

Managing Health & Wellbeing at Work

Workbook



Module 2: Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment

Section 3: Managing Mental Health Self-Care

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Instructors of the program:

BENEDICT LIM, CEO & Chief psychologist



My name is **Benedict Lim**, and I'm the CEO and chief psychologist of iGROW. If I may share about how iGROW was started, its because I was working with at-risk youth in my first career and realized that one to one, the youth are very good, but when they go back to the home environment every good gets undone. So I was thinking how can we reach out to the people that they are living with? And we figured that most adults spend their time working, right? And if you can make the workplace happy and healthier hopefully they don't bring negativity back home. So, that was how iGROW was started. So right now I dedicate my time and energy helping business leaders who are frustrated with teams missing goals, build work cultures that are results oriented, productive, and loyal, so that there's more time and freedom to grow their business.

Instructors of the program:

MARIA PLENGSANGTIP, Partner & Consultant Psychologist



My name is **Maria Plengsangtip**, and I'm a partner and psychologist at iGROW. I'm from Thailand, and now based in Singapore. I help human capital professional facing difficulties to improve employee engagement and health of their employees by designing and developing customized strategies to achieve better health and employee well being. This frees up the precious time and energy to focus on their many priorities at work. I do this through individual counseling, coaching, culture training, as well as lecturing at the local university.

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AGENDA

1. Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace
2. Identify and Support colleagues in need of help
3. **Managing Mental Health Self-Care**
4. Creating a Supportive Culture & Encouraging Help-Seeking behaviour for mental wellness at work

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Section 3: Managing Mental Health Self-Care



**WHAT ARE SOME ACTIVITIES THAT
HELP YOU TO RELAX?**

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Let us take a minute or two to answer this question, what are some activities that help you to relax? It can be anything, nothing too insignificant, as long as it matters to you. If you like, you can press pause and take some time to reflect before continuing.

I chose this picture of the beach because I love the sound of the waves crashing and the cool wind blowing with the sun shining and keeping me warm. It is such a fantastic and peaceful experience for me.

You might have list 'going on a holiday,' as one of the activities that help you to relax. Wouldn't it be nice if we can have frequent breaks and holidays? There are limits to the number of holidays that we can have. Furthermore, some of you might experience more frequent stress. We need a way to better cope with these daily stressors that a holiday cannot fix. Thankfully, there are many ways that makes better financial sense to help us fight stress and to better manage our mental health.

In this section, I will share with you ways to cope and manage our mental health. Keep in mind that what I will be sharing is not exhaustive. There are many other ways to build your mental health. You may want to start with the activities covered here and explore other ways to cope with stress.

Do also note that if you or people around you are experiencing prolonged episodes of negative emotions linking to stress, depression, or anxiety - it is best to consult a professional to receive the best care and support.

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Managing Mental Health Self-Care

S	upport
P	ositive Self Talk
E	xercise
A	ssertiveness
R	est



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Let me introduce you to SPEAR

You might have heard of these self-care techniques before. I would go to the extent to say that these are nothing new. I am sharing this because they have been tested and researched by psychologists and researchers to ensure effectiveness in strengthening mental health.

Furthermore, these are activities that you can do almost anytime and anywhere. Best of all, it is free. The question is, are you willing to spend some time to do these activities to manage your mental health?

Knowing is one thing.

Taking action is another.

Knowing increases awareness, but taking action creates change.

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I will build a case for the importance of these activities. But I will leave it to you to decide if you want to take action.

Managing Mental Health Self-Care

➔ Support

- ➔ Greater social support leads to ***lower psychological strain***
- ➔ Support can ***reduce illness*** and ***hasten recovery***
- ➔ So look for your family, friends, teachers, counsellors, etc

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In general, research has shown that social support helps to lower psychological strain. Support also reduces illness and help us recover a lot faster. Therefore, it is important for you to have support in your life. The person can be your colleague, friends or family members, as long as you feel comfortable with them. The more social support you have, the more protection you have against stress. The social support provides a space for you to lean on. A good social support is someone that you do not feel afraid of judging you. Having someone that can provide a listening ear for you is very important.

A lot of times, people often say that they do not want to worry their parents, friends or family in general. If you feel the same way, see a counselor or psychologist so that they can provide a listening ear. All conversations are private and confidential. As long as you have someone, it will help you to better cope with the stress around you.

