Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life



From surviving to thriving

Developing personal and academic resilience

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This resource isn’t intended as a medical or mental health intervention. If you’re currently experiencing challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplace wellness or employee assistance program.

Crisis lines in Canada: If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or in a mental health crisis, call or text **9-8-8**. To find mental health or community services in your area, call or text 2-1-1. If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, call **9-1-1**.

Evidence for From surviving to thriving

This resource was originally developed based on the evidence in the citations below. As part of our due diligence, the resource was analyzed by McMaster University in late 2017. The results of that analysis were incorporated into a new version, which then underwent a pilot program evaluation at Queen's University, completed in early 2019.

Holt-Lunstad, Julianne; Robles, Theodore F.; Sbarra, David A. Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*, Vol 72(6), Sep 2017, 517-530. Retrieved from **http://psycnet.apa.org/buy/2017-36583-002**

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Marcotte, Diane; Villatte, Aude; Potvin, Alexandra. Resilience Factors in Students Presenting Depressive Symptoms during the Post-secondary School Transition. Elsevier, 23 December 2014, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Retrieved from **https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814064659**

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Developing personal and academic resilience

This resource can help you move from merely surviving your post-secondary experience to actually thriving by helping you build resilience and plan for stressful situations. Developing a plan to get through potentially stressful situations can have a positive impact on both your personal and academic life.

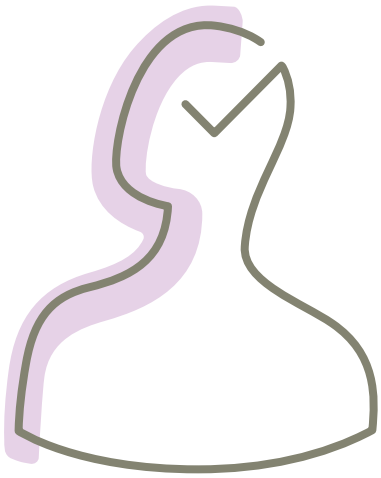
Understanding how other people deal with stress can also improve your ability to be objective about how their actions may impact you. If we recognize we all respond to stressors in our own way, we can also recognize that behaviours of another person that may seem inappropriate or problematic could be that individual's own struggle to deal with stress or adversity.

Having a high level of resilience doesn't mean you'll avoid stress. It means you'll be able to adapt to it and recover more effectively from it.

Many of us juggle personal, family, social, financial, workplace and school demands. While we try to manage, any of us could be blindsided by an unexpected situation or overwhelmed when too many stressors happen at once.

Stress is a fact of life. Stress isn't always bad or the result of a negative situation. **In fact, stress can help motivate us to develop positive coping strategies or find effective solutions to problems. Stress can be a positive force in our lives but too much can have the opposite effect.**

We don't always get to choose the situations we find ourselves in, but we usually get to choose how we respond in the long run. Recognizing our automatic, immediate, unplanned responses to stress and committing to building our own resilience will support our overall success and well-being.



Resilience is…

The capacity to adapt or recover in the face of adversity, including but not limited to:

- Failure
- Trauma
- School problems
- Threats
- Harassment
- Loss
- Relationship or family problems
- Financial problems
- Health problems
- Workplace issues



Resilience can take you…

From surviving which may include:	To thriving which may include:
Being stressed	Recognizing our automatic responses to stress
Reacting in unhealthy ways to stressors	Choosing healthier responses
Denying or ignoring stressors	Recognizing and exploring your stressors
Isolation or one-sided relationships	Balancing your support network – those you help and those who provide help to you
Doing what you've always done even if it's not working	Examining your options and making good decisions
Continually battling your personal weaknesses	Identifying and using your strengths
Resisting or feeling unable to make positive change	Committing to growing, learning and thriving
Waiting until a crisis to find help	Ensuring you're aware of potential resources

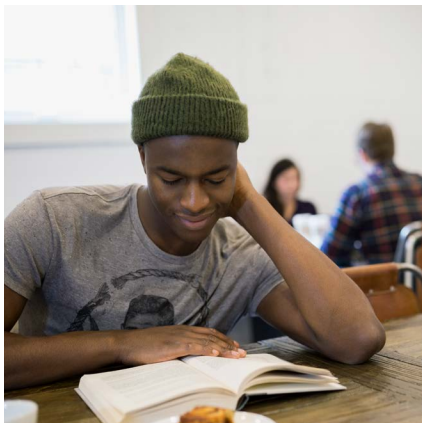
Overview

When you consider your **Automatic responses to stress**, you're more empowered to **Choose healthier strategies**. When you **Recognize and explore your stressors** you can more easily see how to best **Balance your support network** and **Examine your options and make decisions**. By **Identifying and using your strengths** you're maximizing your ability to **Commit to thriving**. It's also important to **Be aware of potential resources**.

Some of the strategies shared with you will include:

- Brainstorming options to address challenges
- Taking action even when you feel overwhelmed by fear or worry
- Learning from your mistakes rather than being unfairly critical of yourself
- Building a network of support

Resilience may not ensure you avoid stressful situations but can help make it easier to get through them. You may be better able to anticipate and prepare for many types of situations. Your stressors and responses often change from year to year, so we encourage you to revisit this regularly or when your circumstances change.



