



# *Building Resilience Handout*



**PRESBYTERIAN  
DISASTER  
ASSISTANCE**

**OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE**

**What do I find meaningful about the work I do?**

**I do this work because**

**Stressors:**

**How I respond to stress**

**What I can do to eat in a healthier way, get a regular, good night's sleep and/or move more every day**

**What I will do to lift my spirits every day**

**Intentional Listening Partners**

**I am grateful for**



## Common Signs of Stress

Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M. Ed.,  
C.T.S., Oklahoma City, OK

Revised and adapted by Presbyterian Disaster  
Assistance, 01/2015



After experiencing a traumatic event, or after a series of cumulative stressors, it is common—and normal—to experience a wide range of reactions. These responses may appear immediately after the event or some time later. They may last for a few days, a few weeks, or even longer. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Over time, many signs diminish. Consider seeking help if they persist or reappear after other upsetting or re-stimulating events. The following are some of the most common signs:

**Circle any signs you have been experiencing and use this information to help you choose self-care and relaxation practices and tools**

Emotional (feelings)	Cognitive (thinking)	Behavioral (doing)	Physical	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Terror</li> <li>• Anxiety/panic</li> <li>• Suspiciousness/paranoia</li> <li>• Rage</li> <li>• Apprehension</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Vengeance</li> <li>• Shame</li> <li>• Humiliation</li> <li>• Guilt/survivors' guilt</li> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Grief</li> <li>• Emotional shock</li> <li>• Emotional outbursts</li> <li>• Loss of emotional control</li> <li>• Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness</li> <li>• Feelings of desperation</li> <li>• Emotional numbness</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Oversensitivity</li> <li>• Inappropriate emotional responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Suspiciousness</li> <li>• Flashbacks</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating/making decisions</li> <li>• Spaciness</li> <li>• Memory problems</li> <li>• Shortened attention span</li> <li>• Overly critical</li> <li>• Blaming others</li> <li>• Poor problem-solving skills</li> <li>• Poor abstract thinking</li> <li>• Preoccupation with the event</li> <li>• Inability to recall all or parts of the event</li> <li>• Disorientation of time, place or person</li> <li>• Heightened or lowered awareness</li> <li>• Thoughts of suicide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to cry</li> <li>• Uncontrollable crying</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Antisocial acts</li> <li>• Blaming</li> <li>• Inability to rest</li> <li>• Hyper alertness</li> <li>• Pacing</li> <li>• Erratic movement</li> <li>• Emotional outbursts</li> <li>• Change in speech patterns</li> <li>• Increased alcohol/drug use</li> <li>• Avoidance of thoughts, feelings related to the event</li> <li>• Difficulty writing or talking</li> <li>• Changes in sexual functioning</li> <li>• Loss or increase of appetite</li> <li>• Verbal or physical violence</li> <li>• Changes from typical behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headaches</li> <li>• Rapid heart rate</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances or nightmares</li> <li>• Shallow breathing</li> <li>• Inability to rest/relax</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Thirst</li> <li>• Twitches</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Weakness</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Visual difficulties</li> <li>• Nausea/diarrhea</li> <li>• Dizziness or faintness</li> <li>• Chills or sweating</li> <li>• Easily startled</li> <li>• Changes in appetite</li> <li>• Grinding teeth</li> <li>• Sitting and staring</li> <li>• Uncoordinated movement</li> <li>• Self-harm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Doubt</li> <li>• Emptiness</li> <li>• Loss of meaning</li> <li>• Feeling unforgiven</li> <li>• Identification of situation as punishment or martyrdom</li> <li>• Wish for magical solutions</li> <li>• Loss of direction</li> <li>• Cynicism</li> <li>• Apathy</li> <li>• Alienation</li> <li>• Mistrust</li> <li>• Crisis of faith</li> <li>• Sudden marked increase or decrease in expressions of faith</li> <li>• Anger at God – “Why?”</li> </ul>

## *What You Can Do to Take Care of Yourself*

Adapted from the work of Jim Norman, M. Ed., C.T.S.,  
Oklahoma City, OK

Revised and adapted by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance,  
01/2015

The same five areas in which you experience the effects of trauma or stress are also areas in which to focus your coping efforts. The following are some ideas others have found useful. Add to the table other ideas you have found helpful.

