



Queen's University
Belfast

Stress Management Booklet

Tips to help you study effectively



Learning Development Service
Queen's University Belfast

As a student, there may be times when you feel under pressure. This pressure is often needed to meet deadlines, but if pressure is prolonged it can lead to stress that you find difficult to manage. This booklet outlines tools you can use to help manage stress effectively.

Benefits of pressure

- Helps to motivate us to learn and achieve goals
- Stimulates us to get things done
- Pressure and demands from situations and people challenge us
- Energy that can be used creatively
- Personal growth

Think of a recent example where you felt under pressure and it was useful to help you perform, for example, revising for an exam.

Sometimes pressure can lead to stress which can be difficult to manage.

Stress, as defined by the Health and Safety Commission, is “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them”.

Examples of when you might feel stressed:

- Being in a lecture for the first time with 200 new people
- Deadlines
- Money problems
- Workload
- Family issues
- Managing study and a part time job
- Lack of time to do everything I want to do
- Pressure from other people
- Making new friends

If you find these situations stressful but you can deal with them, you are managing your stress effectively. If the situations remain as stressful each time you do them you may not be dealing effectively with your stress.

By avoiding dealing with situations that are difficult you increase your levels of stress. Are there situations you would add to the above list?

What happens when you feel stressed?

Cognitive

- Forgetting things
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worrying about things
- Difficulty processing information
- Negative self-statements

Behaviour

- Absenteeism
- Social withdrawal
- Change in appearance
- Relationship problems
- Poor time management or performance
- Reckless



Physical

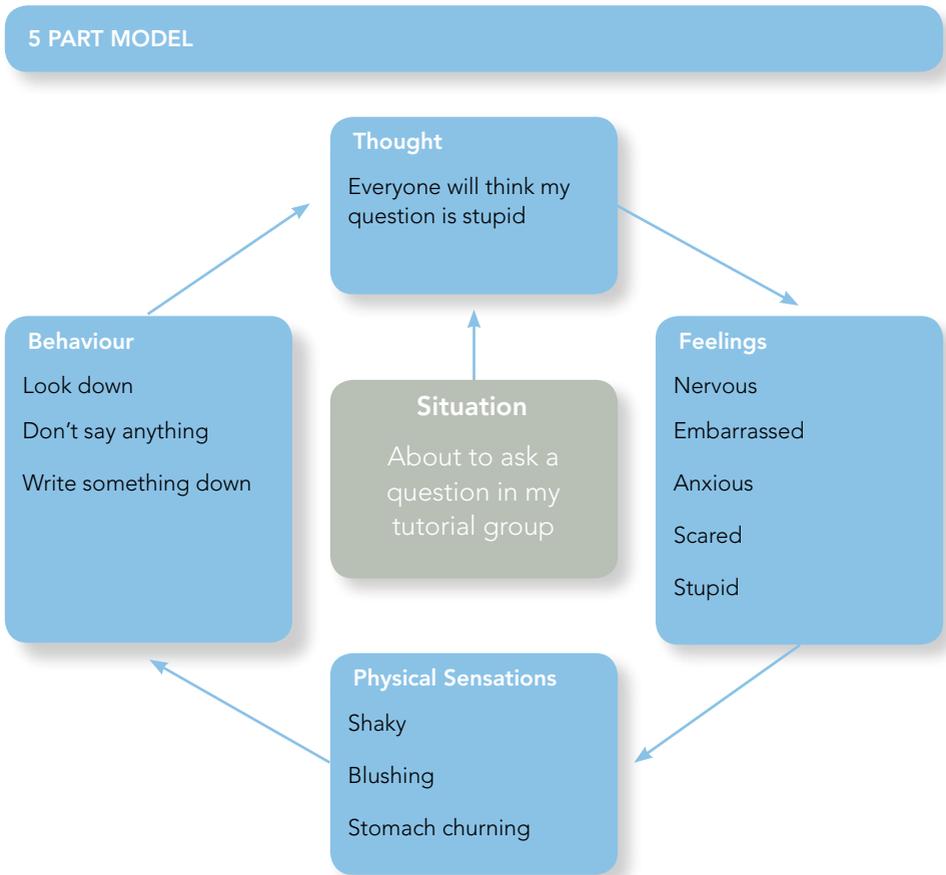
- Racing heart
- Cold, sweating hands
- Headaches
- Shallow/erratic breathing
- Nausea, upset tummy
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Weight loss

Emotional

- Increased irritability and anger
- Anxiety, feelings of panic
- Fearfulness
- Tearfulness
- Increased interpersonal conflicts
- Easily frustrated

