



Understanding Stress and Responding to Distress

**Mā te whakātu, ka mōhio
Mā te mōhio, ka mārama
Mā te mārama, ka mātau
Mā te mātau, ka ora.**

**Through discussion comes awareness
Through awareness comes understanding
Through understanding comes knowledge
Through knowledge comes wellbeing.**

(Whakatauaāki written by Pā Henare Tate)



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Learning outcome

Following this workshop you will be able to:

- » respond appropriately to clients experiencing stress or mental distress.

This workshop will introduce you to stress and mental distress, how to recognise them and how to respond effectively to clients who may be experiencing them.

Blueprint for Learning is one of the largest training providers in mental health, addiction and wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. They have been developing and delivering training across the motu since 2008.

“

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora te iwi

**With your food basket and my food
basket the people will thrive**

(Māori proverb)



Responding to stress

Stress is our internal response to external events. It is what our body and mind experience as we adapt to a continually changing environment.

Not all stress is negative. It can be triggered by positive experiences like falling in love, having a baby, getting a new job or taking an overseas trip. In these situations, stress can motivate us into action or a 'peak performance zone'. It brings a sense of excitement into our lives that we need.

There are two types of negative stress we commonly experience:

Ambient stress

Ordinary, everyday activities which can become stressful.

For example getting the kids off to school, travelling to work, paying bills, work deadlines, caring for elderly relatives.

Major life events

Major, unexpected and uncontrollable events.

For example sudden illness or death of a loved one, a car accident, a relationship break-up, moving house.

If negative stress continues over a long period of time it can overwhelm our coping strategies leading to symptoms of distress.

These may include:

- » poor physical health such as migraines, trouble sleeping and high blood pressure
- » problems at work or at home
- » relationship issues
- » feelings of hopelessness
- » mental health or addiction issues
- » financial issues.

How we respond to stress is determined by many factors. These include how well we use coping strategies, the state of our physical health and the support we have from whānau and friends.

With healthy stress we become stimulated and our performance and efficiency improves as we 'rise to the challenge'. To maintain this, we need a healthy diet, quality sleep, regular exercise and stress management techniques.

When any of these are missing, we tend to move quickly into negative stress responses. Our body and mind become overwhelmed, so we experience difficulties in a number of areas. If we ignore these warning signs and don't step in with some strategies, we may become worse and we may begin to experience mental health issues.

If our everyday stress levels are already high, we are more at risk of being overwhelmed when faced with further stress. It is hard to know at what point we will become overwhelmed before it happens, but we usually know when we have reached that point.



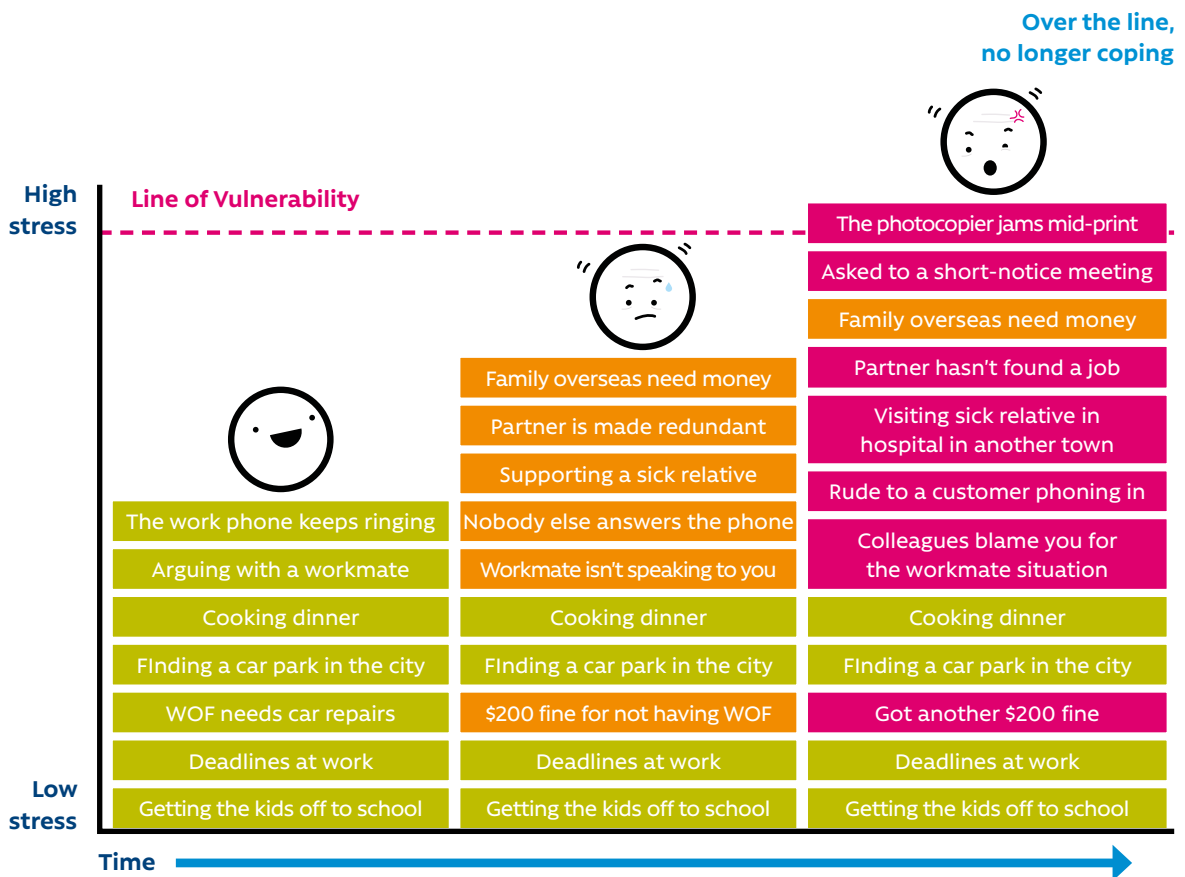
Line of Vulnerability

Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' after life's setbacks. Our resilience is often a combination of genetics and our early childhood environment. Did we have nurturing, stable relationships growing up? Did we experience trauma or abuse? Did difficult life events leave their mark?

