

Mini-Conference: Student Parents on Campus—
Creating Intentional/Supportive Environments to Foster their Success
WILSON COLLEGE
Friday March 7, 2014: 11:00 am-12:00 pm

“Counseling Strategies for Stress Coping and Building Resiliency”

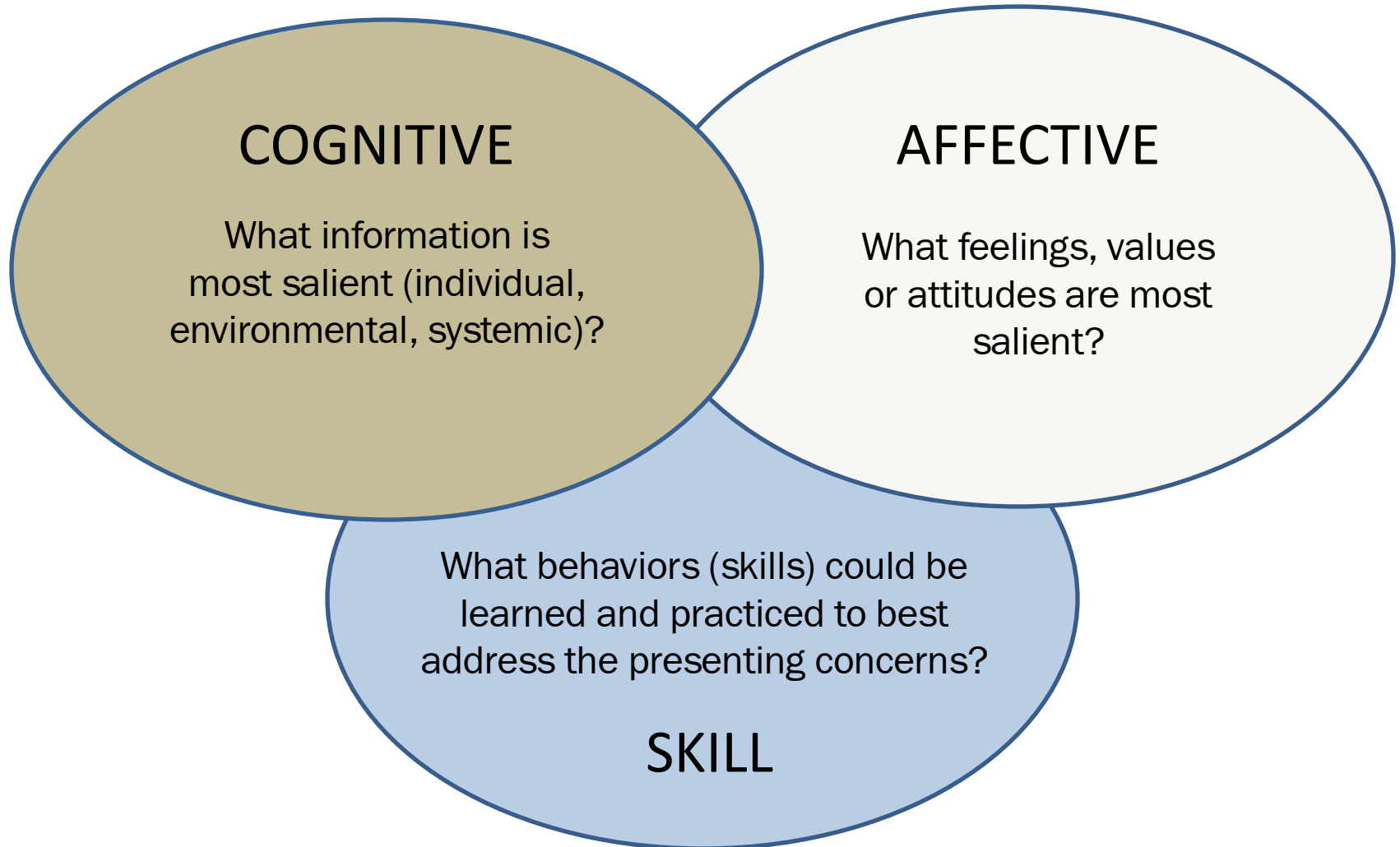
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Starting a conversation
2. Overview of the human stress response
3. Assessment tools: symptoms & coping
4. Strategies
5. Resources

3 Domains for Learning



Starting a Conversation

- When you say “I’m stressed”, what do you mean?
 - *Listen for: emotion, behavior, cognitive, social/roles?*
- What do you know about yourself and stress?
 - *What are your “distressing” stressors?*
 - *stress-related symptoms*
 - *ways of coping (healthy, unhealthy/ineffective)*
 - *Strengths*
- What 1 change would reduce stress to manageable level?
 - *Ex: “vent”, support, organize, eliminate, skills, find meaning*

Defining Stress

- “Stress” is a non-specific term > no direction for change
- DEVELOP a LANGUAGE for CHANGE:
- “**Stress**” = any pressure that creates a response challenge
 - *Stress as a neutral concept, neither good nor bad!*
- “**Stressors**” = types and sources of pressure
- “**Stress response**” = how one perceives the pressure:
 - Distress (dysfunction)
 - Coping (resources & responses)
 - Eustress (growth)

What are “Stressors”?

- Occur on a continuum: mild to traumatic
- Common “stressors” (sources of pressure):
 - Self-demands, roles, life changes, daily hassles
 - Environmental: people, places, things, events
- Stressors can be:
 - Acute** (intense, time-bound, isolated events)
 - Chronic** (intense or not, ongoing)
 - Expected** or **unexpected**
 - Real** or **imagined**
 - ...or –*most likely-* a combination of any of the above!