Recognizing our automatic responses to stress

Why this matters

For most of us, stress is a daily occurrence. Often, our responses to stress are automatic. This means we don't choose them or plan them. However, if we can identify some of our immediate responses to stress, we're more likely to recognize and address them before they create a major life or health concern. Most of us will have automatic physical responses as well as changes in our behaviours and emotions.

Always eliminate the possibility that any of these responses may indicate an unrelated or underlying health issue that should be checked out with your doctor. Once you know it's stress related only, you can use that information to help identify the source of stress earlier and make changes sooner.

Understanding the automatic stress responses of others can be very important information for us, as well. When we recognize a stress response in others, we're less likely to take their behaviour personally. In recognizing this is their defence mechanism to deal with their own stress, we're less likely to feel the need to defend ourselves. In fact, we may be able to help them deal with it. For example, you may have a friend who becomes agitated when someone invades their personal space. Once you know that, you can see the agitation and step back to give them space or help them move to a better location.

Instructions

Read each of the responses and potential impacts on the following pages. Check off your usual responses **when you're experiencing stress** and think about the responses you may have seen with others. It may be in the first moment of stress or after prolonged or chronic exposure.

The following categories include physical, emotional and behavioural responses. If you have a response that's not listed, please add it under the heading "Other".

Behavioural responses

Automatic behavioural responses may include:	Potential impacts from this response may include:
☐ Using substances such as alcohol or drugs	Addiction, relationship problems
☐ Using substances such as sugar or caffeine	An increase in stress, poor health
☐ Making more mistakes	Risk to reputation, job loss, injury
☐ Losing or forgetting things such as keys, appointments	Frustration, time lost, risk to reputation
☐ Clumsiness such as dropping things, tripping or bumping into things	Injury, damaging things
☐ Being disorganized with tasks	Missing deadlines, poor-quality work
☐ Focusing on tasks without being strategic	Wasting time, missing opportunities
☐ Swearing, using inappropriate gestures	Offending others, risk to reputation
☐ Hyper-scheduling or frantically making lists	Increasing demands or feeling overwhelmed
☐ Avoiding social events or not being friendly with others	Damage to relationships, isolation, risk to reputation
☐ Impatience with others	Damage to relationships
☐ Falling asleep fully dressed	Lack of quality sleep, missing out on social interaction
☐ Waking up worried	Increasing stress

Behavioural responses (continued)

Automatic behavioural responses may include:	Potential impacts from this response may include:
☐ Pushing through, despite impact on your well-being	Making mistakes, reducing productivity, increasing health risks
☐ Unhealthy change in physical activity	Lower energy, weight gain or loss, health risks
☐ Cleaning obsessively or leaving things a mess	Poor use of time, being unable to find things when needed, build-up of germs or bacteria
☐ Isolating yourself from others	Damage to relationships, lack of support system
☐ Lashing out in anger	Risk to relationships, loss of respect, possibility of physical or emotional hurt
☐ Losing motivation to do a good job	Job loss, poor grades, loss of opportunity, missed deadlines
☐ Working harder, longer or faster	Risk of burnout, poor work-life balance, potential health problems
☐ Making poor decisions	Guilt or regret, damage to relationships or reputation at school, home or work
☐ Becoming distracted	Making mistakes, producing poor-quality work
☐ Becoming narrowly focused or obsessed with task completion	Missing healthy breaks, not interacting with others
☐ Becoming bossy or aggressive	Alienating yourself and others, hurting others
☐ No longer listening due to indifference or lack of energy	Making mistakes, missing deadlines, offending others
☐ Appetite changes	Health risks, weight gain or loss, lack of energy
☐ Becoming impulsive	Making bad choices
☐ Avoidance through distraction	Choosing unhealthy activities to avoid dealing with the stressor
☐ Other:	

Physical responses

Automatic physical responses may include:	Potential Impacts from this response may include:
☐ Hives	Distraction by the discomfort, feeling self-conscious about how it looks
☐ Changes in sleep patterns – too much or too little	Inability to focus, more prone to accidents, impaired decision making
☐ Blurred or impaired vision	Fear of more serious illness, inability to focus
☐ Headaches or migraines	Prevention from doing things, increased irritability
☐ Exhaustion	Becoming emotional, everything is more difficult
☐ Cold sores	Becoming self-conscious or less social
☐ Irritability, especially with those close to you	Damaging relationships, avoiding social situations, upsetting others
☐ Flushed and red in the face	Embarrassment, feeling anxious
☐ Sweating and/or nausea	Feeling ill or self-conscious, avoiding situations
☐ Tension in neck or shoulders	Irritability, pain, discomfort
☐ Stomach or bowel problems	Feeling self-conscious, avoiding activities
☐ Arthritis or auto-immune illness flare ups	Pain, inability to engage in activities
☐ Shallow and/or rapid breathing	Panic attacks, fear, anxiety
☐ Clenching jaw or grinding teeth	Headaches, pain in jaw, damage to teeth
☐ Lack of energy – even talking is an effort	Withdrawal, isolation, hopelessness
☐ Other	

