

Mastering Stress

Do I Need Therapy: A Special Session within Mastering Stress

We have a special session in the MasteringStress suite of sessions to help employees decide whether or not they should seek counseling. This electronic interview focuses on the person's symptoms (depression, anxiety), their degree of distress and any deterioration in their ability to function at work or at home.

Clinical logic is applied to the answers by the program, and a recommendation is made on a five point scale, the strongest being an emergency situation and encouragement to seek help immediately. The other end of the scale is that therapy is not recommended on the basis of symptoms but optional if unable to solve the presenting problem.

In addition to a recommendation (including counseling not indicated), the employee gets educated about what therapy can do for their specific situation. This is useful inasmuch as it stimulates people to act on the recommendation and provides important information for those who have never sought counseling in the past.

The purpose of this special assessment session is to ensure that those who need Employee Assistance counseling, or a mental health referral, are properly and responsibly directed to the care that they need. In those cases, the MasteringStress program acts as an electronic triage program as well as documentation that the employee can take with him or her to the counseling, which will accelerate the work there, and thereby accelerate their relief from distress.

Sample Client Report: Do I Need Therapy

NAME: Tom

4/2/2002 12:39:31 PM

SELF-ASSESSMENT YOUR SUMMARY

Sources of Stress

I have lost or am about to lose my job and I am experiencing serious financial difficulties.

I am most concerned about problems in my work life or regarding my finances.

Regarding my work or financial life, I am concerned about a recent event or set of circumstances. What I mean by this is Lost my job. This situation is alerting me that I need more security and Work alternatives. In response

to this situation, I have difficulty letting go and moving on, living within my means or budget, and admitting that there is a problem.

Level of Distress

I've been feeling overwhelmed. I have been feeling this way for for several months and it seems to be getting worse.

I am having backaches and have been frequently. I have had this symptom for many months and it seems to be staying the same.

Signs of Stress Overload

I think I might be eating too much, drinking too much alcohol, spending too much money, and drinking too much caffeine. With regard to food, I binge on food, I feel guilty whenever I eat, and I often overeat. When I use alcohol I have difficulty going three days without alcohol, I do or say things that I regret later, and I become irritable or short tempered. I'm very concerned about my behavior.

I've noticed a change in my ability to get things done, decision making abilities, enjoyment of sex and sensuality, ability to concentrate and think clearly, and ability to control my anger.

- With regard to my ability to concentrate, sometimes my mind goes blank and my mind races and I can't slow it down.
- With regard to my anger I'm concerned that I may get so angry that I will explode, smash or break things sometimes, and say or do things that are hurtful which I regret later.

I've noticed a change in my energy level, overall moods, motivation or interests, sleeping patterns, and hopefulness about life.

- With regard to my sleeping patterns I wake up too early, have trouble staying asleep, and have trouble getting out of bed.
- With regard to my hopefulness about life, I want to be alone all of the time.

Impact of Stress Overload

I've noticed the following regarding the impact of distress on my responsibilities and relationships:

- I find things more difficult to do than usual
- I am not getting much done and others have noticed at work
- I lose my patience easily and others have noticed
- my significant other and I argue most of the time now

My level of stress impacts the quality of my life more than moderately.

This level of stress is almost intolerable.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Disclaimer

The following recommendations and detailed report is based on the information you provided. These recommendations are based on a common sense professional understanding of why people want or need therapy, and what help a well trained therapist can provide

The purpose here is to educate and share this understanding so you can make a better decision.

This is not a diagnostic test. There is no attempt to identify specific mental diseases. This is not a complete assessment of all possible symptom complexes or a substitute for a face- to- face interview.

If you have any doubt about what to do, we recommend a consultation with a qualified therapist.

The Recommendations

On a scale of STRONGEST, STRONG, SHOULD, MIGHT, we are making the **STRONGEST** recommendation because you have indicated you are in an urgent or emergency situation. This is based on what you said:

I think I might be:

- eating too much
- drinking too much alcohol

I'm very concerned about my behavior.

With regard to my anger I'm concerned that I may:

- get so angry that I will explode
- smash or break things sometimes
- say or do things that are hurtful which I regret later

With regard to my hopefulness about life:

- I want to be alone all of the time

I've noticed the following regarding the impact of distress on my responsibilities and relationships:

- my significant other and I argue most of the time now

We strongly recommend you see a therapist as soon as possible...preferably today.