Our vulnerability to being negatively affected by things in life depends on several factors. These include the support we have around us, the environment we are in, our personality type, and our physical health.

Each person has a 'Line of Vulnerability' (Nuechterlein & Dawson, 1984). If the stress in their life builds up so much that it takes them beyond this line, they will no longer be able to cope.

Stresses we don't attend to can get bigger over time. They may also become the new normal for us, which means we are not in the best space when other life events occur.





Activity

While watching Hamish's video, record what you noticed about his situation in the spaces below.

What things caused him stress?

What pulled him back from his Line of Vulnerability?

Fight, flight or freeze

When we are distressed our brain instructs our body systems to get ready to fight, hide from, or run away from the danger. If someone is getting ready to fight or run away, increasing heart rate and blood pressure to make sure the muscles are well supplied ready to work hard, muscles tighten and the digestive system slows down.

Each person responds differently. It is an automatic survival instinct, reacting to what seems a life-threatening situation.

It puts the person into a state where rational, logical thinking is impaired. This includes things like memory, reasoning, concentration and problem solving.

Signs of **flight** can be the most obvious. It is harder to notice signs of **flight** or **freeze**, but the person experiencing them is just as distressed.



Flight, Freeze or Fight

Flight	Freeze	Fight
Become restless Getting agitated Moving away Standing up Leaving Beginning to pace	Become withdrawn Unable to speak Difficulty making decisions Appear 'frozen' or unresponsive Turn away	Raised voice Questioning Arguing Clenched fists Exaggerated gestures Red face

It is important that any situation where a person is distressed is resolved in a way that reduces the distress and maintains respect and safety for everyone involved.

Feelings

When in fight, flight or freeze it can be difficult for a person to recall facts and have a full and accurate picture of the situation. Often the feelings of those involved can overwhelm. If you look at the emotions involved it will validate what the person is feeling and may improve the safety of the situation. It helps ground them, so you can then look at the facts together.

You can say things like:

"I'm sorry that decision has impacted on you this way."

"I can see this has been very hard for you."

"I can see you're working hard to be a great parent and it must be tough for you."

"It's fine if you want to take a minute and I'll just sit here with you."

"I can see you are overwhelmed right now and can understand why you feel that way."

Facts

Sometimes calmly finding out the facts will help to calm a situation. It helps the person know their story has been heard and makes sure you are working with the same information.

You can ask questions like:

"I'd like to help, are you able to tell me what's been happening?"

"It sounds as though that's been really difficult. Is there anything else I need to know that would make it easier for me to help you?"

"In order to make a decision that will help you I just need to know what the main issues are from your point of view."

"Have I heard correctly that.....?"



Response

Your role is not to 'fix' the situation or offer solutions. It is important that the person feels heard and their distress is acknowledged. Try to offer more than one option, as if you are seen as the last resort this can lead to more distress.

You can say things like:

"I can see how distressing this is for you. Are you ok to continue?"

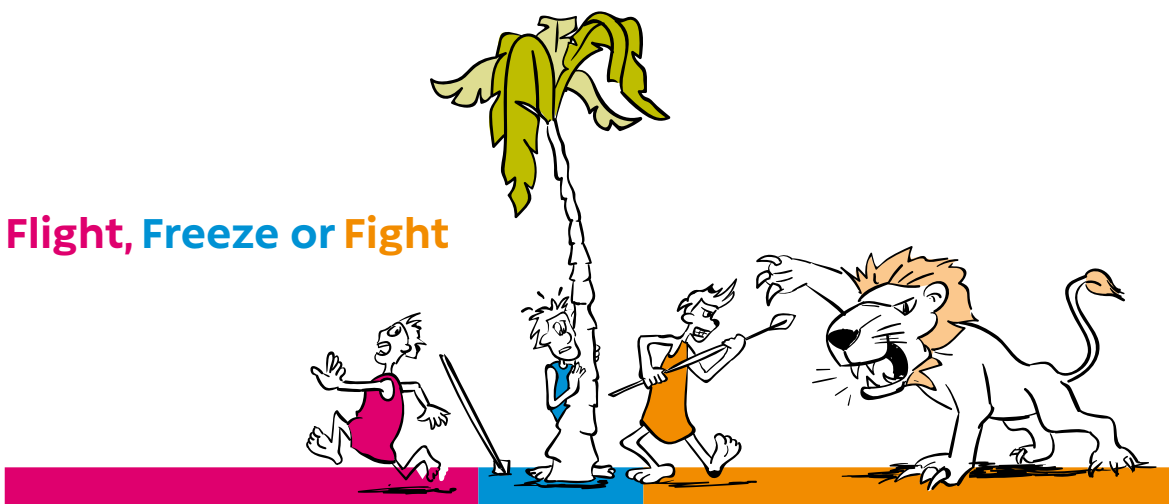
"I can see you are shaking and seem overwhelmed, what can I do that would help you right now?"

"I can assure you that you're safe here and I will stay with you until you feel safe too."

"What can I do to help?"

"I can see you are annoyed with us and can understand why, but we can't continue until you stop yelling."

