

# Managing Interpersonal Stress

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These slides can be found at [www.espenklausen.com](http://www.espenklausen.com)

# Stress 101

Brain detects a challenge

=> Releases Cortisol

=> Puts brain and body in stress mode

=> We do something physical

=> Cortisol gets burned in the muscles

=> We leave the stress mode

If we don't do anything physical, we will tend to stay in a stress mode

# Oxytocin

- We release oxytocin when we have safe-feeling quality time with others
- Safe feeling touch releases even more oxytocin
- More oxytocin gets released when around those you are attached to
- Oxytocin makes us attach to the people we are around
- Reduces the effect of cortisol (the stress hormone) so you are less stressed
- Reduces physical pain

- Any interpersonal contact can bring stress, but oxytocin helps. If you only have contact with someone when it is stressful, you don't get oxytocin.

=> Quality time can be an investment in making it easier to go through stress together

# Breathing Exercises and Muscle Relaxation Exercises

- There are many out there. Handout with relaxation exercises are on my website.
- Practice them every day so that they are helpful when you need them. If you don't practice them, they may make things harder if you suddenly try using them when you need them.
- Try to catch yourself if you get into shallow breathing - then take deep breaths, or slowly drink a large glass of water.

# Realistic Expectations

- Before going into an interaction with someone we find annoying or frustrating, we need to go in with realistic expectations
- Label specifically what they do that you don't like
- Put a number on how many times you expect that they would do it in one encounter (e.g., conversation, meeting, school-day, etc.)
- Before going into the encounter remind yourself that anything less than that number is a better than usual experience
- Keep count in your mind, reminding yourself that it is still a comparatively good experience
- Consider giving yourself a bet that if they exceed that number, you have a piece of chocolate (or other small treat) afterward

# Consider The Reasons They Stress You Out

We tend to jump to conclusions about why people frustrate us. When frustrated with others, go through this list to be mindful of the possible reasons:

- They are deliberately doing something wrong
- They don't realize they are doing anything wrong
- They need better skills
- They don't have the abilities (they are doing what they can with the abilities they were given)
- They have incorrect or too little information
- They have guidelines or rules that others make them follow
- They are doing their best fighting through struggles that you don't even know about
- You may be misunderstanding the situation
- Are you frustrated because of other things, but focusing it on them instead?

# Two-Pronged Ratings

When something upsets you, especially with another person

1. First label for yourself what the issue is (e.g., what they did)
2. Rate from 0-10 how big of a deal it feels. Any answer between 0-10 is good, helping you validate how you feel.
3. Rate from 0-10 how big of a deal it is. Now you should apply logic, keeping in mind that imminent death is a 10, and stubbing your toe without breaking it is something like a 2.

This becomes more effective the more of often you do it.

See [www.espenklausen.com](http://www.espenklausen.com)'s handout section for a worksheet and a tracking sheet.

# The 4 Boxes

This is a good tool for when you keep being preoccupied with what someone did or is doing. It often helps clarify things in our mind.

Get out 4 boxes (or in a pinch - 4 standard sheets of paper)

Label the boxes

1. I (I am the one with the problem)
2. He/she (they are the one with a problem)
3. Third person (company, group of people, is the reason for the problem)
4. Crap happens (some things happen without anyone being at fault)

Then put the issue on a piece of paper and physically put it where it belongs.



# Responsibility Pie

1. Label what you are upset about
2. Draw a large pie (circle)
3. Create a list of everyone and everything that may have contributed to it, even if just a little (e.g., yourself, other people present, your past, their past, things from earlier in the day, any rules or demands from where it happened, the boss, the teacher etc.)
4. Start with the biggest contributor to the problem on your list and write it on the pie - the bigger the contribution, the bigger the pie piece
5. Do the second biggest contributor and add it to the pie
6. Etc.

Handout at [www.espenklausen.com](http://www.espenklausen.com)'s handout section

# Compassionate Communication

This is a great way to make requests, including setting boundaries. It is also a good way for yourself to explore what you need and why you need it.

1. State the relevant objective facts (not opinions)
2. State your feelings - “I feel...” (actual feelings only, like sad, hurt, insecure, lonely, hungry, scared and NOT “I feel like sometimes you do not...”)
3. State the need underlying the request (e.g., “I need to make sure that you are safe,” “I need to fulfill my responsibility of checking on your learning,” “I need to feel comfortable around you”)
4. Politely state your request (e.g., “please don’t call me after 10:00pm,” “please don’t talk to me about Trump”)