

# BEHIND HAPPY FACES

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## 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 5: Good Stress & Stopping Procrastination

The fifth lesson continues the education about good/acute stress by focusing on two case studies that people can examine to see how a person can utilize good stress as well as a new look at procrastination. This lesson can be a great way to review lesson 4 and add some additional information to help members work on utilizing good/acute stress in their lives. Practicing these new skills to change the way that members process stress can take a long time. It's helpful to have multiple lessons to reinforce the skills from lesson 4 and help them learn new skills in this lesson.

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## 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:

- Review the difference between acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress.
- Identify what skills a person can use to utilize acute/good stress in their daily life.
- Explain the role of emotional regulation in procrastination.

## SETTING:

- Choose a room that offers a lot of open space for members 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 pairs.
- 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 be doing these lessons individually or in pairs.



## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- For each person: Lesson 5 handout and a pen
- *If facilitating virtually, handout will need to be downloaded and shared with participants.*
- Projector and screen
- Good Stress and Stopping Procrastination PowerPoint

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS LESSON

### PURPOSE OF LESSON:

The purpose of the fifth lesson is to review the difference between acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress, look at case studies about how members can utilize acute/good stress and review a new approach to stopping procrastination.

It's important to review the differences between acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress to see what members remember and if they are practicing any of the skills from the last lesson. Consistent exposure to these terms helps members remember the definitions and allows them to be reminded to practice the new skills to stay out of chronic stress.

The first exercise in this lesson is to review case studies of college students who experience acute/good stress and chronic/bad stress to better identify how the students in the case studies can use good stress in their lives. It's often easier for students to see what others can do, and this activity can make it easier to talk about the steps to take because the focus is not as personal. In each case study, there is an example of what a person does to motivate them when they experience stress and what types of stress tend to debilitate them. It's helpful for members to see these real-life examples to relate to what someone is experiencing. The lesson will walk you through the points to reinforce for the members.

The second exercise uses research from Carleton University that has found that procrastination is about being more focused on the immediate urgency of managing negative moods than doing the task that is needed. According to their research, procrastination has more to do with emotional regulation than it has to do with stress. This is an important distinction for members to understand. When members feel that procrastination is coming from stress, then they are less likely to see a direct path to stopping the procrastination. If members can begin to identify the negative moods they are attaching to getting work completed, they can effectively address those emotions. Then they may be able to procrastinate less.

It's helpful to check in with members in future lessons to see if they're using the strategies from lessons 4 and 5 to lessen chronic stress and address procrastination.

### 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 conversations, 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 AND STOPPING PROCRASTINATION VIDEO (2 MINUTES)

- This video features the impact of acute stress, procrastination and what you will learn in this lesson.
- Play “Good Stress and Stopping Procrastination” video for the group. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

## REVIEW

### ACUTE STRESS VS. CHRONIC STRESS:

- We’re going to do a lesson about mental health. This is a serious topic that affects all of us and can be really sensitive for members. 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**
- In the last lesson, we discussed the difference between acute and chronic stress. Can anyone tell me what you remember about these two types of stress? **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 middle 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 them 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 an athlete prepares for a game, a sister gets ready to meet their friends or a sister plans their week of homework and tests. **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**
- Can anyone share if you are using some of the strategies from lesson 4? The strategies are taking power in a situation, reframing a situation or lessening irrational thoughts.

### 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, monitor the chat for questions while participants are writing their responses.*

## EXERCISE 1 (10 MINUTES)



### INSTRUCTIONS:

- Acute stress can motivate people to get things accomplished. People often use acute stress in situations that they enjoy like playing sports, preparing for performances, meeting friends or going on trips.
- Review the two case studies on your handout about college students and discuss how they could use acute stress more effectively in their lives. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Jennifer is a sophomore in college. For their whole life they have gotten used to not sleeping the night before they have to take a test or turn in a paper. They don't do this with other things in their life. They always make sure to get good sleep the night before they're playing soccer, going on a trip or going out with their friends. When they are preparing for those things, they are motivated to get some rest because they want to enjoy those events.

Jennifer always had good grades in high school and didn't study much. They would often procrastinate until the last day and didn't develop a lot of study habits. One thing that has been especially difficult for them is that they can't sleep the night before a test or when a paper is due. When they try to go to sleep, their mind races about all of the things that could go wrong on the test and if they don't do well, they think about how that will impact them. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- Rashan is a gamer. When they are not in class, they spend a lot of time researching how they can play games better. They watch other gamers on YouTube. They play games 6-8 hours a day. They enter tournaments. Rashan loves to go online and trash talk their friends when they are playing. They have gotten really good at specific

games and give advice to other people on what they can do. Rashan really loves the anticipation of games and the excitement they get from competing. They use those feelings as motivation to get better.

When Rashan is doing anything outside of gaming, he is not nearly as prepared or equipped. He regularly turns assignments in late. He doesn't get the grades he is capable of getting. Rashan often tells people that school is too stressful and he doesn't like all of the rules. His grades have slipped so low that Rashan is in danger of having to leave college. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



### SHARE:

What are some ways that Jennifer can use acute stress? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- Jennifer can:
  1. Use whatever habit they are using to get good sleep for acute stress to change their sleep before chronic stress.
  2. Prepare for their tests and papers the same way they prepares for other events by thinking positively and focusing on the steps they needs to take to get ready.
  3. Create better habits around preparation for school.
  4. Ask for help because they didn't develop the habits they needed before college.
  5. Create a schedule that helps them procrastinate less. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

What are some ways that Rashan can use acute stress? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- Rashan can:
  1. Take the same type of preparation he uses for his games and use it for his classes.
  2. Be patient as he learns to improve his schoolwork like he improved with gaming.
  3. Spend more time on school and less time gaming.
  4. Use some of the same competitive motivation he has with gaming to compete in his classes.
  5. Try to figure out the strategy of completing work the same way he has figured out the strategy of winnings games. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

