Teaching Stress Reduction Techniques Instructions

INTRODUCTION

1. Briefly explain purpose of stress reduction techniques (talking points)

The goal of teaching stress reduction techniques is to provide you with immediate relief from intense upset and distress over managing target problem areas. Reduction of your distress may have the added benefit of contributing to a calmer environment for the person with dementia and minimizing challenging behaviors.

2. Define stress and describe outcomes of stress (talking points)

Refer to Caregiver Resource Booklet in Education Packet (talking points)

How do you typically react to stress?
We want you to stay healthy so it is important to manage own stress levels.
What support systems do you have in place? (e.g., persons to confide or talk to as one important approach to managing daily stress of caregiving)

We will be practicing three different techniques, the first is deep breathing or sometimes it is called, signal breath\(^1\).

DEEP BREATHING

1. Rate level of stress (talking points)

What sorts of situations have been frustrating or stressful to you?
It is helpful to first rate your level of stress before and after using the technique.
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all stressed” and 5 being “terribly stressed”, what is your stress level right now? (refer to graphic on Stress Diary in Caregiver Resource Booklet)

2. Introduce deep breathing (talking points)

Deep breathing helps when you are in the middle of stressful situations. You can use the technique to prepare yourself for a known stressful situation, while it is occurring, or after it happens.

The technique only takes a moment but can reduce a lot of stress. In addition, it can be used anywhere, at any time, and as many times as you want. In fact, you could even use deep breathing in a crowded room and no one would know.

It is best to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. The nose warms the air and you get a more efficient breath and better air. (If caregiver usually breathes through the mouth and prefers to do the exercise that way, that is fine.)

You may want to think of a pleasant and relaxing word or image. Using imagery may help to keep you focused and will contribute to feeling relaxed. (If caregiver prefers not to imagine a word or image that is fine.) It helps to close your eyes when deep.

It may help to close your eyes to block out anything in the environment that may be distracting. (If caregiver prefers to keep eyes open, that is fine.)

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To help you feel less stressed and tense in situations like these or in your daily life in general, we are going to practice together a short relaxation strategy.

Try to use this strategy every day. Using this strategy will help you gain more control over your stress so that you can manage everyday situations better.

3. **Practice deep breathing (talking points)**

Okay, so let’s try this out. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap.

**First, I will demonstrate** the technique and then you and I will do it together.

**Take in a deep breath and hold it for a few moments.** Don’t breathe so deeply or hold it so long that it is uncomfortable. About 3 or 4 seconds is usually long enough.

**Exhale slowly.**

As you exhale, try to let your jaw, shoulders, and arms go loose and limp. In addition, you may find it helpful to say a word such as “relax”, “let go”, “easy does it” to yourself.

**Okay – let’s try it together.**

Take in a deep breath and hold it. Now, let it go slowly and think of a pleasant and relaxing word or image. Let your jaw, shoulders, and arms go loose and limp.

One more time, take in a deep breath and hold it. Let it out slowly. Relax. Let your body go loose and limp.

**Now, you try it alone.** (Cue caregiver if necessary.)

4. **Rate level of stress again (talking points)**

Now, rate your level of stress. What number best represents your current level of tension? How did that feel for you? Did it help a little?

If caregiver indicates feeling no difference, consider options below:
- If having difficulty understanding the feeling of muscle release: Ask caregiver to tighten fist and hold and then release, OR, ask caregiver to think about sucking on a lemon and then releasing
- **If breath is too shallow**: Explain concept of expanding stomach muscles in order to get a deeper breath
- Recommend practicing as often as possible; more frequent practice will contribute to a better effect

5. **Home Practice and Use of Stress Diary (talking points)**

I encourage you to practice the deep breathing at least once each day.
- Some people find it useful to practice when they are not stressed, because it helps reduce feelings of tension when stressful situations ultimately arise.
- However, it is very important to practice when you are in the midst of a stressful situation if possible.

In the Caregiver Resource Booklet is a **Stress Diary**. This may be useful to you. Rate your stress before and after using deep breathing.

The next time we meet, we will go over the technique again and how you used it. If you use the Stress Diary, we can review that too.
SIMPLE COUNTING

1. **Introduce simple counting (talking points)**

   This is another technique, like deep breathing, that can be used throughout the day to manage stress/upset.

   The simple counting technique involves taking a deep breath and letting out the air slowly while counting from 1 to 10 or 10 to 1, which ever you prefer.

   This quick technique is very helpful to use before reacting to a stressful or frustrating situation.

2. **Practice simple counting (talking points)**

   Okay, so let's try this out.

   **First, I will demonstrate the technique** and then you and I will do it together.

   **Okay – let's try it together.**

   Take in a deep breath and count to 10 (or down from 10).

   **Now, you try it alone.** (Cue caregiver if necessary.)

3. **Home Practice (talking points)**

   I encourage you to use the counting technique before you react to something.

   Can you think of a situation in which counting would be helpful?

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USE OF MUSIC

1. **Introduce use of music technique (talking points)**

   This is yet another technique that can be used throughout the day to manage stress/upset.

   Music can play different roles; loud music can pump you up and soft music can create a quiet atmosphere and help to relax you.

2. **Home Practice (talking points)**

   What types of music to you like?

   I encourage you to use music to relax or give you energy when you need it.

   Can you think of a situation in which using music would be helpful?