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Managing Mental Health Self-Care

➔ Positive Self Talk

- ➔ The steady stream of on-going thoughts or *internal dialogue* that goes on in our minds constantly
- ➔ Your self talk *influences* your **moods**, **emotions**, and ultimately your **behavior**

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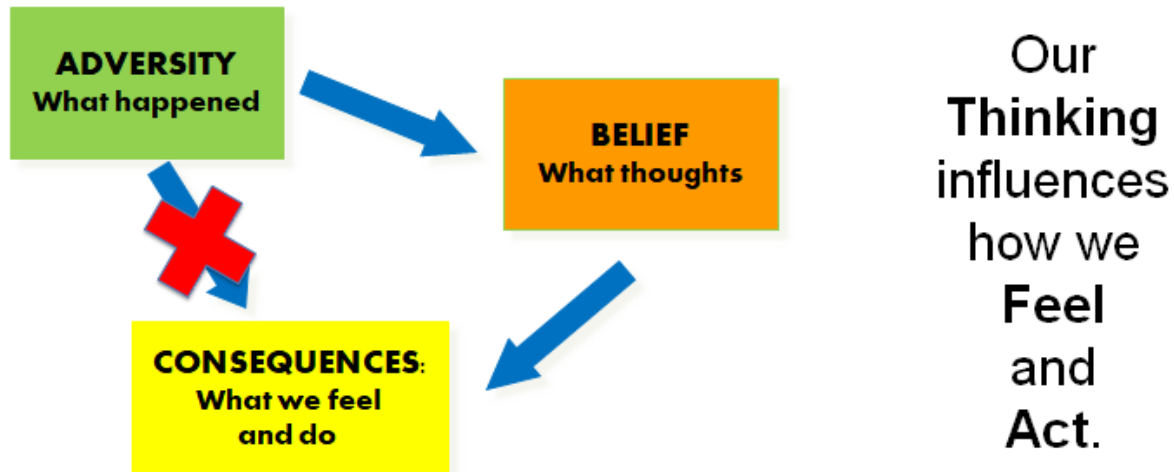
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This is probably the most important self-care method under SPEAR. So what is positive self talk? It is the stream of ongoing thoughts or internal dialogue that goes on in our mind constantly. Self talk influences our mood, emotions and behavior.

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POSITIVE SELF TALK

The Thinking + Feeling Connection



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It is very common for us to think that when something happens and we have a reaction, it is due to the event. However, the Adversity (A) does not cause the Consequences (C) of how we feel or do things.

In between A and C, we have “B” or beliefs/thoughts that help us to interpret and make meaning of the situation.

Imagine that you are in a crowded train and next to you stands a lady wearing stilettos. Imagine that she steps on you. How would you feel if you think that she stepped on you purposely? Angry? Upset?

What would you like to do next? Shout at her? Step back at her? I am quite sure that your action would be aligned to your anger. You are likely to show that you are angry.

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Now, I want you to imagine the same situation. Everything is the same - you are in a crowded train, stand next to a lady, and the lady steps on you with her stilettos. The amount pain is also the same. But this time, you think maybe it is an accident. She did not intentionally step on you, but maybe she lost her balance. How would you feel? Would you still be extremely angry? It is unlikely that you experience extreme anger like the first scenario. Perhaps you still feel angry, but the anger is likely to be reduced.

What would you like to do next? It is unlikely that you would want to shout or step back. It is more likely for you to try to help her or wait to see how she responds. If she apologizes, you are more than happy to forgive her.

The only change in these two scenarios is “B” - your thoughts and beliefs. Our thinking influences our feelings and the way we do things. While we cannot control “A” or the situation, we can control “B” - our thoughts. This applies to any situation that we are in.

In a stressful situation, we need to be aware of our thoughts and beliefs in interpreting and making meaning of the situation. Sometimes our thoughts can be extremely negative causing us more stress and anxiety which affects our actions. By neutralizing our extreme negative thoughts by using more neutral or positive self talk, can lead to better coping.

One word that I often use is, “Maybe.” Maybe implies that there are alternative explanations to the situation that we are in. This helps to counter the extreme negative thoughts by exercising our mind to find other explanations. This results in having a wider perspectives.