Emotional responses

Automatic emotional responses may include:	Potential impacts from this response may include:
☐ Being fearful or paranoid	Missing social or school opportunities, health risks
☐ Overthinking	Increased stress, second guessing your decisions
☐ Crying for seemingly no reason	Embarrassment, becoming self-conscious, avoiding social situations
☐ Being unable to make decisions	Wasting time, missing opportunities, harming relationships
☐ Becoming unresponsive to others	Appearing rude or uncaring, isolation, loneliness
☐ Feeling like nothing really matters	Sense of hopelessness, depression
☐ Lacking compassion for self or others	Feeling low self-worth, isolation, losing connections
☐ Expressing anger or frustration	Offending others, risk to reputation, violence
☐ Having emotional outbursts	Embarrassment, stress
☐ Being defensive or feeling the need to justify every action/decision	Fatigue, angering others, acting irrationally
☐ Being distracted or lacking focus	Making mistakes, personal injury
☐ Being unfairly critical of yourself or others	Headaches and other physical symptoms, not participating in social or school events, fear
☐ Saying no to many things	Losing others' support, missing out on opportunities
☐ Other:	

You may have noticed

By identifying your potential behavioural, physical and emotional responses to stress before they happen, you can increase your ability to recognize when you're having a stress response.

This can enable you to reach out for help earlier, which may lessen the negative impact of stress on your schoolwork and health.

You may also have noticed that some of these automatic responses are things other people do that you may have attributed to their personality or character when in fact it may be a stress response for them.

For more information and resources related to the stress response: **canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/lifestyles/your-health-mental-health-coping-stress-health-canada-2008.html**

Choosing healthier strategies

Why this matters

There are many strategies that can help reduce the negative impact of stressors. The following list includes potential strategies to help prevent or manage stress. Many are evidence-based approaches, such as mindfulness, practicing gratitude and deep breathing. Others are practice-based approaches shared by those who used them successfully to manage their own life stressors.

Not all these strategies will work for everyone. In fact, some may cause you stress because they're not calming or enjoyable to you. Others may have neither a positive nor a negative impact.



Instructions

Check off the strategies below you know or believe will work for you. Highlight or circle those you want to incorporate into your daily or weekly schedule:

- ☐ Take breaks away from your schoolwork at least every two hours
- ☐ Ask for help or support when needed
- ☐ Use time management strategies
- ☐ Find a peer supporter
- ☐ Access academic support services
- ☐ Join communities where you feel supported
- ☐ Write down your experiences and feelings
- ☐ Communicate with a trusted advisor, friend or mentor
- ☐ Practice meditation or mindfulness
- ☐ Connect to your spirituality
- ☐ Do deep breathing and relaxation techniques
- ☐ Stay hydrated with water
- ☐ Reflect on your personal values and strengths
- ☐ Explore options – what you can do differently, cost/benefit analysis
- ☐ Search for quick wins and small victories
- ☐ Seek help to brainstorm solutions
- ☐ Review what you're grateful for
- ☐ Stay active doing things you enjoy
- ☐ Be aware of your thoughts and how they affect you
- ☐ Avoid gossip and refocus the conversation on solutions
- ☐ Ask someone to listen and provide an alternative perspective for you
- ☐ Read for pleasure
- ☐ Spend time outside, especially in nature
- ☐ Sing or dance
- ☐ Listen to calming music
- ☐ Laugh
- ☐ Volunteer or help others
- ☐ Exercise – such as walking, hiking or biking
- ☐ Engage in sports
- ☐ Explore creative arts
- ☐ Play board games or cards
- ☐ Create a poster with images of a positive vision
- ☐ Listen to enjoyable podcasts or videos
- ☐ Increase healthy food choices
- ☐ Improve sleep habits
- ☐ Participate in talk therapy or group therapy
- ☐ Spend time with people who are a positive influence in your life
- ☐ Interact with animals
- ☐ Seek medical advice and/or treatment as appropriate
- ☐ Consider complementary treatments such as acupuncture, reflexology, massage
- ☐ Engage in hobbies you enjoy: _____
- ☐ Enjoy quiet time
- ☐ Make an effort to dress so you feel good about yourself
- ☐ Other: _____

You may have noticed

By including healthier responses into your regular activities, you not only help build resilience, you may be able to help alleviate stress in many different situations.

To help you choose healthier strategies in times of academic or personal stress, you can look to some of the ideas found here: Take your break are healthy activities you can do alone or with others in 15 minutes or less in most settings. **workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/healthy-break-activities**

Recognizing and exploring your stressors

Why this matters

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after being blindsided or overwhelmed by adversity. One of the ways to improve our ability to bounce back is to be aware of the potential adverse events that could happen to any of us at any time and consider how we might cope with them.

This isn't intended to increase anxiety about what could go wrong, but to realize that many people have experienced these adverse events and successfully moved forward with their lives.

For example, most of us know individuals who have experienced serious illness, disability or loss and then bounced back to enjoy and appreciate life more than ever. We probably also know people who experienced a setback many years ago yet continue to experience anger or hurt every day.

By anticipating that life will present challenges and building your ability to bounce back from them, you can do more than just survive. You can bounce back from adversity and thrive.