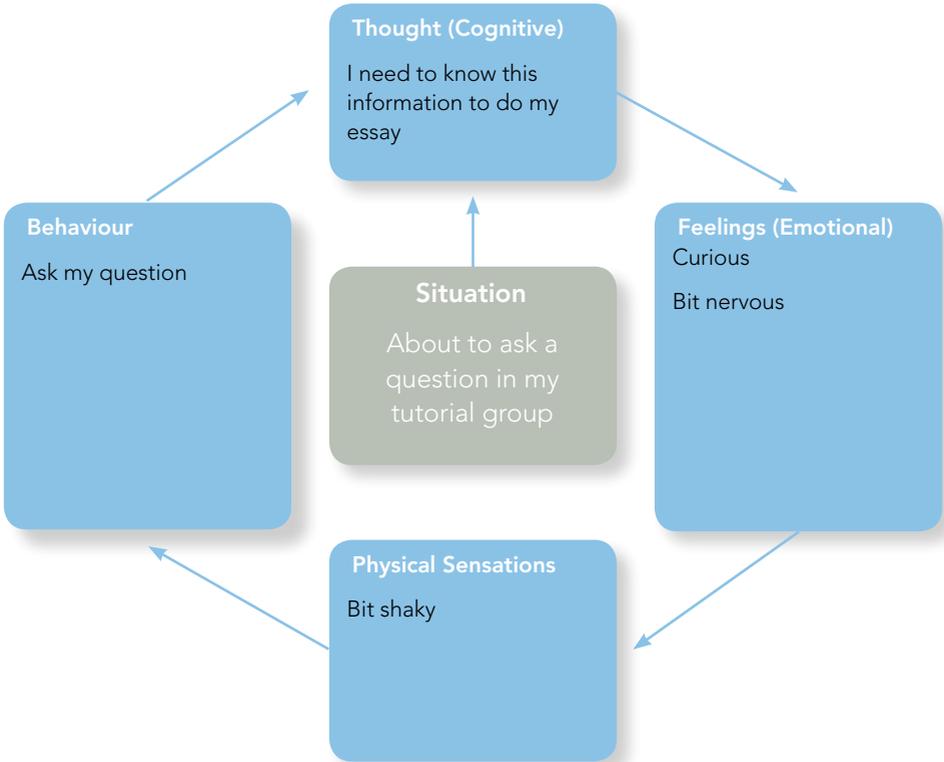
Stressful Events

Below is an example of how a situation can lead to a thought which results in unhelpful feelings, behaviour and physical sensations:



Would it be possible to think of this situation in another way?