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Using the scenario above, our feelings and actions are more neutral when we think that it is an accident. This helps us avoid extreme negative feelings such as anger and actions such as shouting and stepping back. It helps us to better manage the situation.

Let us consider another example:

- A: You have a difficult client who raises his or her voice at you \
- B: The client is rude
- C: Anger resulting in bad relationship

While we are unable to control the “A”, you can change the “B”:

- A: You have a difficult client who raises his or her voice at you \
- B: Maybe the client is having a rough day or maybe the client’s boss is pressuring him/her to get things done.
- C: Calm and empathy resulting in better relationship.

Remember to practice using the word “Maybe” to help neutralize the situation by seeing more alternative explanation to the situation.

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Managing Mental Health Self-Care

➤ Exercise

- ➡ Exercise *depletes the bio-chemicals* produced under stress.
- ➡ Exercise *increases mental acuity*.
- ➡ Exercise & right *diet* increases *immune system*.

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Exercise is very important for your physical health as well as your mental health. It helps to increase your mental acuity, sharpness, and your alertness. Exercise can be an activity that helps to clear the mind, increase focus, and simultaneously reduce the feelings relating to stress.

With a balanced diet and consistent exercise, you will have a better immune system that can combat sickness and keeps you strong.

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Managing Mental Health Self-Care

Assertiveness

- ➡ Learning (permission) to say “NO”
- ➡ **Speaking up** with Confidence and Compassion (others/ self)
- ➡ **Focus on the issue** and not the person
- ➡ When do you need to say “No”?

ACTION: “**Agree to Disagree**” → Respect differences



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When we are stressed, we often feel that we are not in control of the situation. This can result in increased feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. One way to reduce stress is to reduce the feeling of helplessness by increasing our assertiveness. Assertiveness helps us to experience more control in the situation. It reduces the thought or belief that, “Nothing can be done.”

This means that sometimes we need to learn to say, “no”. This does not mean saying no to work and responsibilities. The focus is on being in control despite the situation by evaluating what we can do and what we cannot do.

Assertiveness also includes speaking up with more confidence, but at the same time, have compassion towards others. When there is a conflict, focus on the issue and not on the person. Do not attack or blame the person, but choose to work towards a solution together.

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Managing Mental Health Self-Care

➤ Rest

- ➡ Rest counteracts the depression that follows the “adrenalin rush,” especially if the rush has been sustained over several days.
- ➡ Can’t sleep? Resting quietly can still be an effective alternative.
- ➡ Develop relaxation routines if sleep is difficult.

