

Windsor-Essex Cardiac Wellness Centre

STRESS AND COPING CLASS HANDOUT

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Change

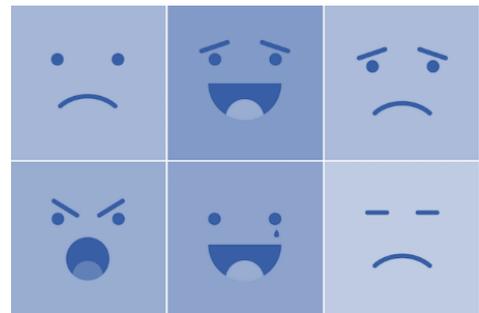
- Involves adjustment and can result in a chain of events and changes
- Stages of change: (more often they overlap each other and don't happen in sequence)
 - Denial
 - Resistance
 - Planning and preparing
 - Taking action
 - Maintenance
 - Integration
- Reactions to change: challenging emotions like anger or anxiety as well as stress

Feelings

All feelings are valid and need to be expressed to process

Common challenging feelings that people experience after cardiac event:

- Depression – sadness, withdrawal
- Anxiety – worry, fear, nervousness
- Anger – when reality does not match expectations
- Grief Reaction: non-death losses can also initiate grieving process, all these changes can be seen as losses ie. loss of independence, loss of role, loss of freedom



People may also experience emotions such as joy, excitement at times or alongside these more challenging emotions. It is important to remember that these feelings are valid as well, and even though you have been through a difficult health event you are allowed to experience these as well.

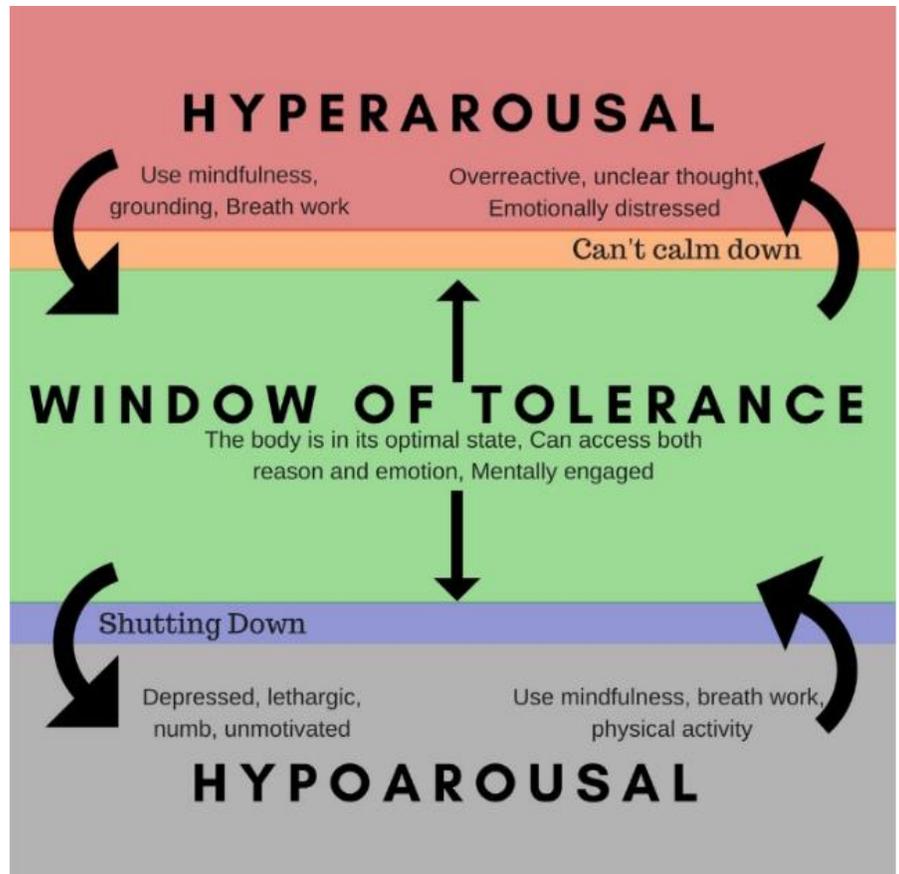
Window of Tolerance

During times of extreme stress, people often experience periods of either hyper- or hypo-arousal.

