



Participant Guide

Overcoming Overwhelm: Handling Stress Well



Overcoming Overwhelm: Handling Stress Well

Handling Stress Well

Overview

In this seminar, you will learn about stress and techniques for managing it. The presenter will share concrete methods and specific skills for holding yourself together in a world that pulls us in a hundred different directions.

Learning Objectives:

- Discuss a simple definition of overwhelm or stress.
- Discuss the components of what we believe causes stress and how they interact to create a chain reaction or cycle of stress.
- Look at each of the components that comprise the chain reaction.
- Discuss simple ways to break the chain at each of these components, because by interrupting the process at any point we will change the outcome.

Seminar Agenda:

- Defining Stress
- The Cycle of Stress
- The Components
 - The Event
 - Thinking
 - Behavior
 - Physical Effects
- Breaking the Cycle
 - Acceptance
 - Correct Thinking
 - Breathing
- Review of Resources

Seminar Length: Approximately 1 hour



Definition of Stress

Definition of Stress

The non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it—real or imagined.



If you want some changes in your life, you must make some changes in your behavior.



Stress Equation



Stress Equation

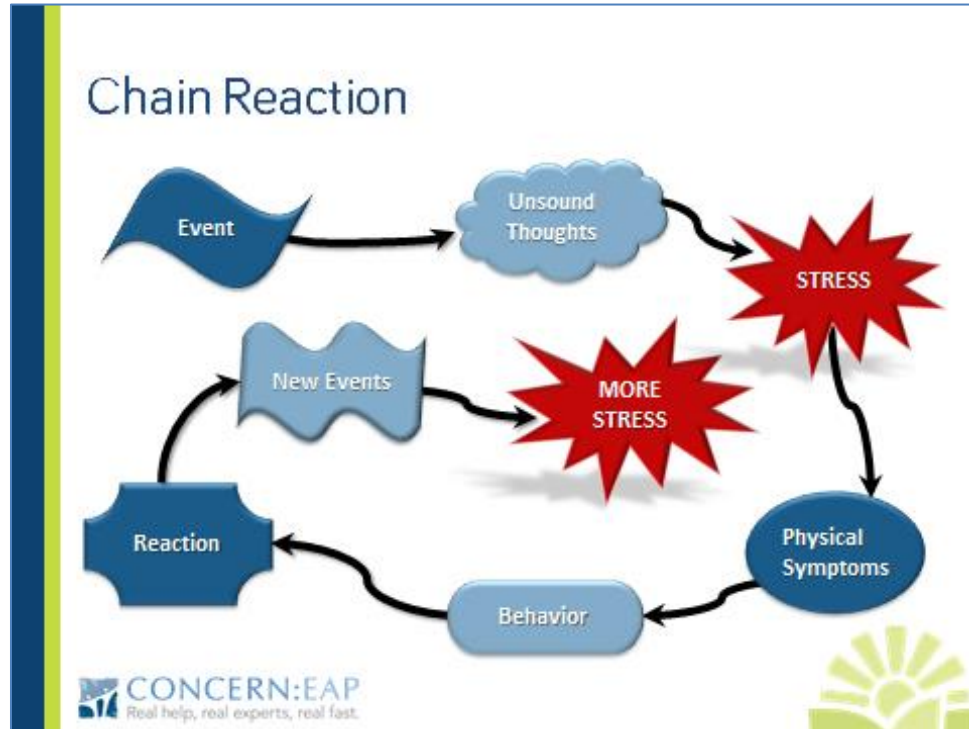


 **CONCERN:EAP**
Real help, real experts, real fast.

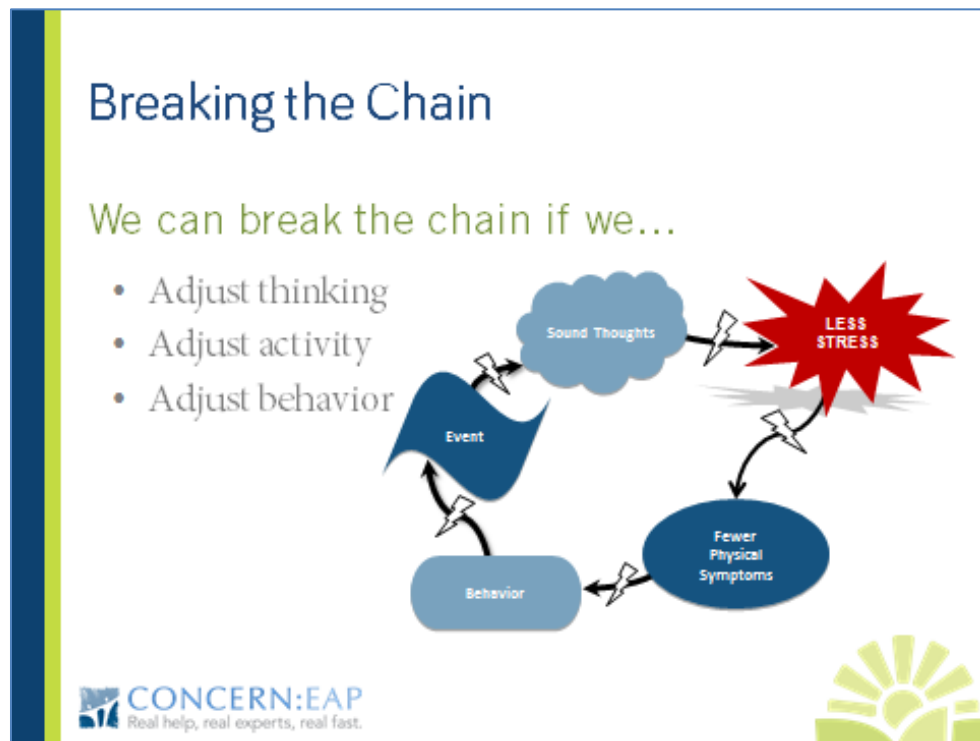




Chain Reaction

[illegible]

Breaking the Chain



Events I stress About:

List five or six things that add to the stress you experience. They could include money, time, family, work relationships, health or anything else you would like to note.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



My Stress Cycle

<p>Stress Causing Event</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>My Thoughts</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>My Behavior</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>My Physical Symptoms</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



The Event

If you change the way you
look at things, the things
you look at change.

A Beautiful Mind



Acceptance



Acceptance

Coming to terms with events

- Personal responsibility for fulfilling my needs
- Knowing I can't change what is done
- Focus on what is possible





An Attitude of Acceptance

When faced with things you cannot change

- Ask yourself:
 - Are my expectations and goals realistic?
 - Am I asking *What can I do* instead of *Why is this happening to me?*
 - Is my behavior in concert with my values and my goals?







