

# GROW UP! IT

Competences and framework for social system youth workers.



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# Lecture



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For years, the World Health Organization has been warning that stress will become a civilization disease of the 21st century. It accompanies us almost every day, which is why more and more researchers are trying to explore its mechanisms and find the most effective ways to cope with stressful situations. Stress is an inevitable part of life and affects everyone. The faster pace of changes, the pressure, the necessity to meet new obligations, the greater demands placed on us by the external environment and which result from personal needs; life on the run, in the crowd, lack of time for oneself, for relatives, are just some of the factors that make stress-free life seem almost impossible, and the problem of stress and coping with it and its consequences is still current.

The effect of numerous studies on stress in its various aspects are different definitions, methods and techniques of dealing with it.

The creator of the concept of stress - Hans Selye - said: **“As long as we live, we will not be able to avoid stress. However, we can learn how to minimize the harmful effects.”** The first step to this is to learn about the mechanisms of stress, to realize what are its causes, symptoms and long-term consequences, etc. Then we can try to fight it.

### **Definitions of stress can be divided into three basic categories:**

- **Stress as a stimulus** - annoying, obstructing and blocking the activity: in this category there are various situations that cause stress, eg noise in the workplace, exam, road accident or illness.
- **Stress as a reaction** to an unpleasant stimulus from the external environment: this category attempts to describe reactions that appear in the body and mind of a person in response to unpleasant situations, such as a mistake during a presentation.
- **Stress as a relationship** between human capabilities and the requirements of the situation, i.e. stressors. Undertaking remedial actions is an attempt to restore balance.

Stress is a natural and unavoidable part of our lives. Dr Hans Selye emphasizes that stress is a normal biological reaction of every organism - a normal physiological phenomenon associated with the processes of life. You may even be tempted to say that the lack of stress response means the death of the body. Stress accompanies each of us. It is a natural reaction to everyday life situations. Stress is both an exam and a conversation about work, changing a school or visiting a doctor. Skillful coping with stress is the way to a better quality of our lives. It is not the stress itself that is dangerous for a human being, but how we react to it. Very often, stress is caused by negative thinking. It is important how we interpret specific situations and what we give them meaning. If we think **“I will fail”**, then there is a much smaller chance of effective action than when we perceive the new situation as one that can be dealt with.

A certain optimal level of stress is needed for effective action. Too low stress level causes a decrease in motivation, apathy and boredom. Too high-tension, difficulty concentrating, anxiety and confusion in the head, physical fatigue, relapse reflex.

In everyday language, stress is negative and means a situation in which we face the necessity of dealing with difficult problems that arouse a lot of unpleasant emotions. In fact, stress to a certain level of severity works in our favor. Everyone has their own individual, optimal level of stress tolerance. Exceeding this limit causes stress to become harmful to the body. Up to this point, however, the mobilization of the body under the influence of stress can be a positive motivating force, improving the well-being and subjective quality of life. The stress situation is accompanied by emotional arousal, the strength of which depends on the individual interpretation of the event.

Typically, negative emotions are associated with stress, such as fear, anxiety, tension, sadness, grief, anger. But in pleasant situations, such as sports rivalry or during a wedding or a trip on a dream holiday, we experience positive emotions: excitement, hope, interest, joy. These emotions trigger the energy in us that is needed for quick response and the most effective action during stress.

➤ **Eustress (positive stress)** - a state of physical and mental well-being in which the mind and body reach their maximum potential. Eustress is a mobilizing and constructive stress. It is associated with clarity of mind and the peak of physical form. The term also defines the positive effects of stress when we feel mobilized and motivated. It occurs, for example, in connection with exams, practicing sports or during a date or other important events.

➤ **Distress (negative stress)** is an overload condition, when the voltage is not discharged in a long time. Prolonging distress is detrimental to healthy functioning. The balance and harmony between our mind and body is disturbed. We stop reacting properly, there are disturbances in our behavior and feelings. This can lead to the emergence of psychosomatic diseases. Distress is also the result of an excess of stressors, or difficult life issues and events. It is connected, for example, with excessive requirements and duties at work, but also with its loss, illness or death of a loved one.