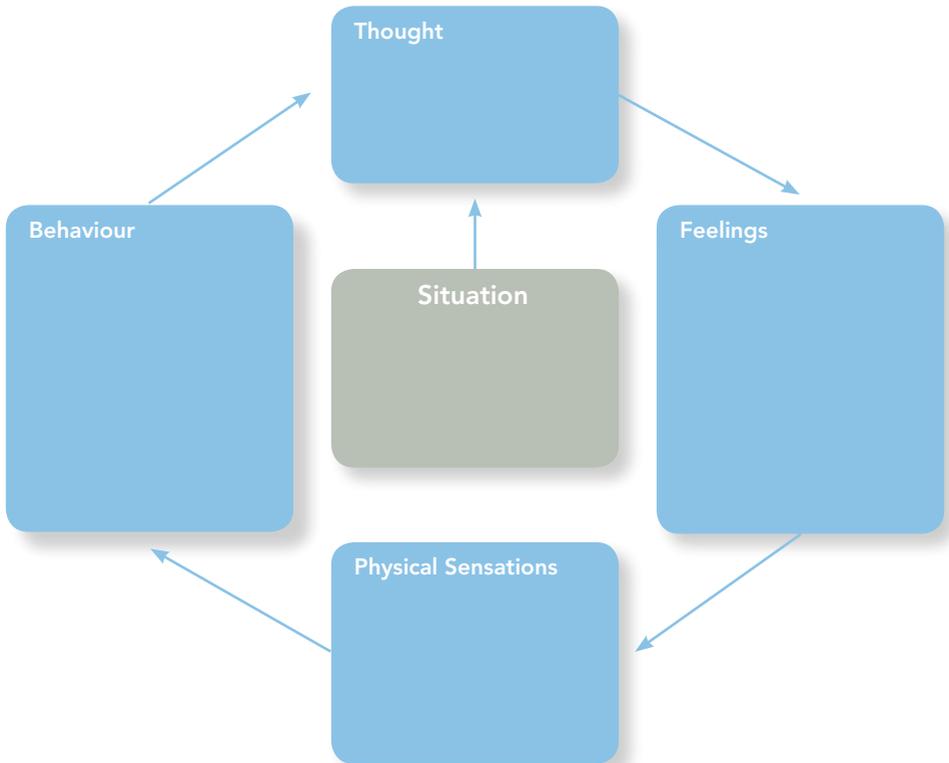
5 PART MODEL



Stressful Events

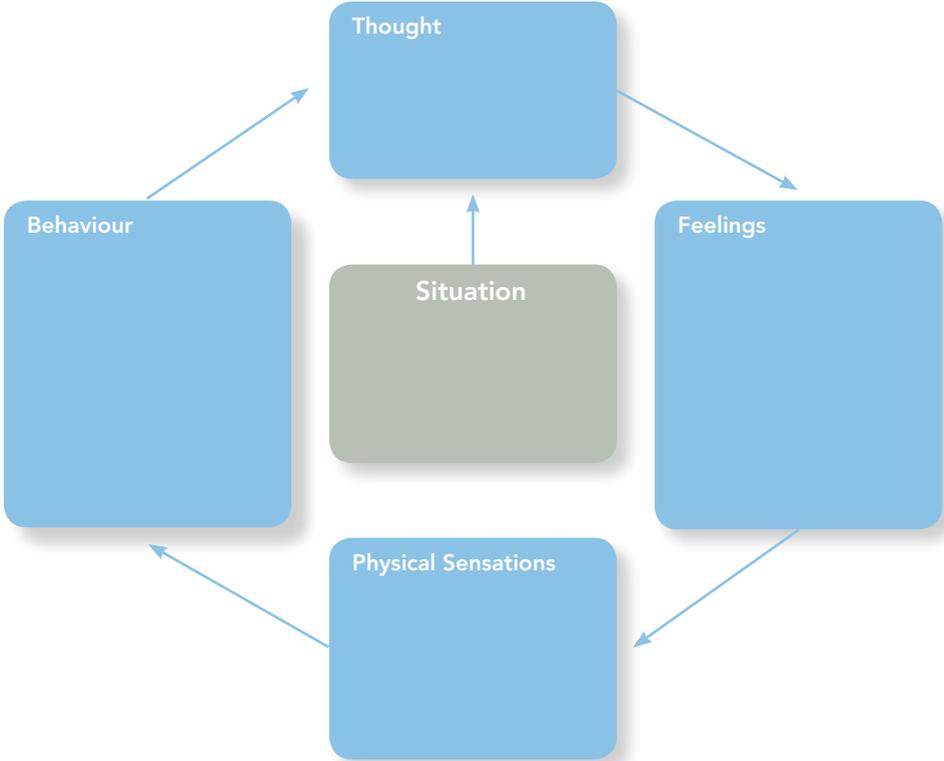
Try completing the boxes below for a situation that you recently felt stressed about.

5 PART MODEL



Looking back at that situation, can you come up with another more balanced thought?
Does that change the content of the other boxes for you?

5 PART MODEL



THINKING PATTERNS

Your thinking affects how you approach situations. Do you notice that you sometimes have a tendency to think in a way that stops you doing things or that results in a negative outcome?

Mindreading

You believe you know what someone is thinking:

"He thinks I am stupid."

"She thinks I'm lazy."

Ask yourself: is it possible to know what someone else is thinking?

Catastrophising/Fortunetelling

You predict the future negatively without considering other more likely outcomes:

"I will never get my degree."

"I will fail my exams"

Ask yourself: Can anyone predict the future?

"Must" / "Should" Statements

You have a precise, fixed idea of how you or others should behave:

"I should understand this by now."

"I must be there for my friends."

Are you putting a lot of pressure on yourself by always behaving in a fixed way?

Labelling

Labelling is where you put a label on yourself or others without considering all the evidence

"I am not good enough."

"I am weak."

Emotional Reasoning

A strong feeling leads to a belief.

"I feel useless therefore I am useless."

"I feel really anxious therefore I have something to be anxious about."

Mental Filter

You pay attention to one negative detail instead of whole picture:

"Because I got a low mark in one assignment I am going to fail the course."

(Despite getting good marks on other aspects of the course.)

"I didn't talk to anyone at my lecture today therefore I will never make friends."

Discounting the Positive

You tell yourself that positive experiences or qualities do not count.

"I only did well in the test because it was easy."