Instructions

The items listed on the following pages can be significant life stressors. They could happen to you or someone you care about.

There may be times in life when you have many different stressors at once and times when you only have a few. Life is very fluid and can change at any time.

We want to build resiliency to cope with any of life's stressors, but this is a lifelong learning activity.

We will start with whatever is most relevant to you NOW.

Check any items you're coping with right now or know will come soon.

You'll be asked at the end of this activity to prioritize one to three of your stressors to explore further for potential solutions.

When you check an item, consider if it's something you're coping with now or you foresee as a concern in the near future.

School

- ☐ Transition to college or university
- ☐ Learning to live on your own – such as cooking or doing laundry
- ☐ Overwhelmed with decisions or managing demands
- ☐ Fear of academic failure
- ☐ Course load or content – like too much or not relevant
- ☐ Marks – low marks, failing marks or pressure to have high marks
- ☐ Concern about whether you've chosen the right courses
- ☐ Pressure to plan your entire future when you're unsure
- ☐ Expectations from faculty
- ☐ Conflicting demands for student on a scholarship
- ☐ Conflicting demands for student athlete
- ☐ Expectations related to group work
- ☐ Interactions with other students
- ☐ Interactions with faculty or staff
- ☐ Uncomfortable class sizes
- ☐ Travel or commuting
- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Balancing job demands with school demands
- ☐ Feeling isolated or lonely
- ☐ Lack of resources for marginalized identities
- ☐ Language or cultural barriers
- ☐ Culture shock – such as for some international or exchange students
- ☐ Accessibility requirements that aren't being accommodated
- ☐ Exam stress
- ☐ Being on waitlists for classes or programs
- ☐ Navigating the post-secondary system
- ☐ Navigating the campus
- ☐ Distraction of social media
- ☐ Lack of opportunities
- ☐ Frustration with technology or software
- ☐ Communication demands/expectations – immediate responses to email and cellphone
- ☐ Other: _____

Social

- ☐ Establishing new relationships
- ☐ Finding supportive friends
- ☐ Managing long distance relationships
- ☐ Isolation or estrangement from family or friends
- ☐ Unresolved conflict or difficulty maintaining relationships
- ☐ Homesickness
- ☐ Break up of relationships
- ☐ Emotionally supporting parents or other adult family members
- ☐ Family that doesn't support your school choices
- ☐ Fear of disappointing your family
- ☐ Cultural or religious expectations of family
- ☐ Loss of a loved one
- ☐ Loss of a pet
- ☐ Grief or bereavement
- ☐ Supporting others dealing with grief
- ☐ Excessive exposure to negative, frustrated or angry people
- ☐ Coordination of schedules with a spouse/significant other
- ☐ Unwelcome change in involvement in church, community or group
- ☐ Supporting children
- ☐ Family breakdown – separation, divorce or custody issues
- ☐ Sexual harassment, violence
- ☐ Aggression, violence, intimidation
- ☐ Gossip, ridicule, humiliation, bullying
- ☐ Being treated differently or unfairly
- ☐ Being ignored
- ☐ Lack of acceptance for who you are
- ☐ Lack of acceptance of who I am (by me)
- ☐ Stigma or discrimination
- ☐ Social injustice
- ☐ Identity-based marginalization
- ☐ Other:

_____

Health

- ☐ Injury or disability
- ☐ Lack of emotional or physical well-being
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ Stress related to the health of friends or family members
- ☐ Vicarious trauma – impact on you when someone else is traumatized
- ☐ An unexpected diagnosis, either physical or psychological
- ☐ Inadequate access to health care, support or resources for self or others
- ☐ Management of chronic or episodic health conditions
- ☐ Other:

_____

Financial

- ☐ Paying tuition
- ☐ Day-to-day expenses
- ☐ Groceries
- ☐ Entertainment, social activities
- ☐ Living expenses – such as rent, mortgage or insurance
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Incurring unexpected expenses
- ☐ Health expenses – such as insurance, prescriptions or treatments
- ☐ Debt repayment
- ☐ Planning for future expenses
- ☐ Lack of work opportunities
- ☐ Care expenses for dependents – such as children, parents or spouse
- ☐ Other:

_____

Work

- ☐ Inability to find work when you need to do so
- ☐ Job insecurity – fear of dismissal or contract not being renewed
- ☐ Lack of role clarity or shifting expectations
- ☐ Ethical dilemmas
- ☐ Wage equity
- ☐ Bullying or harassment
- ☐ Conflict
- ☐ Lack of respect or civility
- ☐ Lack of time to plan, think or reflect leading to errors or poor decisions
- ☐ Extra work – covering for friends or other students
- ☐ Lack of job flexibility
- ☐ Other:

Emotional

- ☐ Dealing with changes
- ☐ Lack of change or boredom
- ☐ Fear of failure
- ☐ Increased responsibility
- ☐ Lack of recognition or appreciation
- ☐ Fear of being perceived as inadequate or incompetent
- ☐ Stagnation – no opportunities for growth or development
- ☐ Fear of missing out
- ☐ Impact from criticism, judgment or accusations
- ☐ Chronic frustration or irritability
- ☐ Ongoing feelings of guilt or shame
- ☐ Continual disappointment, unmet expectations or feeling let down
- ☐ Fear of the social, political or economic climate of the world
- ☐ Fear of violence or terrorism
- ☐ Inability to relax or take time out
- ☐ Sense of hopelessness
- ☐ Other:

The process of recognizing all your stressors can be somewhat…well, stressful. But it also allows you to begin to take control of your life. In the following pages are ways to help you do that.

