

Reinforcing the Adaptive Stage: Prevent Stress

Preventing stress is a great way to **Reinforce Adaptive** behavior.

Listed below are twenty common "Stress Triggers" consistently identified by seminar participants. As you review, it may be helpful to view them as "Fast Triggers" or "Slow Triggers," based on the time between Stress Triggers and negative behavior. Stress Triggers and their effects vary from person to person. Choose and adjust **Pro-Active Support** strategies accordingly.



In the story, Betty faced a number of her own unique Stress Triggers

Stress Triggers	Pro-Active Support
1. Physical Well-being -Hunger -Fatigue -Thirst -Illness/pain	Within your powers as a provider, meet the person's needs for food, drink, sleep and medical attention. More challenging aspects of the person's day may have to wait until these basic needs have been met. Guide and educate people toward an understanding of how diet and health impact feelings of tension/distress.
2. Communication -Inability to express feelings -Limited verbal expression	Become skilled in your ability to augment ways for people to communicate needs or feelings. Become a patient listener, use reflective listening skills or be sensitive to non-verbal communication. When appropriate, use manual communication (signing) or picture systems.
3. Change in Routine -Major Changes -Seemingly minor changes	Provide a routine and structured lifestyle to individuals where this is a need. Be aware that some people require high levels of structure. Anticipate changes in routine and help the person prepare for the change (foreshadowing). When to begin foreshadowing depends upon the person. Help the person establish a new routine.
4. Lack of Control or Choice It is common for persons needing assistance to experience loss of autonomy and self direction.	Be aware that we can become too controlling in our role as providers. Develop a sensitivity regarding when to provide support and when to promote choice and autonomy. Be creative in how expectations are offered to the person. Use humor, offer choices, give people time, etc.
5. Transitions The time between ending one activity and beginning the next.	Foreshadow an upcoming transition. Give the person something to do during the transition. Provide a positive focus for the new activity. Example- "Jimmy, the bus will be here in ten minutes. Here is your tape player to take along." "Remember that you are going outside for gym class today."
6. Ineffective Provider Approach -Inconsistencies among providers -Improper training -Lack of program coordination/communication	Training and ongoing education are important. Provide written protocol for supporting persons who experience Tension/Distress. Allow all providers to have input in developing the protocol. Develop systems for ongoing communication amongst providers.

Managing Threatening Confrontations

Stress Triggers	Pro-Active Support
7. Attention Seeking Intentionally acting out as a way to attain social attention	Promote or teach appropriate ways to seek attention. Give people positive attention when they are doing well (catch people being good). Respond with a neutral presence when people are acting out to get attention. Avoid anger or excessive attention that may be reinforcing the acting out behavior.
8. Being Told "NO" Having requests negated by providers in an abrupt manner	Try to avoid the word "no." Use redirection techniques. That is, instead of saying what the person cannot do, describe what they can do as an alternative. Example– "Can I go to the movie tonight?" Instead of "no" try something like, "Hey that sounds like fun, why don't we plan for Friday. Let's find the TV guide, I heard there is a holiday special on channel 5."
9. Having to Wait -Inability to understand passage of time -Inability to self-entertain during the wait	If possible, reduce long or excessive periods of waiting. Help people who can't tell time understand how long the wait will be (e.g., as long as the evening news). Provide ideas for activities during the wait.
10. Boredom/Loneliness -Caused by compromised life situations -Lack of resources	Help people develop interesting lifestyles and social connections. Provide therapeutic relationships. Help people access the resources they require. Anticipate that this is not an easy task and requires ongoing effort.
11. Environmental Irritations -Noise/disruption -Crowds -Lighting -Temperature	Pay attention to the environment. Seemingly minor factors such as a humming noise in the background or a blinking light can adversely impact people who have tenuous emotional control. Create, or guide people to environments relatively free of "irritants."
12. Weather -Winter: cold/dark -Summer: heat/humidity -Weather changes -Full moon	Pay attention to where you are in the seasonal cycle. Typically, winter and summers require increased attention to emotional support (attention, diversions, empathy). Influence people to dress appropriately for the weather.
13. Mental health issues -Affective (mood) disorders -Delusions -Dementia	Become educated on when tension/distress is in response to a mental health process. Know when to lower expectations or increase behavioral support. Provide situational counseling. Assure proper psychiatric/medical consultation.
14. Chemical dependencies -Alcohol -Caffeine -Drugs -Cigarettes	Become educated to the signs of specific chemical dependencies. Be prepared to increase support or lower expectations when the person is "under the influence," experiencing adverse effects or withdrawal. Provide guidelines for use, promote education or treatment as indicated.

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15. Psychiatric Medications -Lack of appropriate medication -Problems with dose -Side effects	Develop a basic understanding of medications the person is taking. Know the intended positive effects and possible side effects. Assure that there is effective and ongoing communication with the prescribing physician.
16. Low Self-Esteem -Self-deprecating -Unwilling to try new life experiences	Become sensitive to this dynamic. Develop ongoing ways that would promote improved self-esteem (compliments, acceptance, providing successful life experiences).
17. Sexuality -Lack of sexual outlet -Inappropriate sexual expression	Provide guidelines for appropriate sexual expression. Provide social skills training when appropriate. Offer empathy.
18. Physical Limitations -Frustration over limitations -Self-conscious about limitations	Provide empathy. Promote activities that are within skill level. Provide adaptation and accessibility whenever possible.
19. Peer Conflicts -Fairness issues/jealousy -Sharing the same resources	Within your powers as a provider, pair people who are compatible. Develop skills in mediation. Promote social skill training when indicated.
20. Pre-existing Abuse Issues The present situation is associated with a previous incident of physical or sexual abuse	When appropriate, read social histories that would include this information. Avoid support that would provoke memories of abuse. Refer to counseling or therapy when appropriate. Provide empathy.

? Which stress triggers were shown in Betty's story?

? Which triggers are "fast" or "slow"?

? What stress triggers have you encountered that aren't in this list?