

BEHIND HAPPY FACES

Alpha Phi - Key



LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

These outcomes show what knowledge and skills participants should gain from the lesson. It is crucial you review the goals of the lesson with the members so they know what they will learn.



HANDOUT:

It is time to distribute a handout/materials to participants. These can be found at the end of each lesson if it includes a handout. Make copies in advance!



WRITE ON FLIP CHART:

The main points are included in PowerPoint presentations. In the event you do not have access to a computer/projector, write examples and instructions on flip chart paper in the front of the room.



GROUP DISCUSSION:

It is time to prompt participants with questions or dialogue for group discussion.



INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY:

It is time for an activity, like scenarios or a game. These activities help participants feel more connected to the information.



INSTRUCTIONS:

Read information or directions aloud to the groups.



WATCH THE VIDEO:

Each lesson includes videos to help introduce the topic and engage viewers to take part in the lessons. It is important to make sure you test them in advance to make sure the video and audio work on your technology.

Lesson 4: Acute Stress vs. Chronic Stress

This lesson discusses the difference between acute and chronic stress. When most people hear the word “stress,” they immediately think of being overwhelmed or having a breakdown. However, there are two types of stress. Acute stress is a shorter burst of stress that can often motivate someone to do a task. Chronic stress can be persistent, overwhelming and cause many problems that affect a person’s short-term and long-term physical/ mental health. This lesson will provide more understanding about the different types of stress and give members activities to do to learn how to frame good stress.

FACILITATOR:

To facilitate this lesson effectively, it is helpful to have experience or training as a facilitator in other areas of chapter operations or campus life. If you have a member who is or has been a resident assistant, student organization leader, peer advocate, or is studying to be a teacher, they could be an excellent facilitator for this program.

TIME NEEDED:

25 minutes



OBJECTIVES:

- Explain the difference between acute stress and chronic stress.
- Identify skills to reframe stress.
- Practice the ability to take power in some stress and slow down irrational thoughts.

SETTING:

- Choose a room that offers a lot of open space for small groups to be able to spread out and not be distracted by others. Members will need to be able to either sit and gather on the floor or move chairs around into small groups.
- You will show a PowerPoint presentation and play a video during the lesson, so connect a laptop to a projector and screen.
- *If facilitating virtually, you should practice the presentation on your video conference platform to ensure the PowerPoint, video, microphone and sound are all working accordingly. You should read the Purpose of Lesson below and review the facilitation guide to be aware of exercises that will need to be adjusted to the virtual experience.*

GROUP SIZE:

Members will work on this individually or in pairs.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- For each person: Lesson 4 handout and a pen
- *If facilitating virtually, handout will need to be downloaded and shared with participants.*
- Projector and screen
- Acute Stress vs. Chronic Stress PowerPoint

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS LESSON

PURPOSE OF LESSON:

The purpose of the fourth lesson is to teach members the difference between acute stress and chronic stress as well as give them three skills to practice in order to lessen chronic stress.

The introduction of this lesson is to highlight the fact that most members today are having a competition to see who can be more stressed out. When one sister tells another sister that they has a test to study for and a paper to write, the next sister tries to one up them with more papers, tests, extracurricular activities and maybe a job to finish it off. When members are having a competition to see who can be more stressed out, it is a competition that no one wins.

At the core of this competition to see who can be more stressed out is the difference between acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress. Acute stress is often characterized by a burst of energy that advises people on what to do, helps people meet challenges, motivates them to reach goals, produces the short-term fight-or-flight mechanism and can improve heart function and protect from infection. Three examples of acute stress are when a sister prepares for an intramural game, a sister gets ready to meet their friends or a sister who calendar plans their week. Chronic stress is characterized by an inability to concentrate or complete tasks, getting sick more often, body aches, headaches, irritability, trouble falling asleep or staying awake, changes in appetite and being more angry or anxious than usual.

Another difference between acute and chronic stress is how the body processes the types of stress. Chronic stress is fueled by cortisol staying in the body for a long time. When cortisol is present for an extended period of time, it can make a person forgetful, increase anxiety, lower serotonin and dopamine, make a person freeze up and halt production of new brain cells. Chronic stress keeps a person in their sympathetic nervous system where they are in a persistent state of fight-or-flight. This increases their heart rate, restricts bodily functions, constricts blood vessels and raises blood pressure. Acute stress activates the fight-or-flight mechanism for a short burst of productivity. Living in a constant state of fight-or-flight is unhealthy.

