Mental Health and Stress

CHAPTER 2
Positive Psychology and Character Strengths

In recent years, psychologists have become more interested in positive psychology

- Focus on positive emotions, characteristics, strengths, and conditions that create happiness
- Six virtues that “enable human thriving”
  - Wisdom
  - Courage
  - Humanity
  - Justice
  - Temperance
  - Transcendence
Characteristics of Mentally Healthy People

• Possess high self-esteem
• Accept imperfections in themselves and others
• Altruistic
• Have a sense of control over their lives
• Demonstrate social competence in relationships
• Able to rely on others
• Not overwhelmed by emotions
• Try to maintain a positive outlook on life
• Capable of intimacy; no fear of commitment
• Show creativity
• Persevere and take on challenges
• Take reasonable risks in order to grow
• Can bounce back from adversity
The Self-Actualized Person

*Self-actualization*: the state attained when a person has reached his or her full potential

Proposed by Maslow as the level at which people achieve transcendence

- State of well-being that comes from finding purpose and meaning in life
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- Physiological Needs
  - food and water
  - shelter
  - sleep
  - exercise
  - sex

- Safety and Security
  - safe surroundings
  - protection by others
  - knows to avoid risks

- Love and Belongingness
  - loved
  - loving
  - connected

- Self-Esteem
  - as a person
  - as a doer
  - in relationships

- Self-Actualization
  - realism
  - self-acceptance
  - autonomy
  - authenticity
  - capable of intimacy
  - creativity

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Optimism, Self-Efficacy, and Resilience

*Optimism*: tendency to see problems as temporary and specific rather than permanent and general

*Self-efficacy*: a general sense that you have some control over your life

*Resilience*: the ability to bounce back from adverse events
Happiness and Positive Psychology

Happiness involves three components:
- Positive emotion and pleasure (savoring sensory experiences)
- Engagement (depth of involvement with family, work, romance, and hobbies)
- Meaning (using personal strengths to serve some larger end)

Engagement and meaning are the most important in giving people satisfaction and happiness
Emotional Intelligence

Psychologist Daniel Goleman expanded concept of intelligence by including the idea of emotional intelligence

- Insists qualities such as self-awareness, self-discipline, persistence, and empathy are more important than IQ
Emotional Intelligence

People who are emotionally intelligent can:

- Recognize, name, and understand their emotions
- Manage their emotions and control their moods
- Motivate themselves
- Recognize and respond to emotions in others
- Be socially competent
Bereavement and Healthy Grieving

Grieving is a natural response to loss and is often expressed by a multitude of feelings, including sadness, loneliness, anger, and guilt.

Such intense emotional feelings can have a negative impact on one’s overall health.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve and no specific timetable.

Seeking support and keeping a journal can be part of the healing process.
Facing Death

Kübler-Ross, 1969: stages people go through when in the process of dying

- (1) Denial and isolation; (2) anger;
- (3) bargaining; (4) depression;
- (5) acceptance

- Stages are not linear; people experience them in different orders or may revisit stages

More modern approaches focus on ways to *live* with illness rather than prepare for death
The Brain’s Role in Mental Health and Illness

• The brain is the central control station for human intelligence, feeling, and creativity
  – The brain and nervous system mediate all behavior, both normal and abnormal

• Since the 1980s, knowledge of the structure and function of the brain has increased dramatically

• Advances in imaging technologies (CAT scans, PET scans, MRIs, fMRIs) have allowed for many new discoveries
The Developing Brain

By the age of 6, 95% of the brain is formed

A growth spurt in adolescence occurs in the frontal cortex, where the “executive functions” of planning, organization, and rational thinking are controlled

By the early to mid 20s, a more mature adult brain results
Mental illnesses are diseases that affect the brain

- *Cognitive disorders* are caused by a pathology of the brain and are rare
- Mental disorders are more commonly caused by complex interactions
  - Biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors
  - Some have a genetic component

Imbalances of neurotransmitters seem to be particularly important in a variety of mental disorders
Mental Disorders and Treatment

*Mental disorder*: a pattern of behavior associated with distress (pain) or disability or with significantly increased risk of suffering, death, pain, disability, or loss of freedom