Unsound Thoughts—Self Talk

Unsound Thoughts—Self Talk

Don't think with questions that begin with
“Why,” “When,” or “Who”

- Why can't the owner/employee do their job?
- Who is to blame for this problem?
- When will they get us what we need to do the job?



Language and Overwhelm

There is a language that supports peace. The language we use when we are talking to others is important; but, even more important is the internal dialogue that we use; the things we say to ourselves; the unheard talk.



Unsound Thoughts—Self Talk

Do think with questions that begin with “How and I” or “What and I”

- How can I improve this situation?
- What can I do to make this better?







Pain to Power Vocabulary

Pain to Power Vocabulary

PAIN	POWER
I can't	I won't
I should	I would
It's not my fault	I'm totally responsible
It's a problem	It's an opportunity
I'm never satisfied	I want to learn and grow
Life's a struggle	Life's an adventure
I hope	I know
If only	Next time
What will I do	I know I can handle it
It's terrible	It's a learning experience

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers



Language and Overwhelm

Though unheard by others, our thoughts have great impact on our performance. Susan Jeffers in her book “Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway” referred to our word choices as either a choice for pain or a choice for power. Here is how she distinguished the alternatives.



Sound Thinking

Sound Thinking

Faulty Thinking

- Should's
- Mind Reading
- Polarized Thinking
- Blaming
- Expectation
- Negativity
- Being Right

Correct Thinking

- Negotiating
- Asking
- Assertiveness
- Total Responsibility
- Realistic Goals
- Positive Thoughts
- Equality






<u>Faulty Thinking</u>	<u>Correct Thinking: Counter Measure</u>
Should-s: Projecting our standards and values onto other	Negotiate to achieve your needs
Mind Reading: Thinking you know what others are thinking. (87% Incorrect)	Ask Questions
Polarized Thinking: Thinking events are good or bad; great or horrid.	Realizing that much of life is in shades of gray; neither fully good or bad, but with elements of both.
Blaming: Holding other responsible when life does not work out my way.	Assume responsibility for everything in my life.
Expectation: Thinking that things will turn out a certain way because of the effort you put into them. Expecting fairness.	Setting realistic goals and realizing that I am never 100% correct about the future.
Negativity: Selectively seeing only the downside	Positive thinking: Seeing alternatives.