### **Circle the items you commonly use, and mark additional items you would like to begin using**

Emotional (feelings)	Cognitive (thinking)	Behavioral (doing)	Physical	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of what you are feeling.</li> <li>• Allow yourself to experience what it is that you feel (Crying, shaking, and screaming are OK.)</li> <li>• Be responsible for expressing your emotions safely.</li> <li>• Voice what you are experiencing.</li> <li>• Be assertive when needed but check with a trusted person to see if you're overreacting.</li> <li>• Keep communication open with others.</li> <li>• Develop your sense of humor.</li> <li>• Find a vent partner, someone who will listen to you without interrupting or judging.</li> <li>• YOUR IDEAS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the decisions you are already making.</li> <li>• Make small, daily decisions.</li> <li>• Save big decisions till later.</li> <li>• Avoid "all or nothing" thinking.</li> <li>• Get the most info you can to help make decisions.</li> <li>• Have a Plan B.</li> <li>• Remember you have choices.</li> <li>• Practice problem-solving skills that worked for you in the past.</li> <li>• Break large tasks into smaller ones.</li> <li>• YOUR IDEAS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice moderation.</li> <li>• Limit demands on time and energy.</li> <li>• Write things down.</li> <li>• See a counselor.</li> <li>• Stay in touch with your support system.</li> <li>• Do activities that were previously enjoyable.</li> <li>• Take trips or different routes to work.</li> <li>• Ask others how they think you're doing.</li> <li>• Find new activities that are enjoyable and (mildly) challenging.</li> <li>• Do things that relax you and bring you joy.</li> <li>• Get involved with others.</li> <li>• Enjoy your pet.</li> <li>• Go fishing.</li> <li>• YOUR IDEAS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice deep breathing.</li> <li>• See your doctor and dentist.</li> <li>• Exercise.</li> <li>• Maintain regular sleep patterns.</li> <li>• Minimize caffeine, alcohol, and sugar.</li> <li>• Eat well-balanced and regular meals.</li> <li>• Drink water.</li> <li>• Wear less restrictive clothing.</li> <li>• Engage in some physical luxuries—spas, massage, exercise trainers, baths.</li> <li>• Practice relaxation exercises.</li> <li>• Dance.</li> <li>• YOUR IDEAS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray</li> <li>• Meditate.</li> <li>• Practice gratitude.</li> <li>• Discuss your spiritual concerns with spiritual leaders.</li> <li>• Balance time spent with others with time for yourself/with God.</li> <li>• Practice the rituals of your faith.</li> <li>• Attend spiritual retreats.</li> <li>• Visit new places of worship.</li> <li>• Be bold in asking the hard questions.</li> <li>• Read spiritual literature.</li> <li>• Read stories of other survivors who overcame hard times.</li> <li>• Tune in to your higher power: sing, paint, write poetry, journal.</li> <li>• Renew your sense of purpose.</li> <li>• YOUR IDEAS</li> </ul>



These tools can be used either in the moment of interaction with another person or in other stressful moments during the day. Some are ideal in a minute to five minutes of solitude. Others can be done anywhere. Some can help to reduce feelings of “brain fog” or disorientation and increase alertness and mental focus. Weave these into your workdays and beyond to reduce your stress and to work at your maximum potential.

### Relaxing and Grounding

#### Breathing

**Observe Your Breath.** Sit comfortably erect and observe your breathing without trying to control it. Just notice your breath go in and out.

**Vigorous Exhale.** Inhale a deep breath. Pursing your lips, exhale as powerfully as you can. Repeat 4 times.

**4-7-8.** Close your mouth and with tongue touching soft palate beside upper front teeth, inhale quietly through your nose to a (silent) count of four. Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale audibly through your mouth to a count of eight. This equals one breath cycle. Complete four cycles, then breathe normally. *What is important is the ratio of 4-7-8 for inhale, hold, exhale. You will be able to slow it down, which is desirable. Do it at least twice a day.* [Dr. Andrew Weil. [www.drweil.com](http://www.drweil.com)] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh\\_GaiL8s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRPh_GaiL8s)

**Diaphragm Breathing.** Close your eyes if you wish. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen and notice which part of your body moves when you breathe as usual. We invite you to breathe, mindful of using your diaphragm, so that your chest does not need to move and your abdomen does. Keeping your hands placed, breathe in, extending your diaphragm. Then breathe out, contracting your diaphragm. Do two more deep breaths on your own, without the hand placement. Notice how you feel. Many find themselves feeling more relaxed and clear-headed.

#### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tighten your muscles as much as you can, then release them slowly, consciously letting go of all the tension they hold. Begin with your facial muscles, moving to neck, then shoulders and back, downward to upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands and fingers, then downward to torso, then pelvic area, and on to thighs, calves, ankles, feet, toes.

#### Pelvic Floor Relaxation

Many of us tighten our pelvic floor when we are stressed. Nerves in that area communicate to the brain to fight or flee. We can move back into our high thinking by relaxing that area. The pelvic floor includes not only the gluts (buttocks) but also the inner muscles that control elimination, a good part of the lower trunk. A good practice is to tighten all those muscles as much as you can, then gradually release until the whole pelvic floor is totally relaxed. Notice how this impacts your whole body, including your brain.