NOTE: If you're currently feeling extremely overwhelmed, please reach out for help now. Help is available at your school, in your community, through your health providers or through a crisis line like Crisis Services Canada 1-833-456-4566 (or if you're a resident of Quebec 1-866-277-3553). You can come back to complete this resource later.

Please don’t compare your stressors to anyone else’s

One stressor can sometimes overwhelm us, while at other times we can manage multiple stressors quite well.

Whether you check off few or many, your stressors don’t compare to anyone else’s because everyone’s experiences, both past and present, are different.

Any or all of these could be a stressor at some point in your life.

The intent of identifying potential stressors is to build resilience so we’re better equipped to deal with them.

Stress is inevitable and it’s not a competition.

Identify up to three of your current stressors to focus on for the exercises that will follow.

To learn more techniques to help you thrive at school and in your personal life, you can check out the following resources: Ryerson University shares seven tips: **https://www.torontomu.ca/thrivetmu/resources/seven-tips-for-success-at-university/**

Examining your options

Why this matters

We have choices when it comes to dealing with stress and adversity. These choices can usually be classified as one of the four A's: Accept, Avoid, Alter or Adapt. The following is adapted from: mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044476?pg=2

Recognize valid choices are those that can eliminate or significantly reduce your stress:

Accept

Accept the things (and people) you really can't change. As hard as it may be, accepting what's not possible to change – rather than desperately or hopelessly wishing it were different – allows you to manage your stress more effectively:

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable
- Look at challenges as opportunities for personal growth and learning
- Share your feelings to help reduce their power over your emotions
- Learn to forgive and move on

For more on forgiving someone who has hurt you, check out the late Dr. Wayne Dyer's blog drwaynedyer.com/blog/category/forgiveness/

Avoid

Avoid unnecessary stress. Not all stress can be avoided, and it may even be unhealthy to avoid stressful situations that need to be resolved. When appropriate, try to avoid unnecessary stress:

- Learn how to say "no" and stick to your boundaries
- Avoid people who may foster or create a stressful environment for you whenever possible
- Take control of your environment, such as establishing a low-stress study space
- Prioritize your "to-do" list and drop tasks or activities that aren't truly necessary

We may make stress worse by refusing to reach out for help or denying there's a problem.

Alter

Alter by shifting your external environment in some way so the stress is reduced or eliminated:

- Modify your environment
- Change your routines, including what you consume, how you move, what you watch and where you go
- Set boundaries in your relationships

Adapt

Adapt your internal thought processes:

- Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress
- Reframe problems as a desired solution, such as "I don't sleep enough" reframed as "I need to improve the quality of my sleep"
- Consider potential consequences of taking various actions – look at the big picture
- Set clear and reasonable expectations and standards for yourself



Less helpful strategies

Some people turn to alcohol, food or other substances when they're stressed. This can help distract us from whatever is causing the stress, but it rarely makes things better and can often make things worse.

More helpful strategies

Others will step back and take time to consider potential approaches to addressing the cause of their stress. This can provide an opportunity to reduce the stress and gain perspective about what can be done.

* Adapted from Mayo Clinic Staff (2016). Need Stress Relief? Try the 4 A's. Retrieved from **mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044476?pg=2**

Instructions

Think about a specific stressor in your life right now and use the chart below to consider how each of the 4 A's – Accept, Avoid, Alter, Adapt – might make your stress better or worse. There's space to consider responses for 3 different stressors.

First stressor you've identified:

How I might make my stress worse:

Accept

Put the situation in perspective – it is what it is – so that it becomes less personal or stressful.

Avoid

Refocus away from the stressful situation or person, toward something more positive for you.

Alter

Shift your external environment in some way so that the stress is reduced or eliminated.

Adapt

Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress.

How I might reduce my stress:

Second stressor you've identified:

How I might make my stress worse:

Accept

Put the situation in perspective – it is what it is – so that it becomes less personal or stressful.

Avoid

Refocus away from the stressful situation or person, toward something more positive for you.

Alter

Shift your external environment in some way so that the stress is reduced or eliminated.

Adapt

Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress.

How I might reduce my stress:

Third stressor you've identified:

How I might make my stress worse:

Accept

Put the situation in perspective – it is what it is – so that it becomes less personal or stressful.

Avoid

Refocus away from the stressful situation or person, toward something more positive for you.

Alter

Shift your external environment in some way so that the stress is reduced or eliminated.

Adapt

Change the way you think about or interact with the source of the stress.

How I might reduce my stress:



You may have noticed

Perhaps you use a coping strategy that's more damaging than healthy or helpful. Considering all four A's might help you manage your perspective of the situation and improving your stress level. The 4 A's are used by many schools, businesses and organizations because they work.

Balancing your support network

Why this matters

How do you feel after you help someone?

