3

Stress &
Burnout Prevention
Exercises

Welcome

It is a great pleasure to offer you this compilation of tools for stress and burnout prevention. During the past years, Positive Psychology has gained an increasing amount of attention, both from helping professionals and researchers. This attention has resulted in many valuable insights in what contributes to a happy, fulfilling life.

In addition, positive psychology has given us many tools not only to flourish, but also to cope with difficult times in life.

Since 2013, our aim with PositivePsychology.com has been to contribute to this field by disseminating the science to psychology practitioners and educators alike.

We hope that the tools presented here may inspire you too to increase your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you. Please feel free to print and share this document with others.

For those who like what they see, make sure to also check out our online searchable database with all kinds of practical positive psychology tools:

The Positive Psychology Toolkit

All the best!

Seph Fontane Pennock
Hugo Alberts, Ph.D.

Using the tools

This product contains 3 different tools. Each tool is structured in the same way, consisting of a background section, a goal description, advice for using the exercise and suggested readings.
On the first page of every tool, a legend is shown, consisting of several icons:

⊙	**Coping**
🔖	Exercise
⏱	15-20 mins.
⊕	Client
📊	No
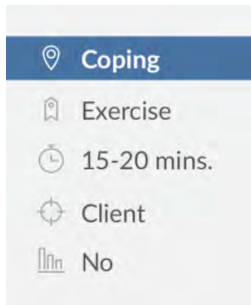
- The first icon displays the main category the tool belongs to.
- The second icon shows the type of tool. The following options are available:

» Exercise (a tool that describes an activity that is done once, during a session)
» Assessment (a tool that aims to assess a trait or characteristic of a person)
» Overview (a tool that provides an overview or list of something; research findings, facts, etc.)
» Advice (a tool that is directed at the helping professional providing advice on how to carry out a certain activity)
» Meditation (a tool that describes a form of meditation)
» Intervention (a tool that describes an activity that needs to be done more than once during a certain period)

- The third icon provides an estimation of the duration of the tool. In other words, how long it takes to complete the exercise. This is always an estimation of the total time it takes. Note that for some tool types, like overview, advice, protocol and intervention it is difficult if not impossible to provide an estimation of the duration. In these cases n/a (not available) is written.
- The fourth icon describes the intended audience for this tool; available options include client, coach or group.
- The last icon indicates whether this specific tool has been tested at least once in a scientific study and has been published in a peer reviewed journal (yes or no). Note that if there is a strong theoretical and scientifically tested basis underlying the tool, but the tool itself in its current form has not been directly addressed in research, the icon will still indicate "no".

Important note
Please note that the tools in this give-away are not a substitute for a clinical or coaching certification program, which we recommend you take before you call yourself an official "therapist" or "coach" and before you see clients or patients.

Note that you are advised to use these tools within the boundaries of your professional expertise. For instance, if you are a certified clinician, you are advised to use the exercises within your field of expertise (e.g. clinical psychology). Likewise, a school teacher may use the exercises in the classroom, but is not advised to use the exercises for clinical populations. Positive Psychology Program B.V. is not responsible for unauthorized usage of these tools.

Strengthening The Work-Private Life Barrier

Coping

Exercise

15-20 mins.

Client

No

While short-term stress can help us deal with the many challenges life throws our way, when it overwhelms us, we might not be able to cope with it. Occupational stress, for instance, leads to an estimated 120,000 deaths each year in the U.S. alone, and those who struggle to find a balance between home and work are over four times more likely to show signs of burnout [1]. With more people than ever working remotely and technology making it possible to perform job tasks from anywhere and at any time, it is increasingly difficult to switch off and leave the stresses of work behind.

Psychological detachment from work refers to a state in which people mentally disconnect from job-related issues when they are away from work [2]. The ability to mentally detach oneself from work in this way can assist recovery from work-related stress, reduce burnout and emotional exhaustion, improve well-being and overall life satisfaction, and improve job satisfaction and goal achievement [3,4]. Psychological detachment from work also improves relationships outside of work and reduces conflict between the demands of work and family [2]. At the organizational level, a healthy work-life balance reduces employee turnover, improves performance, and lowers the incidences of lateness and absenteeism [4].