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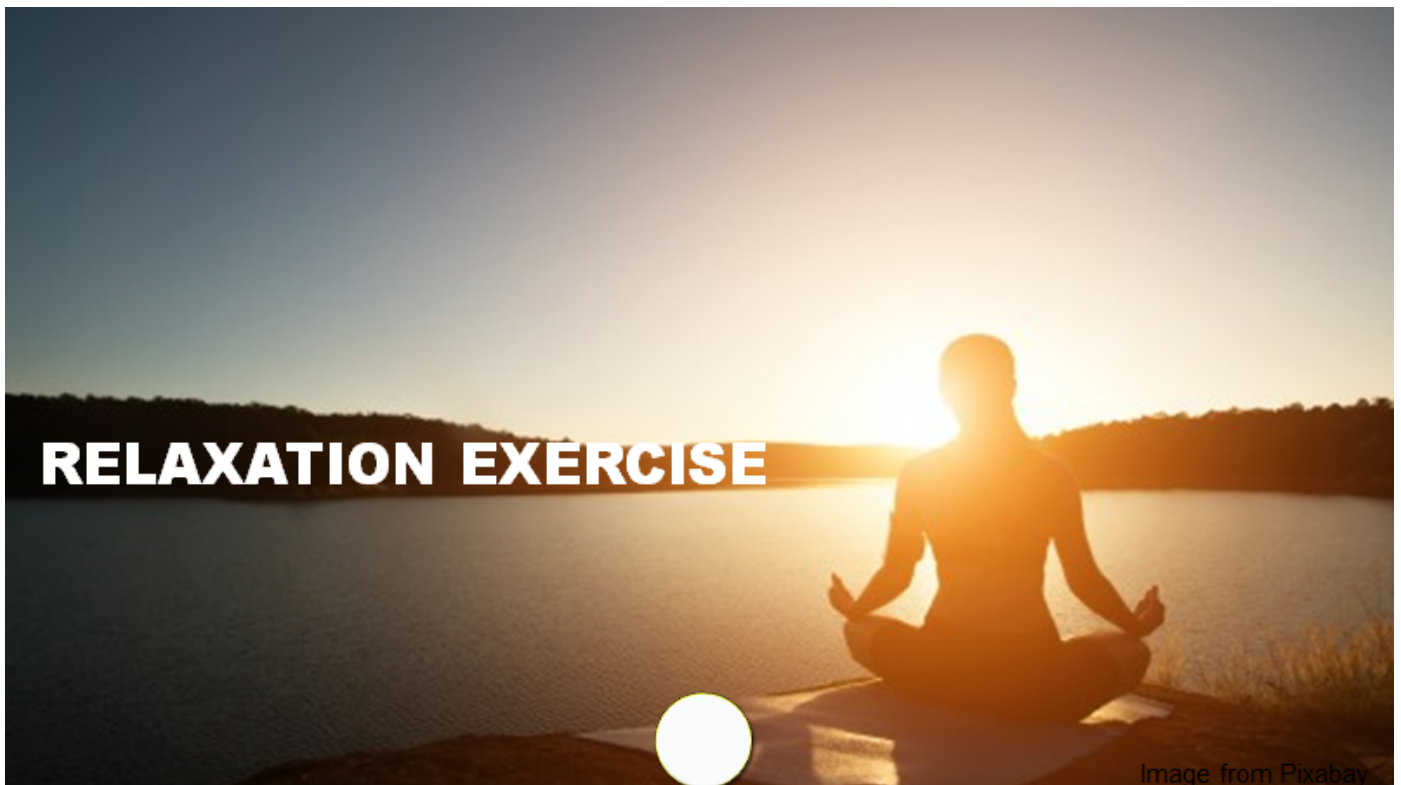
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Rest is crucial for our physical and mental health. It includes having enough sleep at night, as well as having pockets of time throughout the day to refocus despite the hectic schedule.

When we are stressed or anxious, we breathe faster. And when we do this, we send a signal to the body that we are in danger of causing us to experience more stress and anxiety.

One effective way to tell our body that we are okay and for us to feel more calm and to focus better is to do breathing relaxation.

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In the recording, you can see the ball moving up and down. Align your breathing to the movement of the ball. As the ball moves up, breathe in deeply but slowly. As the ball moves down, breathe out.

Continue to follow the ball.

The ball is moving to help you experience Deep Breathing. It slows your breathing and maintains it at 5 second per breathe. Deep breathing helps the body and mind to slow down and increase calmness.

If you have difficulties breathing in all the way for five seconds, try slowing down your breathing. This exercise is not about filling the lungs, but also on how to do it gently and slowly to induce calmness. Make sure to slow down so that you can breathe fully within the five second breath in.

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As I mentioned before, we often experience more physical tension especially around our shoulders. As you breathe out, I want you to just relax. Relax all the part that is tensed. Continue to breathe in and breathe out- relax.

If you experience breathlessness, stop for a while and when you feel better, restart. Breathlessness can happen if you have never practiced deep breathing before. It can also happen if you do not exercise regularly. The body is not used to having an influx of oxygen entering the body and therefore, having more oxygen circulating in the body can cause some feeling of giddiness.

While natural, it takes some time for the body to adjust to deep breathing. Therefore, if you are feeling breathless, stop for a while and try again. Like all new skills and forming new habits. This relaxation exercise requires you to spend more time to practice in order to reap the benefits.

If you are wearing a smartwatch or have a smartphone, you can find a breathing or relaxation exercise app on the devices. I highly encourage you to find one and practice at least five minutes per day. It would help you to relax and calm.

This exercise is also helpful if you are feeling anxious or stressed. This can be the first activity to combat the negative feelings. Deep, slow breathing helps to refocus.

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In this section, we have gone through different skills to reduce stress. When faced with stresses in life, learn to **SPEAR** through the challenges. Pick and choose which **SPEAR** you want to use.