If you're happy to help others and feel good doing it, do you also feel good about asking for help? If not, why not?

Some of us were raised to believe that helping others was a sign of strength but asking for help was one of weakness. But do you think people who ask for help are weak? Probably not.

All of us will have times when we can offer help and times when we should reach out for help. There are times we need to be supported and times we need to be supportive. Asking for help in our personal or academic lives is one of the ways we can move from surviving to thriving.

You may discover there are more people than you were aware of who would be willing to help you. But not everyone can help with every issue. If the first person you reach out to is unable or unwilling to help, try someone else.

If you feel hesitant to reach out, think about how you feel when you can help someone. Many people welcome the opportunity and are relieved to find out we all need help from time to time.



Resilience involves acknowledging our need to connect with each other.

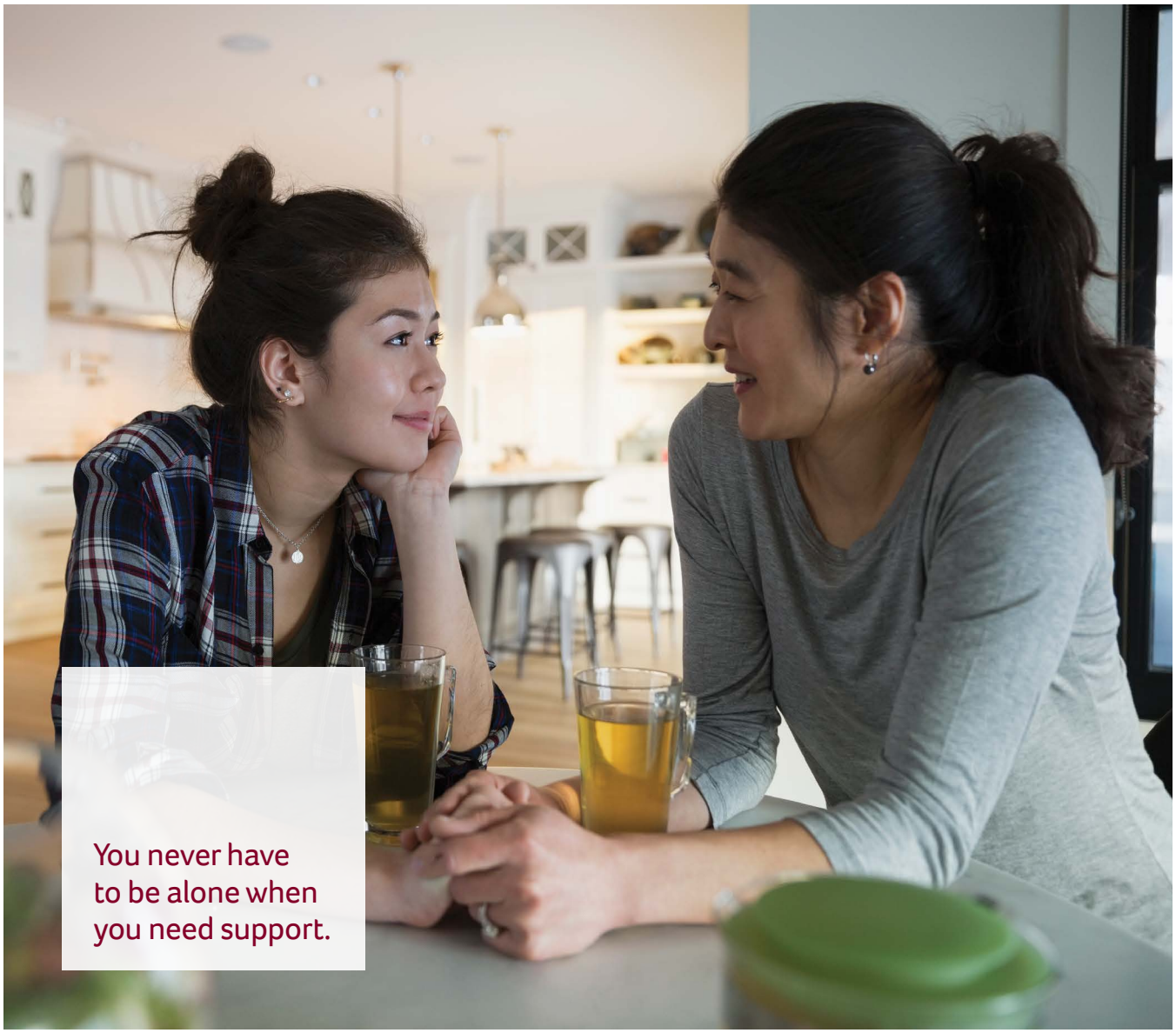
Instructions

Think about family, friends, associates, neighbours or services you could reach out to for help.

On the left side of this chart, list the names of people whom you can or do support for each specific task listed in the centre column.

On the right side, list the names of people who could provide that support to you. Try to include a variety of names so you can create a diverse network of support for yourself.