Neuroscientists have found a couple of actions that are helpful in activating different parts of the brain and the body to be able to combat chronic stress. The first step is gaining some control over the cause of stress. When a person feels like they have more power in what is happening to them, it can be helpful in lessening chronic stress. The first exercise that members do in this lesson helps them take power in five situations. For example, when a sister feels like they have too much homework and extracurricular activities and feels overwhelmed,

they can take power in this situation by developing a plan for their homework, lessening their extracurricular activities and practicing a coping mechanism to be less overwhelmed. As you guide members through how to take power, it will be important to give them realistic examples.

A second way to lessen chronic stress is to reframe the types of stress that a sister is experiencing. Oftentimes when members approach a stressful situation, they frame their response from a place of not wanting to fail or mess up. They will say things to themselves like, “This test is so hard; my plan is to not fail.” One way to reframe this would be to say, “This test is going to be so hard; my goal is to do my best.” Or they could say, “My goal is to study as much as I can.” Members will have the opportunity to reframe five scenarios in this lesson.

A third way to lessen chronic stress is to slow down irrational thoughts. A lot of people tend to spiral when they think about their stress. One sister can think that if they fail a test, then they won’t graduate college, which means they will never get a job and then their parents will kick them out, they will be homeless and they may not make it to age 25. At the heart of stress is often an unnamed fear or two or five. In this lesson, members will have an opportunity to write down some ways that they can slow down irrational thoughts.

The main thing to remember in this lesson is that chronic stress activates the fight-or-flight response and keeps the brain from activating the prefrontal cortex. These three activities can help members activate different areas of their brains and lessen the fear response. None of this happens instantly. Members who have been living in chronic stress for a long time will need to really work hard on practicing these skills in order to see some difference in their lives.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

To facilitate this lesson effectively it is helpful to do the following:

1. Connect to members early about why mental health is important to you and why it should be important to them. If you have a personal story about why you care about mental health, then share it if you’re comfortable doing so. Let members know they should take this seriously. The more that you can make yourself vulnerable and relatable, the more effective you will be as a facilitator.
2. Make yourself vulnerable with a boundary. If you are going to share part of your personal story, make sure you share something that you are comfortable with and have processed. For example, if you share that you care about this issue because you have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and it affected part of your life, then the members see you presenting from a place of strength. If you share something that you are still processing and become emotional, then the members may think they need to take care of you. It’s

helpful if you can be real about why you care and reinforce what you learned from your experiences.

3. Keep the exercises concise. If you give members too much time, they can devolve into so many other unnecessary conversations. Keep members focused.
4. Allow the exercises to be tools for members to identify how to work on mental health, but do not let lessons become therapy. There's a difference between members identifying what they can work on and voicing all of their experiences or pain. Stress that you want to start conversation but that they can do the work outside of the lessons. This is a public health approach to mental health and not a therapeutic approach.
5. Focus on connecting members to their emotions and each other. Have fun when you can. Be positive. Make it a team-building exercise that strengthens communication and connection.
6. It is important to let members know that lessons about mental health require everyone to be open, honest and non-judgmental. Members who share their stories need to feel safe and that the values of your organization are being upheld. Reinforce that the main goal is to start conversations about mental health in a way that can bring everyone together.
7. If a member is sharing their story extensively and continues to provide more details about their life than the lesson is asking for, it is OK to let them know that you hear their story and also want to hear from other members. Remind all members that these lessons are a start to this topic and provide ways to open conversations that can be continued after the lessons are over.
8. The recommended time for each lesson is 20–25 minutes. This gives you enough time to do each exercise; however, you might find that the group you are facilitating wants to spend more time on certain exercises. It is OK to do this when you feel that the group is having a discussion that will help everyone address mental health in a meaningful manner.
9. Show the slide that sets the ground rules for the conversation at the beginning of the lesson and make sure everyone agrees the ground rules.



