.

Ways to react to stress

Instead of...	Try...
Waiting until you are ready to blow up to address the problem.	Speaking up before it becomes a crisis.
Blaming (for example: "You made me miss my deadline.").	Describing your feelings or problem (for example: "I was really upset when I missed that deadline.").
Accusing (for example: "You always leave the kitchen a mess.").	Problem solving (for example: "Can we work out some ground rules to keep the kitchen clean?").
Yelling, interrupting, name-calling.	Making an extra effort to listen and speak with respect.
Raising an ongoing problem in the middle of a high-stress time.	Waiting until things are calmer and there's time to talk it over.
Blurting out the first thing that comes to mind.	Taking a deep breath and thinking about how to say it first.



Let's talk about it

- What have you noticed about the way people communicate when they are stressed?
- Can you think of a situation you've been in where better communication would have helped?



Time management and stress

Time pressure is one of the main stressors of today's world, especially for working parents. Sometimes we really don't have enough time for all we need to do. But often, better **time management** can help reduce the stress.



Time management is making decisions about how you spend your time.

Prioritizing is figuring out which tasks are the most important and making sure they get done first.



Setting priorities

Focusing your time on what's most important is key to good time management. We all have time wasters that eat up a surprising amount of our day.

One way of figuring out what to do first is to ask yourself the following questions:

- Will completing the task have an **impact** on the company, co-workers or customers? If so, it's probably **important**.
- Will there be a **bad consequence** if the task is not completed? If so, it's **important**.
- Does the task need to be completed by a **certain time**, and is the deadline soon? If so, the task is **urgent**.

Tasks that are both important and urgent will usually be your top priority.



Let's talk about it

- Is time a source of stress for you? Can you share an example?
- What are some strategies you use to manage your time? Create a list with your group.
- How can we fit in time to rest and recharge?



If time management is a big challenge for you, the *UP Skills for Work* workbook on Time Management will help you improve this skill.

Your stress toolkit

One of the keys to good stress management is knowing yourself. It's about learning what stress strategies work best for you. For example, are you a person who feels renewed after spending time with a group of friends, or do you recharge better with some alone time? Here are some strategies many people find helpful. Some you can do in the moment. Others you can do later in the day to calm down your stress response. Which stress busters are you going to try?

Stress busters

Stress buster	Why it works	Ways to do it
Take a break	It gives your stress response a rest and allows it to calm down.	Do something that takes your mind away from the stress, like having a coffee with a friend or going for a walk. If there's no time for a full break, try to take a "mini-break" instead. Close your eyes and do the breathing exercise you learned on page 3. Stand up and stretch or run on the spot.
Laugh	Humour helps us get rid of tension, helps us take a more positive view, and releases hormones that help us feel good.	Be open to the funny side of stressful times, and share them with friends or co-workers. Opt for a comedy when you're home in front of the TV.
Get some exercise	Physical activity is a great stress buster. It reduces the level of stress hormones in your blood, and releases chemicals that make you feel good.	Walk the dog, play outside with your kid, go for a run...

Stress busters

Stress buster	Why it works	Ways to do it
Think differently	The way we think about stress can either help us or make things worse. Ideas like “I’ll never get to the end of this,” or “I can’t stand this” make things seem worse than they really are!	With practice we can learn to interrupt those ideas, and replace them with more positive thoughts, like “This is hard, but I’ll get through it,” or “I’m not very fast at this now, but with practice I’ll get better.”
Find a friend	Getting support from a friend or colleague is one of the best ways to ease stress. Just talking to someone who cares and is nice to you often calms us down and helps us feel better.	Go for coffee with a co-worker who understands. Call a family member when you get home. Ask your partner or a good friend if you can share your feelings and stress with them.
“Centering” activities	Yoga and tai chi combine physical activity, deep breathing, relaxation and exercise. So they are great for helping us recover from stress. Meditation and mindfulness practices help us clear our mind of worries and feel more peaceful.	Take a course or find free lessons on the Internet.

Stress busters

Stress buster	Why it works	Ways to do it
Do something you enjoy	Hobbies and leisure activities are more than just fun. They boost our well-being and help us recover from stress.	There are activities to match every interest and budget. Experiment to see what you enjoy!
Get into nature	Simply being outdoors in a natural place like a forest is soothing and increases our well-being. The Japanese call it “forest bathing.”	Find out what’s available in your area. Most cities have woodland parks where you can have a quiet walk.
Self-care	Looking after yourself is not selfish. It will help you keep going and stay healthy.	In a way, this whole list is about self-care. But self-care is also a mindset or habit. Do you look after everyone else ahead of yourself? Try planning some time that’s just for you.

If you would like to make an online, printable action plan for dealing with one or more types of stress in your life, try out the free tool at stresstrategies.ca.



Did you know? While it might seem like a drink will help ease stress, in the long term, it often leads to more stress. Alcohol causes the release of the same hormones that cause the stress response. So it can make us feel worse and less able to cope.



Congratulations!

You've completed the *UP Skills for Work Stress Management* workbook.

You've taken a step in building skills for learning, work, and life.

What did you learn about your stress management skills? What would you like to improve?

For the last activity, we hope you will make a **pledge** to continue building your stress management skills.



Skill words

A **pledge** is a serious promise to yourself or to others.

The pledge can be personal, or you can share it with others.

My pledge

I pledge to work on my stress management skills by:

Sometimes a pledge needs an **action plan**: a list of steps you'll take to make your pledge happen.

My action plan

What do I need to do first?

Who will support me?

How will I overcome setbacks and obstacles?