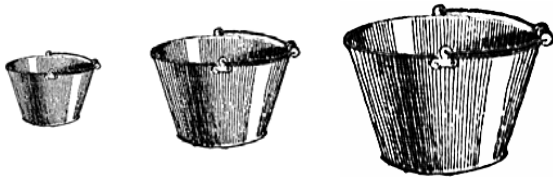


Always arguing with friends and family? Worried about relationships at school / college / work? Got an exam coming up? Feeling like it's just too much to cope with? Things winding you up or getting you down?

Lots of stuff can make us feel stressed. It's important to remember there's no such thing as a stress-free life, so you can't avoid all stress. In fact, to pursue important goals in your life, it's important to be up for taking on new challenges, which can be stressful. But it is helpful to be aware of times when you're under too much stress and to learn strategies for coping with it effectively.

We're all born with a capacity for coping with or containing stress – think of it like a bucket into which your stress pours like water. Some people are born with big 'buckets', some people with small 'buckets', it's just one of those genetic things like the colour of your eyes.



Things that release or reduce stress are like holes in our buckets that let the stress out.

While our buckets are filling up we are managing the stress and we aren't so aware of any negative impact.



But sooner or later, particularly during adolescence, our buckets can become so full so that they overflow and we experience the side effects of stress.

Different people will experience different symptoms – you might feel uncontrollably angry, anxious, sad and miserable or all of these together or even experience feelings you can't put a name to – but generally they're negative, unpleasant feelings and you just want them to stop.

When your bucket is too full you are more vulnerable to developing a mental health issue – like depression and severe anxiety - so it is important to understand and monitor your personal bucket to keep emotionally well and on top of things. (This is called the stress/vulnerability model for any keen psychology students!)

To do this we need to understand what fills our personal 'bucket' up (risk factors) and what empties it (protective or resilience factors). Once you have identified your particular factors you can aim to reduce the risk factors where possible and increase your resilience factors. The impact of factors depends more on how many factors there are rather than what the factors are.

Factors can be personal, family and environmental. They can be different for different people but here are some examples:

Personal risk factors:

- Low self esteem
- Having few or no effective coping strategies
- Communication difficulty
- Unrealistic expectations of yourself
- Poor physical health or a disability

Personal resilience factors:

- Getting sufficient sleep, having a healthy diet and exercise
- Sense of humour & positive outlook
- Good self esteem, feeling loved and valued
- Problem-solving skills
- Experience of success & achievement
- Capacity to reflect and keep things in proportion

Family / home risk factors:

- Overt family / parental conflict
- Hostile, rejecting relationships
- Abuse – physical, sexual, emotional
- Death and loss – including loss of friendships

Family / home resilience factors:

- At least one good parent-child relationship
- Supportive long-term relationships
- Positive role models

Environmental risk factors:

- Lack of opportunities to develop independence and personal responsibility
- Homelessness or insecurity about accommodation
- Negative view by society / discrimination

Environmental resilience factors:

- Wide support network
- Sense of social connectedness
- Access to a wide range of opportunities, academic and non-academic, to develop talents & interests

Coping strategies: One of the best ways of maintaining a healthy level in your 'bucket' is developing a good range of coping strategies. You can't always change your situation but you can often change the way you perceive it and react to it.

Coping strategies that may not help in the long term: Sometimes we are so desperate to cope with the stress that we use strategies that seem to help in the short term but may make us feel worse in the long term. These can include misusing substances or harming ourselves in some way.

More useful coping strategies: Here are some coping strategies that other young people have found more useful for long-term management of their issues:

Setting reasonable expectations for myself

Giving myself credit for my talents and strengths

Talking to someone about my feelings

Using "positive self-talk," by saying things to myself like "This is a challenge, but I can handle it."

Getting things into perspective like telling myself that anyone trying to cope with what I've going through would find it tough, reminding myself I'm not weak or pathetic.

Keeping my sense of humour

Taking a walk or doing some other kind of physical exercise like swimming or going to the gym

Making an 'upbeat' playlist on my MP3 and listening to it

Doing something creative – drawing a picture, writing a poem, playing an instrument

Thinking of the situation as a problem to solve, then work on solving the problem.

For further management of your 'bucket' you may find these websites useful:

www.askTheSite: Advice for a range of problems, information on local support and helplines.

www.itsnotyourfault.co.uk: Advice for young people whose parents are splitting up.

www.thecalmzone.net: Support aimed at young men on a range of issues.

www.there4me.com: Support for problems including abuse, bullying, drugs and self harm.

www.teenagehealthfreak.org: Web-based health information for teenagers

www.selfharm.org.uk: Information resources for young people who self-harm, their friends and families.

www.worriedneed2talk.org.uk: Information about services to help young people

www.getconnected.org.uk

Or try these local organisations:

Howstalk: Information and advice for young people (usually 16 and 17) who are at risk of becoming homeless. **01423 869815** Mon/ Fri, 9am - 4pm

Relateen: Counselling for young people for problems with family or other relationships **01423 502173**

TRAX @ Connexions: Station Bridge, Harrogate for careers advice and signposting to other local support agencies **0845 0349573**.

If you have been experiencing a lot of difficult, negative emotions for some time and it's not getting any better don't suffer in silence – talk to someone who can get you some extra help, try your youth worker, teacher, school nurse or GP.

Balancing your bucket!



Understanding the stress/
vulnerability/coping model to
improve and maintain your
emotional wellbeing

North Yorkshire and York **NHS**
Primary Care Trust