GOOD STRESS VS. BAD STRESS VIDEO (2 MINUTES)

- This video features an introduction about acute stress versus chronic stress and what you will learn in this lesson.
- Play “Good Stress vs Bad Stress” video for the group. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

EXERCISE 1 (10 MINUTES)

INTRODUCTION:

- We’re going to go through a lesson about mental health. This is a serious topic that affects all of us and can be really sensitive for some. If at any time you are triggered by the content in this lesson, you can choose to not participate in the activities or leave the room to talk to someone who can help you.
- Being honest, open and non-judgmental of each other during these exercises will help us learn more about mental health and each other. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Most members today are having a competition to see who can be more stressed out. When one sister tells another sister that they have a test to study for and a paper to write, the next sister tries to one-up them with more papers, tests, extracurricular activities and maybe a job to finish it off. When members are having a competition to see who can be more stressed out, it is a competition that no one wins.
- You don’t win a car or ice cream. You win by being the most burned-out person you know.
- It would be more useful to have a competition to see who can sleep more and get work done earlier, than it is to have a competition to see who can burn out. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- There is a big difference between acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress. Unfortunately, a lot of people are living in a state of chronic stress from high school into college and into adulthood. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Acute stress is often characterized by a burst of energy that advises a person on what to do, helps a person meet challenges, motivates them to reach goals, produces the short-term fight-or-flight mechanism and can improve heart function and protect from infection.
- Examples of acute stress are when a sister prepares for an intramural game, gets ready to meet their friends or calendar plans their week. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Chronic stress is characterized by an inability to concentrate or complete tasks, getting sick more often, body aches, headaches, irritability, trouble falling asleep or staying awake, changes in appetite and being more angry or anxious than usual. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- Chronic stress is fueled by cortisol staying in the body for a long time. When cortisol is present for an extended period of time it can make a person forgetful, increase anxiety, lower serotonin and dopamine, make a person freeze up and halt production of new brain cells. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Chronic stress keeps a person in their sympathetic nervous system where they are in a persistent state of fight or flight. This increases their heart rate, restricts bodily functions, constricts blood vessels and raises blood pressure.
- Acute stress activates the fight-or-flight mechanism for a short burst of productivity. Living in a constant state of fight or flight is unhealthy. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



INSTRUCTIONS:

- Neuroscientists have found a couple of actions that are helpful in activating different parts of the brain to be able to combat chronic stress.
- The first step is gaining some control over the cause of stress. When a person feels like they have more power in what is happening to them, it can be helpful in lessening chronic stress.
- Look at the five situations on your handout and write down ways that you can have more power in these situations. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

FACILITATOR NOTES:

Walk around the room to make sure members are writing down realistic solutions to each scenario. It's helpful if you can share your own example of how you try to lessen chronic stress by taking power in a situation, reframing a stressor and lessening irrational thoughts.

- *If facilitating this lesson virtually, mute all participants so that they can complete this portion on their own.*



SHARE:

- Let's have a few people share some of their answers.

Situation 1: You have too much homework, too many extracurricular activities and feel overwhelmed. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I will make a schedule for when my homework is due and plan when to get it done this week.
- I will have to cut down on some extracurricular activities because I am too busy to do all of them.

- I will cut down on the time that I am on my phone and on social media while I am studying and doing work in order to focus. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 2: You can't sleep at night, because your mind is racing or you just can't fall asleep. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I will download an app that has meditations and focus on creating new habits before I go to bed.
- I will charge my phone outside of my room so that I can't use it before I sleep.
- I will meditate each night before I sleep.
- I will stretch each night before I lay down to sleep.
- I will ask for help to see how I can get more sleep. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 3: You are worried about if you will be able to get a job after you graduate and you don't know what kind of future you will have. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I will focus on taking the classes that support my major and look for an internship or some other way to advance myself.
- I will talk about my fears with other people to see what they have done to cope with these types of worry.
- I will talk to an advisor or someone at my college to see what options I have.
- I will work hard to be OK with uncertainty and try to enjoy my time in college while taking steps to help me after I graduate. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 4: It's hard for me to trust people with my emotions, so I usually don't open up to others and find that I'm not close to many people. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I will find one person I can trust and open up to slowly in order to see how they manage what I am sharing.
- I will make an effort to be more social and see if there are people who like to do the things that I like to do.
- I will write about how I feel in a journal until I am comfortable enough to open up to someone. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 5: I'm always anxious in class. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I will talk to my professor about what can help me stay calm in class.
- I will listen to some meditations, music or anything that helps me stay calm on my walk to class.
- I will talk to a counselor about some options to help me lessen my anxiousness in class. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

EXERCISE 2 (10 MINUTES)



INSTRUCTIONS:

- A second way to lessen chronic stress is to reframe the types of stress that a person is experiencing. Oftentimes when members approach a stressful situation they frame their response from a place of not wanting to fail or mess up.
- Take a look at the following situations on the handout and write how you can reframe or change your response to the cause of stress. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



SHARE:

- Let's have a few people share some of their answers. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 1: This test is going to be so hard; my plan is to not fail. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- This test is hard; my plan is to study as much as I can.
- This test is hard; my plan is to do my best.
- This test is hard; my plan is to form study groups, take notes and review the study guide. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 2: I don't understand this class I'm in; my plan is to just get through it.

