

Roadside Assistance
For Mental Health

- Checking in with yourself
- Noticing what is wrong
- Coming up with a plan to make things better

Benjamin Feere, MC, MSc., CCC
The Caring Place
1350 Osler St Regina, SK
(306)-347-CARE (2273)

Roadside Assistance for Mental Health

- Starting to talk about mental health and self-care is only the beginning of a really good conversation.
- In conversation with clients and frontline healthcare workers, we don't always know what it means to take care of our self, what does it mean to check in with ourselves, and decide how we are doing.
- In the middle of a busy day or week and we ask ourselves "how am I doing?" – we aren't always going to get a good answer.
- Today we are going to look at – how do we know when something is normal stress or maybe creeping up into abnormal, and coming up with a plan to make things better.
- Providing generalize information to help build a framework to help you apply these things in your own life.
- Not everything will work the same for everyone, but this information will provide a starting point.



What is stress?

What is stress?

- Simple explanation – anything that pushes us outside of our comfort zone.
- In itself, not always a bad thing:
 - Preparing for this presentation created some stress
 - Positive stress because paid attention to detail, more careful in preparation and treat it seriously as it is something I cared about.
- Stress we feel on a day-to day basis - Anything we care about and don't want to mess up, is going to cause a bit of stress – and that is not always a bad thing.
- Stress can be too much and become overwhelming and be the main thing on our mind.
- At this point, stress is not something that helps us do a job or help us do it better; actually becomes something that prevents us from a job well.



Preparation Questions to Ask Ourselves

- What are some situations in which I would like to gain more control?
- What are my values?
- When do I let other things or people change my values?
- What are my boundaries? (The things I need to feel safe)
- When I have stress from something that I cannot control, what are the things that make me feel better?

Questions to Ask Ourselves

- Some very large questions - do not expect you to have answers to these.
- Background information for the presentation
- **Situations I'd like to gain more control**
 - Control over ourselves or over the situation
 - When in stressful situations we don't typically think about what we are doing, we are in survival or reactionary mode and we are doing whatever we are feeling at the time
 - Don't always put best foot forward in these situations; don't feel so great after these situations
- **What are my values?**
 - Everyone has 1,000s of values
 - From being good people, being good at our job, helping people...our Netflix time
 - Base value= anything we enjoy, think it good or want to manifest in our life.
- **When do I let other things or people change my values?**
 - Situations where there is pressure and our values are under duress/infringed on
- **What are my boundaries (things I need to feel safe)?**
 - Within these boundaries I feel safe – I can predict what is going to happen, I am not stress or overwhelmed.
- **What are the things that make me feel better**
 - Anything that makes use feel like we are back in our comfort zone (takes away stress or feel like we can cope).

Checking in With Yourself Your Stress Barometer

5 - High level anxiety

4 - Danger way past comfort level

3 - Boundaries are being pushed

2 - Slightly anxious but still communicating well

1 - Comfortable

Checking With Yourself – Your Stress Barometer

- Similar to a barometer that checks atmospheric pressure
- Idea is to look at how much stress we have and how much pressure that is creating, and how that may change the way we act or respond in certain situations
- 5 Levels – we will look at in more depth

Learning to Pay Attention
to Our Warning Signs

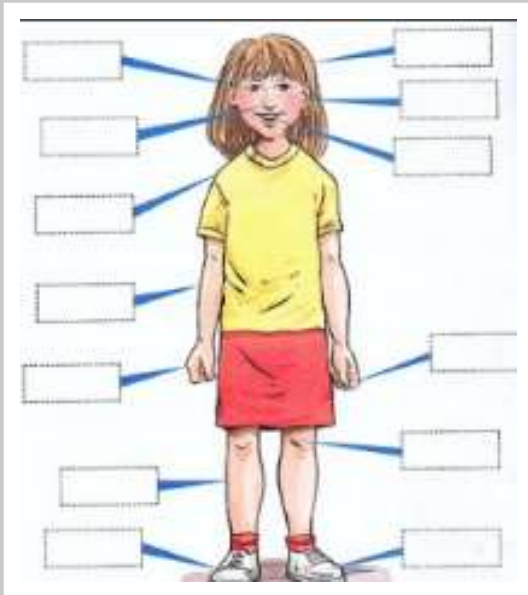
4 Types of Warning Signs

- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual



Four Types of Warning Signs

- When looking at ourselves and trying to determine how much stress and the type of stress we are under, we don't always give that structure or a framework on how to go about that
- Four different dimensions and part of yourself that you can look at for potential warning signs.
- Look at common signs but also start conversation about how you can identify what might be unique to you.
- Four types of warning signs
 - Physical
 - Mental
 - Emotional
 - Spiritual



