STRESS AND OUR PERCEPTIONS

Presented by
Cigna Employee Assistance Program
SEMINAR GOALS

- Explore the relationship between stress and perception
- Determine whether your perception of control is more internal or external
- Realize you have the ability to change your perception of control
- Identify self-defeating thoughts
- Gain skills to change negative thought patterns
- Know the benefits of Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Stress Perception

- Our problems
- Our relationships
- Our world
- Ourselves
WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Others are:

I was lucky to get that job
I just can’t catch a break

I am:

I worked hard to get that job
It has been a rough week, but I know I can turn it around
Who is in charge?

- I feel like I usually am
- I feel like others usually are
SOURCE OF CONTROL

EXTERNAL

- You feel like you don’t have control over what happens to you
- You feel stressed because it seems you can’t change outcomes
- You may accept change as inevitable
- Your reactions are influenced by others
SOURCE OF CONTROL

INTERNAL

- You feel like you have control in your life
- You are able to cope well with high pressure situations
- You take responsibility / credit for your actions
- You are not easily influenced by others
Changing your perception of control

- How we perceive control can be relearned
- Environment may play a role
- Knowing when to give up or take control can reduce stress
Letting go

- Ask for help or delegate tasks
- Allow yourself to say “no”
- Put things into perspective
- Don't blame yourself for things you can't control
CHANGING YOUR PERCEPTION

Taking control
• Give yourself credit
• Own your actions
• Consider your needs
• Let others know your needs
POLL 2

Which type of negative thinking do you experience most frequently?

• All or nothing thinking
• Playing the blame game
• Making a big deal out of small issues
• Believing that nothing ever works out
• None of these
IDENTIFY SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

• Holding pre-conceived notions
• Having an all or nothing attitude
• Making a big deal out of small issues
IDENTIFY SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

- Playing the blame game
- Focusing only on the negative
- Drawing emotional conclusions
- Believing nothing will work out
BUILDING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

Shift your thinking
• Evaluate the evidence to support your beliefs
• Consider other explanations for the situation
• Set realistic expectations
• Don’t make hasty judgments
• Try to reframe your situation
BUILDING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

Be your own ally
- Be kind to yourself
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Believe in yourself
- Use your imagination
- Smile until you mean it
- Be optimistic
“My life is out of control.”
“My life will feel out of control until this task is done, and that is OK.”

“I feel like a fool for forgetting that meeting.”
“I am so busy, no wonder I forgot the meeting. I can’t be so hard on myself.”
MOVES TO SUPPORT YOUR POSITIVE THINKING

- Journal
- Rely on others
- Get moving
- Stop and smell the roses
- Take care of yourself
Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass
It's about learning how to dance in the rain

— Author Unknown
Benefits of Employee Assistance Program

**EAP**

- Face to face sessions
- Confidential
- Prepaid
- Unlimited telephonic consultation
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Household benefit
- Work/Life support such as eldercare, childcare and pet care
- Financial services
- Legal services

*Benefits vary by employer. Please check with your HR for your specific EAP benefits.*
REFERENCES

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Your Company:

Seminar: Stress and Our Perceptions

Please complete this form and fax it to 1.952.996.2702, or email it to eshcomments@cigna.com.

Please state your agreement/disagreement with the following statement using this scale.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2 Agree</th>
<th>3 Disagree</th>
<th>4 Strongly Disagree</th>
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1. Overall I was satisfied with the seminar presentation. 1 2 3 4

2. Seminar Content:
   a. The information I received was helpful. 1 2 3 4

3. Speaker Evaluation:
   a. The speaker was knowledgeable and presented the information clearly. 1 2 3 4

Suggestions that would improve the content/delivery of the seminar:

What other seminar topics would interest you?
Stress and Our Perceptions
Who is in Charge of Your Life?

Do you feel that you are in charge of your life? Do you feel you have control and are responsible for shaping the events that impact you? Or do you believe others are in charge? That your life is guided by circumstances outside of you? Circumstances you cannot control? Fill in the circles next to the statements that describe you.

Internal sources of control

- I believe that what happens in my life is the result of my own actions.
- I believe that I am responsible for my own actions and do not let other’s opinions easily influence my decisions.
- I think that success is the result of hard work.
- I believe that one person can make a difference.