- I don't understand this class; I will go to office hours to make sure I talk to the professor.
- I don't understand this class; I will make time to see the TA to see if they can help me.
- I don't understand this class I'm in; I will form a study group with other members to see if they can help. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situations 3: I really like this person, but I'm sure they will never like me. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I really like this person; I'll talk to them and see where it goes.
- I really like this person; I'll ask them on a date.
- I really like this person; if they reject me it will hurt, but I will be OK.
- I really like this person; I'm going to make efforts for them to get to know me. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 4: I'm not sure my major will help me after college; I'll wait to see what happens. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- I'm not sure if my major will help me after college; I'll talk to people who have my degree and see what they did.

- I'm not sure my major will help me after college; I'll talk to professors to see if they have ideas of what I can do.
- I'm not sure my major will help me after college; I'll try to get an internship and advance myself as much as I can in college. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Situation 5: My college loans are so expensive; I'll never be able to pay them off. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- My college loans are so expensive; I will learn more about the best ways to pay them off.
- My college loans are so expensive; I'll take each payment one at a time and eventually get through them.
- My college loans are so expensive; I will talk to a financial advisor at school about my operations. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

EXERCISE 3 (5 MINUTES)



INSTRUCTIONS:

- A third way to lower chronic stress is to slow down irrational thoughts. . A lot of members tend to spiral when they think about their stress. One sister can think that if they fail a class, then they won't graduate college, which means they won't get a job and then they won't be able to pay their rent. Then they will be homeless and may not make it to age 25.
- At the heart of stress is often an unnamed fear or two or five. In this exercise you will have an opportunity to write down some steps that can slow down irrational thoughts. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Write down a cause of stress that gives you irrational fears. Then write down three ways that you can slow down those irrational fears. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- How can you use other parts of this lesson to stop irrational fears? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

SUMMARIZE:

- We did these exercises to help you learn ways to lower chronic stress.
- If you have been living in chronic stress for a really long time, then it will take a lot of practice to be able to see some results from these exercises.
- It will be helpful for you to practice them slowly at first to have some small positive gains before you can build a stronger habit of lessening chronic stress. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- Having a person who you can check-in with and who wants to help change the way you view stress can make a big difference.
- It requires a lot of work and focus to change this culture of competing to see who is more stressed out, but it is possible.
- Some of the most successful people in our history have used acute stress to thrive in all areas of their lives. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

Please remind members that they should take the survey at the link provided. Show the QPR code on the screen and ask for confirmation that members took the post-test.

https://corexmstcmk6ytnfrbb6.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_50CU0PA1vbCPvV3



Lesson 4 Handout

Look at the following five situations and write examples of how you can have more power in each situation.

1. I have too much homework, too many extracurricular activities and feel overwhelmed.
2. I can't sleep at night because my mind is racing or I just can't fall asleep.
3. I am worried about if I will be able to get a job after I graduate and I don't know what kind of future I will have.
4. It's hard for me to trust with my emotions, so I usually don't open up to others and find that I'm not close to many people.
5. I'm always anxious in class.



RE-FRAMING

Take a look at the following situations and write how you can reframe or change your response to stress:

1. This test is going to be so hard, my plan is not to fail.
2. I don't understand this class I'm in; my plan is to just get through it.
3. I really like this person; but I'm sure they will never like me.
4. I'm not sure my major will help me after college; I'll wait to see what happens.
5. My college loans are so expensive; I'll never be able to pay them off



INTERVENING IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS

A third way to lessen chronic stress is to slow down irrational thoughts. A lot of members tend to spiral when they think about their stress. One sister can think that if they fail a class, then they won't graduate college, which means they don't get a job and then won't be able to pay their rent. Then she will be homeless and may not make it to age 25.

Write down a cause of stress that gives you irrational fears. Then write down three ways that you can slow down those irrational fears.

How can you use other parts of this lesson to stop irrational fears?