Flight, Freeze or Fight



Distress and suicide

Overwhelming mental distress

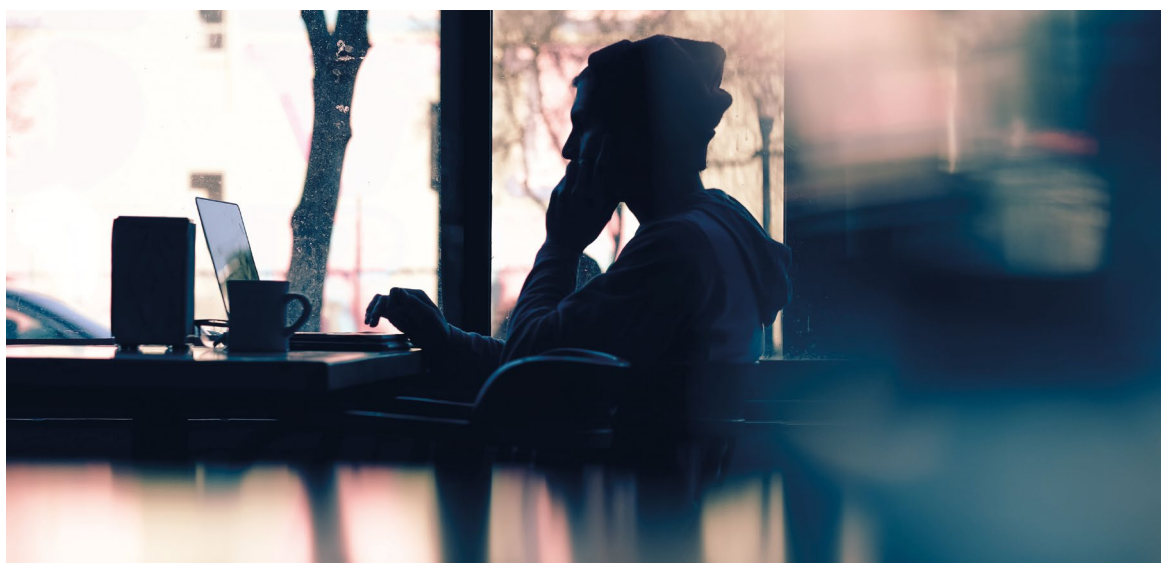
Sometimes people feel completely overwhelmed and unable to see a way out. It isn't unusual for people in this situation to consider ending their life. This is seen as a way to end the pain and distress which has gone beyond what they can cope with.

People having thoughts about ending their own life is more common than you might think. Research in New Zealand suggests that 16-18 % of the population think seriously about ending their life at some point (Oakley-Browne et al., 2006). These thoughts are most common in females, younger people, low socioeconomic areas, urban areas and for Māori and Pacific people.

Most people who are experiencing mental distress will not take their own life, but if someone has thoughts and feelings about ending their life take them very seriously. Never ignore someone who says they want to end their own life. Having the confidence to know what to say and do when someone shares such thoughts with you can help you both.

People might tell you they are thinking about ending their life, or they might hint at it by saying such things as "I wish I were dead" or "it will all be over soon". Research shows that asking someone directly if they are thinking about ending their own life will not encourage or give them the idea of suicide. It will not trigger them to take their own life.

By talking about this with them you let them know you have heard them, have acknowledged their pain and want to support them to get help. Let the person know you may have to tell other people about how they are feeling, if you think they are in immediate danger. You may not be able to keep the situation confidential and it is best to be upfront about this.



Possible suicide warning signs

If you believe either you, or someone you know, is in **IMMEDIATE** danger, please call emergency services immediately on

111

Always take it seriously

- » Previous attempts to end their life
- » Talking or writing about suicide or death, even jokingly
- » Seeking access to the means of suicide
- » Sudden lift in mood
- » Saying goodbye or giving away possessions
- » Self-destructive or risky behaviour
- » Seem overwhelmed with problems they are having
- » Becoming isolated from family and friends
- » Using drugs or alcohol to cope with life
- » Having no hope for the future
- » Feeling worthless, guilty, whakamā or ashamed
- » Affected by recent suicide in their community

There may be other signs like a person who has been struggling with their mental health suddenly seeming happier because they have made the decision to end their life. These things may also not be indicating someone is thinking of ending their life, which makes it hard to know what is going on for them. The simplest way of knowing is to ask. When any of these signs are present, it is really important to check what is happening by gently asking.

For more information on suicide, watch Kevin Briggs' TED talk *The Bridge Between Suicide and Life*

www.ted.com/talks/kevin_briggs_the_bridge_between_suicide_and_life?

Courageous conversations

If you see any of the warning signs that someone maybe thinking about taking their life, you need to have a courageous conversation with them and ASK. It will not put ideas of suicide into their head, you are gently asking if this is already happening for them.

You need to find out:

1. Is the person thinking about ending their life?
2. Do they have a plan for how to end their life?
3. Do they have access to the means of carrying out that plan?

You can suggest ways to connect which are supportive, but not intrusive. For example:

- » give them a call and offer to meet for a coffee
- » offer to spend an afternoon with them doing whatever they want to do. This might be shopping, going for a walk, playing sports or simply hanging out at home with good food.

Most of all, just let them know you are there if they want to talk or need support.



How to respond to someone sharing

Sometimes it is hard to know how to respond to something a person has told you.

- » Acknowledge what they have told you.
- » Thank them for sharing with you and tell them you appreciate the courage it took to share.
- » Acknowledge any emotions occurring at the time.

For example, "I can see how upset you are" or "I can see this makes you really angry".

- » Let them know you will help them through this if that's appropriate for you or will find someone who can.
- » If their safety is at risk, let them know you will do whatever you can to keep them safe.

Responding to online concerns

When interacting with people online, you may see statements that give you concern for their wellbeing. Look out for statements like:

"I am completely over it"

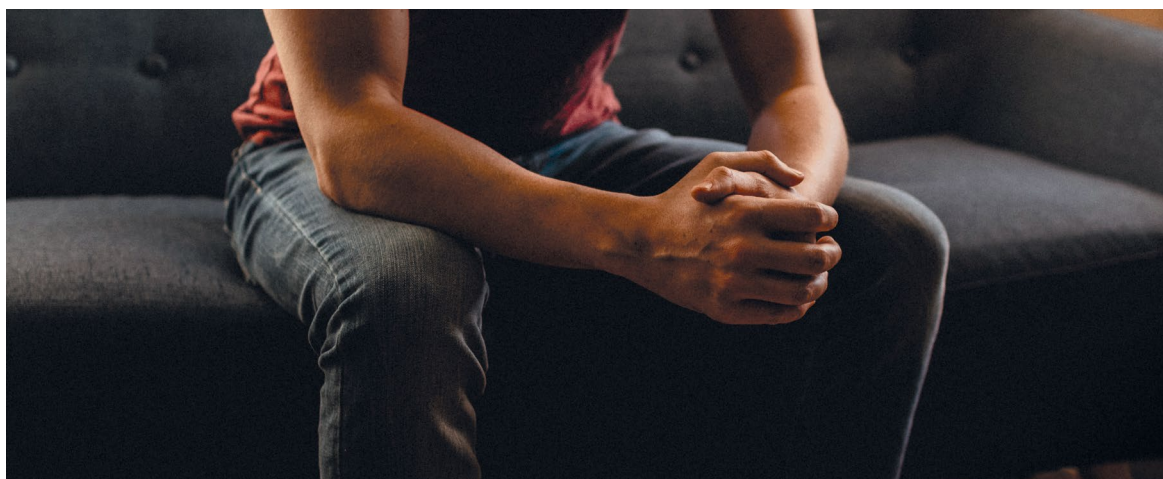
"This year just can't get any worse"

"I wish I could sleep forever"

If someone you know posts a comment online that sounds like they need support or are distressed, encourage them to talk to you in private by contacting them directly.

