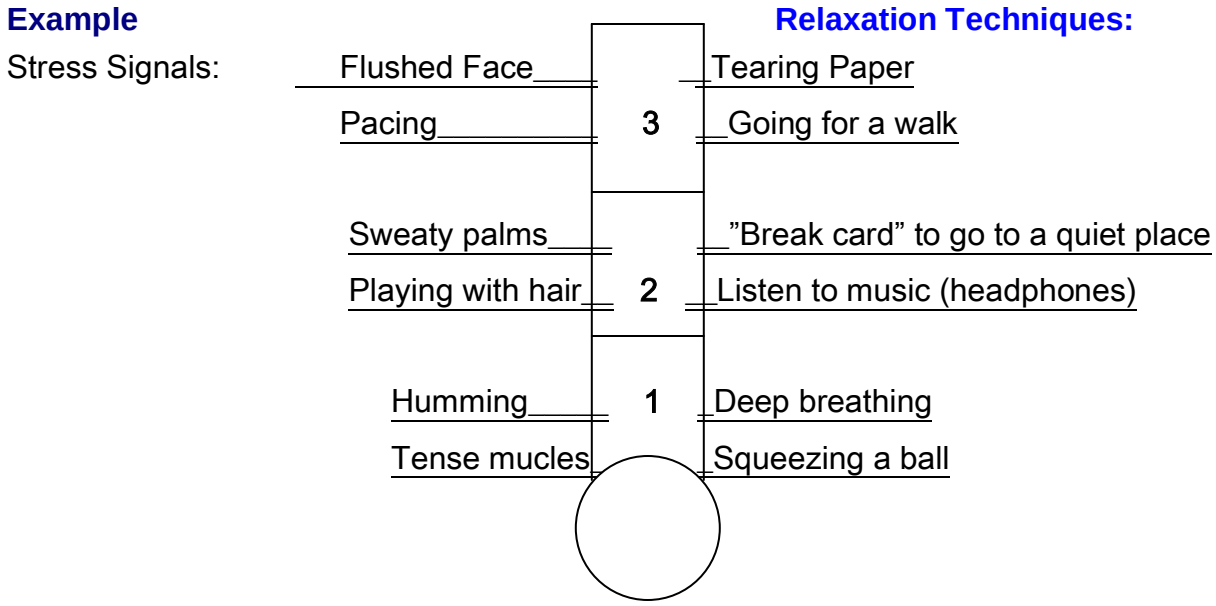
Stress Thermometer

Definition
A Stress Thermometer is a visual representation of low, moderate and high stress signals with corresponding relaxation techniques. By referring to the thermometer a person can recognize his/her own stress signals and choose the appropriate stress-reducing activity.

Example



Why use it?

- Capitalizes of learning strengths by providing a visual representation of stress.
- Assists the person in choosing a set of relaxation techniques that he/she can use in a variety of situations.
- Helps the person to recognize early signs of stress, rank the stress and use the appropriate relaxation technique

Key Features

- The thermometer is made together with the person.
- The technique is practiced outside of stressful situations initially.
- Eventually fade the use of the thermometer, but continue to reinforce the use of relaxation strategies.

Highlights

- Many people enjoy using their own words to describe their stress levels (e.g. stormy)
- The thermometer can be posted on a cue card in his/her pocket.

Reinforcement

- Praise participation in practice situations.

- Reinforce any attempts by the person to incorporate the relaxation strategies into real life situations.

How to use it

- Rate with the person events they find stressful and place on a hierarchy with the least at the top and the most stressful at the bottom
- Collect information regarding stress signals through observation and interview.
- Make a list with the person, and others involved, of potential relaxation techniques for low, moderate and high levels of stress.
- Narrow the list down into a final menu of relaxation techniques that the person is comfortable with, finds effective, and that can be performed in the situation.

How to teach

- Involve the person in developing the thermometer
- Have the person label his/her stress signals to the left and the chosen relaxation techniques to the right.
- Use the hierarchy to prompt the person to recognize his/her stress and choose a relaxation technique. Start with the least stressful event and introduce a more stressful event once they have become successful at using a relaxation technique at least three times with the least stressful event.
- Reinforce the person for recognizing and ranking their stress, using a technique to calm down, and remaining calm.
- Repeat this process under controlled practice situations before introducing it into real life situations.
- If the person uses a relaxation technique in a real life situation without being prompted, reinforce strongly.

References

McAfee, J. (2002). *Navigating the social world.* Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.

More Tips for Creating and Using Stress Thermometers

1. After explaining the concept and showing some examples of the scale/thermometer to the client and caregivers, ask what kinds of things do you do when you feel just a little bit worried/scared/mad/stressed (pick one)? How do other people know that you're feeling just a little bit worried? How do you feel on the inside when you feel just a little bit worried? Prompt if needed by saying some people say that they might do/feel….. and give examples. It is helpful to have a series of pictures of possible physical indicators that they can use to pick ideas from.

2. Then ask if you can check with caregivers to see if they've noticed any other signs that client is just a little bit worried/mad

3. After working on what does it look/feel like when you're a little bit worried/mad etc., ask what helps or works for the client to feel better and again prompt with what others have said and a number of pictures of strategies/activities that client can choose from if needed.

4. Repeat this process for feeling *pretty* worried/mad etc, and then feeling *really* worried/mad. Often the "what works" strategies are repeated at more than one level.

5. Ask the client to pick a colour to represent each level on the stress thermometer. The colour in the circle at the bottom of the thermometer should represent a calm state. It can be helpful to have a colour chart to use to ask the client to pick the colour that represents each level for them.

6. Once you have the draft completed, ask if the client would like just words, pictures and words, or just pictures on the final product. Put together a finished, laminated version (usually legal sized for posting on a wall and wallet sized for carrying about) or you may want to separate the levels into separate card (e.g. a card with level 1 signs and strategies, a second card with level 2 signs and strategies etc) and then attach them using a key chain.

7. Teach how to use the scale/thermometer through regular practice using scenario questions such as "What if you noticed that you were (physical indicator)? What level would you be at? What could you do?" Role play examples. Practice in this way daily with client (reinforcing each effort) and then start to use in real situations for level 1 and slowly move up to using in real life level 2 and then 3 situations (reinforcing each effort) while continuing with regular practice.

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STRESS THERMOMETER WORKSHEET

For:_____

Stress Signals:		Relaxation techniques:
_____ _____ _____ _____	3	*High Stress* _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____	2	*Moderate Stress* _____ _____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____ _____	1	*Low Stress* _____ _____ _____ _____