

Stress to Strength Workbook



Designed and produced by the Involvement, Recovery and Wellness Centre

Please contact 01625 505647 for further information

Helping people to be **the best they can be**



References

Page 1 image www.pixabay.com

Page 4 image www.pixabay.com

Page 6 NHS Inform (2019) and Harvard University (2019) and <https://theconversation.com/the-psychology-of-roller-coasters-99166>

Page 7 www.reachout.com

Page 8 Hanson 2018 and Mental Health Foundation 2019 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

Page 9 Stress to strength model adapted from 2005 The Resiliency Advantage Disruptive change model Al Siebert – The Resiliency Centre and from Dr Martin Seligman – ABCDE Model

Page 10 Mental Health Foundation 2019 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

Page 11 <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/> and Mental Health Foundation 2019 <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

Page 13 <http://www.housingworkers.org.uk/page/66/stress-aware.html>

Page 14 NHS 2019, Mental Health Foundation (2019), Kristen Neff Self Compassion

Page 15-16 Adapted from University of Colorado, 2019 at URL:<https://www.colorado.edu/law/25-quick-ways-reduce-stress>

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References

Page 20 Hanson 2018 and Survivor Personality Siebert 2005

Page 22 MIND Stress guide https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4667/how-to-manage-stress_2015.pdf and Mental Health Foundation 2017; picture www.pixabay.com

Page 23 www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUUDlbyfAZw

Page 24-26 Adapted from material by Dr Amit Sood, Professor of Medicine Executive Director of Global Centre for Resiliency and Wellbeing (2019) Dr Kristen Neff (2019) Mindful Self-Compassion workbook

Images taken from: Video on 'Resilience Living – Increase your inner strength' by Dr Amit Sood, Professor of Medicine at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUUDlbyfAZw> and Edublogs <https://arnostaff.edublogs.org/>

Page 23 Stress to strength model adapted from 2005 The Resiliency Advantage Disruptive change model Al Siebert – The Resiliency Centre

Welcome

We're glad you're here

This workbook can be used on its own or to refresh your skills after completing our Stress to Strength workshop. It can be completed on your own or with someone you trust such as a healthcare professional, friend or family member.

If you feel things are getting worse when you are using this workbook, please get in touch with your mental health team or your GP. If you feel you are in crisis, please call the CWP crisis line number which is 0800 145 6485 (for residents of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Wirral, of all ages).



What is stress?

What does stress mean to you? Here are some examples from staff and people who use our services of what stress means to them.



This workbook will outline how stress feels, what happens when the body is under stress and techniques to handle stress.

Use the area below to write down what stress means to you.

What is stress?

Stress can feel different from one person to the next, even if they are in exactly the same situation. Take the example of being on a rollercoaster. For some people this brings positive emotions, for others this brings negative emotions. Each person on the ride will perceive it differently.

Stress is usually seen as negative, however it can sometimes be positive in the short term and help you to be more alert when you need to be. However, it is usually only beneficial if short-lived and over the long term can contribute to health conditions.

General Definition of Unhealthy Stress

‘Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure which turns into stress when you feel unable to cope.

People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else.’