Physical Warning Signs

- Common Warning Signs
 - Shortness of breath
 - Feeling lightheaded, dizzy, or woozy
 - Tightness in muscles - especially in chest, shoulders, and neck
 - Inability to sit still
 - Jaw clenching
 - Aches or pains
 - Stomach or digestive problems

Physical Warning Signs

- Easiest to identify; unique to individuals
- When looking for physical signs, be aware of what is happening in your body.
- Common signs - not a comprehensive or prescriptive list:
 - Shortness of breath
 - Feeling lightheaded, dizzy, or woozy
 - Tightness in muscles - especially in chest, shoulders, and neck
 - Inability to sit still (if abnormal behaviour or struggle to sit still for long periods)
 - Jaw clenching
 - Aches or pains
 - Stomach or digestive problems
- Useful means to identify – take a deep breath, starting with top of head, get in touch with your body and look at what are you feeling?
 - Headache? Stiff neck? etc
- Identify why signs are present – why am I doing that, what is stressing me out today



Mental Warning Signs

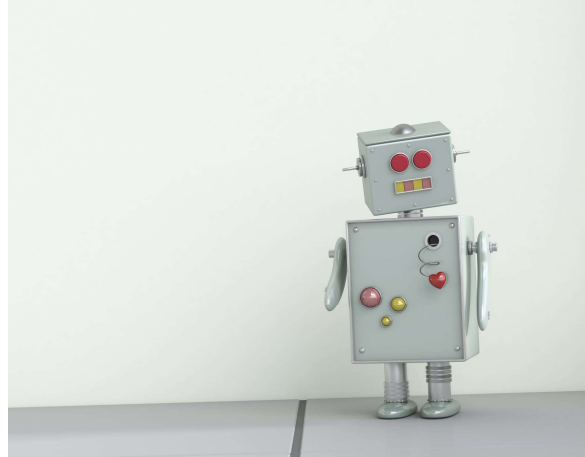
- Common Mental Warning Signs
 - Specific or generalized anxiety
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Circular thoughts
 - Catastrophizing
 - Disrupted sleep or oversleeping
 - Inability to focus
 - Feeling like you are “in a haze”

Mental Warning Signs

- Think about what is going on in the back of your mind
- Common warning signs:
 - Specific or generalized anxiety
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Circular thoughts
 - Thoughts going on in background, takes up energy, ongoing; make it difficult to focus on present task
 - Catastrophizing
 - Planning for worst case scenarios; not looking forward to things that are good
 - Disrupted sleep or oversleeping
 - Should I be asleep or is it related to change in work schedule?
 - Do I lay awake or do I wake up in middle of night?
 - Inability to focus
 - Feeling like you are “in a haze”

Emotional Warning Signs

- Common Emotional Warning Signs
 - Depression or General Unhappiness
 - Loneliness
 - Irritability, or Agitation
 - Unstable or Unpredictable Emotions
 - Lack of motivation



Emotional Warning Signs

- Difference between mental and emotional
 - Mental – thoughts you have in background – usually in words
 - Emotional – happens faster, when told something we will have a feeling about it before we think about what it actually means
- Common warning signs:
 - Depression or General Unhappiness
 - Loneliness
 - Irritability, or Agitation
 - Unstable or Unpredictable Emotions
 - Reacting to things in a way we don't understand or doesn't make sense after the fact
 - Lack of motivation
 - Not enjoying or motivated to do things are often motivated to do

Spiritual Warning Signs

- Common Spiritual Warning Signs
 - Questioning identity
 - Questioning career/family/life direction
 - Lack of confidence
 - Feeling disconnected from friends, family, or work
 - Feeling disconnected from the world
 - Crisis of faith or belief about the world



Spiritual Warning Signs

- “Spiritual” means a lot of different things to a lot of different people in the world
- Traditional religious side to new age definition
- “Spiritual” for this purpose means the understanding of who we are, our understanding of ourself, and our connections and place in the world.
- Example of spiritual crisis – at a party and you tell a joke and it falls flat
 - Before - you are confident, with friends, and in a good place
 - After – don’t know who you are – am I a loser, less confident, question self and friendships, disconnection
- Common warning signs
 - Questioning identity
 - Questioning career/family/life direction
 - Lack of confidence (mentally know competent)
 - Feeling disconnected from friends, family, or work
 - Feeling disconnected from the world
 - Crisis of faith or belief in the world
 - Questioning place in world, choices made, etc

Checking in With Yourself Your Stress Barometer

5 - High level anxiety – Be safe, stop talking, exit the situation ASAP!!