Cultivating a solid barrier between work and personal life is imperative to psychological detachment. Indeed, the absence of a strong barrier between the two roles may limit opportunities to recharge and unwind from work-related stressors [4]. It is, therefore, essential to identify the behaviors, beliefs, and conditions that create metaphorical "holes" in the work-life barrier. For instance, some actions, like not taking sufficient breaks or believing you must be available around the clock for work-related issues, will puncture holes in the barrier.

These holes weaken the work-life barrier and make it easier for work-related stress to spill over into private life. However, identifying ways to fill these holes and strengthening the barrier between work and personal life offers opportunities to recharge and unwind from work-related stressors [5].

This exercise will help clients identify the behaviors, beliefs, and conditions that create metaphorical "holes" in the barrier between work and private life. In doing so, clients will strengthen the barrier between the two roles to restore a healthy balance between the two.

Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston.

Goal

This exercise aims to help clients identify the behaviors, beliefs, and conditions that create metaphorical "holes" in the barrier between work and private life. In doing so, clients can better develop a solid barrier between work and private life to help them restore a healthy balance between the two.

Advice

- Work-life balance does not mean an equal balance of time spent on each area. Work-life balance is not defined by hours but by outcomes. Moreover, psychological detachment is about mentally switching off from work-related issues during off-time; it is not about caring less when at work, which may also be problematic.

- Ensure clients understand that there are no perfect, one-size-fits-all solutions. Work-life balance choices are different for each of us because we all have different priorities and lives.

- Reassure clients that the mind can be easily distracted, which is completely normal. When putting their solutions into action, the mind is likely to wander back to work-related issues. The key is to acknowledge that one's attention has shifted and then refocus on the task at hand.

References

1. Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2007). The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12*, 204.

2. Sonnentag, S. (2012). Psychological detachment from work during leisure time: The benefits of mentally disengaging from work. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 21*, 114-118.

3. Sonnentag, S., & Kruel, U. (2006). Psychological detachment from work during off-job time: The role of job stressors, job involvement, and recovery-related self-efficacy. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 15*, 197-217.

4. Rao, T. S., & Indla, V. (2010). Work, family, or personal life: Why not all three?. *Indian journal of psychiatry, 52*, 295-297.

5. Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 472-491.

Strengthening The Work-Private Life Barrier

We all experience stress from time to time and, in the short term, it can help us cope with some of life's challenges. However, when stress is prolonged, it can be damaging to both physical and mental health. Stress in the workplace is no different. Many things can cause work-related stress, but the absence of a strong barrier between your work and personal life plays a big part.

This work-life barrier helps you leave the stresses of work behind you at the end of the day so that you can relax and recharge while you are at home.

Thus, what strengthens the work-life barrier? Some behaviors (the things you do), beliefs (what you think is true), and conditions (your circumstances) make it easier to separate the two roles and leave the stresses of work behind at the end of the day. Certain behaviors, beliefs, and conditions can also create "holes" in your work-life barrier. These holes weaken it and allow stressors from work to spill over to your private life.

This exercise will help you recognize the behaviors, beliefs, and conditions that puncture holes in the barrier between your work and private life. When you know what weakens your work-life barrier, you can identify what is needed to fill these holes and prevent work issues from spilling into your private life.

Step 1: Identifying the holes in your work-life barrier

The things you do, your thoughts, and your circumstances can puncture holes in the barrier between your work and home life. For example, taking work calls or checking emails at home will create holes in your barrier that can leave you feeling stressed long after work is over. In this step, you will think about the behaviors, beliefs, and circumstances that create holes in your work-life barrier.

Holes created at work

First, think about the behaviors (the things you do), beliefs (what you think is true), and conditions (your circumstances) **at work** that puncture holes in the barrier between your work and personal life. When you have identified these holes, write them down in the first column of the 'Holes in My Work-Private Life Barrier' worksheet in Appendix A. For reference, a completed example can be found in Appendix C.

Holes created at home

You will now think about the behaviors (the things you do), beliefs (what you think is true), and conditions (your circumstances) <u>at home</u> that create holes in your barrier between work and private life. When you have identified the holes created by your behavior, beliefs, and circumstances at home, write them down in the second column of the 'Holes in My Work-Private Life Barrier' worksheet in Appendix A.

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Step 2: Filling the holes in your barrier

It takes thought and planning to strengthen the barrier between your work and private life. You must find ways to fill the holes so that a healthy balance can be restored. Now that you have identified the behaviors, beliefs, and circumstances that puncture holes in your work-life barrier, you will identify solutions to fill them.