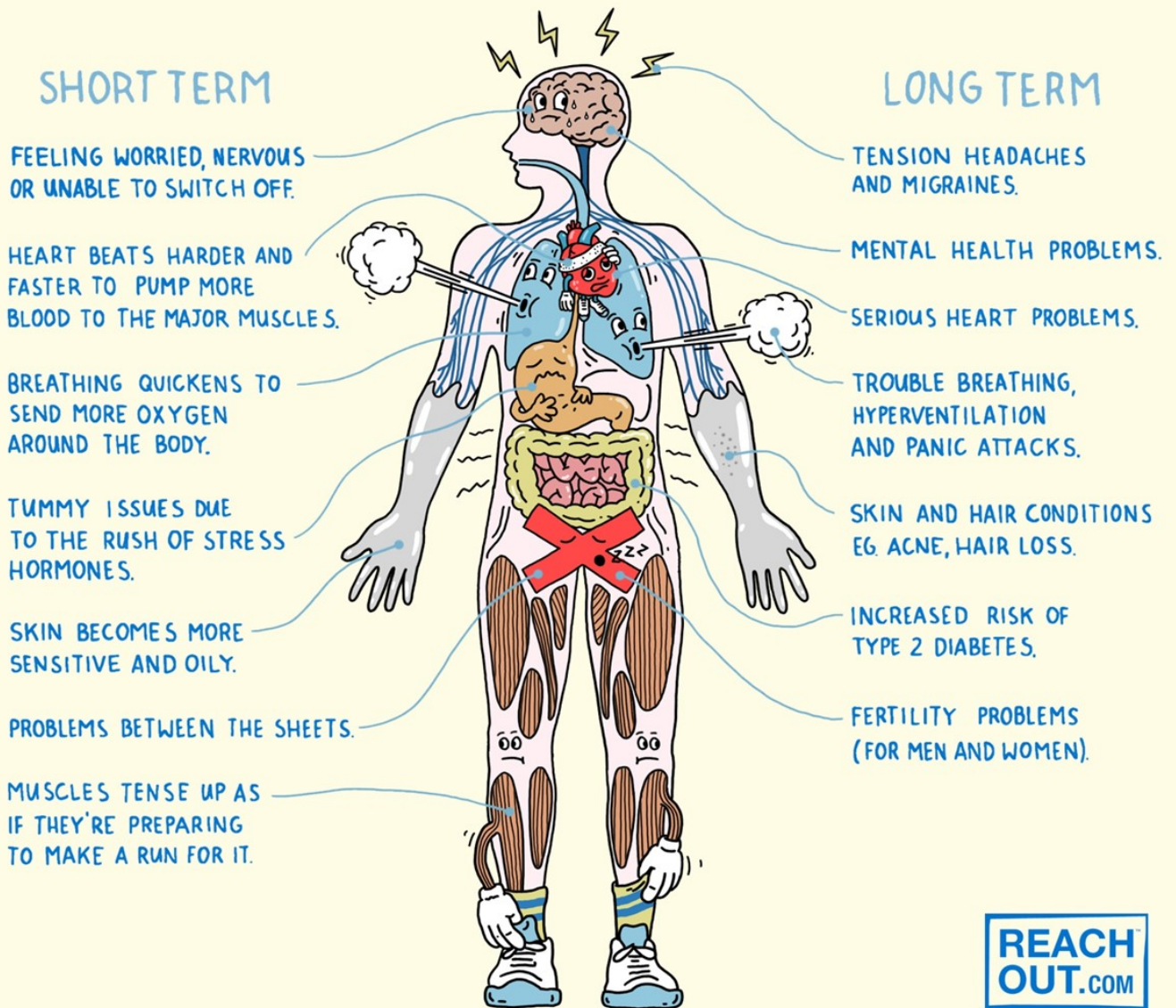
(NHS Inform 2019)

‘Stress is how you as an individual respond to life events/situations’

(Harvard University, 2019)

What is stress?

WHAT STRESS DOES TO THE BODY



Stress can contribute to health problems, but it is possible to understand and handle the stress cycle and to feel better when feeling stressed.

Do you recognise any of these short or long terms symptoms of stress?

What is stress?

How Stress affects your Mental and Physical Health

There are 2 Types of - 'Stress Response'



1. Acute Stress

– short-term stress –
e.g. a few seconds,
minutes, hours...



2. Chronic Stress –

– long-term stress – e.g.
over four hours, months,
years....

NHS

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When someone responds to stress, they can have a short-lived acute response or a longer term chronic response to stress. Usually when there is a quick period of stress, this is a period of acute stress. However if we have lots of periods of acute stress, they build up and become chronic stress, where our threat systems are activated more often.

Chronic stress can cause stress-related illness and it is really important to learn to manage this to feel better and be healthier.

Stress can make mental health problems worse and mental health problems can be stress triggers in themselves, but the opposite is also true, that where stress is managed, this can improve your mental health.

How to respond to stress?

This workbook will take you through the process below to look at one way of managing stress better. You will be able to look at each step and see what this means for you.



How to go from stress to strength

Many things can lead to stress. Sometimes these can be negative life events, but even positive life events such as moving to a better house or getting a promotion can be sources of stress (Mental Health Foundation 2019). Some of the most common stress triggers are:

- Experiencing something new or unexpected
- Experiencing something that threatens your feeling of self or safety
- Feeling that you have little control over a situation

Step 1 – Identify stress triggers

Use the box below to think about some of the triggers of your stress. These will be used in the workbook later. Are there any one-off events that occupy your mind a lot, or are there any events that occur frequently that are stressful?