- A mental disorder is different from a psychological problem that can be considered normal, and it can be diagnosed from a set of symptoms
Mood Disorders

Known as depressive or affective disorders

Among the most common mental disorders around the world

More than 20 million adults in the United States suffer from a depressive illness, affecting more women than men

Examples include:

- Major depressive disorder (depression)
- Bipolar disorder (manic episodes)
Anxiety Disorders

Along with depression, anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders

- Affect more than 40 million Americans 18 and older
  - Panic attack: apprehension or intense fear in the absence of danger
  - Panic disorder: recurrent unexpected panic attacks
  - Specific phobia: intense fear of a situation or object, invoking immediate anxiety
  - Social phobia: intense fear of social or performance situations
  - Generalized anxiety disorder: worry about routine matters
  - Obsessive-compulsive disorder: persistent, intrusive thoughts, impulses, or images that cause intense anxiety or distress
Addiction

Continued, compulsive behavior despite serious negative consequences

Physiological dependence reduces sensitivity to substance’s effects

Withdrawal symptoms occur when substance use stops

Even without physiological dependence, psychological dependence can occur

Usually associated with substance use, but concept of addiction now extended to other areas of compulsive behaviors
Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders

Disorders characterized by delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech or behavior, and other signs that an individual has lost touch with reality

Schizophrenia has a strong genetic component

In most cases, symptoms of the disease can be controlled with medication
Mental Disorders and Suicide

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students

About 7% of college-aged students seriously considered suicide in 2012, and almost 1% attempted to kill themselves

Women in U.S. society are more likely to attempt suicide, but men are four times more likely to succeed
Mental Disorders and Suicide

What leads a person to suicide?

- As many as 90% of those who commit suicide are suffering from a mental disorder—often depression.
- The symptom linking depression and suicide is a feeling of hopelessness.
- Depression and alcoholism may be involved in two-thirds of suicides.
- Substance abuse and depression can be lethal.
- Sometimes there is no apparent precipitating event or problem.
Mental Disorders and Suicide

Behavioral signs that may indicate a person is thinking about suicide:

- Comments about death and threats of suicide
- Increasing social withdrawal and isolation
- Intensified moodiness
- Increase in risk-taking behaviors
- Sudden improvement in mood, accompanied by certain behaviors, such as giving away possessions
Mental Disorders and Suicide

How to help:

- The danger of asking if someone is thinking about suicide (“planting the seed”) is a myth
- Encourage the person to talk
- Encourage the person to get help through a suicide hotline or counseling
- Do not keep the situation a secret
- Do not leave a suicidal person alone
Self-Injury

Intentional injury to one’s own body, known sometimes as self-harm, self-mutilation, or self-injurious behavior

Behaviors include cutting, burning, scratching, branding, picking, hair-pulling, and head-banging

Individuals often have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse as well as coexisting problems such as substance abuse or an eating disorder
Treatments for Mental Disorders

Psychotherapy
- More than 250 different models of psychotherapy
- Based on the development of positive interpersonal relationship between a client and a therapist

Medications
- Antipsychotics
- Antidepressants
- Anxiolytics (anti-anxiety)
- Use has increased dramatically in recent years
What Is Stress?

Stress: the general state of the body, mind, and emotions when an environmental stressor has triggered the stress response

Stressors: events or agents in the environment that can cause stress
  • When you appraise an event as positive, you experience eustress, or positive stress
  • When you appraise it as negative, you experience distress
The Stress Response

A stress response (or fight-or-flight response) is a series of physiological changes that occur in the body.

All animals, including humans, have the ability to respond to emergencies they perceive as dangerous.

The autonomic nervous system is triggered via the sympathetic branch to activate the body’s organs to respond to the possible threat; it has two branches:

- **Sympathetic branch**: initiates stress response
- **Parasympathetic branch**: turns off stress response and returns the body to normal
The Stress Response: Changes in the Body

Scalp: The scalp tightens so that hair appears to stand up.

Eyes: Pupils dilate to sharpen vision.

Ears: Hearing becomes sharper.

Heart: Heart rate increases, heartbeat becomes stronger.