You can start an online conversation by saying something like:

"Hi there, I saw your post on Facebook and I am a bit worried about you. Sounds like you're having a rough time. Do you have time for a chat?"



When to get help

Sometimes getting help is the right support to provide. Think about the impact mental distress is having on the person's life to decide whether to do this.

- » Are symptoms affecting their physical health?
- » Are symptoms affecting their sense of identity or self-esteem?
- » Are symptoms affecting their relationships with whānau and friends?
- » Are symptoms causing emotions and behaviours that aren't normal for them?

If a person is so distressed you feel their safety is at risk, seek help immediately.

The person's GP is a good place to start.

If they have an EAP programme at work, arranging a free counselling session is another option.

Or use the free **1737** phone line to talk directly to a mental health counsellor.

1. If it is an emergency and you feel someone is at risk of harm – phone 111.
2. Phone your local Mental Health Crisis Team.
Find their phone number at www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis
3. Phone Healthline 0800 611 116.
4. Go to your nearest hospital emergency department.



Activity

The facilitator will describe a situation.

Write down your immediate response:

- » the words that come into your head straight away
- » the emotions you felt
- » the physical way your body reacted.

Words

Emotions

Physical

Automatic reactions

Our instinctive reaction in any situation happens without us thinking about it. We can react in a positive or a negative, helpful or unhelpful way. Our reaction is influenced by our culture and values, our life experiences and the kind of day we are having.

Sometimes we need to challenge these and try to adapt our response to be more supportive for the person we are interacting with. A new experience or self-reflection can help us to do this, or we could talk to a healthcare professional with skills in this area.

The automatic thoughts we have in a situation can also be positive or negative. If your boss offers you a new opportunity at work your immediate thought might be:

- » "I'd be perfect for that"
- » "I'd never be able to do that".

Emotional

- » Fear
- » Excitement
- » Panic
- » Anger
- » Pain
- » Shame
- » Joy

Physical

- » Racing heart
- » Sweaty palms
- » Churning stomach
- » Shortness of breath
- » Butterflies in the stomach
- » Nausea

Behaviour

- » Laughter
- » Run away
- » Yelling
- » Restlessness
- » Frozen to the spot
- » Excited gestures
- » Aggression



Lenses and filters

We use our own 'lenses' and 'filters' when relating to people.

Lenses (who we are)

Lenses are the way we view the world and it doesn't tend to change. This world view is the starting point of our reactions that we bring into every situation. It is shaped by our:

- » age
- » gender identity
- » status
- » personality type
- » our role in society and the expectations that go with it
- » background and family life
- » cultural beliefs
- » our culture's rules for what is considered polite
- » personal values and beliefs.

Filters (how we are)

A filter affects our response in a particular situation. It is like the coloured overlays a photographer uses to tint a photograph. It can be things like the following.

- » If we are having a good or bad day.
- » If we feel scared, uncomfortable or confident.
- » How much time we have.
- » How tired or hungry we are.
- » If we have something else on our mind we are thinking or worrying about.
- » How well we know the people involved and our relationship with them.
- » Previous experiences in a similar situation and whether those went well or not.
- » How we feel about the meeting place.
- » If we are at work, professional codes of conduct may apply.

Our lenses and filters influence our reactions and behaviour in a situation. This is the same for the person we are interacting with. We see reactions and behaviour that are influenced by their lenses and filters. These can create a barrier when trying to relate to someone else.

Recognising them in our self and being aware they are different for others helps reduce barriers when we want to relate to someone.

Activity

Read through this situation about Bill.

Bill is a 60-year-old customer who has built up a reasonable property asset base from long-term family land ownership. Bill's operations include a mix of horticulture and residential property developments in a regional city. The residential development land has been used for cattle farming, increasing in value as the city boundary spread closer. ANZ's lending was \$10 million at peak, recently reducing to \$2 million as Bill sold sections and partially refinanced the horticulture business.

The bank's relationship with Bill has been difficult. This started when management of his business was shifted from Agri to Commercial, worsening later with a transfer to Lending Services. This transfer involved about \$7 million debt due to Bill's largest property project experiencing completion delays, material cost escalation and falling demand for sections.

Lending Services approved additional funding, but tightened controls in a way Bill had not experienced before. They required milestones for various consents, a Plan B for delayed section sales and regular short term loan maturity dates. With some sections now sold and the partial refinance achieved, Bill's lending has now reduced to \$2 million.

You manage the relationship with Bill. He has told you he is very angry about his experiences with ANZ. He feels they were unnecessarily controlling at a stressful time and changed their lending requirements in an unreasonable way. Bill says the reduction in ANZ debt to \$2 million proves his property model was never high risk, and he wants the government review into rural banking to consider his complaint about the bank's conduct.

Bill has asked to meet with you to tell you how the last few years have felt for him and to find out which senior ANZ person he should write to with his complaint. This is the second customer complaint you've had in the last fortnight, and you are particularly busy with reviews to complete before the end of the month. You have agreed to meet Bill at his premises and are gathering your thoughts ahead of what you expect to be a challenging meeting.

In threes, practise having a challenging conversation with Bill for a few minutes, as if you were in this situation.

- » One of you is Bill.
- » One of you is discussing his complaint.
- » One of you is observing.

Take time to do some planning, first jotting your ideas for a positive approach in the spaces on the following page.



Activity

Your lenses and likely filters on the day

Their lenses and likely filters on the day

Negative messages you need to share

Positive wording to share these messages

Offering several options

Planning for what might go wrong

Building a connection

Golden Rule

You may find yourself in a situation where you are unsure about how to behave and communicate with someone in distress. There is a golden rule which works every time, in every situation (Eriksen, 1998).

- » Be polite.
- » Be professional.
- » Tell the truth.