(Discount that you worked hard)

"Even though I got a good mark in this practical, it doesn't mean I'm going to get through this module."

Personalisation

When you believe you are responsible for another person's negative behaviour:

"My tutor wasn't happy today, so I must have done something wrong."

(Rather than something that has happened.)

"She's upset because of me."

Is it possible to be responsible for other people's feelings?

All or Nothing thinking

You there can be no half-way measures:

"If I don't get a First I have failed."

"If I don't get over 70% there is no point in trying."

Does this thinking give you any room for making mistakes and learning from them?

Overgeneralisation

From one situation, you make a sweeping negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation:

"Because I felt uncomfortable at the meeting, I don't have what it takes to say what I think."

"I found that assignment difficult, therefore I am going to find every assignment difficult."

What is your evidence?

When you are thinking in these ways, try asking yourself the question: *"What evidence have I to back up this thought?"* If you do not have a lot of factual evidence to back up the thought maybe it is inaccurate and you could change it for a more balanced thought.

Unbalanced Thought: *"I will fail my exams."*

Evidence for

Evidence against

I failed my 11+

I passed 9 GCSEs
I have achieved the grades needed for my course at Queen's

I will forget everything that I have revised

I have a habit of thinking the worst sometimes e.g. I didn't think I would get into Queen's.

I have not forgotten everything in previous exams

New balanced thought *"Although I had a negative experience of exams because I did not pass my 11+, I passed at GCSE and A level therefore I know I can pass exams."*



BEHAVIOUR

There are a number of practical things you can do to help you manage stress effectively:

1. Physical exercise
2. Relaxation
3. Breathing exercises
4. Laugh and smile
5. Time management
6. Social support/friends
7. Seek help
8. Healthy eating

1. Physical Exercise

When you hear the word exercise, do you think of curling up in front of the TV and watching someone else doing engage in physical activity?

Try and think of exercise you enjoy; dancing, walking or football.

Then try it for 5-minutes, if you do not like it stop, but if you do like it keep going.

Start to add exercise into your weekly timetable: 30-minutes at lunchtime or 30-minutes before your evening meal.

If you can't think of exercise you enjoy, look at what other benefits might attract you to trying something; benefits such as meeting new people, relaxing, getting away for the weekend, and then do some research to find a hobby that would provide these benefits.

Additional information

<http://www.qubsu.org/clubs.asp> for Queen's Clubs and Societies.

<http://www.queenssport.com//> for Queen's Physical Education Centre

2. Relaxation

Try this exercise:

Deep Muscle Relaxation

Practice in a quiet and comfortable environment for the first few times. Close your eyes to reduce distractions and concentrate on the set of muscles you are dealing with. Sit down in a comfortable chair and loosen any tight clothing.

Don't force yourself to relax, adopt an attitude of passive concentration. After relaxing a muscle group, mentally repeat the word 'relax'. Relax each part of your body in the following order:

Hands and Lower Arms: Clench both fists as tightly as you can for about five seconds and feel the tension. Now relax them completely and note the difference between tension and relaxation.

Front Upper Arms: Bend your arms at the elbows and try to touch your wrists to your shoulders to tighten the muscles at the front of the upper arms (the biceps). Hold this position for about five seconds, then relax and let your arms straighten by your sides. Continue to let the muscles unwind and concentrate on the feeling of letting go.

Back Upper Arms: Straighten your arms as rigidly as you can. Feel the tension in the back of your upper arms (your triceps muscles) for about five seconds and then let go. Let your arms relax completely.

Neck: Press your head back hard against the chair so as to tense your neck muscles and hold that position for about five seconds. Feel the tension and then relax your neck and simply let your head rest back gently. Concentrate on the feeling of letting go.

Shoulders: Shrug your shoulders, drawing them up into your neck as tightly as you can. Notice the tension in your shoulders, hold the position for about five seconds and then relax. Let your shoulders flop and unwind and enjoy the feeling of letting go.

Eyes and Eyebrows: Frown as hard as you can and squeeze your eyes tightly shut in order to tense the area around your eyes. Hold that position for about five seconds and then relax. Feel the relief of letting go.

Forehead and Scalp: Raise your eyebrows as high as you can as though enquiring. Feel the tension in your forehead and scalp and hold that position. Feel the tension and relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation and continue the feeling of letting go. Keep your eyes still and look straight ahead.

Mouth: Press your lips tightly together and tense the muscles in your lips and face. Hold this position for about five seconds and then relax. Let your lips rest lightly together and continue the feeling of letting go.