Blood vessels: Blood pressure increases, clotting time decreases.

Lungs: Breathing rate increases, lungs take in more oxygen.

Liver: Liver converts glycogen to glucose for instant energy.

Sweat glands: Perspiration increases to cool the body.

Hands and feet: Extremities become cold as blood is directed away from skin and toward large muscles.

Brain-center: Neurotransmitters in the brain activate the amygdala, triggering an emotional response to the stressor, such as fear or anger.

Brain-front: Neurotransmitters suppress activity in the frontal cortex of the brain (concerned with short-term memory, inhibition, and rational thought), allowing quick reactions to take over.

Mouth: Salivation decreases as fluids are diverted from nonessential functions.

Stomach, intestines: Digestion in the stomach slows or stops.

Adrenal glands: Adrenal glands release hormones that cause physiological and metabolic changes.

Large muscles, legs: Muscle tension in the large muscles increases to prepare body for action.
The Relaxation Response

*Homeostasis* is a state of stability and balance in which body functions are maintained within a normal range.

The *relaxation response* is a series of physiological changes that calm the body systems and return them to normal functioning.
Acute Stress and Chronic Stress

Your body can deal with short-term *acute stress*, as long as you recover afterwards

When stress is constant, it becomes damaging to the body

Many people live in a state of *chronic stress*, which is a stress response continuing without a relaxation and increases the likelihood of illness or disease
The General Adaptation Syndrome

Hans Selye developed the General Adaptation Syndrome as an explanation of the physiological changes observed during a stress response.

The process has three stages:

- **Alarm**
- **Resistance**
- **Exhaustion**
Physical Effects of Chronic Stress

Stress plays a role in illness and disease in a variety of ways

- Immune system
  - Both brief and long-term stressors decrease immune function
- Cardiovascular system
  - Long-term stress response can cause various forms of heart disease
Physical Effects of Chronic Stress

Stress plays a role in illness and disease in a variety of ways

- **Gastrointestinal system**
  - Common forms of stomach ailments can be related to stress

- **Mental health**
  - Forms of acute and chronic stress can contribute to the development of psychological illnesses
    - Acute stress disorder
    - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
    - Adjustment disorder
Mediators of the Stress Response

Different people respond differently to stressors

Factors that affect these responses could be past experiences and overall level of wellness

Other critical areas include:

◦ Personality traits
◦ Habitual ways of thinking
◦ Inborn or acquired attitudes toward the demands of life
Personality Factors

Type A behavior pattern
- Impulsive, achievement oriented, and highly competitive
- Prime candidates for stress-related illnesses, and increased risk for a number of other diseases

Type B behavior pattern
- More easygoing and less readily frustrated
- Less susceptible to coronary heart disease

Recent additional personality types
- Type C personality types: introverted, detail-oriented, reserved people
- Type D personality types: not very expressive, and hold in negative emotions
Cognitive Factors, and Resilience and Hardiness

*Cognitive factors*: your outlook and beliefs about life affect how you deal with stressors in your life

*Resilience*: stress-resistant people seem to focus on immediate issues and explain their struggles in positive and helpful ways

*Hardiness*: characterized by a tendency to view life events as challenges rather than threats
Sources of Stress

Life events

Daily hassles
  ◦ College stress
  ◦ Job pressure
    ◦ Burnout
  ◦ Money and financial worries

Family and interpersonal stress

Time pressure, overload, and technology

Anger

Trauma

Societal issues
Healthy and Unhealthy Ways to Manage Stress

Unhealthy ways to manage stress include the use of tobacco, the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol, and the use of food to manage feelings.

Need to experiment with active stress management techniques.

What works for one person may not be helpful for another.

Practice stress management on a regular basis.

Some stressful events and situations are overwhelming—don’t hesitate to seek counseling.
Stress Reduction Strategies

Time management

Social support

A healthy lifestyle

Relaxation techniques
  ◦ Deep breathing
  ◦ Progressive relaxation
  ◦ Visualization (guided imagery)
  ◦ Mindfulness-based meditation
  ◦ Yoga
  ◦ T’ai chi
  ◦ Biofeedback
  ◦ Affirmations