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STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is a part of all our lives. It is caused when the demands on us—physical, mental or emotional—are more than what we can comfortably handle. Instead of wishing it away, we should learn to cope with it.

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to adverse events or situations that we all come across. Demands at work or studies, conflict with family, friends, teachers, colleagues or boss, issues of health and money, and many more factors can cause stress. In life, stress is a constant condition to which everyone must learn to adjust. Training in stress management can be effective in de-stressing for many of us.

Stress management refers to the wide range of strategies and psychotherapies which can help people successfully bring down persistent levels of stress, with the express aim of enhancing their routine functioning. Stress can manifest itself through many physical and mental features, which vary with each individual. These may include deteriorating physical health or depression. Managing your stress factors successfully is an important criterion of a happy and fruitful life.

Stress management involves using different techniques to handle stress and prevent it from harming us. If not dealt with, stress affects our health and also our mental functions such as memory, concentration and understanding, which are closely linked to our performance. Some signs of stress are sleeplessness, exhaustion, loss of appetite or excessive appetite, headaches, excessive anger and frequent emotional outbursts, restlessness, poor concentration and memory, and nervousness. Managing stress starts with identifying the sources of stress in our lives and finding ways of withstanding pressure and meeting challenges without letting it harm us. We also need to think carefully about our attitudes, habits and way of working in order to reduce the level of stress we experience. We should never turn to unhealthy

MOTIVATION AND POSITIVE APPROACH

As we have discussed in the section on stress management, it is important to maintain a positive attitude towards life and its problems to find solutions and to lead a happy life. That a positive attitude helps one lead a better and happy life is an established fact; and no one will contest it. Yet, when faced with problems and stress, we tend to slide into a gloomy, moody mindset. So it is important that we affirm the obvious and make it a point to cultivate a positive attitude.

Motivation is the process that initiates, controls and sustains goal-oriented behaviours. Motivation is what makes us act, whether it is learning how to play football for pleasure or reading a book to gain knowledge. Motivation is often used to describe why a person does something. For example, you may be so motivated that you struggle hard to get into the course that you always wanted to study.

Motivation and positive approach reflect your optimistic perspective on life, towards yourself as well as others. More than just displaying upbeat behaviour, it is a constructive attitude and mindset that seeks to engage with routine life, including adverse circumstances, in a positive and productive manner. The benefits of positive emotions and perceptions are translated into meaningful skills and resources later in life. For example, children who are at ease with their peers in day-to-day interaction and communication are likely to grow up with healthy social and communication skills, which can facilitate their professional life later on.

We can define positive attitude as an approach to life which looks at every situation in life as the best situation. It is a way of approaching life where one sees opportunities and possibilities in even the worst of difficulties. It is a strong conviction that the future is going to be better.

GOAL SETTING

A goal is something that we want to do, achieve or get within a few minutes, hours, days or years. 'Goal setting' is trying to achieve our goal and making our dream a reality. Every individual will have a goal in his or her life; it may be a small one or a big one. All of us are born to achieve something. We must find out what we are made for, what our abilities and skills are and try to reach our goal. If we do not have a goal, we have to invent or set a goal and achieve it. Without any aim or goal, our lives become miserable and meaningless. Everything in this world has a purpose.

Depending upon the time it takes to reach a goal, we can classify our goals into 'short-term goals' and 'long-term goals'. What we want to achieve immediately or by the end of the day or in a month or so may be called a short-term goal. What we want to achieve after a few years or a decade or so may be called a long-term goal.

Goals can also be identified based on their purpose. They are personal goals and professional goals. For example, your personal goal may be to buy a house or a car or to be happy in life. Your professional goal may be to become the manager of a particular company or to become an IAS officer or so on. Whatever your goal is, it must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable (Achievable), Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART).

Before setting a goal you must have a clear understanding about your priorities that is what is important and what is not. And after considering everything you must set your goal. If the goal is a big one, you can split it into smaller chunks and then achieve your goal step by step. Any goal appears huge until you begin approaching it. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. That one step can change your life. Perseverance, hard work, belief in yourself, self-motivation, etc.,

ADAPTABILITY SKILLS

Adaptability is the ability to change oneself when necessary, and also to be changed by circumstances. The skill of adaptability is crucial for survival, and is in fact, almost an evolutionary skill. Humans have survived on this planet because of their ability to transform themselves to fit into the environment around them. Adaptive responses are an important skillset. We all possess these skills but may not be aware of them. For example, if my bus does not come on time, I request a friend to drop me, or I take an autorickshaw to college. If my project has been rejected by the supervisor, I quickly look for other topics and work on them because I need to submit it before the final examination.

While some people are better at being able to adapt than others, it is a skill that can be learnt. Adaptability is a mindset; if we focus on the aim or goal rather than the process of achieving that goal, we will find our own adaptive solutions. If we become too attached to how we do things rather than why we are doing something, we will find it difficult to adapt.

Part of adapting is also finding creative solutions to problems. Often, in order to adapt, we may have to think 'out of the box', indulge in 'lateral thinking', approach the problem from a different direction, ask others to give their inputs and modify similar solutions to suit a particular problem.

Adaptability skills are particularly important for leaders. This is because they frequently have to analyse the consequences of their decisions, and then change their thinking if the results are not favourable. They should not become entrenched in their own beliefs, to the extent of being blind to their mistakes.

However, it is important to mention that adaptability does not mean that one should compromise on one's basic principles or