How to go from stress to strength

Step 2 – Recognise how you think/feel/act and consequences when stressed

How you may feel emotionally

- overwhelmed
- irritable and "wound up"
- [anxious](#) or fearful
- lacking in [self-esteem](#)



How you may feel mentally

- racing thoughts
- constant worrying
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty making decisions

How you may feel physically

- [headaches](#)
- muscle tension or pain
- [dizziness](#)
- [sleep problems](#)
- feeling [tired all the time](#)
- eating too much or too little

How you may behave

- Drinking, smoking, eating more
- snapping at people
- avoiding things or people you are having problems with

Everyone reacts to stress differently. This reaction can happen very fast and combine into one big stress reaction.

It can be a good idea with practice to slow down and recognise each element of the stress reaction. This will mean that you will be able to understand yourself better in a stress reaction and be able to choose a better response if you need to.

Can you identify any of your own stress reactions in the diagram above? Are there any others that you have that are not on the diagram? Sometimes it can be helpful to ask someone close to you whether they have noticed any changes that might not be so obvious to you.

How to go from stress to strength

Here is an example. Try filling in your own below for different stress triggers.



How do you think?	How do you feel?	How do you act?	What are the consequences?
oh no, I'm late, I am never going to get there on time, what an idiot I am, why didn't I get up earlier, why do I always do this?	Stressed, worried, sick, panicky, racing head, heart beating fast, hot sweaty,	I rush, grab my things, drive fast, run for the train,	I will be late, I trip up, forget things, bang my head, miss the train, drive too fast, have a panic attack, get angry, irritable, beat myself up

How do you think?	How do you feel?	How do you act?	What are the consequences?

How do you think?	How do you feel?	How do you act?	What are the consequences?

You can also find another version of this on the next page or you can keep a simple log on paper or on your phone. Use what works for you.

How to go from stress to strength



Stress Diary

Date	<i>10th Sep</i>				
Where was I?	<i>Eg work</i>				
What was I doing?	<i>Eg working on report</i>				
Who was I with?	<i>Manager arrived</i>				
How did I feel?	<i>worried</i>				
What was I thinking?	<i>I cant do this. They'll sack me.</i>				
What did I start doing?	<i>Bitting nails, restarted report</i>				
What happened Physicially	<i>Breathing faster, Speaking fast, Tense muscles</i>				
Stress Rating 10 highest	<i>7</i>				

How to go from stress to strength

Once you have identified your response to your stress trigger, the next step is to safely release stress.

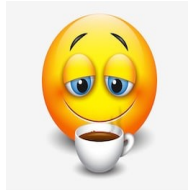
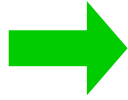
Step 3 – Safely Release Stress

Top 5 Tips:

1. Distance yourself from the stress trigger
2. Eat, drink (water) and sleep well
3. Exercise – e.g. boxercise, yoga, tai chi
4. Seek help - Talk to someone – Express
5. Take time out - self-care - be kind to yourself

You are now aware of the triggers of your stress and how you respond to it, so now is the time to find more ways to release the stress. What works for you? Try something that might have worked in the past or something new. Use the space below to write down your own ideas.

How to go from stress to strength



25 Quick Ways to Reduce Stress in Five minutes or Less

Here are some ideas of reducing stress that you might use for step 3.

1. Breathe

Slow, deep breaths can help lower blood pressure and heart rate. Try pranayama breathing, a yogic method that involves breathing through one nostril at a time to relieve anxiety. The technique is supposed to work the same way as acupuncture, balancing the mind and body.

2. Listen to Music

No matter what the song, sometimes belting out the lyrics to a favourite tune makes everything seem all right. Try 'Under Pressure' by Queen! If you're in a public place, just listening to music can be a quick fix for a low mood. Classical music can be especially relaxing right before bedtime.

3. Take a Quick Walk

When you're feeling overwhelmed or having trouble concentrating, go for a quick stroll. You'll get the benefits of alone time, physical activity, fresh air, a change of scene, time to reflect, get perspective, clear your mind and gather your thoughts.

4. Find the Sun

If it's a sunny day, head outside for an easy way to lift your spirits. Bright light can be effective for lifting the mood. Worries and concerns out before a big stressful event or situation to calm your nerves.

How to go from stress to strength

5. Give Yourself a Hand Massage

Try DIYing a hand massage for instant relaxation that calms a pounding heart. Hands in general can carry a lot of tension. Apply some lotion and start kneading the base of the muscle under the thumb to relieve stress in the shoulders, neck, and scalp.

6. Count Backward

When worries are running rampant, try slowly counting to 10 and then back again to calm down. It's harder to get stressed out when you're busy remembering what number comes before seven. Or say the alphabet backwards!