4 - Danger way past comfort level – Briefly explain your feelings and create space (e.g. “I am feeling a overwhelmed right now, I need to step away and collect myself”)

3 - Boundaries are being pushed – Recognize what values are being pushed, decide how you want to respond (take a walk or ask the other party to sit down and discuss the situation)

2 - Slightly anxious but still communicating well – Notice that you are having a reaction, try to reset in some way (e.g. take a deep breath, ask for a drink of water, use the restroom etc.)

1 – Stressed but okay – Recognize that I might need to exercise more patience than normal

Stress Barometer

1st Level – Green Zone

- Good stress zone, but recognize need more patience

2nd Level – Blue Zone

- Checked in with ourselves and noticing a few things within the 4 dimensions
- Stress present, not sure what it is yet - take a deep breathe, step away for a moment
- Not a high stress situation, not feeling awful and don't need a big reaction, just need a moment to calm the background thoughts, evaluate values and how you want to react/show up

3rd Level – Yellow Zone

- Person or situation is stressing out or upsetting us, making us uncomfortable
- Evaluate what boundaries and values are being pushed and how do we want to respond
- No set way to respond – address individual directly (assertive) or talk to someone who does value us (passive)

4th Level – Gray Zone

- Past comfort level - purely in reactionary mode, cannot control emotions/reaction, not best self in the moment; somewhat in control

- Be aware of reaction and how you want to handle it (eg: recognize and explain feelings and create space)
- Not about a set reaction but about being as aware as possible - what am I going through, what is being pressed upon me, what affect is that having on em and how do I want to respond to that

5th Level – Orange Zone

- Currently experiencing panic attack or about to have one
- Not reacting to thins, in survival mode
- Heart racing, short breaths, etc
- Be safe, stop talking and exit situation as soon as you can
- As frontline healthcare workers – not always possible to walk but its about being safe and recognizing you are no longer helpful, asking for support so you can collect yourself so you can show up in the situation in the way you want.

Preventative Self-Care

- Like our physical health, mental health measures are best taken before we are in crisis
- Anything that improves our health across the 4 dimensions
- Common self-care practices
 - Journaling
 - Meditation
 - Reading
 - Talking with friends
 - Getting fresh air
 - Exercising
 - Eating well
 - Sleeping regularly (Naps are great!)

Preventative Self-Care

- Self-care is anything that improves our health across the 4 dimensions
- Common self-care practices
 - Journaling
 - Meditation
 - Reading
 - Talking with friends
 - Getting fresh air
 - Exercising
 - Eating well
 - Sleeping regularly (Naps are great!)
- Self-care will be unique to you and what helps take away stress; should not make things or you feel worse
 - Eg – taking an hour for yourself, but creates guilt and new stress
- When things are not making you feel better, don't continue doing it as self-care.
 - Recognize if it is something that is improving your mental health across 4 dimensions or making it harder or getting in the way of feeling better.



Journal Sample

- Morning

- What am I thankful for today? (Be Honest!)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- What would make today great?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

- Evening

- What was the highest my stress level got today?
- What situation surrounded this event?
- How did I handle that event?
- Did I recognize it at the time?
- Could I have handled it better?
- Could I have done anything to prevent the stress or put myself in a better frame of being to handle the stress?

Journaling

- Example of how-to string things together and recognize patterns
- If not your thing or creates stress for you – don't do it.
- Take a few moments during the day to check in with yourself
 - Morning Check-in
 - What am I thankful for today?
 - Be honest/genuine
 - If nothing to write down, don't write something down
 - No point in lying to yourself in a journal
 - What would make today great?
 - What will make today better? What do you control to make things better?
 - Evening Check-in
 - What was the highest my stress level got today? (What level on barometer?)
 - What situation surrounded this event?
 - How did I handle that event?
 - Did I recognize it at the time?
 - Could I have handled it better? Did I allow it to change the way I reacted
 - Could I have done anything to prevent the stress or put myself in a better frame of being to handle the stress?
 - As healthcare workers can't always control stress, but ways

to cope with cumulative affect of stress

“Unprecedented
Circumstances”

- We have heard some variation of this phrase constantly for a year now. Stress is cumulative and with the year we have had it is beginning to build up for so many of us. Even more so for our frontline healthcare workers. There is no shame in needing self-care. In fact, it is our recognition of and response to stress that allows us to continue to be effective in “times such as these”

Self-care is not selfish; it is self-focused.

Keeping your self in good shape – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually - allows to be able to take care of and help others, professionally and personally.

Commend all of you for taking part in session and talking about these things and taking it seriously to find ways to make it better.