The level of stress in which we operate is important: if we are not under enough pressure, our performance may be below optimal, especially if we suffer from boredom or lack of motivation. If the stress load is too high - we are also not very effective. We ourselves are largely responsible for our own stress - it is often the result of our thoughts, which we can influence. It is worth to observe and monitor your stress level and adjust it - increase when you need more stimulation, or decrease when you feel too tense. Active stress management will allow us to increase our efficiency and productivity. The approach to optimizing stress depends on the type of stress experienced. Strategies to cope with short-term stress focus on adrenaline

management to ensure maximum efficiency.

- **Short-term stress** can be the result of difficult meetings, rivalry and other confrontational situations.
- **Long-term stress**, fatigue and a high level of adrenaline over a long period of time can reduce performance. Optimizing long-term stress focuses on managing stress, health and energy.

Psychological and physiological reactions to stress.

#### **Physiological reactions:**

increased activity of the nervous system  
increased levels of adrenaline (or nor-adrenaline)  
in the blood, resulting in heart palpitations, increased pressure  
headaches, backaches, abdominal pain

#### **Psychological reactions:**

Anxiety  
depressive states  
sadness  
irritation  
disappointment with life and yourself  
depression

Alongside them, there are also:

#### **Changes in behavior:**

overeating  
alcohol abuse  
sleep disorders  
nail biting  
smoking  
Irritability  
avoiding contact with people

### Changes in thinking:

problems with maintaining attention and concentration  
forgetfulness  
negative thinking, creating black scenarios

Long-term stress arises under the influence of an intensified stressor or stressors or when they work over a long time. It can lead to dysregulation of the body.

Initially, a human acts much slower. Then there are problems with the transmission and reception of information, until finally the disorganization of life and the loss of control over the situation. Prolonged stress can cause negative health effects, such as:

- **heart diseases,**
- **ischemic disease,**
- **neurosis,**
- **arrhythmias,**
- **hypertension,**
- **peptic ulcer of the stomach and duodenum,**
- **high cholesterol in the blood,**
- **heart attack**
- **insomnia,**
- **lower immunity,**
- **menstrual disorders.**

### Stress reduction techniques:

- environmental methods (it's about reducing stressors in the environment)
- minimize the importance of the event
- reduce uncertainty
- listen to relaxing music
- physiological techniques (appropriate when we feel a sudden increase in adrenaline)
- muscle relaxation
- breath control
- biofeedback
- mental techniques (appropriate when psychological factors have a significant effect on stress levels)
- relaxation using visualization
- Positive Thinking, remembering successful events and achievements

**The prophylaxis is the best and the most effective in coping with stress**

## The most often recommended methods of dealing with difficult situations:

- Stay in touch with nature - a walk through the park or forest, listening to birds singing can act like a boost of good energy.
- Make sure that you have at least a few moments for yourself and do what you really like.
- Talk to someone who will listen to you carefully - do not pretend to be perfect and infallible. Allow yourself to be weak and give yourself the right to receive help from other people.
- Use relaxation techniques - it can be yoga, meditation or breath control. They will make you feel calm and relaxed.
- Play sports - physical exercises are undoubtedly a better way to deal with stress than obsessive thinking about what can happen and constant worrying.
- Eat healthy food - remember that there is a relationship between the physical and psychological side of the human being. Avoid stimulants; cigarettes, coffee, alcohol. You can supplement the diet with products rich in magnesium: pumpkin seeds, cocoa, soybeans, buckwheat, beans, chocolate, nuts. The proper level of this element has a positive effect on the nervous system. You can also take magnesium available in a pharmacy without a prescription, often combined with vitamin B6
- Laugh as often as you can
- Learn to better manage time - make a plan of the day, or even a week, a list of things that you have to deal with very urgently and those that can wait. Organize your workplace or study well

Stress and anxiety are closely related to the subject of stress. Anxiety can appear as a consequence of excessive stress. There are also situations when sudden fits of anxiety become stressors.