Those I can or do support	Types of support	Those who could or do support me
	Do errands	
	Help with housework	
	Help with schoolwork	
	Offer emotional support	
	Be trusted with a secret	
	Provide a tough love approach by calling stuff out	
	Provide a reality check and question my perspective	
	Provide encouragement and support unconditionally	
	Celebrate	
	Make each other laugh	
	Motivate positive action	
	Explore potential solutions	
	Hold accountable to follow through	
	Have fun	
	Go to a social or school event	



You may have noticed

You never have to be alone when you need support: there's always someone who really wants to help, including a professional or volunteer. There are multiple school and community resources that can be found in person, online and over the phone. We'll cover these supports in our community and school resources listing. You just need to reach out to them.

The Government of Canada highlights varied supports for youth here: **canada.ca/en/services/health/youth-health.html**

You may have more support than you first thought. You might also notice your support network isn't as large as it could be.

This isn't a popularity contest. We're fortunate if we have a few good people in our lives who will be there to help us.

To help develop your network, look for opportunities to use your strengths to assist others.

This can include joining a club, collaborating online or in person, volunteering or finding one person who needs your help. However you choose to build a support network, the more people you support, the more people there may be when you need help.

Identifying and using your strengths

Why this matters

When we talk about a person's character, we're talking about the sum total of who that person is. This means how their thoughts, feelings and behaviours shape who they are, how they see the world and how they interact with the people around them. Every person has character strengths. These are positive qualities that are part of who we are. It's much easier for us to use our strengths during times of adversity than to try to manage our weaknesses. For example, if patience isn't your strength, trying to be patient when faced with a delay in obtaining your marks won't be easy. On the other hand, if creativity is a strength, distracting yourself from the stress and frustration of waiting while you begin a fun art project might be helpful.

If you haven't already done so, consider completing the free VIA character strengths survey at **viame.org**. It will take you about 15 minutes. There's no need to buy the full report to learn about your top strengths.

This survey is part of a research project, so you'll need to provide personal information, including your name and email address, for research purposes. Or you can write what you feel are your top strengths using the list found in Appendix A.

Once you know your top three strengths, write them in the space below and then add ways to use them to help you deal with challenging times. The first three are examples to help you get started.

Top 3 strengths	How I can use this strength to help me deal with challenges
Forgiveness	Because I prefer mercy over revenge, it's easier for me to move on, even when someone has hurt me.
Love of learning	When things go wrong, I know I can examine the situation and learn a new way of going forward.
Bravery	Even when being opposed by many, I'm able to do what I think is right.

You may have noticed

We all have many character strengths, but we don't all have the same strengths to the same degree. For example, while everyone has curiosity, it will be stronger in some people than in others. Also, any strength can be overused to the point where it becomes a problem. Consider curiosity: not enough can make life boring – too much can make you seem nosy or intrusive. Recognizing strengths in ourselves and using them wisely can help us improve our own self-confidence and build connections with other people.

More information and tools on how to use your strengths to help you thrive in all areas of your life can be found here: **viacharacter.org/www/Reports-Courses-Resources/Resources/Character-Strength-Fact-Sheets**

Academic resilience

Why this matters

Not being able to study or attend classes can exacerbate stress. If you couldn't complete your assignments or write your exams for any reason, having a plan that minimizes potential negative impact on your school year can make a big difference.

Instructions

Answer each of the questions below.

1. If you were unable to complete assignments or write exams due to a disability, does your school provide accommodations so you can have more time, modified conditions or alternative exam times?

2. What would be the effect on others, such as groups or teams who rely on your input, if you were unable to provide your contribution?

3. Who can help you catch up, or stay caught up, with school demands?

4. What is the process and who can help if you need a temporary leave from school?

5. What insurance or government benefits are available to you?

6. What tasks or assignments could wait or be dropped altogether if you weren't able to do it all?

7. Who could help you with relationship issues with family, friends, staff, other students or faculty?

8. How will you set a reminder to review this again in one year?

You may have noticed

Stressful thoughts about school can consume much of your time and energy. Recognize that if your situation changes, you can still thrive. Knowing what to do when change may be unwelcome or unanticipated can help with decreasing this stressor.

Committing to thriving

Why this matters

At this point, we've explored how you might automatically respond in the face of adversity and have considered alternative responses or daily habits that could be more beneficial. Now you can commit to one thing you're willing to do differently for at least three weeks to improve your own resilience.

Instructions

Choose one of the items listed below or create your own.

Over the next three weeks, I'll commit to working on:

☐ **Reframing challenges as an opportunity for growth**

Life will always present us with stressors, such as disappointment, frustration, conflict or loss. We don't always get to choose what happens to us, but we always get to choose our response. With this commitment, you'll pause to consider what you may have gained from any of these events. It could be you've learned what not to do next time. It could be you're spurred to take action that propels you toward something better. It could be you've learned to be more sensitive or compassionate. In each case, record what you've gained and review them all at the end.

☐ **Taking action to complete tasks I know are good for me**

Motivational speaker Mel Robbins talks about immediately taking action when we have a thought about something we know is good for us, but don't have much motivation to do it. For example, if you know you should call a family member, but don't feel like talking on the phone, just count down (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) and make the call without the motivation. Just do it. You will probably feel much better afterward. This can work whether the activity is eating something healthy, going for a walk or asking for help. Count down and then just do it. Sitting and waiting for motivation rarely spurs us to take effective action.

