



Stress Planning - Opening Exercise – “**Stressing the Truth**”

Background –

Quite often when you ask someone who regularly uses a substance (such as cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, etc.) about the reasons why they use, one of the most common answers is: “It helps me relax” or “It helps me when I feel stressed”

Therefore, when someone is working on a substance use issue, quite often a common question is: “What am I supposed to do when I feel stress if I can’t use?” Stress can often trigger urges to use

“Stressing the Truth” - Activity

Directions: Each person in the group takes turns going one at a time. When it is someone’s turn that person should pick a category and let the group know their choice. Afterward, that person should tell a story to the group about a stressful thing that happened to them related to that category. If possible, make the story related to substance use/abuse and stress. The person has the choice to tell a true story or make up a fictional one. Once the story is over, the rest of the group should one by one choose whether or not they thought the story was true or a lie. Finally, the person who told the story should reveal whether or not the story was in fact true or a lie. If the story was a lie, then the person gets a point for every person that they fooled. If the story was true, the person gets two points for every person they fooled.

Example:

Person #1 chooses the category “*Family*” then tells the following story:

“I grew up with four older brothers and they used to tease me about my looks because I was a late bloomer growing up and I was very small and skinny. Since I have become an adult they haven’t teased me in years but I still get really anxious and stressed out whenever I am around two or more of my brothers at the same time, so for years I would get high before family functions to try to deal with the stress”

The group then votes and 4 people guess the story is a lie and 6 people guess it is true. Person #1 reveals that the story is true and gets 8 points (2 points for the 4 people who guessed wrong)

Categories:

Family	Work	Drugs/Alcohol	Police/Court/Jail	Crisis/Disasters
School	Insecurities	Bad News	Money	Lost (Lost something or got lost)
Fears	Confusion	Out of time	Friends	Wrong place-wrong time
Health	Big mistake	Test/Competition	Embarrassment	Counselor’s Choice

(The purpose of this game is to serve as an ice breaker and to get people talking about stress and substance abuse)



Stress Planning

We have all heard of stress management. Stress management focuses primarily on dealing with stress once we experience it. In reality, stress management is only a part of the story when it comes to learning to effectively deal with stress. Stress planning actually should come *before* stress management. Stress planning is more proactive as it focuses on preparing for stress before it happens. Stress planning involves two things (A and B) that should take place ahead of time, before we even feel stress.

- A. **Identify Avoidable Stressors** - Try to organize your life to prevent unnecessary or avoidable stress
- B. **Self-Care** – Being proactive in order to prepare yourself mentally and physically for stress

A -Identify avoidable stressors – What situations stress you out? (I.e. traffic, long lines, certain people, etc.) Which ones are avoidable or preventable? Fill out the following list of your personal stressors and then try to measure how avoidable these stressors are for you using the following scale:

- 1 – Easy to avoid if I try
- 2 – Sometimes avoidable
- 3 – Occasionally avoidable (Once in a while)
- 4 – Unavoidable – (I will have to face this)

My Stressors (Things and Situations that Trigger Stress)	Avoidability Score (1-4)
<i>Dealing with my mother-in-law's criticism and nagging</i>	4
<i>Getting to work late because of traffic</i>	3

Discuss your stressors from your grid as a group. Focus on stress that is avoidable or preventable



Now Consider: What can you start to do in order avoid some of the stress you have in your life?
(For example, “I will start waking up earlier and leaving earlier to avoid being late to work)

Some Suggestions for Preventing Stress Ahead of Time: (Check all that apply in your situation)

- Know your limits and stay within them (time, money, etc.)
- Be assertive – (Know when to say “No!!”)
- Avoid procrastination (I’ll do it tomorrow)
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it (Don’t always try to do everything yourself)
- Simplify – Can you simplify your life to reduce stress?
- Re-organize – Can you rearrange your life to make it less stressful?
- Re-prioritize - Are you putting first things first or are you letting less important things get in the way?

Discuss – Which of the above do you need to work on? How?

B. Self-Care – Being proactive in order to prepare yourself mentally and physically for stress

Discuss – What do you do now to take care of yourself and prepare yourself for the stresses of life?

Suggestions for Self Care: (Check all that apply as areas you need to work on)

- Recognize: Are you aware of when you are getting stressed out? Do you know your warning signs?
- Balance work, recreation, and rest
- Healthy diet and nutrition
- Exercise
- Plan healthy escapes and relaxation time
- Get proper sleep
- Avoid Caffeine, Nicotine, and Substance Abuse
- Other ideas? _____

What do you need to do in order to prepare yourself to better handle stress mentally and physically?

Stress Planning Conclusion: In summary - Come up with at least three or four solid things you can start doing in the near future to try to plan to avoid or prevent stress:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.