Polite

Being polite shows respect, friendliness, kindness and sometimes also compassion. Thank the client for coming in for what is a difficult conversation for them.

Professional

Tell the client you are there to work them and do your best for them, but that the bank also has some things they need to see as a result of the meeting.

Let them know you are keen to hear anything they have to say, and that you welcome any ideas.

Tell the truth.

Tell the client you will be honest with them about their situation and can only help them if they are honest with you.

If there is no way forward other than something the client doesn't want to hear, you must let them know that.

Pause and prepare

Before starting a professional conversation with someone who may become distressed, 'check your own oxygen mask first'. This means you will be in the best position to reduce stress and have an effective discussion that achieves the purpose of the meeting.

Prepare

- » Be clear of your client's situation, check through the paper work and documents.
- » Plan for a range of possible outcomes. This shows you genuinely want to help.
- » If you expect to give the client bad news, instead if this looking like a 'dead end' if you have several options it can retain a sense of hope and purpose for them.

Think

- » How to approach the person.
- » What support you bring with you.
- » Any other resources you can call on.
- » Imagine the person's possible reactions and think about how you might respond.

Breathe

- » Make sure you have lowered your heart rate, are calm and can think clearly.

Decide

- » Where and when to meet.
- » What to say and the tone you use.

“

To listen you have to be silent

Active listening

Choose your meeting space to be somewhere comfortable and without distractions or people interrupting you. Switch your phone to silent so it won't intrude on your conversation.

Think about where you are sitting in relation to the other person, so you feel connected to them but not too close to invade their personal space.

Body language is as important as what you say. Sit openly with your arms and legs as relaxed as possible. When the other person is talking use encouraging gestures like nodding your head.

Be aware of your facial expressions which can show care and encouragement or can show unhelpful emotions like surprise or disapproval.

Don't be afraid of silence, it can give time for a person to reflect on what has been said or collect their thoughts.

Use the OARS approach with your conversation:

- O** - Open questions.
- A** - Affirm, finding positive things to say.
- R** - Reflect back to show you have listened and understood.
- S** - Summarise what you have talked about



Use a positive approach

Think positively about your client

Do this ...	Instead of ...
Think of your work as working with clients to help them.	Think of your work as having to handle or manage clients.
Think of the client's behaviour as information and the result of their situation.	Think of the client as manipulative, disruptive, needy or...
Understand that this meeting might be life-changing for the client.	See the client as over-emotional or hysterical.
Expect a positive outcome.	Expect a negative outcome.

Speak positively

Think about how you might phrase what you need to say in a positive way, even when you are delivering a difficult message. Frame your sentences positively rather than being accusing.

For example

"I'm glad you called to let us know about the situation, and for giving me the chance to help. We can work together to get the best possible outcome for you and for us."

"We know how hard you have worked to avoid this, it must be devastating for you. There is no option left but to go into receivership, but we would like to work with you so you remain in a position where you can sell the business and protect your family home."

Avoid doing these things when speaking to a client:

- » making excuses
- » reacting defensively to things they say
- » quoting policy
- » using banking jargon
- » using accusing language.

Act positively

Body language and tone of voice matter.

Communication involves more than just the words we use. 55% of our message is conveyed through our body language and 38% through the tone of voice we use.

No technique or considered phrasing of sentences will work if your body language and tone don't match up with the words you are saying. Remember, actions speak louder than words!

Do this ...	Instead of ...
It can be really difficult to understand jargon and financial terms, so I'll avoid them as much as I can.	You don't seem to know what's going on.
Our records show you had advised a payment would be made by Friday but unfortunately, we have not received one. We're keen to see if we can support you with your current difficulties.	You said you would make a payment by last Friday, but you've failed to do that.
We understand that facing financial difficulties can seem overwhelming and easier to pretend they're not there. We want to help and make it less overwhelming for you.	You've ignored this problem for far too long and now you've run out of options.
Would you prefer for me to go through the options first, or do you want to ask questions as we go? What makes you more comfortable?	It would be best if you just let me lay it all out for you and then you can speak.

If things go wrong

- » Keep your body language relaxed with a calm, open posture.
- » Reduce direct eye contact, don't stare at the person.
- » Give them plenty of personal space.
- » Make sure there isn't an audience to the situation.
- » Suggest they take some time to absorb the information.
- » Set limits if you have to by saying something like *"If you keep yelling, we will need to stop and arrange another time for you to come back"*.

Taking care of yourself

Self-care is vital when having challenging conversations is part of your role. Even when meetings go well, they may have impacted on you. They definitely will have when they don't.

- » Talk to a colleague or your manager after the meeting.
- » Take a break and get some fresh air or a cold drink.
- » Make time to do the things that de-stress you.
- » Use your work's EAP service.
- » Have someone with you when next meeting a client you expect will be distressed.



Where to get help

Call 1737

Anyone can call or text New Zealand's mental health and addiction free helpline any time and talk to a mental health counsellor.

If someone is feeling stressed, anxious, worried, depressed, or needing advice on mental health or addiction issues they can use it.

If supporting a hearing impaired person, consider video calling a sign language interpreter at www.nzrelay.co.nz who can voice call **1737** to enable effective communication.

NEED TO TALK?



**free call or text
any time**

LifeKeepers training

Le Va provides a free suicide prevention training programme called LifeKeepers that teaches you to support people in distress to get the help they need.

You can either attend a workshop in your area or complete the programme online at www.lifekeepers.nz.



Just a Thought

Just a Thought is an effective therapy tool that provides online courses to help people with different types of mental health challenges they may be going through.

It is free and instantly available to all New Zealanders at www.justathought.co.nz.