Anxiety is a feeling that each of us has experienced. It can be persistent, sudden, chronic, overwhelming. We say that anxiety attacks us, paralyzes us that it has big eyes. It accompanies us throughout our lives in greater or lesser intensity.

Anxiety is defined differently. It is usually assumed that it is a feeling of general uncertainty for an indefinite threat and as such it differs from the fear that arises when the threat is real, arising from a specific situation.

There are five types of anxiety disorders:

- panic attacks associated with agoraphobia,
- panic attacks unrelated to agoraphobia,
- social phobia,
- simple phobia,
- generalized anxiety disorder.

Each of these disorders is perceived as a separate problem and can be recognized on the basis of more or less defined behaviors. If you experience symptoms of any anxiety disorder - contact a specialist who will help you deal with them.

Agoraphobia are the most common, negative and persistent, anxiety disorder. People suffering from this disorder feel a unrestrained fear of being in unfamiliar surroundings, wherever they can not control the situation. They are afraid of open spaces, leaving the house, closed, small rooms, riding a bus, cycling. They experience sudden and recurring panic attacks, which are accompanied by: rapid heartbeat, dizziness, sweating, shortness of breath, neck pain, fatigue, difficulty in swallowing saliva, inability to concentrate and fear of death. Such people feel helpless and deprived of control over their own lives, which makes them easily depressed.

**They avoid situations that can cause anxiety attacks, which in extreme cases leads to the fact that they quit their job and do not leave their homes.**

It is worth knowing that agoraphobia can co-exist with obsessive-compulsive neurosis, anxiety neurosis, social phobia, bipolar disorder or epilepsy.

The disorder of panic attacks unrelated to agoraphobia is characterized by the fact that people suffering from such an illness do not avoid public places, and thoughts that cause fear are associated with the impression that their body is malfunctioning, which in turn leads to deterioration of health.

People suffering from social phobia feel the least fear when they are alone. Problematic and debilitating anxieties are situations when they are forced to be in the midst of other people, make relationships with them, make conversations, stay in crowded rooms. Social meetings, public appearances are situations that people with social phobias avoid because they are afraid of ridicule and being judged. They then experience symptoms similar to panic attacks: they turn red and sweat.

Patients with social phobia usually organize their lives in such a way that allows them to avoid situations that cause anxiety attacks.

Panic attacks are situations in which suddenly a fear appears for no apparent reason. A person experiencing such an attack has the impression that something is squeezing their throat. They experience difficulty in breathing, headache, palpitations, numbness. The seizures last for a short time and disappear, but the patient feels like they are dying.

People with a simple phobia are afraid of specific situations or events. This disorder is often associated with anxiety about contact with a specific animal species, fear of heights or in confined spaces. Other types of phobia relate to fear of death, which can be caused by, for example, an airplane accident or lightning shock.

Generalized anxiety disorders is characterized by experiencing long-lasting anxiety, interrupted by short moments of relief. People who experience this condition almost constantly worry about something and constantly create black scenarios. Usually, the subject of anxiety is their own health and family, financial matters, work, but also minor everyday situations. On the physical level, there is arousal, irritability, sleep problems, abdominal pain, muscle tension, backache.

It is characteristic that calming down one issue does not result in the cessation of anxiety because new worries arise.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder should also be mentioned. Its main symptoms are obsessive, thoughts, which may result in intrusive activities called compulsions. People with such disorders are aware of the mechanism, but are unable to control it. One of the more well-known examples of obsessive-compulsive disorder is the fear of contamination, which results in the necessity of constant hand-washing.

**When considering the subject of stress, special attention should be paid to public speeches.**

If we ask people who are randomly chosen about the situations in which they experience the greatest stress, then probably public appearances would be at the top of such list. The vision of speaking in front of the audience scares a lot of people, and it does not matter whether it is a stage performance, for example during a school play, presentation during lessons or a toast in a family circle.

Feeling of stress, although common to all people, is a very individual response. Different people have a different level of sensitivity to different stimuli, different ways of reacting and, finally, different methods of dealing with them. The best way to deal with stress is to create your own strategy. And that requires watching yourself. We should determine whether what causes the greatest stress in us is the view of the recipients, or maybe our own destructive thoughts. Usually, the jitters comes from the fear that we will not



meet the expectations of others that we will be misjudged.