### **Strong Back, Soft Front**

In the midst of a stressful situation, straighten your back, imagining a string pulling you up from the top of your head. Then take a deep diaphragm breath, relaxing your front outward and mentally softening toward the person/situation you are facing. This process allows you to be strong and vulnerable simultaneously, relaxes your body, and allows you to think more clearly and logically and plan your actions accordingly rather than simply being reactive.

This process was developed by Roshi Joan Halifax, creator of the *Being with Dying* project. Roshi Joan says of this practice: It is about the relationship between equanimity and compassion. 'Strong back' is equanimity and your capacity to really uphold yourself. 'Soft front' is opening to things as they are.... The place in your body where these two meet – strong back and soft front – is the brave, tender ground in which to root our caring deeply. To learn more, do an internet search for *Strong Back, Soft Front Joan Halifax*.

### **Doorknob Affirmation**

As you get in your car, walk down the hall to a stressful situation, or you open the door to go into a meeting, think to yourself, *I do this work because . . .* This reminder of your motivation places your sense of purpose and meaning at the forefront of what you are about to do. (adapted from Ashley Davis Bush, *Little and Often: Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care*, Psychotherapynetworker.org, p. 27.)

### **Peripheral Vision Exercise**

Please stand up and allow some space between yourself and those near you. Place both arms in front of you, shoulder height with both index fingers pointing up. Focus on your finger tips. Slowly move both arms outward, and keep looking at both fingers. Stop at the point where you can still just see both fingertips. You are using peripheral vision.

### **Tactile Grounding Tools**

When you are drifting off while sitting in a boring meeting—or spacing out from anxiety while standing at a podium—you can try this tool. You need to be able to use a part of your body to initiate some voluntary tactile contact. Hands are easiest, but sometimes you can use feet as well.

- You need to have easy access to some objects that your hands can touch—paper clips or coins in your pockets, your clothing, or a podium, chair, or sofa.
- Let your fingers quickly and quietly explore an object.
- Invite your mind to attend to the tactile qualities you experience: size, shape, texture, temperature, etc.
- You may also use your feet to tap the floor or bump against the chair. This simple exercise of voluntary touching and intentional noticing can usually bring you back into a more focused and alert state quickly.
- Take off your shoes and feel your toes and the soles of your feet against the floor or the grass or dirt. Feel the energy of the earth come up through your feet, your legs and your body, all the way to the top of your head. Any time you feel that you need grounding, even in the middle of a meeting, you can do this.

### **Sound Grounding Tools**

Ring a chime or a Tibetan bell, beat a drum, clang a cymbal -- any sound that resonates through your body and grounds you.

## **Bilateral Grounding Tools**

Many experts believe that adding a component of intentional bilateral movement intensifies the desired effect of increased mental focus and alertness.

- Let your hands rest on the sides of your chair. Then let each hand take a turn tapping or rubbing the surface and notice what you feel.
- Or, look at a tree several feet away. Look to the left and observe one side of the tree, then shift your gaze to the right and take in visual details on that side.
- Repeat these movements of hands or eyes several times to sharpen your mental focus.

## **Centering**

- Sit comfortably erect, feet on floor, hands on your lap, eyes closed or almost closed. Allow a word or phrase that soothes to come to you. It might be a word like *peace, hope, soothe, joy, love*, or a phrase like *Water washes my soul* or *The heartbeat of hope is love*. Create your own phrase.

Repeat that word or phrase over and over in your mind until you come to a place of stillness and are not focused on anything outward. If people or things come to your mind, kiss them lightly and allow them to move on.

- You might choose a leaf or a flower, a painting or a ball, a meaningful symbol or something as mundane as a matchstick or a stone. Focus deeply on that object, shutting out all else. Dwell with your focus on that object until the time feels complete, maybe 1-5 minutes or more.

Both these processes can take you to the still point within where your peace and wisdom dwell. Dwell there for a time, maybe 5-15 minutes.

## ***A Peaceful Place with a Wisdom Figure***

Imagine yourself in a place that is restful, peaceful, relaxing. It might be the swing on your grandmother's porch, the beach, a favorite park, your own garden. In your imagination, listen to the sounds; smell the scents; feel the quality of the air on your skin; taste the flavors; watch the movements and stillness; feel the response of your muscles, your longing to move or be still or jump or lie down.

As you dwell with these sensations, imagine that you are sitting with someone who has been very significant as a wisdom figure in your life: a mentor, a grandparent, a parent, a friend, a teacher. In your imagination, tell this person what's happening with you, where you are with it, what your longings are. Feel free to ask your wisdom figure a question or for help. Listen for his/her response. This is a good activity to do in your journal.