Physical Aspects of Stress

Physical Aspects of Stress	
<i>Fight or Flight</i>	<i>Relaxation</i>
↑ Heart Rate/Pulse	↓ Heart Rate/Pulse
↑ Blood Pressure	↓ Blood Pressure
↑ Shallow Chest Breathing	↑ Full Abdominal Breathing
↑ Muscle Tension	↓ Muscle Tension
↓ Blood Vessel Size	↑ Blood Vessel Size
↓ Skin Temperature	↑ Skin Temperature
↓ Digestive System Changes	↑ Digestive System Changes
↓ Immune System	↑ Immune System

 **CONCERN:EAP**
Real help, real experts, real fast.



Now let's look at the physical aspects of stress. Stress produces physiological changes associated with what we refer to as the Fight or Flight Syndrome. Perhaps you have heard of it. It is the body's automatic response to any real or perceived threat.

When such a threat occurs, the brain instructs the body by sending endorphins throughout the system to prepare the body for attack. Some of the things that occur:

- Veins constrict
- Blood pressure increases
- Blood is redirected from the brain and digestive system to the outer limbs
- The heart rate increases
- Breathing becomes shallow
- Cholesterol is pumped into the system
- Muscles become tense

This is a normal and suitable reaction to a significant threat like being chased by a wild animal. It is excessive for most of the occurrences that happen in our daily lives. Things like traffic, being late, or spilling a cup of coffee. Nevertheless, the mind and body reacts the same to both kinds of threat. Sustained occurrences of the fight or flight function are a contributor to stress related illness

As I mentioned earlier, during stress, breathing becomes shallow and rapid. Deep breathing exercises are an automatic and effective technique for lower the effects of stress.



Easing the Stress



Summary



CONCERN: EAP Services

Resources:

CONCERN: EAP -The Resilience Hub™ & Life Adviser

- Online members exclusive resources center
- Articles, videos, training courses and more
- Self-help toolkits, guides and tips
- Triumph over stress, improve your well being
- Learn how to manage stress, build resilience and create positive habits

www.concern-eap.com

800-344-4222



There are also many resources on resilience, stress, and change on our **RESILIENCE HUB** and *Life Adviser* website.

Please call **CONCERN** if you feel overwhelmed by the stressors in life. We have counselors who are ready to assist you in taking charge, reducing stress, and living



Questions



 **CONCERN:EAP**
Real help, real experts, real fast.



Breathing Exercise

- Make yourself comfortable. Sit back in your chair, have your back straight but not stiff. Your head straight, resting on your shoulders. Feet planted firmly on the ground.
- Allow your hands to be relaxed, in your lap, or resting gently, palms up, at your sides.
- Take several long, slow, deep breaths, breathing in fully and exhaling slowly. As you exhale, blow as if you are blowing out a candle ...but slowly so the flame only flickers, but does not go out...
- Allow your breath to find its own natural rhythm. Feel the cool air as it enters your nose...and the warm air as you exhale.
- Let your eyes close, or simply leave them softly focused.
- Become aware now of your stomach, as it expands on the in-breath and relaxes and let's go on the out-breath.
- To help you with concentration, for the next breaths I would like you to count to five on the in-breath and say "Relax" to yourself as you slowly exhale.
- When your mind wanders from your counting as you are distracted by sounds, or my voice, simply notice the distraction like clouds floating by and when you notice you are distracted; return to focus on the 'breathing'...
- And now, bring your attention to the area of your body where you experience pain...tension...or tightness, and imagine that area of pain softening and releasing with time as you exhale.
- And now allow your attention to return to your breath ...feeling the rise and fall of your abdomen ...now, include your entire body ...becoming aware of yourself sitting on the chair...opening your eyes and slowly becoming aware of other images in the room...
- And now, stretch your arms out in front of you, feeling the life in your hands and arms; breathe deeply; release, and return fully alert and awake to the present moment.