7. Stretch and visualise

Standing up for a quick stretch can relieve muscle tension and help you relax during a stressful workday. Try a shoulder roll-out or a chest-opening stretch right from the desk chair. Or try standing up and stretching your arms as far as you to reach the sky, or put your hands together over your head as if imagining you are a strong mountain reaching up to the sky.

8. Rub Your Feet Over a Golf Ball

You can get an impromptu, relaxing foot massage by rubbing your feet back and forth over a golf ball.

9. Escape a Stressful Situation or Event and Close Your Eyes

Leave any situation or event that triggers stress and find a calm quiet place, a refuge. Then take a quick break by just lowering your eyelids. It's an easy way to regain calm and focus.

10. Squeeze or throw a Stress Ball, Cushion or Pillow

On days when you are getting stressed, squeeze, throw a stress ball, cushion or pillow instead. It's an easy, portable, and non-violent way to relieve tension.

How to go from stress to strength

Next, find some time to calm and ground yourself. Below are some common things that help people to feel safe. See whether any of these ideas apply to you.

Step 4 – Calm, ground yourself

Top 3 Tips:

1. Focus your attention on what makes you feel safe, calm and stable
2. Prioritise calming and stabilising yourself
3. Take action to calm and stabilise yourself until you succeed – experiment until you win – **don't give up!**

Most common things that make people feel safe?

1. **Feeling safe inside your own mind and body,**
e.g. own health, own identity, safety needs fulfilled, safe from external threats
2. **Feeling safe in your environment**
e.g. safe place, basic needs met
3. **Feeling safe in the outer world**
e.g. within self, identity and role(s), safety needs fulfilled – having meaning, purpose, fitting in

Strength and resilience

For the next two steps, we will focus on strength and resilience. Here are some ideas of what resilience is to people who use our services and to our staff members.



Again, think about what being strong and resilient means to you.

A large empty rectangular box for reflection.

Strength and resilience

Here are some ideas about what it means to be resilient:

‘When strong/resilient people have their life disrupted they express their emotions and handle their feelings in healthy ways ‘

**‘ They allow themselves to feel anger, grief, loss, and confusion when hurt and distressed, but they expect to heal and don’t let it become a permanent state’
(Siebert 2005)**

Resilient people are everyday people, survivors with flaws, imperfections, and vulnerabilities who have worked at learning how to handle pressure, difficult people, negative situations, and disruptive change.’ (Siebert 2005)

Don’t worry if you read this and think that you are not like that—no one is all of the time. People can learn ways to be more resilient and you are doing just that by learning with this workbook. Understanding yourself better and learning techniques to become more resilient are both great steps towards this.

Strength and resilience

So let's move on to:

Step 5 – How to Switch to Strength/Resilience when dealing with Stress

Top 3 Tips

1. Resilience is a skill anyone can learn at any age
2. You already have strength and resilience skills
3. Resilience is an Attitude and Approach to life/stress

Research shows that 1/3 of resilience is how we are born and the other 2/3 can be learned and be developed. When asked what skills and techniques people use to be resilient already, people using our services and staff members answered:



Strength and resilience

What do you do already that shows you are resilient? Think about whether you already have the following qualities and write your ideas in the box below:

