# Session Plan

**Session Title:** Session 4: Family Carer stress reactions and alternatives

**Audience**
Family members/carers

**Timeframe (length of session)**
55 Minutes

**Session Objectives**
By the end of this session you will

Learn to use alternative thought patterns to minimise stress responses

**Session requirements**
Computer
Internet
Note pad and pen
Handout 1. ‘Stress in the Care Situation’ Page 5
Handout 2. ‘Guided Breath Relaxation’ Page 7-8
Handout 3. ‘Coping with Stress’ Page 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>KEY POINTS</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>Welcome to the Study program and sessions</td>
<td>Introduction to Study Program and Session Objectives</td>
<td>Training Manual Preface Index of sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2min</td>
<td>Learning expectations</td>
<td>Create a wish list on what you hope to get out of the session</td>
<td>Note pad and pen</td>
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**Session**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 mins</th>
<th>Stress in the Care Situation</th>
<th>Take a look at Handout 1. ‘Stress in the Care Situation’ Page 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative thoughts and stress responses</td>
<td>Take a minute to consider how having negative thoughts about a stressful situation can sometimes be lessened, or even reversed, by using alternative thought patterns.</td>
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<td>Stress factors</td>
<td>Write down answers to the following questions:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Q 1. What would make this situation stressful for you?</td>
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<td>Q 2. What are some of the thoughts you would be having in this situation?</td>
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<td>Handout 1 Stress in the Care Situation’ Page 5</td>
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<td>Note pad and pen</td>
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| Stress responses | It is important to remember that while everyone will have their own interpretation of the situation and they may be thinking different things about the situation, the result will be the same if their thoughts are negative i.e. they will respond from a place of being stressed.

These feelings of stress may include feeling tearful, irritable, anxious, upset, angry, overwhelmed, or hopeless. |
|---|---|
| Understanding stress responses in care staff | Think again about the scenario in the Handout ‘Stress in the Care Situation’ Page 6

The following approach can be used to help you analyse the scenario in the Handout.

Create two columns on your note pad and write the following headings along the top: ‘The Situation’ and ‘Thoughts’.

Now write down answers to the following questions:

**The situation**

Q1. ‘What might make this situation stressful for the nurse who is responsible for giving your father his nebuliser?’

Write answers under this heading.

**Thoughts**

Q 2. ‘What do you think the nurse might be thinking when she/he becomes stressed about competing responsibilities in this situation?’

Write answers under this heading.

You will probably have identified that everyone involved in the caring role will have an individual interpretation of the situation.

These thoughts will become instructions for how each person responds. | Handout 1 Stress in the Care Situation Page 6
| Note pad and pen | Handout 1 Scenario Page 6 |
### Negative stress cycle

As identified in Session 3, stress reactions occur at 3 levels:

1. **Emotional** – discomfort, anxiety, tension, irritable, nervous
2. **Bodily** – muscle tension, perspiration, pain, headache
3. **Behaviour** – how you act

Sometimes these stress reactions give rise to a **Negative Stress Cycle**.

Consider how this negative stress cycle might develop in the Scenario depicted in Handout.

- You think “Oh No! This nurse is going to be late again. I will need to hurry to get to the doctor on time!”
- You feel the pressure of being late and become irritable and anxious.
- You become tense and this communicates to your relative, who becomes anxious too.
- You may try to hurry up the nurse by running up to the nurses’ desk to see if she can be paged.

### Ways to reduce situational stress

**What actions might help you in this situation?**

Write down your ideas on your note pad.

Think about how other family members/carers might respond in this situation, and what might cause them to react differently.

### Helping family members/carers to reduce their stress

Here is an alternative way of thinking about and dealing with the stress arising from this situation, by using positive thoughts:

You think, ‘Oh well, it’s not the end of the world.
You might think, ‘The doctor is generally running late so it probably won’t be a problem if I get there half an hour late anyway’.

You could ring the doctor’s receptionist and say, ‘I am running a little late because my father is unwell and I need to make sure he gets his
medication as soon as possible. I’ll be there as soon as I can, but I may be 15 minutes late’.