☐ **Brainstorming options to address stressors I encounter using the 4 A's**

Regularly use the 4 A's to consider your options and evaluate how they might make your stress better or worse.

☐ **Expressing appreciation to those who help me**

This can help us recognize that many people want to and do offer help in both large and small ways every day. Whether it's someone who holds the door open or someone who makes us a meal – thank them specifically for what they did with as much detail as possible. For example, say, "Thanks for holding the door for me," or, "I really appreciate you making me this sandwich." By encouraging and rewarding this type of behaviour, you'll probably find people will be quicker to offer help or support.

☐ **Consciously learning from my mistakes**

When we hide our mistakes, we risk repeating them or having them become even more of a problem. Taking responsibility for our mistakes and openly discussing them with the intention of finding solutions can significantly change our perspective. We can move from seeing our mistakes as weakness or failure to understanding that mistakes are part of life. This can help facilitate our personal growth and development.

☐ **Accepting support when offered and reaching out when needed**

Over the next few weeks, pay extra attention to offers of help you receive from others – such as helping you with homework, bringing you a coffee or making you a meal. Make a mental note of when people offer help, and wherever possible, accept the help and say thank you. Also, ask for help when you need it. Don't worry if someone can't provide what you ask – congratulate yourself for having the courage to ask.

☐ **Improving self-talk (the things I say to myself about myself)**

Each time you say something derogatory to yourself about yourself, such as "I'm an idiot," or "How can I be so stupid?" catch yourself doing this and rephrase the comment in a way you would for someone you care about. For example, "That was an honest mistake," or "Try again." Retraining your brain to think fewer unkind or critical thoughts will help you feel better and be more resilient.

Put a reminder in your calendar now to review your progress next year. Keep your plan and refer to it when stress becomes overwhelming or share it with a trusted friend who will help you when needed.



You may have noticed

Committing to a challenge and sharing your plans with someone may help keep you accountable to your goals. Limit your stress by choosing only one change to work on at a time.

Coping strategies planner

Below add in your most likely or existing stressors and the coping strategies or strengths you'll use to deal with them. The first one is an example to help get you started.

Stressor:

Loneliness

Coping strategies:

Join a group
Volunteer

Stressor:

Coping strategies:

Stressor:

Coping strategies:

Stressor:

Coping strategies:

Stressor:

Coping strategies:

Stressor:

Coping strategies:

Be aware of potential resources

Fill this in on your own or obtain a list of resources available to you within your school or community **before you need them**.

Potential school resources

Student services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Advocacy groups - (for example, international, Indigenous or LGBTQ)

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Human rights

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Members of faculty

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Wellness/health centre

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Drop-in medical or psychiatry

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Student union resources

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Student peer support program

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Student crisis or help line

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Potential community resources

Family doctor

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Family benefit provider

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Local mental health agency

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Addiction services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Support/help line

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Child and family services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Spiritual or bereavement counseling through church, temple, mosque or funeral home

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Circle of support – people who agree in advance to support each other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Physically close supporters(those you see regularly)

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Peer support services

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Other

Name/organization: _____

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Appendix A – The VIA classification of strengths

Every individual has all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. You can discover your personal character strengths profile by taking the scientifically validated VIA Survey at **viacharacter.org/survey/account/register**.

Wisdom	**Creativity**	Thinking of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who you are.
	Curiosity	You like exploration and discovery.
	Judgment	You think things through and examine them from all sides.
	Love-of-learning	You have a passion for mastering new skills, topics and bodies of knowledge.
	Perspective	People who know you consider you wise.
Courage	**Bravery**	You don't shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain.
	Honesty	You live your life in a genuine and authentic way.
	Perseverance	You work hard to finish what you start.
	Zest	You approach everything you do with excitement and energy.
Humanity	**Kindness**	You're kind and generous to others.
	Love	You value close relations with others.
	Social Intelligence	You know how to fit in to different social situations.
Justice	**Fairness**	One of your abiding principles is to treat all people fairly.
	Leadership	You excel at encouraging a group to get things done.
	Teamwork	You excel as a member of a group.
Temperance	**Forgiveness**	You forgive those who have done you wrong.
	Humility	You don't seek the spotlight and others recognize and value your modesty.
	Prudence	You're a careful person.
	Self regulation	You're a disciplined person.
Transcendence	**Apprecation of beauty**	You notice and appreciate beauty and excellence in all domains of life.
	Gratitude	You're aware of good things that happen and don't take them for granted.
	Hope	You expect the best in the future and you work to achieve it.
	Humor	Bringing smiles to other people is important to you.
	Spirituality	Your beliefs shape your actions and are a source of comfort to you.



Thanks for completing this – and have a great year at school.

This resource isn't intended as a medical or mental health intervention. If you're currently experiencing challenges, please reach out for support. You could reach out to your health care professional, your workplace wellness or employee assistance program.

Crisis lines in Canada: If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or in a mental health crisis, call or text **9-8-8**. To find mental health or community services in your area, call or text 2-1-1. If you're in immediate danger or need urgent medical support, call **9-1-1**.

Notes

Notes

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