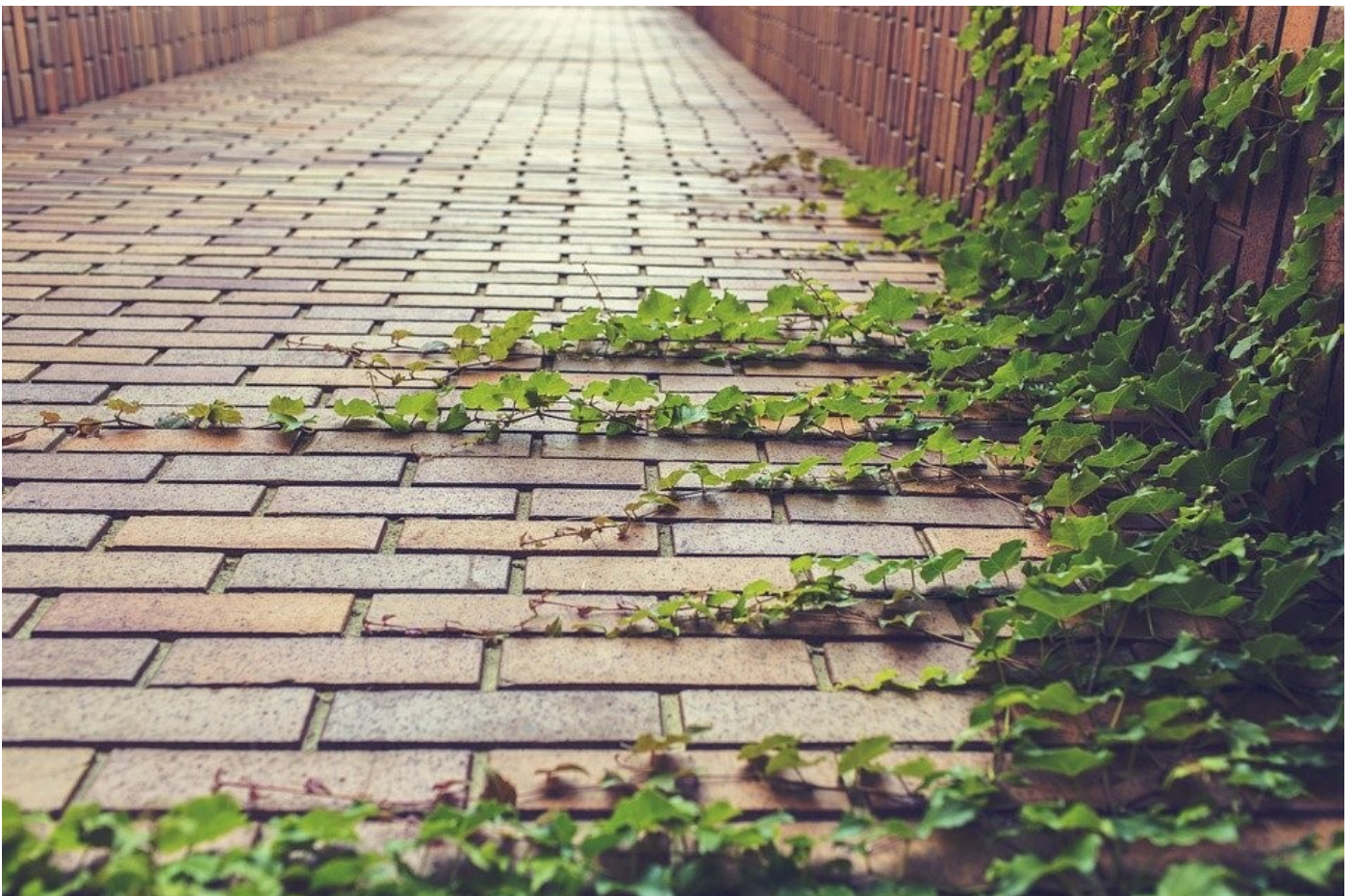
- Courage to face up to and deal with your own stress
- Determination to keep trying again and again
- Ability to survive stress through your own effort
- Ability to learn from what doesn't work and try new ways to deal with stress
- Acceptance and letting go of what you cannot change in a stressful situation
- Ability to calm yourself down and focus on taking useful action when stressed
- Ability to safely express and release stress and recover
- Ability to seek help from others
- Or anything else!

Strength and resilience

Below are some further tips to increase resilience. Remember that part of being resilient is knowing when to ask for further help, so if you find yourself still overwhelmed, please ask for help from friends, family and professionals.

Top 5 Tips

1. Focus on what strength/resilience you have and build on this bit by bit
2. Experiment with different stress responses until one works well
3. Engage in something more meaningful in life instead – helps move you on and up to more life satisfaction and happiness
4. Change attitude to stress – embrace, learn, solve and grow
5. Find some resilient role models, observe, learn and experiment yourself



Strength and resilience

You can build your inner strength by focusing your resources and changing the choices you make on a day to day basis.

Too little stress and challenge can mean that life is boring and too much stress can mean that we are overloaded and suffer. It is about finding a balance of “stress” that is right for you.