We are afraid of criticism, because behind this fear is the thought that if we are negatively judged, then social exclusion awaits us, and the need for belonging is extremely strong in each of us. The thought that we can be rejected is sometimes paralyzing. It is a fact that we judge each other at each step, and we perceive the audience as an exposure to judgment. It is worth focusing on what we have influence over in such a situation. We can take control of our thoughts. Possible judgement from others will only be relevant to us as much as we let it be.

A great exercise will be to write all the opinions we are afraid of. The next step is their acceptance, and acceptance of the fact that someone can actually think about us that way. The next stage will be the recording of a credible, positive thought that will reduce, counterbalance the negative tone of criticism.

During public speeches, the vast majority of people are accompanied by stress. For some it is positive and has a mobilizing effect. It is eustress. More often, however, it is paralyzing and even overpowering and then we are dealing with its second kind - it's a distress.

People in the second group should make specific preparations to minimize negative feelings.

The first step in fighting the distress is to identify the causes. What then are we afraid of in connection with public appearances? Is it judging, ridiculing, criticism or lack of acceptance.

The following concerns contribute to the creation of the above concerns:

## 1 Negative, so-called "black" thought patterns

It happens that we fall into the so-called "Black Scenario" One negative thought drives the next, until a loop of black, exaggerated scenarios is created. Small, single problem grows into catastrophic visions of events. One small mistake is perceived as the first domino cube, which, by falling, activates the whole avalanche of negative events. This happens when we perceive the achievement as the only way to survive and maintain a safe status quo. People considering different options, plans and solutions are more likely to cope with possible failures, because they do not attach themselves to one event - in this case a public appearance - such a big significance. Simply put, the world will not collapse if I do badly. Identifying negative, sabotaging thoughts, and consequently - beliefs, facilitates replacing them with positive, supporting ones.

## 2 Perfectionism, I have to do perfectly

The desire to get the best results is a human thing, but if we do not allow ourselves to make mistakes, there is pressure that is difficult to cope with. Perfectionism disturbs the real assessment of the

situation. It is associated with thinking in black - white categories. There can only be two scenarios: I will be perfect, or I will fail. At the same time, failure is treated very personally, to the extent that one small mistake that has stood on the road to perfection causes a person to perceive themselves as an individual who has failed at some fundamental level.

Dealing with such situations should begin with a realistic assessment of the situation, as well as setting a goal that is within our capabilities and adapted to the level of skills at the moment. It is important to acknowledge and accept your own right to make mistakes and the fact that no one will notice them during the performance.

### 3 **Lack of self confidence**

It is worth devoting more time to the subject of self-confidence, because it is very important in the context of the issue of stress and public appearances discussed here.

People who lack self-confidence put a lot of energy into constantly proving themselves and other people. It is difficult for them to accept that someone may think wrong about them or that they can not meet their own expectations or those that give them. Self-confidence can be learned and maintained at a level that allows you to function in your life calmly, confidently, and stress, if it appears, is acceptable and even motivating. We say that a person is self-confident, when he feels calm, comfortable and harmonious when performing a variety of activities, he is "in good emotions". A self-confident person is often not even aware of his confidence in a given situation. It just feels natural, like a fish in water. It happens that self-confidence can be volatile. There are situations in which it is at an extremely high level. We feel calm and relaxed, we are filled with positive emotions. However, in other situations we feel its lack.

**It is worth developing this feature so that it would accompany us at any moment. The process of building self-confidence should contain certain elements:**

#### ➤ **Self-awareness**

Most of us live like in a dream. Thoughts run through our heads, we act according to certain mechanisms, emotions and feelings appear, bodies undergo some processes, and all this happens without the participation of our consciousness, we do not even notice it. The first step to becoming aware of yourself is mindfulness. By becoming attentive, we begin to be aware that our mind is generating thoughts and black scenarios that block our thoughts, and as a consequence, negative emotions appear in our bodies, processes that are harmful to our health occur. When we notice this, we will be able to do something about it, cope in some way, counteract it. An excellent exercise to deepen self-awareness is the technique of asking yourself everyday questions; how I feel, what I need, what is good for me and what is bad for me, what supports me in action and what blocks me.