## **Gratitude Walk**

A gratitude walk provides grounding, relaxing, and energizing all at the same time. A gratitude walk can be done in the minute it takes to walk to the restroom or water fountain, or you might take a 15-minute break to do a gratitude walk outside. The principles are the same.

While you are walking, focus your awareness on sights, sounds, physical sensations, and smells around you. If you are in your office, notice a person for whom you are grateful or a painting on the wall or the general ambience of your organization that serves or the view from a window. If you go outside, look at the clouds and the trees and the ground and let yourself be amazed. Listen attentively to the sounds of nature and enjoy the sound of a bird or the rustling of leaves. Let your face feel the breeze or your fingers feel the tingling of little blades of grass or the rough texture of bark or the sensation of the sun.

When you look, listen, touch, and smell, be especially receptive to sights, sounds, sensations, and smells that you perceive as beautiful or awe-inspiring. Be receptive to observing things that elicit in your heart a sense of wonder, joy, or peace. Be willing to practice saying “thank you” silently as you notice special objects or sensations and perhaps associate your observations with other special moments in your memory.

To help you concretize this experience, sometimes look for an object or two you can take back with you.

As you walk and observe what’s around you, thoughts will certainly come marching through your mind. When thoughts and judgments appear, gently move them aside and re-focus your awareness on the sights, sounds, touches, and aromas for which you are grateful.

### ***Candle***

For many people, gazing into a flame is very soothing. When you have difficult work to do, try lighting a candle and gazing into the flame. Watch the dancing of the flame. Watch the tallow as it melts and flows down the candle. Take in the warmth and light of the candle. Notice how it does not rush. Breathe deeply as you focus completely on the candle. If you can stay with it long enough, watch the wick curl and embrace itself as it finishes its purpose of providing warmth and light. Notice how the wick drops off. If your setting allows, keep the candle burning while you do your work.

## ***Releasing at End of Day***

**It’s important at the end of a workday to have a way to release the people and work of the day, to shift your focus away from the needs of the people with whom you work -- to yourself, your friends and your family. Sometimes a ritual of release can help restore you physically, as well as emotionally and spiritually.**

### **Wring It Out**

Sit upright in a chair. Slowly and gently twist your body to the right from your hips to your head. Turn around as far to the right as you can. (You might wish to grab the chair handle to help you turn further.) Hold for 10 seconds or longer, allowing your muscles to relax and stretch. Add an extra stretch with a deep inhale, letting your chest expand. Then exhale as you come back to the front. Then repeat this process to the left. As you wring yourself and exhale, imagine that you’re a sponge that’s absorbed your clients’ energies. You want to squeeze out this sponge, freeing yourself from their concerns. Take a moment to notice how your body feels after you twist. Once you’re done, shake your arms in front of you as you release the day’s work. From Ashley Davis Bush, *Little and Often: Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care*. Psychotherapynetworker.org, p. 27.

### **What went well today?**

Ponder for a moment on what went well today. List 3 things that went well. Pause for gratitude for those.

### **Releasing Ritual**

Design a ritual for the end of the day in which you release to God’s care the people, concerns or situations that feel incomplete, worrisome or demanding of more attention.

- You might write the list of those on a piece of paper, fold it, and place it in a special container on your desk or somewhere in your home with a commitment to leave it there until tomorrow.
- You might doodle or create colors on a page to express the feelings you have of frustration or fear or trouble letting go of.
- In the morning, you can return to paper to bring fresh energy, or you may find you have released the concerns sufficiently to move on in new ways.

## ***Energizing***

### **March in Place**

March in place, knees high, arms swinging, crossing right elbow to left knee and left elbow to right knee.

### **Move and Laugh**

- Spend a few minutes moving your body. Reach for the sky. Reach for the horizons. Rotate your body at the waist. Bend your body at the waist in both directions; rotate in a circle. Drop your hands to the floor, then very slowly come up one vertebra at a time.
- Stand with your hands on your hips, feet shoulder width apart, and begin to laugh a rolling deep belly laugh. Roll your torso around as you laugh. Dance around as you laugh, if you wish. Rock while you laugh. But laugh, long and loud and deep. Laugh till it turns to tears if you need. But laugh. When you're done, feel the energy flowing through your body in places where you thought only tension reigned.

### **Sing**

Sing a song that you love, jazz it up, move with it, sing loud, sing soft, sing silly, sing high, sing deep. If you can do body movements like clapping or tapping feet, even better. Let yourself feel the energy rising as you energize your song more and more.

### **Think Fast**

Have a little contest with yourself or people around you to see who (individual or group) can make up the most words starting with a given letter within three minutes or so.