OR ‘I am running late because my father is unwell and I need to make sure he gets his medication as soon as possible. If you are unable to hold that appointment time for me, do you have an alternative time today that I can see the doctor?’

You can ask one of the care staff on the floor to help you make your father more comfortable until the nurse arrives with the nebuliser.

You may ask the staff member to identify what she/he can do to provide support to your father until the nebuliser arrives.

You can ask the staff member to find the nurse and advise her of the situation, and request a timeline for when the nebuliser will be administered to your father.

You can ask the staff member to make a call to the care unit manager via the paging system and advise her/him of the situation, with a request that she/he come and speak with you about the situation as soon as possible.

You can ask the care unit manager to allocate another nurse to administer your father’s nebuliser as soon as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 mins</th>
<th>Common staff/family stress situations</th>
<th>Thought patterns and stress responses</th>
<th>Note pad and pen</th>
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Identify similar patterns happening between yourself and care staff, or managers, when having a stress response to certain situations. Write these ideas down.

You may have noticed how one negative or positive reaction to a stressful situation begets another, and that this is influenced by the patterns of our thoughts.

Write down what has occurred for you when involved in these stressful situations, according to the following:
| 5 mins | Positive stress responses | Now write down how you might think differently about these stressful situations, in order to change the negative stress response cycle to a positive response cycle. |
| 5 mins | Positive thoughts | To help with developing positive thoughts about stressful situations rule up a thick piece of A4 paper or cardboard into even sized rectangles and cut them into separate ‘blank’ cards. Write one positive thought for each of your most common stressors in relation to staff/family relationships on each of these cards. An example of a positive thought might be ‘The staff caring for my father generally try to meet his needs. I can help by giving staff a list of important care requirements, such as making sure his hearing aid is inserted and turned on each day’. To remind yourself that it is possible to turn a negative thought into a positive one when faced with stressful situations, you can keep these Positive Thought cards in your wallet/purse, and in a visibly obvious place in your home, or in your car. You can remind yourself to look at these Positive Thought cards when a stressful situation is about to occur, or has occurred. |
| 10 mins | Breath relaxation | Do you think that taking five deep breaths before reacting could help you feel less stressed by this situation? |
| 10 mins | Guided breath activity | A short breathing activity can be found in Handout 2 Pages 7-8, which you can use to learn how to relax in a tense situation. You can do this exercise briefly when confronted by issues for your relative. It will help you to feel more in control of the situation and less likely to feel stressed, angry or upset and to speak out in frustration. |
| Coping more effectively with stress | Read through the Guided Breath Relaxation handout to get a feel for the words and then slowly use these words to start relaxing the different parts of your body in a systematic way. While you say the words to yourself, take slow breaths and concentrate on your breathing. Once you have learned the sequence of relaxing different parts of your body, you can close your eyes and go through the process from memory. If you feel that this Guided Breath Relaxation helps you to feel calmer in stressful situations, or as a daily relaxation activity, you can use the techniques with family and friends to help them. | Refer to Handout 3 ‘Coping with Stress’ Page 9. Try to remember these tips when feeling stressed in your relationships with care staff and managers. | Handout 3 Coping with Stress Page 9 |
SESSION 4 HANDOUT 1 STRESS IN THE CARE SITUATION

“The nurse who you are waiting on to give your father his nebuliser is late because another resident has fallen and your father is becoming more breathless. You do not want to leave your father in that state, even though you have a doctor’s appointment that you have been waiting a few months for. You are anxious that if the nurse does not come in the next few minutes you’re going to be late for the appointment.”

Answer the following Questions:

Q 1. What would make the following situation stressful for you?

Q 2. What are some of the thoughts you would be having in this situation?

SESSION 4 HANDOUT 2 GUIDED BREATH RELAXATION

Self-awareness is about being conscious of how your body responds to your feelings, experiences and behaviours. Have you noticed that when you get upset or frustrated with the care situation that you get tense muscles or a headache, or even slightly breathless? Do you find yourself getting tearful or angry, or sometimes feeling really helpless?

The place to start with paying more attention to how feeling upset affects your body, is with your breathing. Concentrating and slowing down your breathing in order to feel calmer and more in control of a situation is the essence of a meditation called Hatha Yoga.