For example, a hole created by checking work-related emails at home can be filled by turning off notifications or turning off your phone after work hours. To give another example, feeling stressed at home because of your workload will likely pierce a hole in your work-life barrier. To fill this hole, you might practice saying 'no' to additional work when you feel it is right to do so.

So, what can you do to fill the holes and strengthen your work-life barrier? For each behavior, belief, and circumstance you identified as a hole in your barrier, take some time to think of a solution that will fill that hole and strengthen the barrier.

When you are ready to do so, use Appendix B to fill in the 'Strengthening the Work-Private Life Barrier' worksheet. A completed worksheet with additional examples of hole-fillers can be found in Appendix D.

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Step 3: Taking action

Now that you have identified what you need to do to fill the holes in your work-life barrier, it is time to put them into action. For each solution you added to the 'Strengthening the Work-Private Life Barrier' table, think of small steps to include them in your regular schedule.

For example, to stop checking work-related texts and emails outside of work hours, you might think about disconnecting when you are at home and changing the settings on your devices so that you will not be bothered by work-related notifications.

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Step 4: Reflection

How do you feel after completing this exercise?

How does it feel to strengthen the barrier between your work and private life?

What did you find most rewarding about this exercise?

In what ways has this exercise changed how you think about your work-life balance?

What did this exercise teach you about your work-life balance?

In what other ways can you fill the holes and strengthen the barrier between your work and private life?

Appendix A: Blank 'Holes in My Work-Private Life Barrier' Worksheet

Work		Private life

Behavior
(things you do)

Beliefs
(what you think is true)

weak barrier

Conditions
(your circumstances)

Appendix B: Blank 'Strengthening the Work-Private Life Barrier' Worksheet

✂ Work	🏠 Private life

Behavior
(things you do)

Beliefs
(what you think is true)

strong barrier

Conditions
(your circumstances)

Appendix C: Completed Example of 'Holes in My Work-Private Life Barrier' Worksheet

✂ Work	🏠 Private life

Behavior
(things you do)

Work	Private life
– I say "yes" when asked to do additional work, even when I am already under pressure. – I often find myself spending a lot of time on unimportant tasks. – I don't take enough breaks during work to recharge.	– I take work-related calls and check emails at home. – I stay up late and feel tired in the morning. – I eat an unhealthy diet. – I do not exercise regularly.

Beliefs
(what you think is true)

Work	Private life
– "I have to keep working until all my tasks are done." – "My work needs to be perfect every time." – "Not finishing things in time is my worst nightmare." – "My work is the most important part of my life."	– "I don't really have time for friends and family, I'm just too busy." – "If I take too much time off, then I will be less productive." – "I have to make myself available around the clock, even when I'm at home, for work-related issues."

weak barrier

Conditions
(your circumstances)

