

Common Causes of Stress in Healthcare

Trauma

A traumatic injury

Due to the experience of or exposure to intense injury, horrific or gruesome experiences, or death.

Loss

A grief injury

Due to the loss of people, things or parts of oneself.

Inner Conflict

A moral injury

Due to behaviors or the witnessing of behaviors that violate moral values.

Wear and Tear

A fatigue injury

Due to the accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery.

The Stress Continuum Simplified

Thriving <i>(Adaptive Coping, Effective Functioning)</i>	Reacting (Mild Distress)	Struggling (Persistent Distress)	Unwell (Unresolved Distress)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In control of your thoughts & actions• Feel motivated and competent to do your work• Mind and body are calm & steady	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May feel mildly anxious, irritable or sad• May feel temporarily unmotivated, unfocused or distracted• May experience transient physical symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, headaches or stomach upset	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less in control of your thoughts & feelings• May feel intense negative emotions like fear, sadness, rage• May use drugs or alcohol to numb intense feelings• May avoid friends & family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experiencing symptoms of stress that do not resolve• May feel unable to do your job or interact positively with friends or family• May be experiencing panic attacks, loss of control, nightmares, or flashbacks• May be at risk for developing dependency on drugs & alcohol and for developing suicidal behavior

Stress Continuum Model

READY (Green)	REACTING (Yellow)	INJURED (Orange)	ILL (Red)
<p>DEFINITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal functioning Adaptive growth Wellness <p>FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one's best Well-trained and prepared In control Physically, mentally and spiritually fit Mission-focused Motivated Calm and steady Having fun Behaving ethically 	<p>DEFINITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mild and transient distress or impairment Always goes away Low risk <p>CAUSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any stressor <p>FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling irritable, anxious or down Loss of motivation Loss of focus Difficulty sleeping Muscle tension or other physical changes Not having fun 	<p>DEFINITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More severe and persistent distress or impairment Leaves a scar Higher risk <p>CAUSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life threat Loss Moral injury Wear and tear <p>FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of control Panic, rage or depression No longer feeling like normal self Excessive guilt, shame or blame Misconduct 	<p>DEFINITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical mental disorder Unhealed stress injury causing life impairment <p>TYPES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTSD Depression Anxiety Substance use disorders <p>FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symptoms persist and worsen over time Severe distress or social or occupational impairment