## EXERCISE 2 (10 MINUTES)



### INSTRUCTIONS:

- Members think that procrastination is often a part of chronic stress. New research from Carleton University has found that procrastination has more to do with



avoiding the negative emotions associated with doing work than it has to do with stress. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

- For example, when a person has to write a paper, study for a test or do homework, they associate something unpleasant with those tasks. It could be that those tasks are boring, but it could also be deeper than that. Some people may have self-doubt, low self-compassion, no confidence, high anxiety or high insecurity.
- They might think to themselves, “I’m not smart enough to do this. This is too hard. What if I do a terrible job?” **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- When a person has negative emotions attached to a task, then they will often disassociate from the task they need to do and distract themselves by going out, seeing friends, playing video games, cleaning or anything to avoid the task.
- When that happens, it will deepen the negative emotions, making the feelings worse when a person tries to return to accomplish the task. When the person tries to complete the work, they can feel a higher degree of anxiety and self-blame and low self-compassion. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- The cycle gets even worse because a person is rewarded when they originally procrastinate. The more our brains get a reward, the more they repeat the cycle. Over time, this unhealthy reward system can lead to chronic stress.
- However, I want to be clear that procrastination itself doesn’t start with chronic stress. It gets to that point after not addressing the negative emotions involved in procrastination. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- The last dangerous part of procrastination is that when people do procrastinate, their brains are telling them the future work is someone else’s problem. The fight-or-flight mechanism is activated and just wants to resolve the situation by delaying the work for another day.
- Even when people know that putting off the task will create more stress in the future, their brains are still hardwired to remove the threat in the present moment. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- So what can we do? In the case of procrastination, we need to find a bigger reward than avoidance.
- Researchers have found five steps can help people address their emotions with procrastination
  1. Forgive yourself for procrastinating. One study found that students who forgive themselves for procrastinating on a first exam will procrastinate less on the next exam.

2. Improve self-compassion. As you learned in lesson 3, self-compassion is the way you treat yourself. If your internal voice is constantly negative, then procrastinating is going to grow. You need to improve your level of self-compassion.
  3. Be curious about your emotions. When you're procrastinating, start to pay attention to where you feel emotions, where they come from, how they make you feel and how they affect you. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
  4. Think about the next step. This doesn't mean come up with a plan that has a lot of small steps in order to finish your task. It means literally, what is the next step you need to take. Make that decision and do the next step necessary to get motivated.
  5. Make larger obstacles for your temptations. Put your phone outside of the room. Don't log onto social media. Don't magically become someone who wants to clean. Stay away from YouTube and Netflix binges. The harder it is for you to be tempted, the easier it will be for you to do your work. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- Write down one thing that you typically procrastinate on and two strategies you can use to change procrastination. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**



#### SHARE:

- Let's have a few people share some of their answers.
- Was it difficult for you to identify what you procrastinate on?
- Do you think you would be willing to try to use these strategies? **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**

#### SUMMARIZE:

- We did these exercises to help you better understand how to use acute stress and learn the deeper elements that are a part of procrastination.
- Much like the skills you learned in lesson 4, these will need to be practiced on a regular basis for you to be able to have success using them.
- The goal in using these skills is not to make a massive change in a short time frame. The goal is to practice them slowly, until you build the neural pathways for them to be used more frequently. **CHANGE PPT SLIDE**
- The information for how to change our behavior is more available now than at any other time in human history. However, the only way for us to change is to apply the skills that have been proven to help people.
- Only you can find the motivation to put these skills into action.

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](https://corexmstcmk6ytnfrbb6.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_50CU0PA1vbCPvV3)



# Lesson 5 Handout

## JENNIFER

Jennifer is a sophomore in college. For their whole life they have gotten used to not sleeping the night before they have to take a test or turn in a paper. They don't do this with other things in their life. They always make sure to get good sleep the night before they're playing soccer, going on a trip, or going out with their friends. When they are preparing for those things, they are motivated to get some rest because they want to enjoy those events.

Jennifer always had good grades in high school and didn't study much. They would often procrastinate until the last day and didn't develop a lot of study habits. One thing that has been especially difficult for them is that they can't sleep the night before a test or when a paper is due. When they try to go to sleep, their mind races about all of the things that could go wrong on the test and if they don't do well, they think about how that will impact them.

**What are some ways that Jennifer can take what they have been doing to prepare with acute stress and use it for things that cause chronic stress?**

## RASHAN

Rashan is a gamer. When they're not in class they spend a lot of time researching how they can play games better. They watch other gamers on YouTube. They play games 6-8 hours a day. They enter tournaments. Rashan loves to go online and trash talk their friends when they are playing. They have gotten really good at specific games and give advice to other people on what they can do. Rashan really loves the anticipation of games and the excitement they get from competing. They use those feelings as motivation to get better.

When Rashan is doing anything outside of gaming, they are not nearly as prepared or equipped. They regularly turns assignments in late. They don't get the grades they are capable of getting. Rashan often tells people that school is too stressful and they don't like all of the rules. Their grades have slipped so low that Rashan is in danger of having to leave college.

**What are some ways that Rashan can use the acute stress he has with gaming for the chronic stress he has with test, papers and homework in college?**



## STOP PROCRASTINATING

Write down one thing that you typically procrastinate on and two strategies you can use to change procrastination.

### THE STRATEGIES ARE:

1. Forgive yourself.
2. Improve self-compassion (how you treat yourself).
3. Be curious about your emotions.
4. Think about the next step.
5. Make larger obstacles for your temptations.