Jaw: Bite your teeth together for about five seconds and feel the tension in your jaw. Then relax the muscles in your jaw by parting your teeth slightly so there is no tension in your jaw. Concentrate on the feeling of letting go.

Throat: Press the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth and press upwards as hard as you can. Feel the tension in your tongue and throat and hold that position for about five seconds. Then let go and allow your tongue to flop down into the bottom of your mouth. Feel the relief of letting go and continue to relax your tongue and throat.

Chest: Take a deep breath and feel the tension in your chest. Hold your breath for about five seconds. Now breathe out and concentrate on the feeling of relaxation. Take another deep breath and feel the tension again. Hold it for five seconds then breathe out and relax. Now keep your breathing shallow and relax every time you breathe out and feel the relief of letting go.

Stomach: Tighten the muscles around your stomach area as though you were preparing to receive a punch. Feel the tension and hold this position for about five seconds. Now relax and let your stomach muscles loosen and unwind. Continue the feeling of letting go and relaxing.

Leg and Hips: Squeeze your thighs and buttocks together, straighten your legs and point your toes downwards. Hold that position for about five seconds, note the tension in your legs and hips and then relax completely and feel the tension ease away from your legs and hips.

For the next two or three minutes concentrate on relaxing all the major muscle groups: legs, buttocks, stomach, chest, mouth, throat, eyes, forehead, neck, shoulders, arms and hands.

Feel yourself sinking deeper into your chair as your body becomes heavier and heavier, more and more deeply relaxed. Now count backwards from ten and then open your eyes and look around. Move slowly. In your own time get back to what you were doing and maintain the feeling of relaxation.

Hint

Try practising deep relaxation at least once a day for about 15-minutes. It will do you even more good if you can practise for two such periods – say one during the middle of the day and one in the evening. Two 10-minute sessions may be easier to fit into your daily routine. After about five days you should find that you are able to relax quickly and easily.

Quick Relaxation

Once you can use deep relaxation techniques to relax quickly and easily, you may be ready to move on to 'quick relaxation'. You can do this by sitting or lying in a comfortable position and tensing and relaxing all your muscle groups at the same time. First tense and hold for about 10-minutes whilst concentrating on a relaxing image and the word 'relax'.

If you enjoy relaxation exercises you should look at other related topics such as mindfulness or yoga.

3. Breathing

By breathing deeply you allow your body to get more oxygen and the process helps you feel calmer.

Be aware of your breathing. Breathe in counting to five, hold for five and then breathe out counting to five.

4. Laugh and Smile

Have you found that when you laugh you can look at things differently? It allows you to put things into perspective. You think your first presentation was terrible. It is not the end of the world, it is a 2-minute episode in your life which you would maybe like to delete but you are human. We are designed to make mistakes.

5. Time Management

This may seem an unusual term to come across as a carefree student but it is one area that can give students a lot of stress. Balancing part-time working hours, meeting assignment deadlines and having a hectic social life or home life can be demanding. You sometimes need to take time out and look at where your 168 hours a week are going. (See www.qub.ac.uk/lds for time planner sheets). But while reading this, note things you may be spending too much time on activities such as Facebook or having long coffee breaks.

TIME RECOMMENDATIONS

Studying and lectures	36 hours minimum
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Part time work	12 hours a week
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Sleep	56 hours a week
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36 hours is a rough guide for study and lectures, at times it will be more and depending on your course it might always be more.

6. Support

A key way to help yourself with events that are stressful is to talk to people. When we are feeling stressed sometimes we bottle things up whereas when we talk about the difficulty it helps. Think about who you can go to for support, it may be a friend or family member.

7. Seek help

There are a number of people in the University who you can talk to. You may find it helpful to first contact your personal tutor and you can also make an appointment with a counsellor.

Freephone: 0808 800 0016 (During office hours)

Email: counsellingappointments@qub.ac.uk

8. Healthy eating

As a student you are on a tight budget but that does not mean your diet should be unhealthy. Try and make sure you eat breakfast, even fruit, on your way to a lecture as this will give you energy for the start of the day. Lunches can be expensive but there are a number of places near the University that offer free lunches, you can have fun checking out the best of these. Also, think of places where you can eat a packed lunch. The front of the Union is a good spot, as is Botanic Gardens in the sunshine. If you are living in Halls you have a great opportunity to make friends by offering to try out your cooking skills.

Having read this booklet what action will you take to manage stress more effectively?

Reference and further reading

Padesky, C. and Greenberger, D. (1995) *Mind over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think*. New York, Guilford Press.