Ask – Have you ever done any relaxation therapy, or yoga or meditation before? What was that experience like? Did you have any concerns?
The exercise that I am going to teach you now is very simple; you just need to breathe steadily and think about how you are breathing.

Guided Breath Relaxation Script
As anyone who has done any relaxation therapy will know, when you try to quieten the mind, it reveals itself to have an obsessive and naughty character, which we will call the ‘monkey mind.’ So don’t worry if odd thoughts intrude, just acknowledge them, let them go and stay focused on your breathing.
• Make yourself comfortable and close your eyes.

• Start by just becoming aware of how you are breathing, in and out. Are you breathing through your mouth or your nose? Is breathing through your nose difficult? Do you need to blow your nose? (Have some tissues to hand out if needed)

• Now, try slowing your breathing down and doing it more consciously – just saying in your mind, ‘in’……… and ‘out’…………. Imagine you are floating on your breath like a slow moving, peaceful river.

• Now, while still breathing, In ..... Out ...... In.... focus on relaxing the muscles in the body, starting with the feet: tense all the muscles in your feet, then relax them slowly until you can feel all the muscles are soft. Repeat this process moving up the body, calves next, then thighs and buttocks, stomach, then hands, arms, back, neck, then to the face.

• Now, while still breathing, In .... Out ...... In.... focus on your thoughts.

• What is your ‘monkey mind’ doing? Is it chattering away, obsessing on things that worry you? Do you feel caught up by these thoughts, or are you able to observe them from a distance?

• When you observe your mind like this, it is interesting to see how you can watch your mind thinking, like there’s a higher ‘me,’ a more peaceful ME who is able to sit outside the day to day worries. You can shift the locus of your consciousness to that ME, observe yourself from a calm, peaceful position.

• Keep breathing, In ....... Out ........ In ....... Focus on your feelings. How are you feeling? Are you happy? Sad? Worried? Do you feel caught up by these feelings or are you able to observe them from a distance?

• Keep breathing, In ....... Out ........ In ....... Don’t judge or try to change these feelings. Just acknowledge and observe them.

• Imagine that place where you are happy. How does the air feel on your skin? How does it smell? Breath it In ...... Out ...... In .......

• Keep breathing In ...... Out ........ In ....... Now, slowly open your eyes

Taking a few minutes to practice this breath relaxation each day can be particularly helpful if you are feeling upset or frustrated with a care staff’s behaviour, or their response to requests. Instead of getting upset and reacting in anger or agitation, you could try taking five deep breaths and focus on these breaths to help you feel a little calmer about the situation. Once you have calmed down a little, you can then think about why the care staff are acting or responding in that way. If you can work out the reason for staff’s actions/reactions, you might be able to see how to calm the situation and work collaboratively with care staff in meeting your relative’s needs.
SESSION 4 HANDOUT 3 COPING WITH STRESS

Support. When things are difficult to manage on your own, or you need advice, or information, or simply someone to talk to, don’t be afraid to say what you need. You don’t have to cope on your own.

Treat yourself kindly and gently. Look after yourself. Make sure you are getting enough rest and exercise. Make sure you are getting pleasure out of life. Try not to smoke and drink too much: this can be self-destructive in the long run.

Realistic goals. Don’t try to do or achieve too much. You’ll only get frustrated and disappointed. Don’t expect too much of yourself and the people you care for.

Express your feelings to someone who can listen- maybe a colleague, a friend, or someone who can provide support. It’s often not appropriate to express your feelings at the situation or the person who provoked them. If you are upset or angry, don’t bottle it up for too long. Try to find the time to get it off your chest in a non-harmful way.

Stop and think: is there a different way of approaching the situation? Is a person who is causing you problems actually trying to tell you something? Perhaps if you can find a way of meeting their needs, the situation will become less stressful.

Sort out what it is that is causing you stress. This can help you to feel calmer and happier at home and at work. There might be some stresses which you can control: Are you trying to do too many things at once? Are you leaving things until the last minute? Are you clear about your priorities? Do your priorities need to be reconsidered?

Reference