## ➤ **Self-acceptance**

When we become more aware of ourselves, we acquire knowledge about what is good about us and what is not. The next step in building self-confidence is acceptance. It will be easy for us to accept what is good, positive and supportive about us. However, the point is to accept what we do not like - defects, limitations, blockages. At the same time it is important to understand that acceptance does not mean passivity and submission, but is a step on the path to change. For the mind, acceptance is a synonym of security. If we succeed in accepting a possible negative scenario, according to which, for example, we will be laughed at by the audience during the performance, this situation will not be perceived as threatening. Acceptance means no risk. It is primarily about self-acceptance, which comes automatically when the black scenarios that appear in your head are accepted.

The procedure should look like this. When the mind produces a negative scenario concerning any life situation, our task is to accept it. You can say "ok, if it does not happen, I accept it". Lack of acceptance causes negative emotions, stress and even anxiety.

## ➤ **Self-satisfaction**

Self-satisfaction allows you to determine the degree of self-acceptance. If we ask ourselves whether and how much we are satisfied with ourselves and we get positive answers more and more often, it means that we are on the right path in the process of building self-confidence. If, however, we are still dissatisfied, we think that we are constantly doing something wrong, it is a signal to stop and work on self-awareness and self-acceptance. A supporting exercise at this stage may be keeping a diary in which we will write to what extent on a scale of 1 to 10 we are satisfied with ourselves and what affects the level of satisfaction. Such diagnosis will help us plan activities that will lead to better self-satisfaction.

## ➤ **Believe in yourself**

As Henry Ford said, if you think you can, or if you think you can not, in both cases you are right. This statement emphasizes the power of our thoughts. Strengthening your self-confidence requires two things: intentions, that you want to believe in yourself, and the actions that will help you implement this intention.

Self-confidence is closely related to our self-esteem and self-acceptance. An excellent exercise that strengthens belief in one's own abilities may be writing on a piece of paper what we want for ourselves and what at the same time seems impossible to achieve. The next step is to determine why it is impossible, to write out the obstacles. In the next stage, you should look at your own resources - what I know, what I can do, what competences I have, what skills, what experience - for each obstacle give at least three ways to overcome it. Dare to see your influence and believe that you can do something. Even if it was a really small step.

In addition to dealing with stressful situations such as public appearances, pay attention to a few tips that will help to minimize negative emotions and make our speech the best one possible.

## 1 **Preparation**

Lack of proper preparation is one of the stressors when it comes to public appearances. At the same time, it is important to ensure that this preparation concerns various areas: our knowledge, technical or logistic issues. The more we take care of all possible details, the less risk that something goes wrong. Remember, however, to keep the limits of such attention to detail, because exaggeration will lead us into the trap of perfectionism.

## 2 **Open yourself**

Openness is a huge force. Showing the human face is a great way to get in touch with the audience. It means that we have faults and weaknesses, just like every human being. Talking about yourself, just ordinary, "humanly" will establish a relationship with the audience. Thanks to this, the possible assessment of the speech will certainly be more favorable. It should be noted that the assessment of the occurrence is influenced not only by the content itself, the technical setting, but above all the attitude, body language, tone of the presenter's voice and the relationship he will build with the audience.

## 3 **Be present**

Physical presence does not mean full presence. Before the speech it is worth to "clean your head" if there is chaos in it and a lot of unnecessary thoughts, because this condition contributes to the emergence of negative emotions. It also makes us inconsistent and therefore less credible. The audience will notice without any problems if we are "swinging in the clouds" with our thoughts. Lack of mindfulness and being here and now is also a way to make mistakes. It's easy to lose a thread, get lost or forget about something.

The daily practice of mindfulness while performing ordinary, smallest duties will help us, in important moments, not to have problems with behavior and attention.

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