Stress Awareness Week

What is Stress?

"People are disturbed not by a thing, but by their perception of a thing." — Epictetus

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work." - HSE

Definition of Stress

There has been no definition of stress that everyone accepts. Therefore, it's difficult to measure stress if there is no agreement on what the definition of stress should be.

People have very different ideas with respect to their definition of stress. Probably the most common is, "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension". Another popular definition of stress is, "a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to access and use."

Clearly then a stressor for one person may just be a motivator for another?

Most people consider the definition of stress to be something that causes distress. However, stress is not always harmful since increased stress results in increased productivity. A definition of stress should also embrace this type of healthy stress, which is usually ignored when you ask someone about their definition of stress.

The definition of stress for most people tends to focus on the negative feelings and emotions it produces. Almost every definition of stress also discusses certain resultant physical, physiological or biochemical responses that are experienced or observed.

Any definition of stress should also include good stress, or eustress. For example, winning a race or election is just as stressful as losing, or more so. A passionate kiss and contemplating what might follow is stressful, but hardly the same as having root canal work. Any definition of stress should similarly explain the difference between eustress and distress.

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Building Personal Resilience

Know your A-B-C

Something happens   -   We think about it   -   We respond.

To help us, let's think of it as learning our ABC's:

A. Something bad happens (*Adversity)*
B. our explanation about why the situation happened (*Beliefs*)
C. the feelings and behaviours that our belief causes. (*Consequences*)

Caught in a traffic jam, one person will honk the horn in anger, another will turn on some quiet music and just sit and wait, while still another will be flooded with anxiety about being late. Why do people have different reactions to adversity and stress?

Sometimes our beliefs about a situation are not accurate, and our reactions undermine resilient responses.

So why are the ABC's so important: The B/C connections

Using B-C connections can help us identify our beliefs. If we know what our emotional reactions are, we can identify what types of beliefs we may have, examples of this are:-

Thoughts

- Feeling attacked, our rights violated
- Loss or loss of self worth
- Future threat
- Comparing yourself others negatively
- Hurting someone else

Feelings

- Anger
- Sadness
- Fear, anxiety
- Embarrassment
- Guilt

The beliefs (our thinking) matter because they will shape the intensity of our feelings and what we do.

When we are more resilient we are not saying we don't have strong feelings but that we are able to regulate and control them to respond to situations in ways that work better for us.

We can use the ABC model to identify our beliefs and, if necessary, challenge whether they are true.

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