Hyperarousal – sometimes known as the fight/flight responses to stress

Hypoarousal – sometimes known as the freeze response

We want to have many coping strategies and techniques to help us get back in our window.



Stress

Stress is a risk factor for heart disease

Almost one quarter of Canadians reports a high degree of stress

Pressures of everyday life can have an impact on your wellbeing

It is not always possible to avoid high levels of stress, this is why strategies are needed to manage stress

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old but on building the new.”

- Socrates

Preventing Stress

Saying no: Don't overwhelm yourself trying to please everyone else while ignoring your own needs

Taking action: If you think you can only perform under pressure, you may be trying to convince yourself you do. It may be an excuse to procrastinate which can lead to stress. Instead take action.

Getting help when needed: It takes a lot of strength to ask for help.

Stress Management

Strategies to add to your 'toolbox'; each individual will benefit from different techniques so having a lot of options is so important

It is also helpful to look at your current daily life and see what hobbies, interests, and self-love activities you can incorporate that you already know help you

- **Setting Healthy Boundaries** Healthy boundaries need to be set in many areas of life in order to set you up for success with the relationship with yourself, loved ones, strangers and the world
 - **Assertive communication** Example: "When you are 2 hours late I start to worry that something might have happened. Next time can you call me?"
 1. Describe the behavior that is bothering you by using the word when. Do not blame.
 2. State your feelings about the behavior that is bothering you. Use "I messages" to express your anger or yourself assertively
 3. State why you feel as you do. Do not sermon.
 4. State what you want to happen or how you want the behavior to change
- **RECOGNIZE** the feelings, stressors and changes that are impacting you and your loved ones right now; focus on present as much as possible
 - Name the feeling and try to recognize the other feelings and thoughts attached to it

- Example: anger because of guilt – guilt because of sense of inadequacy – sense of inadequacy because of fear.

TALK about how you feel; share your feelings and thoughts with a friend, loved one or professional

FEEL your feelings- notice where you feel it in your body and acknowledge that emotional pain can be held within your body and cause physical discomfort or pain

ASK yourself, “What realistically needs to happen for me to feel better?”

BE PATIENT with yourself.

- **Love** send love and compassion to yourself, think about what you would say to a loved one going through the same experience and say it to yourself
- **Acknowledge** even the smallest of accomplishments, write them down if it helps
- **Avoid** comparison, everyone has a different journey
- **Mindfulness** can be done in the simplest of ways: feeling the warmth of the sun on your face, noticing the colors of the season, taking 3 deep breaths, square breathing
 - More formal mindfulness with visualization, relaxation exercises, guided meditations, yoga
- **Laughter** really is the best medicine, watch a funny movie or read some jokes
- **Journaling** or writing an Angry Letter-write a letter to person, situation, experience you feel the anger towards and then destroy the letter
- **Take care** with a massage, movement or maybe a rest
- **Prioritize** decide what is most important to you, set realistic goals, and manage your time to ensure your energy is going towards what matters to you and helps you reach your goals
- **Language** notice how the words you use affect your moods, instead of saying “I should, I must, I need to, If only I had” try “I choose, I prefer, Starting now I will”.

SQUARE BREATHING



- **Respond** rather than react to situations, taking some moments to ensure you are in your window of tolerance before deciding what step to take next
- **Remember** that we can do hard things, but we do not need to do them alone



Virtual Social Support

- <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/heart/recovery-and-support/the-power-of-community>
- Women Only:
<https://cwhhc.ottawaheart.ca/programs-and-services/virtual-care-program>

Cardiac Wellness Social Work Support

- Individual social work sessions are available, call the cardiac wellness program to connect with the social worker
- 519-257-5111 ext. 72525

Community Mental Health Supports

- Crisis Lines:
 - Community Crisis Centre (Ages 16+) 24-Hr Crisis Line: 519-973-4435
 - Windsor Distress Centre (All Ages) 12pm-12am: 519-256-5000
- Canadian Mental Health Association 519-255-7440
- Family Service Windsor-Essex 1-888-933-1831 or 519-966-5010