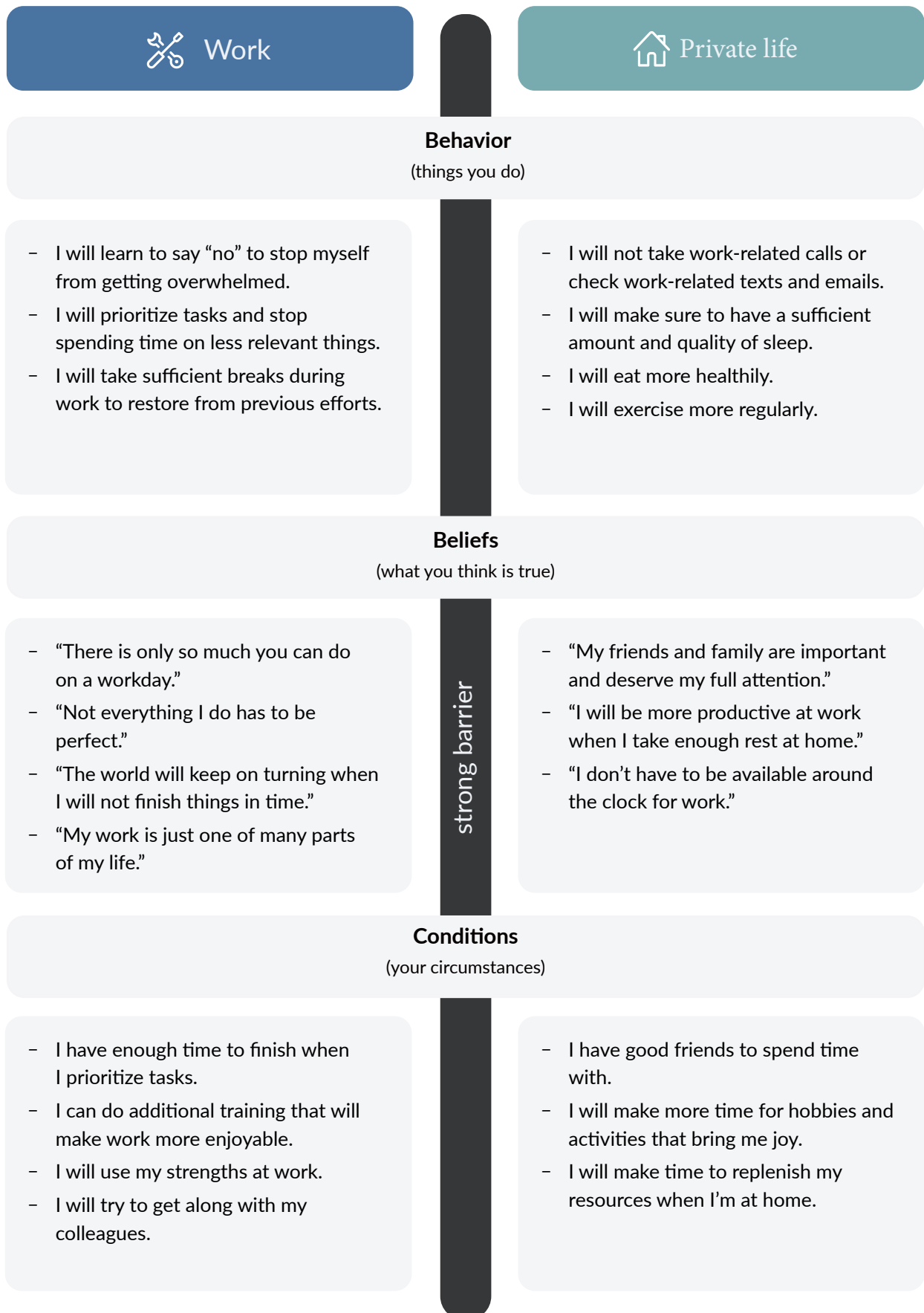| Work	Private life
– I often don't have enough time to finish my tasks. – I dislike my job. – I don't have the opportunity to use my strengths at work. – I do not get along with my work colleagues.	– I don't spend time with friends. – I don't have hobbies or activities that bring me joy. – I don't have enough time to recharge my batteries when I'm at home.

Appendix D: Completed Example of 'Strengthening the Work-Private Life Barrier' Worksheet

| ⚒ Work | 🏠 Private life |

Behavior
(things you do)

Work	Private life
– I will learn to say "no" to stop myself from getting overwhelmed.	– I will not take work-related calls or check work-related texts and emails.
– I will prioritize tasks and stop spending time on less relevant things.	– I will make sure to have a sufficient amount and quality of sleep.
– I will take sufficient breaks during work to restore from previous efforts.	– I will eat more healthily.
	– I will exercise more regularly.

Beliefs
(what you think is true)

Work	Private life
– "There is only so much you can do on a workday."	– "My friends and family are important and deserve my full attention."
– "Not everything I do has to be perfect."	– "I will be more productive at work when I take enough rest at home."
– "The world will keep on turning when I will not finish things in time."	– "I don't have to be available around the clock for work."
– "My work is just one of many parts of my life."	

strong barrier

Conditions
(your circumstances)

Work	Private life
– I have enough time to finish when I prioritize tasks.	– I have good friends to spend time with.
– I can do additional training that will make work more enjoyable.	– I will make more time for hobbies and activities that bring me joy.
– I will use my strengths at work.	– I will make time to replenish my resources when I'm at home.
– I will try to get along with my colleagues.	

Energy Management Audit

Resilience

Assessment

10-15 min.

