

Tool 18: Emotional resilience postcards

This tool focuses on individual strategies for coping with emotional stress. However, it is important to note that emotional resilience is an organisational issue and it is vital that individual practitioners are not held solely responsible for their own responses to the emotional demands of their role.

Aims

To support supervisors to work with supervisees to:

- > Identify the emotional demands they face at work
- > How they feel in response to those demands
- > How they are currently managing their emotions.

Applications

The tool should be explained and worked through in supervision first. The postcards might then be photocopied and printed off for supervisees to keep with them.

The postcards provide a framework for reflection but this does not replace the support element of supervision. This tool should only be used if the supervisee finds it useful as a tool to promote individual learning of effective coping strategies in stressful situations.

Instructions

Step 1: Identify emotional demands

Begin by asking the supervisee to identify the emotional demands they face; knowing what these are will inform the discussion about which coping strategies might work best, so it's important to identify them at the outset.

Step 2: Identify current coping strategies

Ask the supervisee what strategies they use for coping with stressful situations. Strategies currently being used can be compared to those on the postcards.

The strategies on the postcards have been found to provide longer-term benefits (compared to short-term distractions such as comfort eating or drinking alcohol, for example).

Negative strategies – such as self-criticism, avoiding the problem or wishful thinking – are often used but will not help individuals cope in the long term. (Note: The supervisor should avoid any implied 'telling off' of individuals who use negative strategies; rather, they should encourage the supervisee to turn to some of the more effective strategies on the postcards.)

Step 3: Identify main stressors and explore new coping strategies

The supervisor can help individuals identify what demands at work appear to be creating the most stress and consider whether these demands can be controlled by the individual, team or organisation. If they can be influenced, try and work towards a solution together.

If the demands are not controllable (by the individual, team or organisation), then other strategies such as reframing the problem, exercise, seeking social support and modifying mood might be more helpful.

Original postcards are available from Dr Laura Biggart: l.biggart@uea.ac.uk

When things get stressful...

Plan ahead

How will I feel?

Could I change...
...where future events happen

...how things happen - for example, layout,
sequence, people attending

Reframe

What can I control?

What is not in my control?

Focus on what is in my control

Think of the bigger picture

Take time out to think

Exercise

Any kind of physical activity to...

...use up emotional energy

...help breathing

...regain perspective

...give a break from thinking

Tackle the problem

What is the root cause?

Tackle the root cause

Seek advice/help with this

What problems might be on the horizon?

Learn new skills to prepare for
change/challenge

Seek support

Talk to colleagues, family and friends

Listen to different perspectives

If support is not immediately available, bring to
mind someone who loves and/or respects you

Modify mood

Before any challenge, visualise it going well in
detail

Think of something that makes you smile

Pay equal attention to the positive

At the end of each day, bring to mind at least
one positive thing

Source: Biggart et al (2016)

Based on tool by Economic and Social Research Council, University of East Anglia and Centre for Research on Children and Families