

# Expressive Therapies

Creating a safe and empowering space for equality with – race, gender, sexuality, age, economic status, cognitive, physical, spiritual needs, and those living with mental illness – through trauma-informed care: music therapy, art therapy, and psychotherapy, to improve health and well-being.

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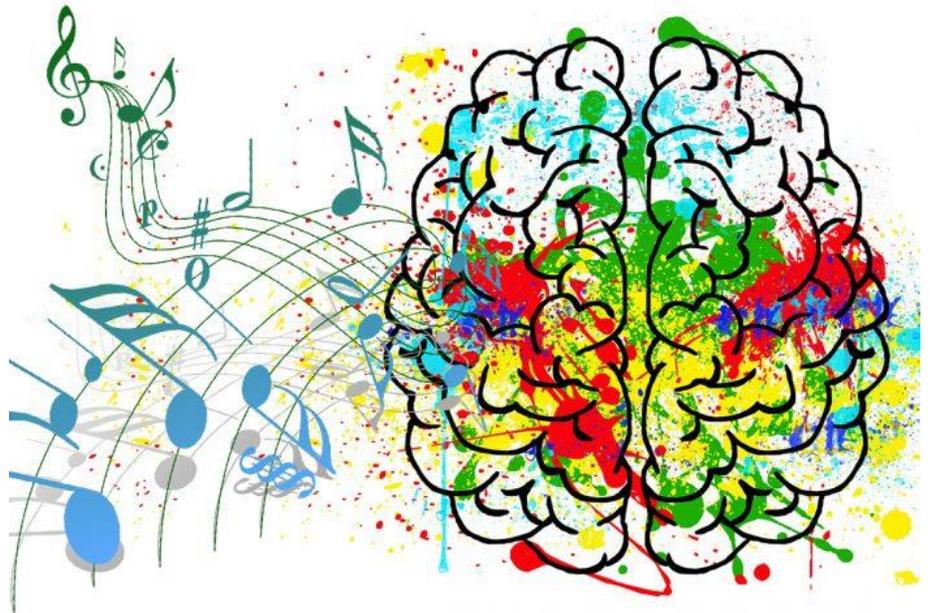
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## Stress, Emotional Health, and Immune Support

Stress is a natural human experience, something that everyone will experience in some way over the course of their life. Some stress is actually beneficial! It teaches the body important self-regulation skills, can improve survival skills, and can provide psychological benefits, such as a self-esteem boost and a feeling of accomplishment after completing something that may have been frustrating or difficult. However, when we typically think of stress, we think of the negative variety, when stress becomes unmanageable and can begin to affect us adversely. This happens when our perceived stress level exceeds our perceived ability to cope. If we are experiencing a great deal of stress, we might need to consider all the different factors at play, including what is creating our stress and how we are responding to it, and practice implementing different coping strategies that can help us to support our emotional health and immune systems, and help us to avoid burnout. This newsletter will explore how stress can impact

our immune systems, emotional and mental health, and will address how music therapy and art therapy can support healthy coping and stress reduction.



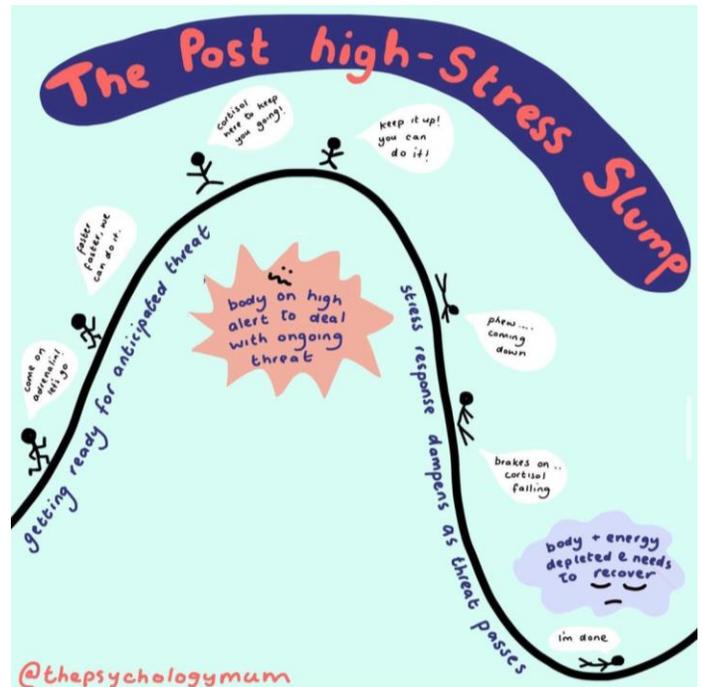
# Emotional Health: Stress

## Resilient vs. Vulnerable

When we encounter stress, we may be resilient or vulnerable, depending on many factors. When individuals are resilient to stress, they may have strong support systems, healthy coping strategies, and positive past experiences with handling stress. When individuals are vulnerable to stress, they may not have as many strong support systems and healthy coping strategies, they may have more negative past experiences with handling stress, or they may be overwhelmed at that time. All these factors and more are at play when individuals experience stress and can influence whether they are more resilient or vulnerable to stress.