It is said that your resilience depends on 3 factors:

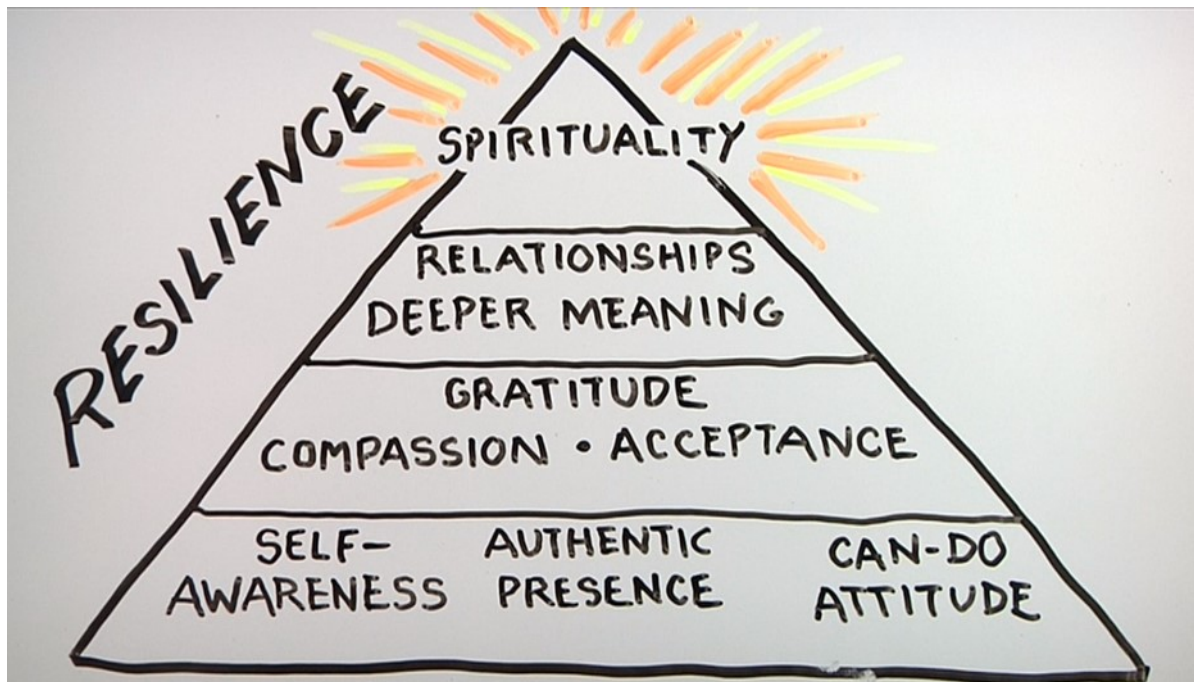
Genes

Life situation

Life choices

Therefore we can accept that there may be not much that we can do about our genes, but there may be some things we can do about our life situation and there is certainly much that we can do about the choices we make in life, though it may be hard.

Strength and resilience



Self awareness is developing a better understanding of stress triggers and responses. Fear is often behind the cause behind stress triggers and understanding and growing in awareness of a situation and self-awareness of how this triggers a response can empower you to be able to take more useful action to anticipate, prepare and prevent stresses in life.

Authentic presence is being honest and true to how you feel, expressing not repressing emotions (e.g. not bottling them up, brooding on them, denying them or pretending and faking them). There is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' emotions. Acknowledging and accepting them as natural healthy human emotions will enable you to handle feelings in healthy ways.

Can-do attitude is believing things can improve and thinking, problem-solving, seeking advice, being flexible open, and creative on what action or behaviour someone can take to make a situation the best it can be. Embrace stress triggers and see them as an opportunity to learn about yourself and experiment with trying different things to learn how to adapt and reduce the stress in your life.

Strength and resilience

Gratitude is recognizing and being thankful for all your blessings, little or large. Dr Amit Sood states that *"I try my best to focus on what went right within what went wrong. There are so many things that I am grateful for. And when I focus on them I feel full and when I am full I am ready to give and I am also better able to withstand adversity."*

Compassion is noticing and feeling others' suffering and doing something to alleviate it. That something could be tangible action, kind words or just a good wish or silent prayer. Being happy in others' success is also compassion. Compassion to you (self-compassion) is as important as compassion for others. We don't recognize that we are humans and as capable of committing mistakes and being imperfect. Look at yourself with the eyes of the person who loves you the most. Or imagine someone you care about has gone through exactly the same as you have, and imagine what they would like to hear that would make them feel better and say this to yourself.

Acceptance is about accepting 'what is' just 'as it is'. Not wishing for things to be other than they are, and then creatively working with what is, and being open to possibilities. For small things, focus on - will it matter in one year or five years? For bigger things, try to find meaning in it, some positive meaning of what you could learn from the stressful situation. Acceptance isn't about agreeing with 'what is', but acceptance is wisely letting go of the uncontrollable to save energy for the controllable. Accepting what can be changed and working on that constructively to find better ways forward.