External sources of control

- I think that many things that happen in life are the result of luck.
- I believe the choices and actions of others can determine what happens in my life and I may not be able to influence that outcome.
- I think that no matter how hard you work, what is meant to happen will happen.
- I believe that many things in my life turned out the way they have because I was in the right place at the right time.

So what does it all mean?

Internal Source of control
People who have an internal source of control tend to cope with high-pressure situations better because they feel they have the ability to control the outcome of events. Having this sense of control may help these individuals feel less stressed. Additionally, “internal” people are more likely to take responsibility for their actions and aren’t easily influenced by the opinions of others.

External source of Control
Feeling that you don’t have control of events in your life can increase stress for some people. “External” people are more likely to pay attention to and be influenced by other people’s actions and opinions.

These differences in the way people view control can affect their reactions. It may impact the way they determine their options and manage the curve balls of life.
Shifting Your Perception of Control

The amount of control you feel you have over what happens in your life is largely learned. As a result, it can change. You may already notice that your perception of control changes in different environments – for example, at work vs. at home. Finding a healthy balance between internal and external sources of control will help you to deal with stressful situations in an effective way. How can you do that? It begins by understanding when to accept circumstances as they are and when you need to step up and take control.

Letting go of control:
• **Allow yourself to rely on others.** Always trying to take control of every situation isn’t good for your health. In fact, being over-controlling and anxious can be as stressful as feeling you have no control at all. If this sounds familiar, try letting go a little more and relaxing your control. For example, ask for help or delegate tasks at work if you are in a position to do so. Allow yourself to say “no” to requests that don’t impact your job or daily life.

• **Put things into perspective.** Look at the big picture, does it really matter if the bed isn’t made or the dishes in the sink aren’t done? Will these events ultimately change the outcome of your day or will your perspective on these small tasks influence your day?

• **Don’t blame yourself for things you can’t control.** Release yourself from responsibility for things you have no control over.

Tips for increasing control:
• **Give yourself credit.** For example, did you really get that promotion because you were just lucky, or is it more likely that you are actually good at your job? What would you say to a friend who discounted their success as being due to luck or the actions of others? Practice catching yourself when you don’t take credit. Try to think of at least one thing that you did that influenced the outcome.

• **Own your actions.** Think also about what role your actions may have played in a negative outcome. For example, if you don’t leave enough time to get somewhere and are late as a result, recognize that instead of blaming it on traffic. Learning to put yourself into the equation will help you develop your sense of internal control.

• **Consider your needs.** What do you want to achieve and how are you going to get it? Make a plan for how you can be the one to make that happen. Build slowly from small steps to larger ones. For example, if you long to buy a house, but feel at the mercy of your credit rating, start working on fixing that. You may need to meet with a credit counselor and start making moves to repair your credit, before you can actually take the step of looking for your new home.

• **Let others know what your needs and feelings are.** Work on communicating what you need. Start by sharing your ideas and plans with those that support you.

Whatever type of person you are, it’s important to recognize how you interpret and respond to certain situations and to know that you have the ability to change your response.
There are several ways to challenge self-defeating thoughts. When you find yourself thinking negatively, try some of the following suggestions to help get you back on track to more positive ways of thinking.

**Things to keep in mind:**
- Most automatic thoughts—thoughts that come to mind instantly—have a *bit* of truth to them.
- *Negative* automatic thoughts usually fall into the *exaggerated, all-or-nothing* category.
- It is possible to learn to *talk back* to self-defeating automatic thoughts, just like learning any other new skill.
- Reserve judgment about the effectiveness of the following technique until you have tried it for at least a month.

**The technique:**
Identify and replace negative, automatic thoughts with alternative, balanced thoughts.

**Example 1:** Your *automatic thought*: “My life is out of control. I can’t live like this.”
An *possible counter thought*: “My life will feel out of control until this task is done and that’s “O.K.”

**Example 2:** Your *automatic thought*: “I feel like a fool for forgetting that meeting.”
An *possible counter thought*: “I’m so busy; no wonder I forgot the meeting. I can’t be so hard on myself. I will set a reminder for myself next time so I won’t forget again.”

**Example 3:** (Think of your own example)
Your *automatic thought:*

______________________________________________________________
A *possible counter thought:*

______________________________________________________________

The next time a stressful situation triggers your negative thoughts, take time to listen to your internal self-talk. Remind yourself that we have a choice about how we think about events in our lives. This technique may feel mechanical and slow at first, but the more you practice, the easier and more automatic it will become.

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