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## **Stress Management Programme for Cadets – Causes of Stress and Countering their Effects**

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Cadets on sea service and young seafarers often do not manage stress as well as the more experience seafarers. It is for this reason that this training programme is devised for them. They face experiences that they have not face before and being away from home often for the first time can itself cause stress. Ships are designed for some 30 years and hence expecting all to provide some degree of comfort with access to online facilities is unrealistic. For this reason the main emphasis in this programme of training is how to identifying the main causes and counter their impact.

The stress management workshop is in two parts.

Part 1 deals with discussions on the causes of stress, ways to manage stress, challenging negative thinking and developing positive thinking, how to cope stress positively, and how to develop assertive skills.

Part 2 deals with some exercises to develop concentration, eliminating negative thought process, breathing exercises (pranayama) to develop calmness of mind and how to develop memory.

### **PART 1**

#### **1. Introduction to Stress**

There are generally two classes of stress. Professional and hence work related and non-professional. This programme does not distinguish between the two types but the emphasis is on countering stress through distraction from the stress and positive thinking.

#### **2. Ways of managing stress**

- a. Escape from seeing expanse of water from day after day waiting to go home – Entertainment, learning and thinking positively about what you wish to do in the future
- b. Physical relaxation through activity
- c. Self care time management skills
- d. Build a support network

#### **3. Challenging Negative Thinking**

- a. Identifying your negative thoughts
- b. Changing negative thoughts

-What is the evidence?

-What alternative views are there?



- What is the effect of thinking the way that I do?
- What thinking errors am I making?
- What action can I take?

#### **4. Positive coping talk**

Creating a dialogue in your head and/or talking to your trainer or a mate on board or a family member through Skype etc.

#### **5. Family of origin and assertiveness skills**

- a. Contacting family members online or when in ports.
- b. Writing letters to family members and friends.
- c. Learning to become positively assertive and developing skills to be able to speak for yourself.

### **Stress Management Workshop for Cadets**

#### **1. Introduction to Stress**

Seafaring for cadets on job training and young seafarers is potentially very stressful with many different and sometimes conflicting pressures; doing complex jobs, reading complex technical or theoretical material, writing reports and doing assignments with deadlines, working in unusual times, having a social life, family demands. All of those conditions often can become less bearable near deadlines, which themselves explicitly test your performance under pressure by setting strict time conditions and removing potential resources such as access to books, peers, notes etc.

Managing yourself, study and renewing one's qualifications, can also challenge your ideas of who you are, who you think you are or who you want to be, lead you to compare yourself with others, who may be look like they have everything under control (not always the case by any means).

Any change or transition, even a welcome one is stressful and being a cadet and initial seafaring involves lots of transitions in addition to other life events: for example:

- a. Sailing from port to port, to another part of the world,
- b. Meeting new people, facing authorities from other countries and your own
- c. Different expectations from crew members and trainers – and each posting at sea brings changes
- d. Different types of ship, job experiences, perhaps new mates
- e. Changes to living conditions which should not be underestimated.

#### **2. Ways of managing stress**

You probably already have a number of ways to manage stressful situations so some of the following will be familiar, or you may know some of the ways in theory, but haven't ever put them in to practice. Here are some examples, but don't get into the habit of thinking there is a 'right' way to manage stress, otherwise you might end up stressing yourself over this as well.

##### **i) Escape**



Sometimes it is helpful to remove yourself physically or mentally from the situation. This is likely to be a temporary rather than a long term solution. Its success depends on genuinely switching off and as a result feeling refreshed e.g.

A warm Shower/bath

Guided visualisations e.g. close your eyes and imagine yourself on a remote tropical island, away from it all

Going for a short walk

Going out with mates when at port

Cinema

TV, listening to music

Meditation

A regular 'escape' activity can restore some balance into your pressured life

### **ii) Physical relaxation through activity**

This can work by releasing pent up energy, boosting confidence, and increasing levels of 'Feel good' hormones in your system e.g. short exercise/runs, short walks, Yoga or Martial arts e. g. taekwondo, tai chi, judo – it is never too late to learn about these techniques

Dancing

Team games/sports

Swimming if available on board

Progressive muscle relaxation techniques

Importantly, find something you enjoy doing and perhaps persuade someone to join you so you can encourage each other

### **iii) Self care**

Helps energy levels as well as self esteem e. g.

Adequate sleep – learn about shorter than normal sleeps

Balanced diet

Drinking sufficient water

Monitor caffeine, sugary foods, alcohol, nicotine, recreational drugs

Think about using breathing exercises, like pranayama, or spending 10 minutes resting quietly at some points in the day.

### **iv) Time management skills**

Much pressure is caused by feeling of too many demands and too little time – a classic stress equation. How to reduce the demands or increase the time? e. g.

Prioritise ruthlessly. Cut out anything that is not important but do not cut out all escape and physical activities and do not cut out sleep. These are important. At very pressured times like renewing a certificate or an exam or deadlines it may include cutting down on some social contacts, room duties for a specific period. Make lists of essential tasks but keep the list SHORT and PRACTICAL so you can tick things off easily. No task on your list should take more than 40 minutes to complete – if it does, break it down into smaller sections that will take less time. Don't expect to concentrate for more than 30 or 40 minutes. For some people, and especially if reading a complicated text, concentration span may be 15-20 minutes. Then take a 5 minute break and move around some.

### **v) Build a support network**



In isolation pressures are likely to seem bigger. You are unlikely to be the only one feeling as you do. Find people you can talk to and share your thoughts with. Spending time with other people can be really important as a release. If you also want to use additional resources, consider what else is available on board or online, on entertainment or learning support, online counselling service and so forth.

### **3. Challenging Negative Thinking**

We all have thoughts continually going round in our heads. Often, these thoughts are so fleeting that we fail to notice that we are even having them. Any of these thoughts are positive, and therefore helpful to us in our lives. However, many are negative and have an adverse affect on us. Our thoughts have a great bearing on how we feel and how we behave. Once we are aware of our thinking patterns, we can work on changing them. First though, we have to learn to identify our negative thinking.

#### **i) Identifying your negative thoughts**

Negative thoughts which might make you behave in a way that is not helpful to your well-being have certain features. They are usually automatic thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. Often they can flash through your mind without you being aware of them. They seem reasonable at the time and you accept them without question. They are the kind of thoughts that, if they were true, would make most people feel quite anxious or unhappy. Next time you feel particularly stressed or anxious; take time to examine what is going through your mind. Are the thoughts or pictures similar to any of the typical negative thoughts that were described above? It may be quite hard to identify your automatic thoughts at first, but it will get easier with practice. Writing your thoughts in a diary may help you get into the habit of doing this.

#### **ii) Changing negative thoughts**

To help you change your thinking, use the following guidelines to reach more rational thoughts

##### **What is the evidence?**

- What evidence do I have to support my thoughts?
- What evidence do I have against them?

##### **What alternative views are there?**

- How would someone else view this situation?
- How would I have viewed this situation if I were not so anxious about eating?

##### **What is the effect of thinking the way that I do?**

- Does this way of thinking help me, or hold me back?
- How?