Deeper Meaning focuses on who you are, why you are here and what this world means. How can you touch a part of the world, however small, and leave it a little better than you found it? What is the thing that matters to you most, your beliefs? What do you value in life, how can you handle situations so you act true to your beliefs and values and how you would like to act?

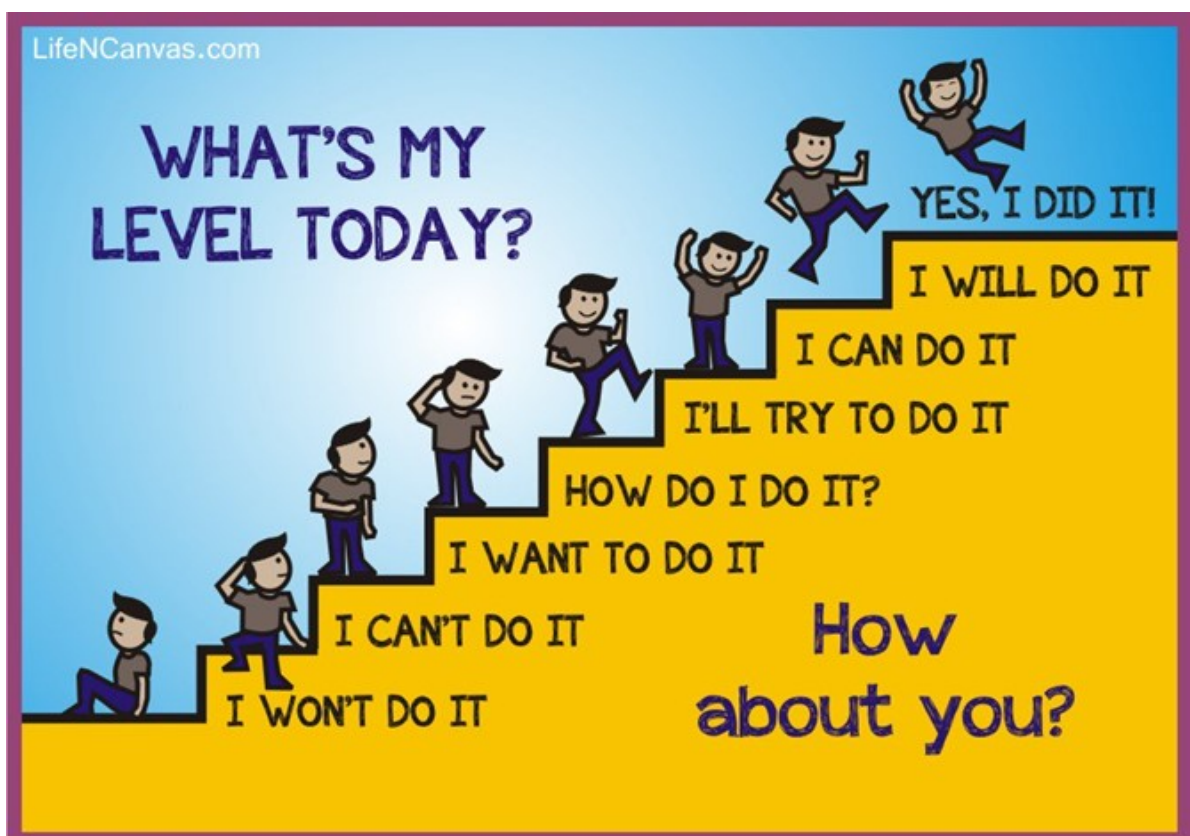
Strength and resilience

Relationships is about fostering and nurturing healthy relationships, based on greater emotional intelligence. Relating to every human being with kindness, care, compassion, gratitude, humility, patience, non-judgment, understanding, and respect. As well as having healthy choices, boundaries, being assertive and communicating effectively altogether results in the most respectful and positive relationships that may be possible.

Spirituality a very personal option and journey for each individual to decide.