Helplines and useful websites

Organisation	Description	Contact
Alcohol Drug Helpline	Speak to a trained counsellor 24/7. The Helpline is here to assist anyone with a question or concern about their own or someone else's drinking or other drug use. They provide non-judgmental and confidential professional help and advice.	<p>Phone: 0800 787 797 Text: 8681</p> <p>Online chat available www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz</p> <p>Māori Line Phone: 0800 787 798</p> <p>Pasifika Line Phone: 0800 787 799</p> <p>Youth Line Phone: 0800 787 984</p>
Anxiety Helpline	Free and confidential 24/7 service offering encouragement, education, and advice for anyone experiencing anxiety or supporting someone else living with anxiety.	<p>Phone: 0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY)</p> <p>www.anxiety.org.nz</p>
Depression Helpline	Talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask a question. Plus get information on how to help someone.	<p>Phone: 0800 111 757 Free text: 4202</p> <p>www.depression.org.nz</p>

You'll find more helpful websites, useful apps and online tools on our website under Support.

www.blueprint.co.nz/support

Organisation	Description	Contact
Gambling Helpline	A free support service for people worried about gambling or the gambling of others. Call for immediate support, referrals to other gambling support services, or for information about problem gambling.	Phone: 0800 654 655 Text: 8006 Online chat available www.gamblinghelpline.co.nz Māori Gambling Helpline Phone: 0800 654 656 Pasifika Gambling Helpline Phone: 0800 654 657 Youth Gambling Helpline Phone: 0800 654 659 Gambling Debt Helpline Phone: 0800 654 658
Healthpoint	Healthpoint provides up-to-date information about healthcare providers, referral expectations, services offered and common treatments.	www.healthpoint.co.nz
Lifeline	Free, confidential 24/7 helpline offering support a range of issues including psychological and emotional distress, financial and work issues, marriage and family problems, and for callers who are lonely, ill, depressed or experiencing violence or abuse.	Phone: 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) Free Text: 4357 (HELP) www.lifeline.org.nz
Netsafe	Offers free and confidential advice and support to people experiencing online bullying, abuse or harassment, including a reporting service.	Phone: 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) Text: 'Netsafe' to 4282 Email: help@netsafe.org.nz www.netsafe.org.nz

Organisation	Description	Contact
OUTline	A free and confidential support line for all-ages connecting people to trained volunteers from the Rainbow community, with a focus on sexual orientation, gender identity and diverse sex characteristics.	Phone: 0800 688 5463 from 6pm to 9pm Online chat available https://outline.org.nz
Quitline	Free support and advice to help you beat the tobacco smoking addiction.	Phone: 0800 778 778 Online chat available www.quit.org.nz
Samaritans	24/7 confidential support for anyone experiencing loneliness, depression, despair, distress or suicidal feelings.	Phone: 0800 726 666 www.samaritans.org.nz
Seniorline	A national information service to help older people and their whānau navigate the health system. A telephone service is available for over 65s Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm.	Phone: 0800 725 463 www.seniorline.org.nz
Suicide Crisis Helpline	Run by Lifeline, this is a free 24/7 nationwide service operated by experienced counsellors. Call if you think you, or someone you know, may be thinking about suicide.	Phone: 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
Victim Support	A free, nationwide support service for people affected by crime, trauma, and suicide in New Zealand. Support Workers are available 24/7.	Phone: 0800 842-846 www.victimsupport.org.nz
Youthline	A free, confidential 24/7 service available for any young person in New Zealand, or anyone who is supporting a young person.	Phone: 0800 376 633 Free text: 234 Email: talk@youthline.co.nz www.youthline.co.nz

Extra reading



Maintaining wellbeing

Maintaining mental health and wellbeing is important to everyone. These strategies are known to help support our wellbeing:



Exercise

Any exercise is better for our health than none. Up to 30 minutes of moderate heart-pumping exercise, five times a week is recommended. This includes activities like aerobics, brisk walking, jogging and swimming.



Good nutrition

Eating healthy food is important for wellbeing. Guidelines recommend eating a variety of nutritious foods. This is particularly important during times of stress.



Mindful rest

It is important to pause now and then from the busyness of life. Check out how you are doing and how much stress you are under. Allow yourself to switch off and spend time caring for yourself both mentally and physically.



Adequate sleep

The length, timing and quality of sleep are important for health, performance and safety. Try to get the recommended hours of sleep, with a couple of hours of these before midnight to support the body's natural rhythm. Taking a break from technology before going to bed improves sleep.

How much sleep do we need?

Pre-school (3 to 5 years)
10 to 13 hours a night
Primary-school (6 to 13 years)
9 to 11 hours a night
Teenage (14 to 17 years)
8 to 10 hours a night
Adults (18 to 64 years)
7 to 9 hours a night
Older adults (64+ years)
7 to 8 hours a night

(Ministry of Health, 2021a)



The Five Ways to Wellbeing, from the Mental Health Foundation

Improving resilience

Knowing we have our own Line of Vulnerability helps us to understand and recognise the effect of stress on our mental wellbeing. We should do everything possible to avoid coming close to or tipping over that Line. There are two things we can do to achieve this: increase our resilience and reduce our stress.

Increasing resilience

There are protective factors that increase a person's resilience when they are present:

- » financial stability
- » good emotional and psychological health
- » positive coping skills
- » well connected with the community such as a sports club, school, church, youth group or support group
- » whānau and social connections
- » education or academic achievement.

There are many ways we can increase our resilience to make sure we are in the best possible place to face life's challenges. These include:

- » know your own strengths and limits
- » ask for help
- » use your support circle or community
- » use self-care and be kind to yourself
- » be flexible and go with the flow when you can
- » be hopeful
- » keep a sense of humour
- » do something for someone else
- » be with others – contact a friend or visit whānau
- » put it into perspective, *"Is it life and death or burnt toast?"*
- » think about Te Whare Tapa Whā and keep your four walls in balance.

Reducing stress

Even if there is little you can do about a situation, sometimes making some small changes will make a difference. Consider doing things differently, taking time out, thinking about it in a different way, getting help or seeking advice.

Identify what is making you stressed:

- » where am I when I'm feeling stressed?
- » what am I doing? Who am I with?
- » what helpful changes could I make?
- » what is within my control?

Do things differently:

- » do something different to what you normally do
- » make time for yourself each day by including relaxation, fun, enjoyment
- » create a healthy balance. Allow time for activities which give you a sense of achievement, make you feel close to others and are enjoyable
- » focus your attention on only one activity at a time
- » try different relaxation techniques and find one that works for you
- » put on some music. Sing and dance along, or just listen attentively
- » meditate or pray
- » engage in a hobby or other interest and find one if you don't have one!
- » what have you enjoyed in the past?
- » what have you thought about doing but not got around to?
- » limit your responsibilities. It is okay to say no
- » write down your thoughts and feelings to get them out of your head
- » just take one step at a time. Don't plan too far ahead
- » positive self-talk. Tell yourself *"I can do this. I am strong and capable"*
- » find an affirmation that works for you, write it down and memorise it for when you need it. It doesn't matter if you don't believe it at first
- » do something creative
- » use imagery. This could be putting photos on paper or writing and decorating a list
- » talk to someone
- » tell yourself *"This will pass, it is only temporary"*, or *"I've been through this before, I can do it now"*
- » pamper yourself. Do something you really enjoy, or that relaxes you.