## Physiological and Psychological Reactions

With any level of stress, there will be physiological responses, such as increased heart rate or breathing, feeling sweaty or clammy, experiencing muscle tension, and an actual change in the stress hormone level in the body. When we are resilient to stress, we have healthy tools and self-regulation abilities available to help us manage those responses, but when we are vulnerable to stress and it becomes unmanageable, stress can adversely affect our physiological reactions, mental well-being, and immune system. Stress can be a predisposing or perpetuating factor impacting physical and mental health, such as struggles with depression, anxiety, substance use, and other stress-related disorders.



**Are you stressed, or are you...**

- overwhelmed?
- exhausted?
- disappointed?
- lonely?
- nervous?

Getting specific about the emotion allows you to ask "What does my body/mind need for support in this moment?"

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Additionally, stress has been shown to have a major impact on immune health. Stress causes an immune reaction in our bodies, activating hormones that respond to stress. When our stress level is unmanageable, our immune system may over- or under-respond to that stress, leaving our immune system out of balance until the stressor is resolved. This explains why we might feel exhausted or get sick after a stressful period of busyness, uncertainty, or change. When stress is chronic, constant, or poorly managed, the immune system may be out of balance for an extended period of time, which can lead to altered immune responses in the future.

Therefore, unmanaged stress can affect an individual's health in multiple ways! It is important for individuals to be aware of different stressors and their responses to stress, so that they can practice coping strategies which will address that stress in a healthy and beneficial way.

## Coping Strategies

### Defining Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are tools that individuals use to help them respond to stress. They will be varied and distinct for different people, as individuals will connect with certain strategies over others and respond to stress differently. A coping strategy also does not need to be a specialized task and may be as simply as drinking more water or sleeping. Specific coping strategies might be certain types of exercise, creative outlets, breathing strategies, or mindfulness practice. Check out the box to the right for some examples!

### Positive/Adaptive Coping vs. Negative/Maladaptive Coping

A coping strategy is simply a tool used to respond to stress—this does not mean that all strategies will be effective in promoting healthy or beneficial coping with stress. Strategies that are adaptive and promote self-expression and self-regulation will be more effective as healthy coping responses. Other coping strategies may be maladaptive, and these strategies will create more stress rather than relieve it, support avoidance of emotions rather than self-expression, or lead to additional stressors and health concerns. Maladaptive coping strategies which can contribute to poor immune support, physical health, and mental health outcomes that may arise from unmanaged and chronic stress.

### Impact of Coping Strategies in Responding to Stress

An individual's choice of coping strategies will have an important impact on their management of stress and their health. If healthy, adaptive strategies are practiced and are effective in managing stress, then one may not see any negative impacts on their immune, physical, or mental health, especially if use of that strategy becomes habitual. Additionally, successful responses to stress through healthy coping strategies can boost an individual's immune system and self-esteem! It is through manageable levels of stress and healthy coping strategies that we can see the benefits of stress, as this combination can help people to learn new skills, feel confident in their abilities, and be set up for successful coping in response to future stressors.

If unhealthy, maladaptive strategies are practiced, individuals will be more likely to experience difficulties with emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. These strategies can then in turn create more stress, negatively impact mental and emotional health, and influence more negative immune health outcomes. Individuals may begin to use maladaptive coping strategies because they are familiar, easily accessible, or habitual. Stress that is addressed with maladaptive coping strategies can lead to an opposite effect than what was intended, like lower self-esteem, lack of confidence, addition of more stressors, and impacts on individual health.

## Coping Strategies

Diffusing your favorite essential oil

Spending time in water

Going for a walk or a hike

Spending time in nature

Journaling or writing

Improvising music to match your mood

Creating art around your feelings

Exercise or working out

Listening to your favorite playlist!

Spending time with a good friend

Getting sleep and rest

Curling up with a book and coffee/tea

## Impact of Stress and Coping Strategies on Health

Here is a comparison between some of the positive impacts of manageable stress and healthy, adaptive coping strategies, and some of the negative impacts of unmanaged or chronic stress and unhealthy, maladaptive coping strategies on an individual's immune health, emotional health, and mental health. Also note that the presence of most of these negative impacts can also precipitate difficulties with managing stress in a healthy way, which can then increase an individual's perceived stress level.

### Managed Stress and Adaptive Coping

- Improved sleep patterns
- Higher self-esteem
- Decreased anxiety and/or depression
- Improved problem-solving abilities
- Improved coping and regulation abilities
- Reduced stress responses and physiological reactions
- Improved immune response
- Improved interpersonal relationships

### Unmanaged Stress and Maladaptive Coping

- Impaired sleep
- Increased anxiety and/or depression
- Lower self-esteem
- Substance use disorders or other addictions
- Physical disorders
- Emotional dysregulation
- Out-of-balance physiological stress reactions
- Impaired immune response

## *Dynamic Drumming!*

Dynamic Drumming is an energizing music and cardio combo that is great for the whole family or with friends! Lots of laughter occurs encouraging stress relief! There are limited spots for in-person participation, and you can also attend virtually from home! No experience necessary.