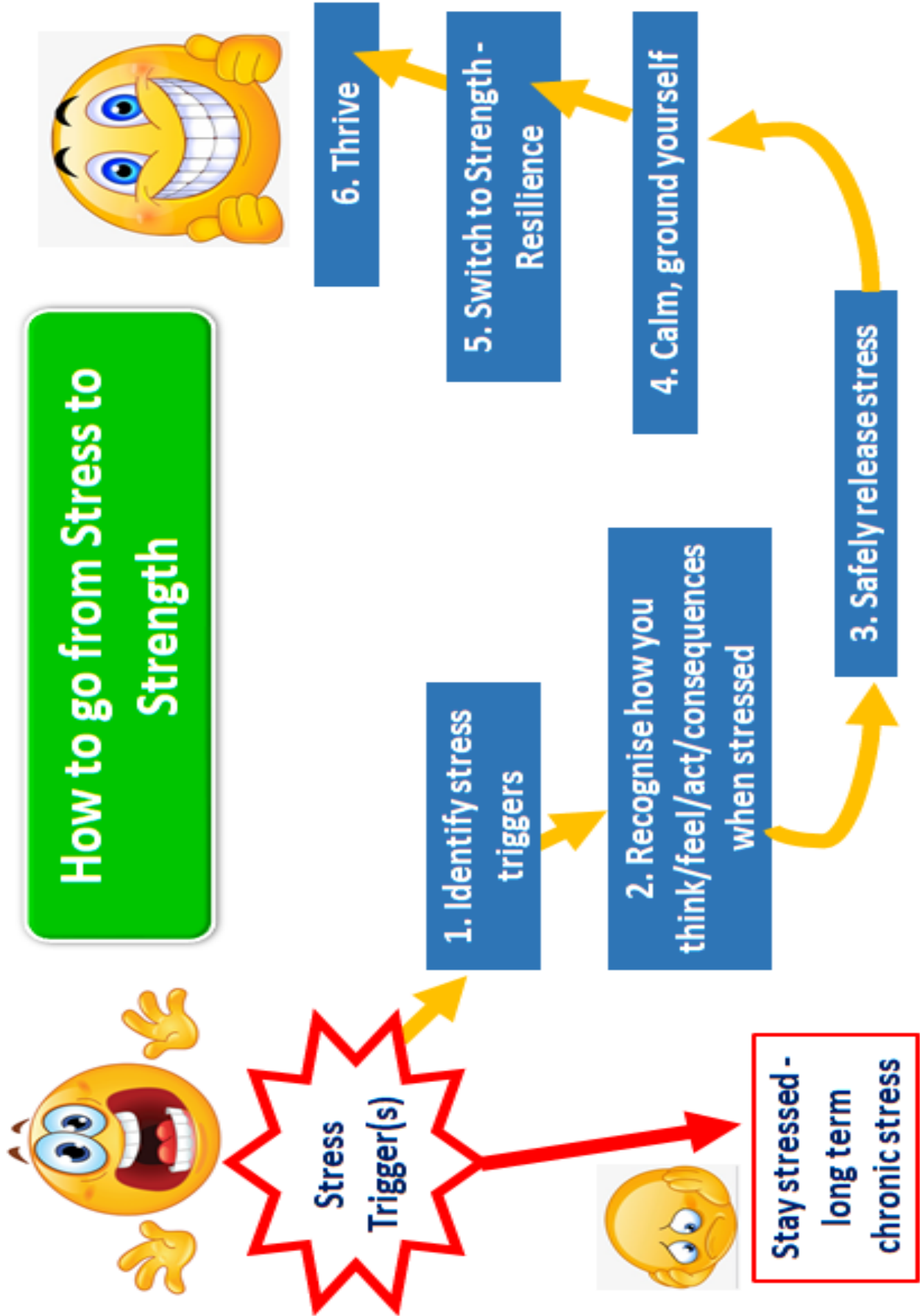
Source: Adapted from material by Dr Amit Sood, Professor of Medicine Executive Director of Global Centre for Resiliency and Wellbeing (2019) Dr Kristen Neff (2019) Mindful Self-Compassion workbook

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Strength and resilience

Here is a summary of what you have learned in all of the steps.



Further resources

Here are some further resources regarding coping with stress.

The Mental Health Foundation Stress Self Help Guide

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/how-to-manage-and-reduce-stress.pdf>

MIND Stress Self Help Guide

https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4667/how-to-manage-stress_2015.pdf

Rethink Mental Illness how to cope with stress guide

<https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/wellbeing-physical-health/stress-how-to-cope/>

For full list of helplines, go to <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

Thank you for using this workbook

We hope this workbook has been helpful.

If you have any feedback, positive or negative, please get in touch with us on cwp.involve-and-recover@nhs.net or 01625 505 647.

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**IT'S NOT THE LOAD
THAT BREAKS YOU
DOWN; IT'S THE WAY
YOU CARRY IT.**



LOU HOLTZ

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