Resilience for Māori

Māori culture and identity contribute to overall wellbeing (Carswell et al., 2017).

Resilience is provided through:

- » whanaungatanga factors, which are networks and relationships
- » pūkenga factors, which are abilities and skills
- » tikanga factors, which are meanings, values and beliefs
- » tuakiri-ā-iwi factors, which are having a secure cultural identity.

(Waiti & Kingi, 2014)

Māori participants in recent research identified spiritual connection, safety, and hauora as the most important indicators for resilience (Le Dé et al., 2021).

Resilience in other ethnic groups

New Zealand research on resilience after a disaster or pandemic found that although the important factors were the same, what they meant varied for different ethnic groups (Le Dé et al., 2021).

- » For Pasifika people, faith and connections to family and community are important for wellbeing and resilience (Le Dé, et al., 2021; Satele, 2021; Firestone et al., 2020).
- » For some Asian people, strategies like mindful self-compassion have been shown to build resilience (Kariyawasam et al., 2023).
- » For migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, being within a social environment that enables community support, and remaining connected to family overseas are essential for resilience (Le Dé, et al., 2021).

Village is an app where young people can share their feelings with a safe buddy. It helps them process their emotions.

www.villageapp.kiwi

Sensory modulation

Sensory modulation is about using sensory activities to influence how we feel. These activities can interact with any of our senses. They can help us manage stress, overwhelm, and distress during challenging situations.

There are sensory modulation activities that calm us and alert us, depending on the impacts of extreme stress we are experiencing. Each person needs to experiment until they find activities which suit their sensory preferences and improve how they feel.

What works for you?

Using sensory strategies to help people cope with challenging situations.

This resource is for people who want some general guidance on how to use sensory strategies.

How do tough times lead to stress?

Some stressors are a normal and essential part of everyday life (for example, meeting new people, or waking up early for school or work). It is natural for people to feel greater levels of stress during more challenging situations, such as the breakup of a relationship, a natural disaster or other adverse event.

These situations can be a serious threat to ourselves and the people or things we value in our lives, and we may become really stressed and anxious.

Experiencing too much stress can have a negative impact on our health and wellbeing. For example, we may experience headaches or sore muscles and find it difficult to concentrate or sleep, which in turn creates more stress and anxiety. This can be different for everyone. Some of us may feel agitated or restless and others may feel like they have little or no energy.

How can we use our senses to reduce stress and improve wellbeing?

The reality of life is there will always be stressful situations. What matters most is how we respond.

Every day we are already balancing ourselves using our senses (for example, touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste). We may have a warm cup of herbal tea to help us settle down or listen to upbeat music to help us feel energised. This helps us to feel 'just right', 'in the zone', 'in balance' or 'grounded'.

Sensory strategies involve the deliberate use of activities to influence how we want to feel. These activities can help us manage stress, overwhelm and distress during challenging situations.

General principles for using sensory activities

We all have different sensory responses and preferences. Experiment to find a variety of sensory activities that improve your wellbeing.

Sensory activities can be calming or alerting.

Calming sensations are helpful when people are feeling restless, overwhelmed or agitated. These sensations tend to be slow, simple, soft, and familiar and remind people of positive things.

Alerting sensations are helpful when people are feeling low energy, flat and tired. These sensations tend to be fast-paced, complex, and not familiar.

Practical key steps to help people become familiar with using sensory activities

1. **Explore** – Explore yourself or encourage others to try out different sensory activities and notice any difference they make. For example, how did it feel? Did you like it? Was it calming or alerting?
2. **Practice** – Once a person is familiar with their preferred sensory activities, they can use these whenever they are feeling stressed.
3. **Reflect** – Remember to self-reflect after using a sensory activity. For example, how did they feel before and after? Did it work in this situation?



Calming sensations

To improve relaxation and calmness

Alerting sensations

To improve attention and energy

Touch

Deep, strong, firm, pressured touch or warmth (eg massages, miri miri or warm baths)

Light, tickly, prickly, squishy touch or stroking (eg fidget items, cold showers or splashing cold water on the face)

Sight

Soft colours, natural or dim lighting, and simple, peaceful and pleasant images or views (eg scenery pictures or videos, or reading a book)

Bright colours, changing patterns of light, and complex visual images or sceneries (eg visual puzzles, watching a sports game)

Sound

Soft, slow, simple, melodic and repetitive music or sounds (eg waiata, karakia, white noise, birds singing, soft orchestra music, or sounds of Māori musical instruments)

Offbeat, loud, quick-paced music or sounds (eg handheld instruments, loud and upbeat music)

Smell

Mild and pleasant smells and fragrances (eg floral scented baths or candles such as lavender or rose)

Strong smells and unpleasant odours (eg strong scents such as citrus, peppermint or cinnamon)

Taste

Mild, pleasant and sweet (eg hot chocolate, herbal tea, soup, oatmeal, applesauce, lollipops or sweet chewing gum)

Strong, unpleasant, spicy, salty, sour, bitter (eg black coffee, sour candies, hot chillies, pickles, cold iceblocks or crunchy foods)

Balance/movement

Slow, regular, and predictable movement (eg rocking chairs, knitting, raranga harakeke, making poi, walking or pacing barefoot in the dirt, backyard, forest or beach)

Fast, irregular, or unpredictable movement (eg kapa haka, gardening, cleaning around the house, stretching or jumping)

(Te Pou, 2020)

Self-soothing behaviour

Everyone uses self-soothing behaviour when they feel stressed. This may be eating their favourite food, drinking wine, exercising, shopping, bingeing on Netflix, or using other drugs. It can enable someone to keep going and to feel better in the short term. For some people this behaviour gets out of balance so they can't stop doing it and it causes them harm.