Role of Perception

- Perception of stressor/s correlates with response type
- Perception is processed through assessment:
 - of stressor: threat/ no threat?
 - of coping resources: can I handle this?
 - of expected outcome: will I succeed or fail?
- Implications:
 - We may or may not have control over stressors
 - We DO have the ability to adjust our perceptions

Stress Appraisal & Response

- Initial appraisal:
 - Primary: significance? (threat/no threat)
 - Secondary: capacity to respond? (low/high)
- Signs of **Distress** appraisal:
 - Emotional, dramatic, catastrophic (fight/flight, or freeze)
 - Inability to access and/or use available resources
- Signs of **Eustress** appraisal:
 - Realistic, control/confidence/efficacy, hopefulness
 - Can distinguish actual problem from emotional response
 - Effective use of available resources

Stress & the Nervous System

Primitive Response

Limbic system (amygdala)/brain stem

The “emotional brain”; “fight or flight”; the freeze response

Cognitive Response

Frontal lobe

“Directed attention”, “willful activity”

Emotional intelligence

Info Transfer Bi-Directional

CNS/brain & spinal cord \leftrightarrow sensory receptors/body

Can use brain and/or body to prevent and interrupt unhealthy stress responses (cognitive and/or behavioral interventions)

Consequences of Chronic Stress

SYMPTOMS: Social, physical, mental, emotional

- **Functional Impairment**
 - Interpersonal (dysfunction, isolation)
 - Work (over/underwork)
- **Physical Health**
 - Cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, digestive problems, obesity, skin conditions, impaired immunity (asthma, allergy)
- **Mental Health**
 - Mood disorders (depression, anxiety)
 - Substance abuse and behavioral addictions
 - Cognitive impairment (processing, decision-making)

Defining Resilience

- “Adapting well in face of adversity” (Southwick, 2011)
 - *Allostatic: returning to normal functioning*
 - *Green twig analogy*
- Three core psychological attributes (Buckwalter, 2011):
 - *Strength*
 - *Meaning/purpose*
 - *Pleasure*
- Multidimensional (varies across domains)
- Possible to increase resiliency

Resilience: Psychosocial Factors

(NCPTSD: Southwick, 2011)

- **“...can be enhanced through learning and training”**
 - Engaging neuroscience: plasticity and the brain
- Mediating factors:
 - *Genetic, developmental, neurobio, **psychosocial**, spiritual*
 - *Need for accurate assessment (multiple instruments)*
- Psychosocial factors:
 - *Role models, positive emotions, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, coping style, spirituality, moral code, social support, training, rapid recovery, purpose and meaning*

ASSESSMENT TOOLS & STRATEGIES

Awareness

SELF-INVENTORIES: STRESS COPING

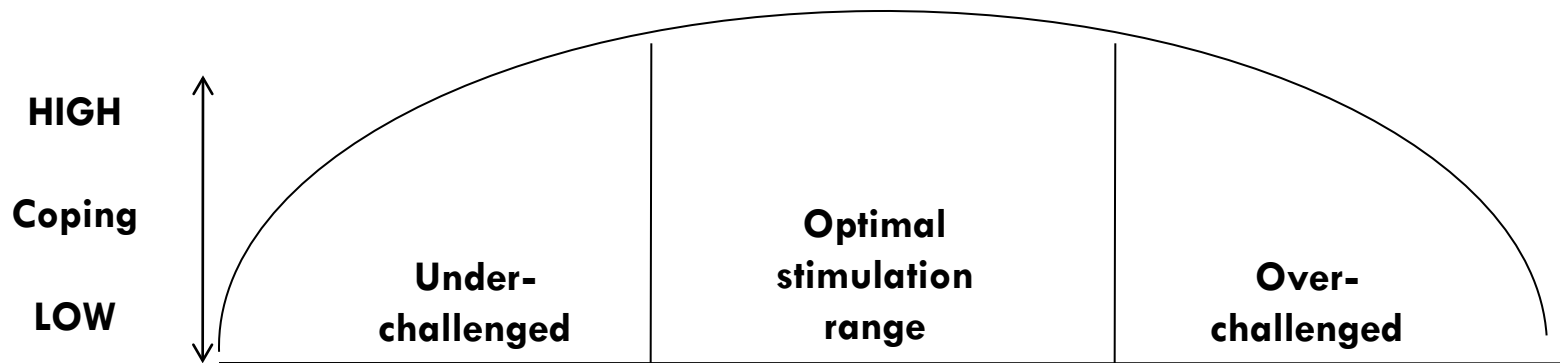
Tools:

- Identify, quantify & explore **STRESSORS**
- Identify, quantify & explore **STRESS SYMPTOMS**
- Identify, quantify & explore **COPING RESOURCES**

AWARENESS facilitates ability to:

- **MONITOR** stress
- **INTERRUPT** and **AVOID** stressors

Monitoring Stress Arousal



- Awareness of optimal stimulation range
- Practice body scanning (physical awareness)
- Adjust demands level
- Check your pacing
- Avoid rapid shifts in pacing
- Record patterns

Interrupting Stress Arousal

- **Interruption** of neurological stress response:
 - Accurate assessment of stressor / coping resources
 - + Intentional change in cognition or behavior (willful activity)
 - = Alteration of neurochemistry & information flow
 - Diffusion of adrenaline and cortisol
- **ACTIVITIES:**
 - Laughter
 - Mindfulness practices
 - Walking, moving, sitting; prayer, contemplation; drawing
 - Aerobic exercise (breathing exchange of gasses)
 - *Any cardio, yoga, kickboxing, hiking, swimming, walking*

Resources & Wrap Up

- Resources: see handout