Stress Hardy Test

People less affected by stressful situations and more resilient in adjusting to change have qualities called Stress Hardiness. The components of stress-hardy people include:

- **Commitment** to self, work, family, and values. A sense of commitment allows people to see problems through without being upset by stress. Commitment may be defined as believing that something is worthwhile and having the willingness to change oneself in order to attain it.
- **Control** over their lives. They cannot control every detail of their lives, but they know where they have control, such as their attitude.
- **Challenge** - seeing change as a challenge rather than a threat. Change is inevitable. By viewing change as a challenge, stress-hardy people avoid the stress connected with threats.
- **Support** - a strong network of support. Knowing you are not alone in the world makes the effects of everyday stress much easier.

Which set of statements expresses the way you view the world and your place in it?

High level of stress hardiness

- Doing my best makes a difference sooner or later.
- I wake up eager to start the day.
- I would sacrifice financial security for an opportunity that is really challenging.
- I can have an impact on politics.
- I make a valuable contribution to the world.
- Encountering new situations is an important priority in my life.

Low level of stress hardiness

- All I can do in a relationship is hope for the best.
- People don't change.
- My work doesn't matter.
- I prefer routine every day; change is unpleasant for me.
- Without the right breaks, it is hard to be successful.
- Getting close to people obligates me to them.
- When I have free time, I like to do nothing.



Tips for Reducing Stress

- Exercise:** Enhances mood and blunts the stress response. 30 minutes a day can decrease the risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease.
- Meditate:** Daily meditation of 15 to 30 minutes assists in maintaining personal balance and is health enhancing.
- Share your feelings:** Good friendships, social networks, and supportive communities can allay stressful situations. Providing support to others can also alleviate our stress.
- Be realistic:** If you're overwhelmed, learn to say NO. Ask for help and explain why you need to set limits. Be ready to compromise.
- Visualize:** Use your imagination and picture yourself handling stressful situations effectively. See the successful outcome. Use visualization also to create a mini-vacation, which can provide a break from daily stressors.
- Enjoy your hobbies:** Find outlets that delight you and take time on a regular basis to enjoy them.
- Live a healthy lifestyle:** Good nutrition is vital to your health and well being. Limit your alcohol and caffeine consumption, get adequate rest, and balance work and play.
- Be gentle with yourself and others:** Be careful of criticism and don't expect too much from yourself and others. Recognize your uniqueness and be willing to forgive yourself and others when errors occur.
- Personalize your workspace:** Family or vacation photographs may lift your spirits and make your work days easier.
- Use humor:** Finding the light side in a situation can brighten the day and lift the mood for you and those around you. Laughter releases the tension of pent up feelings and helps us to keep perspective. It also appears to reduce the stress hormone levels. During tragic events, laughter can help us endure emotional pain.



Gaining Control

- Take responsibility for yourselves and your actions
(*We are in charge of our lives, our deeds, and our attitudes.*)
- Practice positive self-care: physically, emotionally, and spiritually
- Don't manage your feelings by using the trash compactor method; i.e. shoving your feelings down. Feelings of anger or frustration that are not expressed in an acceptable way may lead to hostility, and a sense of helplessness and depression.
- Spend time in nature or call on your "higher power" if one is part of your belief system.
- Ask yourself: In the terms of the rest of my life, how important is this really?
- Be mindful of self-talk – eliminate "should-s," "awful-s," and self-defeating messages
- Stay present
- Remind yourself that yesterday is over and tomorrow will take care of itself?
- Accept your strengths and vulnerabilities?
- When a change occurs; take ownership for your response; i.e., "I accept what has happened and I will choose how to deal with it."
- If the change is not your issue, let go of your need for control and release the situation?
- Take care of yourself.
- Listen to your internal dialogue and re-state or re-focus any negative messages.
- Maintain a problem-solving, forgiving attitude for today and going forward.



Muscle Relaxation

Muscle Relaxation techniques, often combined with deep breathing, are simple to learn and very useful for getting to sleep. (In the beginning it is useful to have a friend or partner check for tension by lifting an arm and dropping it, the arm should fall freely). Practice makes the exercise much more effective and produces relaxation much more rapidly. Studies have reported beneficial effects on blood pressure in hypertensive patients who employ this technique.