Distress and self-injury

In New Zealand, there are over 7000 hospital admissions each year due to self-harm (Ministry of Health, 2016). This is highest in young females.

Self-harm is the deliberate act of hurting or injuring your body. It doesn't mean the person wants to die. It is a way of coping with intense or very difficult emotions, or overwhelming situations and life events. It may help people to express feelings, distract them from life issues or release built up emotional pain. They are trying to cope with their pain.

Some people believe that self-harm is simply attention seeking. Despite what others may think, it can help people feel better and for some it is a strategy which may help them to go on living. People who self-harm usually do-so in secret. Shame and fear can make it very difficult to come forward and ask for help.

In the long-term, people who self-harm have a much higher risk of choosing to end their own life due to other factors. It is important to recognise their ongoing distress and need for support.

Getting help from a compassionate professional is important. Counsellors or health professionals can help people learn to recognise their triggers or situations which lead to the self-harm. They then work with them to identify alternatives for coping with the intense emotions they are feeling.

If you are concerned that someone is self-harming, ask them if they would like to talk about what's going on for them and if you can help. If they're not ready to talk, accept it and continue to be patient and supportive.



**Tūhia ki te Rangi
Tūhia ki te Whenua
Tūhia ke te Ngakau o te Tāngata
Tihei Mauriora**

**What is written in the sky
Is written in the earth
And is written on the hearts of people
Let there be life**

Empathy instead of sympathy

Empathy builds connection with someone who is distressed. It is connecting with them in such a way that they feel less alone. To do this we need to:

- » recognise the perspective of the person who is distressed
- » not judge them for their perspective
- » recognise the emotions they are experiencing
- » communicate this by feeling it with them.

It can be challenging to do this, as sometimes we have to dig deep to connect with something in ourselves that knows that feeling from our own experiences.

Sympathy is our more natural response, wanting to make things better for the person. We may try to distract them into thinking about something else more positive. Or we might try to put a positive spin on the situation.

Anything we say that starts with "At least..." will be sympathy and not empathy.

We can rarely do anything to make someone's situation better, but we can try to connect with them using empathy. Instead of trying to problem solve we can say something like "*I don't really know what to say, but I am so glad you told me*" (RSA, 2013).

Watch the YouTube video *Brené Brown on Empathy* to remind yourself of the difference between empathy and sympathy.

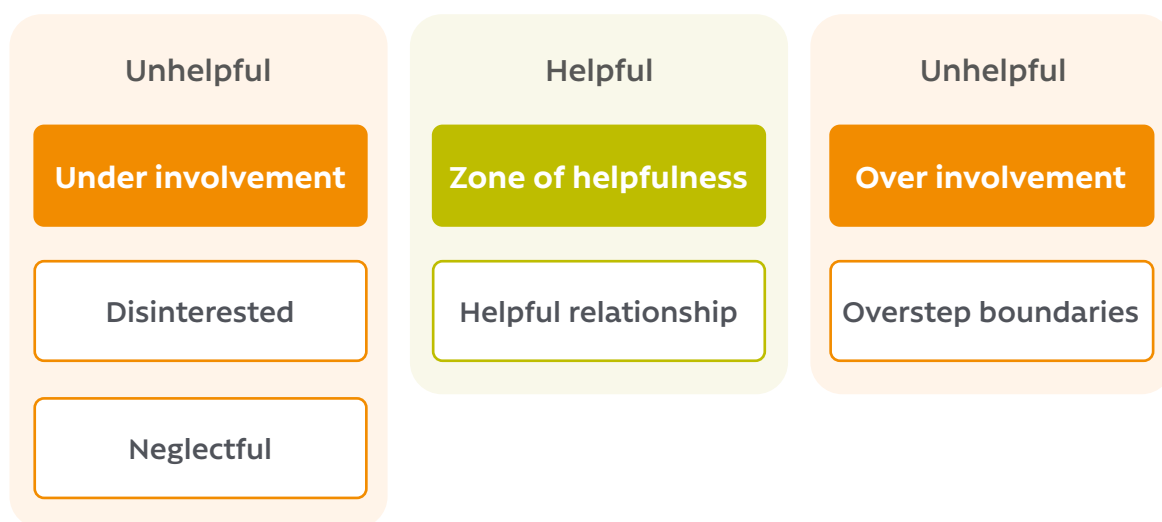
<http://tinyurl.com/empathy-and-sympathy>

Looking after yourself

Interacting with clients who are distressed or in difficult situations can keep people up near their Line of Vulnerability, increasing the risk of stress and burnout. It can also impact on the effectiveness of client interactions and the service provided.

Regularly reflect on where you are in relation to your Line of Vulnerability and do things to reduce stress and maintain wellbeing if you need to. Make time to do things you enjoy and that make you feel refreshed. Talking to your manager, a colleague, the EAP service or using the 1737 can help you find a less stressful way of working or with the challenges of a particular case.

Zone of helpfulness



The **Zone of helpfulness** is where the majority of interactions with clients should occur. This is the most effective, and best for your own wellbeing. If you are in either of the unhelpful zones you will not be working the way you should be, which will impact your wellbeing and how you deal with clients (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2012).

Signs of under involvement include:

- » distancing
- » disinterest
- » coldness
- » neglect.

Signs of over involvement include:

- » inappropriate relationships
- » being overly friendly
- » being overly involved in a person's life
- » inequitable time spent with people in your team.

Boundaries are important. Communicate with people where your role ends. Being clear on professional boundaries helps avoid compassion fatigue, ensures you remain friendly but not friends, and maintains your physical and emotional safety. It enables you to stay focused on what you can provide within the limits and responsibilities of your role. It also protects clients by reducing the chance of them feeling betrayed, abandoned, or poorly supported by you (Wolf, 2008).

You can maintain professional boundaries by:

- » clearly identifying your availability at the outset
- » frequently clarifying and reinforcing your role and boundaries to it.
Act immediately if you feel a boundary may have been crossed
- » using your workmates or professional support and supervision time to discuss issues or concerns about boundaries.



We all have different work situations, experience, personalities and Lines of Vulnerability. This means the risk areas and pressure points we need to keep an eye on most will be different for each of us.

You need to know where you are most vulnerable, and what to watch out for so you notice when you are heading into amber and towards red.

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