Client

No

The prevalence of time management tools and resources is a key indicator of our keen desire to try and balance the competing demands that face most individuals today; and yet time is a finite resource that cannot be expanded. A recent large-scale Gallup poll demonstrated the impact this is having in the workforce, with 23% of employees reporting feeling burned out very often; and a further 44% reporting feeling burned out sometimes (Gallup, 2018). Employee burnout can trigger a downward spiral of both employee and organizational performance and notably also has a key influence on employees' family life. A counterpoint perspective that is gaining increasing traction is learning how to manage energy, which is defined as the strength and vitality that develops our capacity for doing work. Energy is a renewable resource that can significantly enhance the efficacy of the time we do invest. This is a fundamental paradigm shift from a focus on efficiency to instead focusing on efficacy.

In order to continue to operate at our best, it is important to understand where we gain energy from and what we can do to re-fuel. Our energy sources are closely connected to our basic human needs that cover mind, body, emotions, and spirit. These interact together to influence one another and thus no one source is sufficient on its own. Physical energy is derived from how well we fuel our body, including nutrition, exercise, rest and sleep. When we are able to manage our emotions, developing psychological flexibility, we can enhance the quality of our emotional energy and subsequent performance. Mental energy can be honed by learning how to develop attentional focus; a key strategy to counteract the growing influence of distractions so common in today's work and social environments. Finally, we can tap into the wellspring of spiritual energy when our activities are aligned with our values and help to develop a sense of meaning and purpose.

This audit is designed to provide insights into an individual's energy strengths and deficits, building awareness of the impact this is having on their day to day efficacy. This can then be leveraged in designing an ongoing program to enhance wellbeing and performance.

Author

This tool was adapted from Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy's work by Rachel Colla (merakai.com.au).

Goal

The goal of this tool is to enable clients to assess their current energy levels in 4 domains: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Advice

- This tool may be paired with the Energy Audit tool to track varying energy levels throughout the day and develop further insights into the key activities that fuel the client's energy levels.
- Please note that although this questionnaire is not directly tested in research, the fundamentals of the model are based on research.

Scoring

To determine how your overall energy rating is, total the number of statements checked:

Guide to scores:
0–3: Excellent energy management skills
4–6: Reasonable energy management skills
7–10: Significant energy management deficits
11–16: A full-fledged energy management crisis

To determine what you need to work on, calculate the number of checks in each category:
Body:
Emotions:
Mind:
Spirit:

Suggested Readings

Schwartz, T. & McCarthy, C. (2007). *Manage your energy, not your time.* Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time

Hofoll, S.E. (2002). Social and psychological resources and adaptation. *Review of General Psychology, 6(4),* 307-324.

Gallup (2018). *Employee burnout, Part 1: The five main causes.* Retrieved from: https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx

Energy Management Audit

Instructions

Check any of the statements that represent your usual daily actions.

Body

- ○ I frequently skip breakfast, or I settle for something that isn't nutritious.
- ○ I often wake up feeling tired and rarely get at least seven to eight hours of sleep.
- ○ I don't take regular breaks during the day to renew and recharge, eg. I often eat lunch at my desk, if I eat it at all.
- ○ I could work out more often (ie. I do less than three cardiovascular exercise sessions per week, and strength training at least once a week).

Emotions

- ○ I don't feel like I have enough time with my family and loved ones. When I'm with them I often feel like my thoughts are distracted on other things such as work.
- ○ I could express my appreciation to others and/or savor my own accomplishments and blessings more frequently.
- ○ I often find myself feeling irritable, impatient, or stressed at work, especially when work is demanding.
- ○ I have too little time for the activities that I deeply enjoy.

Mind

- ○ I regularly work in the evenings or on weekends, and I almost never take an e-mail–free holiday.
- ○ I have difficulty focusing on one thing at a time, and I am easily distracted during the day, eg. by e-mail.
- ○ I don't take enough time for strategizing, reflection, and creative thinking.
- ○ I spend much of my day reacting to immediate demands and crises, rather than focusing on activities with longer-term value.

Spirit

- ○ My decisions at work are more often influenced by external demands than by a strong, clear sense of my own purpose.
- ○ I don't invest as much time and energy as I would like to into making a positive difference to others or to the world.
- ○ There are significant gaps between what I hold to be most important in my life and how I actually allocate my time and energy.
- ○ I don't spend enough time at work doing what I do best and enjoy most.

The Stress-Related Growth Scale

The Stress-Related Growth Scale (SRGS; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996) is a questionnaire designed to assess positive ways in which people believe they have grown and changed after experiencing a stressful or traumatic event. The items of the questionnaire are all related to positive outcomes of hardship/difficulty. The concept "stress-related growth" concerns multiple dimensions in life, including positive changes in personal relationships (e.g., "I developed new relationships with helpful others") and personal resources, including life philosophy (e.g., "I rethought how I want to live my life") and coping skills (e.g., "I learned to work through problems and not just give up").