- After lying down in a comfortable position without crossing the limbs, concentrate on each part of the body.
- Maintain a slow, deep breathing pattern throughout this exercise.
- Tense each muscle as tightly as possible for a count of five to ten and then release it completely.
- Experience the muscle as totally relaxed and lead heavy.
- Begin with the top of the head and progress downward to focus on all the muscles in the body.
- Be sure to include the forehead, ears, eyes, mouth, neck, shoulders, arms and hands, fingers, chest, belly, thighs, calves and feet.
- Once the external review is complete, imagine tensing and releasing internal muscles.



Meditation

Meditation is widely accepted in this country as a relaxation technique. The goal of all meditative procedures is to quiet the mind (essentially, to relax thought). Studies have suggested that regular meditation can benefit the heart and reduce blood pressure. Better research is needed to confirm such claims.

Try meditating for 5 minutes and building up to 20 minutes in the morning after awakening and then again in early evening before dinner. Even once a day is helpful. Note: Meditating before going to bed may cause some people to wake up in the middle of the night, alert and unable to return to sleep.

New practitioners should understand that it can be difficult to quiet the mind, and should not be discouraged by lack of immediate results.

A number of techniques are available. A few are discussed here.

Mindfulness Meditation - Mindfulness is a common practice that focuses on breathing. It employs the basic technique used in other forms of meditation.

- Sit upright with the spine straight, either cross-legged or sitting on a firm chair with both feet on the floor, uncrossed.
- With the eyes closed or gently looking a few feet ahead, observe the exhalation of the breath.
- As the mind wanders, one simply notes it as a fact and returns to the “out” breath. It may be helpful to imagine one’s thoughts as clouds dissipating away.

Transcendental Meditation (TM) uses a mantra (a word that has a specific chanting sound). The mediator repeats the words silently letting thoughts come and go. In one study, TM was as effective as exercise in elevating mood.

Mini-Meditation - The method involves heightening awareness of the immediate surrounding environment. Choose a routine activity when alone. For example:

- While washing dishes, concentrate on the feel of the water and dishes.
- Allow the mind to wander to any immediate sensory experience (sounds outside the window, smells from the stove, colors in the room).
- If the mind begins to think about the past or future, abstractions or worries, redirect it gently back.
- This redirection of brain activity from your thoughts and worries to your senses disrupts the stress response and prompts relaxation. It also helps promote an emotional and sensual appreciation of simple pleasures already present in a person’s life.



Stress Analysis

Take a few minutes to assess your stress level on the checklist on the next page. This is for your eyes only.

Check off any symptoms on the list below that you may be experiencing. If you have any of these warning signs, you need to identify your stressors and take steps to alleviate your stress.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in sleeping patterns | <input type="checkbox"/> Letting little things bother you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling drained and lethargic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of anger and frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic backaches/headaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of fun at work or home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased or loss of appetite | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased self-doubt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to drink or smoke | <input type="checkbox"/> Losing your temper more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tendency to blame mistakes on others | <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to express feelings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling overwhelmed and numb | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling disappointed more often |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent stomachaches |

If you are experiencing three or more of these symptoms, please consider contacting your Employee Assistance Program for counseling and support.



“Stop” Time Out

1. Pick a worrisome or negative thought to monitor and stop.
2. Tell yourself “STOP” sharply and convincingly.
3. Re-direct thoughts to the present moment sensation.
4. If at first you don’t succeed.....
5. If it works, keep using it!

ACTIVITY: Pair up with a partner. Spend a minute or two coming up with a worry or negative thought. The first person spends 30 seconds ruminating and repeating the negative thought in their mind. At which time, the other partner says STOP in a firm and convincing voice. Discuss the reaction. Switch roles and repeat the process.

If this doesn’t work for you, consider using worry postponement.

If the thought stopping method isn’t working for you, consider using worry postponement, i.e., give yourself permission to “worry” about your situation later. “I don’t have time to deal with this now. I’ll worry about it when I get home at 6:30 p.m. tonight.” You may find that by 6:30 p.m., it is no longer such a pressing issue or by giving yourself permission to worry, you may not worry as much or as long as you thought.