Classes are Fridays from 10:30 – 11:15 am (through May 15)

Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday 10 – 10:45 am OR 11 – 11:45 am (3/20, 4/17, 5/15)



Cost: Individual \$10/session OR Family \$25/session

Email [scheduling@expressivetherapies.net](mailto:scheduling@expressivetherapies.net) or call (920)903-1009

to register and reserve a spot!

# Music Therapy and Art Therapy

Therapeutic interventions which work to decrease stress or increase coping abilities can be highly beneficial in countering some of these unhealthy outcomes. Habitual practice of some of these skills, whether in a therapeutic setting or as an independent coping strategy, can help to improve personal and interpersonal functioning, improve quality of life, contribute to immune support, and prevent burnout. Music therapy and art therapy can be highly beneficial mediums for stress reduction and coping!

## Music Therapy

Music has been studied through research and shown to have a positive impact on stress reduction. Music listening and active music making or singing are associated with decreases in physiological arousal responses, indicated by lowered heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormone levels. Music also affects emotional states that are stress related:

research has shown that music may have a strong influence on the amygdala, a part of our brains that is responsible for the regulation of emotional responses. For this reason, music can decrease our sense of worry, anxiety, restlessness, and nervousness. Music listening and musical improvisation have been shown to decrease the intensity of stress-related emotions and evoke more positive emotions, like pleasure and happiness. Music can also serve as a distractor by diverting our attention toward something more pleasurable, which in turn also creates lowered stress perception.



## BURNOUT RECOVERY

@BLESSTHEMESSY

- 
**GET ENOUGH SLEEP**  
 BUT SERIOUSLY, 8 HOURS, FOLKS!
- 
**CONNECT**  
 EVEN JUST A TEXT. CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE WE LOVE KEEPS US GROUNDED.
- 
**DRINK WATER**
- 
**TAKE INVENTORY OF WHERE YOU'RE HOLDING STRESS IN YOUR BODY**
- 
**DO NOT CROSS SET BOUNDARIES**  
 WITH YOURSELF, WORK & OTHERS.
- 
**RITUALS/PRACTICES**  
 HEALING YOUR SPIRIT & MIND. JOURNALING, MEDITATION, GRABBING MINDFULNESS, POSITIVE TALK.
- 
**UNPLUG/DISCONNECT**
- 
**PRIORITIZE FUN**
- 
**REST**  
 NO MINDLESS SCROLLING!
- 
**SUPPLEMENTS**  
 IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO ADVISE IN THIS AREA BUT I DO THINK IT WORTH EXPLORING, RESEARCH & TALKING TO YOUR DR ABOUT WHAT YOUR BODY MIGHT NEED.

Music therapy interventions can thus be structured to best suit the needs, preferences, and desired responses of different individuals. A music therapist creates an environment that is supportive to the therapeutic process, and can implement music interventions like music listening, active music making, composing, songwriting, or other ways of interacting with music, structured in a particular way that best matches each client. Some considerations for music therapy for stress reduction include: the music tempo, instrumental music or music with lyrics, and live music or recorded music.

## Art Therapy

Art is another creative medium which can influence our emotions, thoughts, and well-being, and has demonstrated through research an ability to have a positive impact on stress reduction. Images can evoke a response in our bodies, be it happiness, fear, anger, calm, or others. Images which are peaceful and calming to us, then, can create a relaxing response in our bodies, and the creation of images can serve as a means for expressing difficult emotions like stress that could be difficult to identify or name. Art making as well as art combined with mindfulness are a very effective method for stress-reduction for this reason, as they provide a mind-body connected experience that expresses emotions and feelings we may be carrying with us and helps us to cope by moving these feelings outside of ourselves.

Art therapy interventions are also structured to best suit the needs, preferences, and desired responses of different individuals. An art therapist helps to create an environment which is therapeutic and supportive, and may implement art directives like mandalas, guided imagery, free and open art creation, or other ways of engaging with art. Some considerations for art therapy for stress reduction include: the art medium, complexity or simplicity of the task, and the incorporation of guided imagery or meditation experiences.

### Music Therapy Interventions

- Music and mindfulness
- Use of the ISO principle for progressive relaxation
- Music and movement
- Songwriting and composition
- Musical Improvisation
- Music listening
- Active music making and singing

### Art Therapy Interventions

- Art and mindfulness
- Open art making
- Mandalas
- Meditation
- Mind and Body Connections

## THANK YOU FOR READING OUR NEWSLETTER!

We appreciate connecting with the community by sharing the specifics of music therapy and art therapy. If you have further inquiries, we highly recommend you visit our website at [www.expressivetherapies.net](http://www.expressivetherapies.net), our Facebook page (Expressive Therapies), the American Music Therapy Association at [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org) and the American Art Therapy Association at <https://arttherapy.org/>, or email us at [info@expressivetherapies.net](mailto:info@expressivetherapies.net).

Take care and be well!