Goal

The purpose of the SRGS is to assess positive ways people believe they have grown and changed after experiencing a stressful event. Stated differently, the scale measures stress-related growth.

Advice

In addition to the assessment of the level of stress-related growth of a client, this scale can also be used to gain a clearer understanding of the perceptions a client has about the positive changes that occurred as a result of the difficult event(s). For instance, a client may predominantly experience positive changes in personal relationships rather than a shift in coping skills.

This scale can also be used in an educational context. The items of this scale include many commonly-experienced positive consequences of hardship/trauma. Consequently, the scale can be used to illustrate the concept of stress-related growth.

Scoring

A total score can be calculated by adding the individual scores on the 50 items. A higher score reflects a higher level of stress-related growth. In the study by Park et al. (1996), the mean total score was 50.68. Note, however, that there is no information available on cut-off scores and population norms.

Suggested Readings

Park, C. L., Cohen, L. H., & Murch, R. L. (1996). Assessment and prediction of stress-related growth. *Journal of Personality, 64*, 71–105.

Armeli, S., Gunthert, K., & Cohen, L. H. (2001). Stressor appraisals, coping, and post-event outcomes: The dimensionality and antecedents of stress-related growth. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 20*, 366–395.

Roesch, S. C., Rowley, A. A., & Vaughn, A. A. (2004). On the dimensionality of the Stress-Related Growth Scale: One, three, or seven factors? *Journal of Personality Assessment, 82*, 281–290.

The Stress-Related Growth Scale

Instructions

Ask your client to reflect on their most stressful event from the past year.

Write down what your most stressful event was in this past year:

....

....

Rate how much you experienced each item below as a result of this past year's most stressful event.

0	1	2
not at all	somewhat	a great deal

no.	rating	statement
1		I developed new relationships with helpful others.
2		I gained new knowledge about the world.
3		I learned that I was stronger than I thought I was.
4		I became more accepting of others.
5		I realized I have a lot to offer other people.
6		I learned to respect others' feelings and beliefs.
7		I learned to be nicer to others.
8		I rethought how I want to live my life.
9		I learned that I want to accomplish more in life.
10		My life now has more meaning and satisfaction.
11		I learned to look at things in a more positive way.
12		I learned better ways to express my feelings.
13		I learned that there is a reason for everything.
14		I developed/increased my faith in God.
15		I learned not to let hassles bother me the way they used to.
16		I learned to take more responsibility for what I do.
17		I learned to live for today, because you never know what will happen tomorrow.
18		I don't take most things for granted anymore.
19		I developed/increased my trust in God.
20		I feel freer to make my own decisions.

no.	rating	statement
21		I learned that I have something of value to teach others about life.
22		I understand better how God allows things to happen.
23		I learned to appreciate the strength of others who have had a difficult life.
24		I learned not to "freak out" when a bad thing happens.
25		I learned to think more about the consequences of my actions.
26		I learned to get less angry about things.
27		I learned to be a more optimistic person.
28		I learned to approach life more calmly.
29		I learned to be myself and not try to be what others want me to be.
30		I learned to accept myself as less than perfect.
31		I learned to take life more seriously.
32		I learned to work through problems and not just give up.
33		I learned to find more meaning in life.
34		I changed my life goals for the better.
35		I learned how to reach out and help others.
36		I learned to be a more confident person.
37		I learned not to take my physical health for granted.
38		I learned to listen more carefully when others talk to me.
39		I learned to be open to new information and ideas.
40		I now better understand why, years ago, my parents said/did certain things.
41		I learned to communicate more honestly with others.
42		I learned to deal better with uncertainty.
43		I learned that I want to have some impact on the world.
44		I learned that it's okay to ask others for help.
45		I learned that most of what used to upset me were little things that aren't worth getting upset about.
46		I learned to stand up for my personal rights.
47		A prior relationship with another person became more meaningful.
48		I became better able to view my parents as people, and not just parents.
49		I learned that there are more people who care about me than I thought.
50		I developed a stronger sense of community, of belonging, that I am part of a larger group.

Total Score (sum of all subscales):

Weighted Score (Total Score /50):