Preparing for a Stressful Situation

The following steps (using an example of someone who is alarmed about having to give a speech) may be helpful.

- First, identify the worst possible outcome (forgetting the speech, stumbling over words, audience contempt).
- Rate the likelihood of these bad outcomes happening (probably very low or the speaker wouldn't have been selected).
- Envision a favorable result (a wonderful presentation with rewarding applause).
- Develop a specific plan to achieve the positive outcome (practice in front of a mirror, use a tape recorder, or relaxation exercises).
- Try to recall previous situations that initially seemed negative, but ended well.
- Breathe
- Identify your thoughts
- Reframe the event more positively
- Consider contingencies and alternatives

Keep Perspective and Look for the Positive. Reversing negative ideas and learning to focus on positive outcomes helps reduce tension and achieve goals.

Six 60 Second Stress Reducers

1. Close your eyes and let your mind go blank
2. Try to remember all the ingredients of your favorite meal
3. Quietly hum the first nursery rhyme that comes to mind
4. Picture yourself starring in a movie, Who would be your co-star?
5. Try to recall the contents of your pockets or handbag. Write down as many of the items as you can.
6. Munch on a snack in small bites that you take precisely every 10 seconds



References

www.well-connected.com

Brooks, Robert and Goldstein, Sam, The Power of Resilience, 2003

Jeffers, Susan, End the Struggle and Dance with Life, 1996

Mellinger, David and Lynn, Steven Jay, The Monster in the Cave, 2003

Rosch, Paul J., *American Institute of Stress Newsletter*

Sapolsky, Robert, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, 2004

Stress Management for Dummies by Allen Elkin (Paperback - September 15, 1999)

The Stress Management Handbook by Lori Leyden-Rubenstein (Paperback - January 11, 1999)

Stress Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Wellness by Edward A. Charlesworth (Paperback - October 12, 1985)

Stress Management Made Simple: Effective Ways to Beat Stress for Better Health (Book with Two Audio CDs) by Jay, MD Winner, Susan Myers

The Everything Stress Management Book: Practical Ways to Relax, Be Healthy, and Maintain Your Sanity (Everything Series) by Eve Adamson (Paperback - January 1, 2002)

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): A New Era and Standard of Care in Crisis Intervention (Innovations in Disaster and Trauma Psychology, V. 2) by George S., Jr Everly, Jeffrey T. Mitchell (Paperback - June 1, 1999)

Stress Management for Busy People by Carol Turkington (Paperback - December 1, 1997)

Stress Management Intervention for Women With Breast Cancer: Participant's Workbook by Michael H. Antoni, Roselyn Smith (Paperback - November 1, 2002)

Stress Management for Lawyers: How to Increase Personal & Professional Satisfaction in the Law by Amiram Elwork (Paperback - January 1, 1997)

Office Stress Emergency Kit: The World's Easiest Stress Management Program by Darrin Zeer (Unknown) (Hardcover - May 1, 2005)

Don't Get Mad, Get Funny! A Light-Hearted Approach to Stress Management by Leigh Anne Jasheway (Paperback - April 1996)

10 Minute Guide: Stress Management (Management, Vol. 8) (Management Series Volume 8) by Alpha Group (Editor) (Paperback - September 2000)

Practical Stress Management: A Comprehensive Workbook for Managing Change and Promoting Health, Third Edition by John A. Romas, Manoj Sharma (Paperback - July 3, 2003)



Seminar Evaluation Form**CONCERN: Employee Assistance Program**

Please fill out and return to presenter or HR Representative. Your feedback is very important to us. Thank you!

Seminar Title Overcoming Overwhelm Company: _____

Date _____ Presenter: _____

Regarding the Seminar	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. How well were the seminar objectives met?					
2. Usefulness of seminar information?					
3. Length of seminar?					
4. Effectiveness of exercises?					
5. How would you rate this seminar overall?					

Regarding the Presenter	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
1. Presentation skills?					
2. Ability to answer questions?					
3. Knowledge of subject?					
4. Use of time?					
5. Overall assessment of presenter?					

Additional Comments

1. What would you recommend to make this seminar more effective? _____

2. What part of the seminar did you find most helpful? _____

3. Additional comments/suggestions for speaker's improvement? _____

Thank you for your feedback.