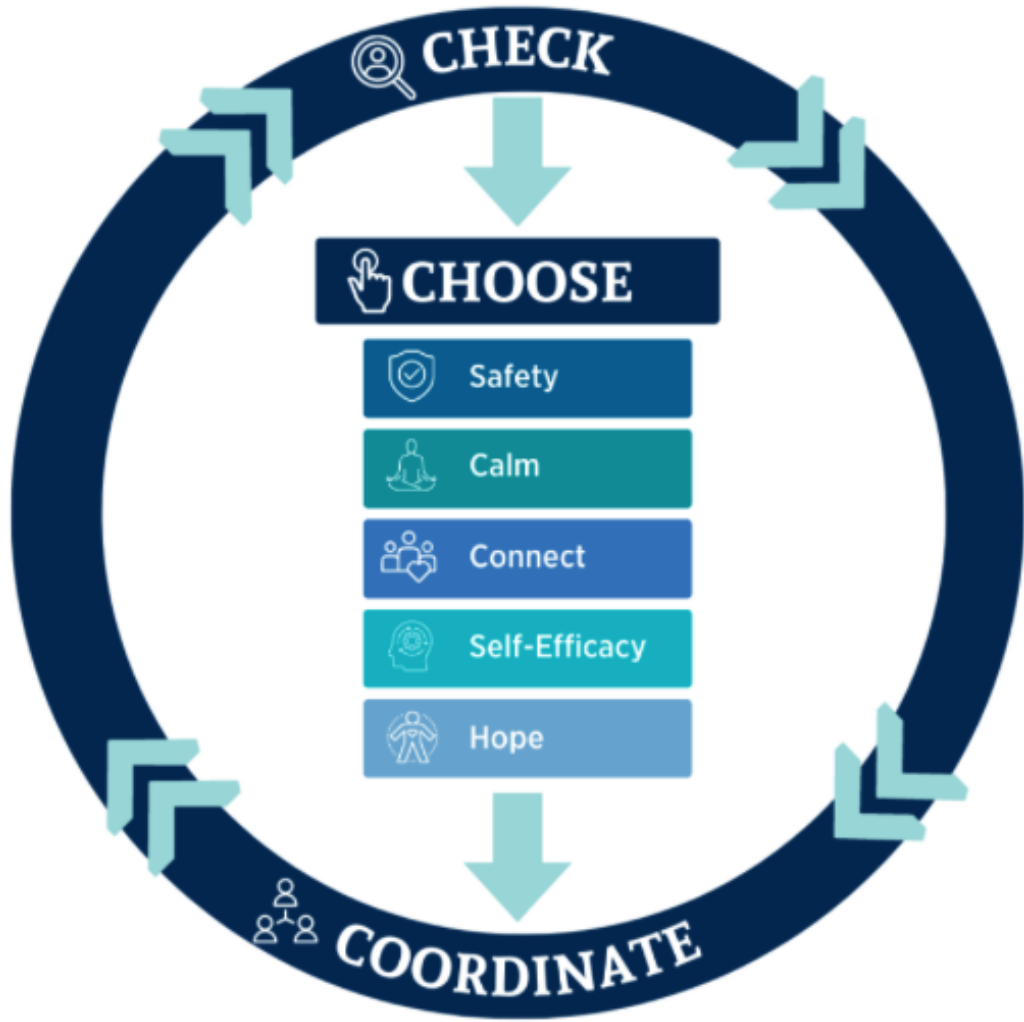
Stress Continuum Check In Scale

Thriving “I got this”	Surviving “Something isn’t right”	Struggling “I can’t keep this up”	In Crisis “I can’t survive this”
Calm and steady with minor mood fluctuations	Nervousness, sadness, increased mood fluctuations	Persistent fear, panic, anxiety, anger, hopelessness and sadness	Disabling distress and loss of functioning
Able to take things is stride	More easily overwhelmed or irritated	Exhaustion	Nightmares or flashbacks
Consistent performance	Inconsistent performance	Poor performance and difficulty making decision and focusing	Unable to fall or stay asleep, carless mistakes, or inability to focus
Able to take feedback and to adjust to changes in plans	Increased need for control and difficulty adjusting to changes	Avoiding interactions with family, friends, and others	Intrusive thoughts
Able to focus	Trouble sleeping or eating	Fatigue, aches and pains	Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
Able to communicate effectively	Activities and relationships are not as enjoyable or interesting and may be stressful	Restlessness and disturbed sleep	Easily enraged or aggressive, withdrawal from relationships
Normal sleep patterns and appetite	Muscle tension, low energy, headaches	Self-medicating with substances, food or other numbing activities	Dependence on substances or other numbing activities

◆ Orange Zone Indicators



- To recognize those who need help, look for the three Orange Zone Indicators:
- Recent Stressor Events
- Distress
- Changes in Functioning



The 2 Core Actions and 5 Key Factors

The Core Actions of Stress First Aid – **Check** and **Coordinate** – are the foundation for any supportive measures taken. These actions are continuously in play when implementing the Stress First Aid Model. Once you have checked in with a distressed colleague, then you can coordinate your next action and use the evidence-informed **Key Factors** to determine your next step. These include:

1. **Safety**
2. **Calm**
3. **Connect**
4. **Self-Efficacy**
5. **Hope**

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<p>SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay informed Face facts Set boundaries <p>CALM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change expectations Be patient Keep balanced <p>CONNECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apart But Connected <p>SELF-EFFICACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize what to expend energy on Plan and adapt Focus on prevailing Problem solve Make routines Seek mentoring/ training <p>HOPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live by values Find gratitude Faith / philosophy 	<p>SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a marathon approach Build healthy habits Set boundaries <p>CALM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be disciplined about taking breaks Identify unhelpful thoughts Practice helpful thoughts Focus on what you can control <p>CONNECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek specific support <p>SELF-EFFICACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build resilience skills <p>HOPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make time to reflect Seek mentoring / support 	<p>SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get help with setting routines and boundaries <p>CALM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest and recuperate Build tiny health habits <p>CONNECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask for targeted or sustained support <p>SELF-EFFICACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify unhelpful ruts Tackle one issue at a time <p>HOPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask for assistance in reframing unhelpful thoughts Remind yourself that you don't need to be perfect 	<p>SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make small positive behavior changes <p>CALM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pause...take a time out Distance from stressor to reduce agitation <p>CONNECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get formal behavioral health treatment Find a mentor <p>SELF-EFFICACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regain lost ground Rehabilitate as you would a physical injury <p>HOPE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconnect with values

Stress Indicators

Physical

- Aches and pains
- Weight loss/gain
- Indigestion/digestive issues
- Sleep disruption/sleeplessness
- Immune system problems
- Medical symptoms of undetermined cause
- Stress induced seizures
- Increased use of sick leave

Emotional

- Emotional extremes
- Anxiety/panic attacks
- Crying easily or unexpectedly
- Depression
- Short temper
- Frustration
- Increased drinking
- Giving up
- Hypervigilance

Mental

- Loss of interest in things that once mattered
- Decrease in the quality of work/productivity
- Decreased motivation
- Decreased patience
- Increased work errors
- Increased lateness/absenteeism
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted thinking
- Reduced self-awareness
- Trouble keeping up with workload

Social

- Marital/partnership stress
- Increased isolation
- Increased complaining
- Less tolerance
- Irritability / impatience / intolerance
- Social engagement with others dropping off
- Closed off body language
- Reduced interpersonal boundaries
- Less volunteerism
- Uncharacteristic negative changes in social behavior

Double Edged Sword of Values and Ideals

Strength	Guiding Ideal	Vulnerability
Placing the welfare of others above one's own welfare	Selflessness	Not seeking help for health problems because personal health is not a priority
Commitment to helping patients heal and supporting their families	Loyalty	Guilt and complicated grief after perceived failure or loss
Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint	Stoicism	Not aware of or acknowledging significant symptoms, impact or suffering (minimization of impact)
Following an internal moral compass to choose "right" over "wrong"	Moral Code	Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code
Becoming the best and most effective professional possible	Excellence	Feeling ashamed; denial or minimization of imperfections that impede asking for help or guidance

Reference

Watson, P., & Westphal, R.J. (2020). *Stress First Aid for Health Care Workers*. National Center for PTSD. Available on: www.ptsd.va.gov.