See the detailed report below for more information regarding this recommendation.

HOW A THERAPIST CAN HELP YOU

I have lost or am about to lose my job and I am experiencing serious financial difficulties

Stress producing events such as these have a strong impact on every person who experiences them. These types of occurrences have lingering effects and require active coping methods. It's possible you've dealt with the situation and it's fully processed. It's also possible that you could use some help coping with this.

I am most concerned about problems in my work life or regarding my finances.

Regarding my work or financial life, I am concerned about a recent event or set of circumstances. What I mean by this is Lost my job. This situation is alerting me that I need more security and Work alternatives. In response to this situation, I have difficulty letting go and moving on, living within my means or budget, and admitting that there is a problem.

Problems commonly come and go in the course daily life. If you're feeling stuck and not able to resolve the situation yourself or know what you need to do but just can't get yourself to do it, we suggest that you consider seeing a trained counselor. A counselor can help you get moving again.

I've been feeling overwhelmed. I have been feeling this way for for several months and it seems to be getting worse.

I am having backaches and have been frequently. I have had this symptom for many months and it seems to be staying the same.

It's difficult to ask for help when you're in this much pain and yet help is what you need to get relief. A good therapist will not only help you reduce the pain they will also help you resolve the problem that has caused the pain in the first place.

Typically physical symptoms are the body's response to too much emotional stress. Unfortunately the pain draws your attention away from the original trigger and keeps your focus on the discomfort. A therapist can help you develop strategies to diminish the discomfort and re-focus you on the source of the stress.

Although the physical symptoms can be part of your stress picture, it is also possible that they are indicators of some somatic disease. It is often difficult to sort out the origin of physical symptoms. We suggest that if you are in any doubt about the origin of these symptoms that you see your family physician.

I think I might be eating too much, drinking too much alcohol, spending too much money, and drinking too much caffeine. With regard to food, I binge on food, I feel guilty whenever I eat, and I often overeat. When I use alcohol I have difficulty going three days without alcohol, I do or say things that I regret later, and I become irritable or short tempered. I'm very concerned about my behavior.

These behavior patterns are usually difficult to control on your own because they easily become ingrained habits that temporarily make you feel better. The natural tendency is to continue to use these pain-relieving mechanisms even when they demonstrably cause more problems.

The kind of patterns you have identified usually require working with a specialist who knows how to help you control these difficult patterns. The specialist will be able to refer you to additional treatment resources as necessary.

Since you are very concerned about these patterns already, we strongly recommend you see a therapist as soon as you can. Only you know how important that is, and how easy it would be to let this moment of clarity slip by.

Once eating patterns are used for anxiety instead of nutrition, a basic biological function has been tampered with, and the internal regulation of the body is being compromised.

Alcohol problems are particularly difficult to spot as they are progressing because often it happens so gradually and there is a blurry line between social drinking and too much drinking.

I've noticed a change in my ability to get things done, decision making abilities, enjoyment of sex and sensuality, ability to concentrate and think clearly, and ability to control my anger.

- With regard to my ability to concentrate, sometimes my mind goes blank and my mind races and I can't slow it down.
- With regard to my anger I'm concerned that I may get so angry that I will explode, smash or break things sometimes, and say or do things that are hurtful which I regret later.

I've noticed a change in my energy level, overall moods, motivation or interests, sleeping patterns, and hopefulness about life.

- With regard to my sleeping patterns I wake up too early, have trouble staying asleep, and have trouble getting out of bed.
- With regard to my hopefulness about life, I want to be alone all of the time.

You have indicated you have high anxiety. Once you have reached this level, it is difficult to think clearly for prolonged periods of time because the anxiety interferes and clouds your consciousness. This makes it even more difficult to pinpoint problems and the added third party mind of a therapist can be good temporary help.

You have indicated that you are very angry. It is important that you get a perspective before you do anything that you will regret. Being this angry usually means you are at your wit's end and have run out of resources and can't think of a better way to solve your problem.

You have indicated you have a sleep problem. This means that the unsolved problems and stresses of the day are robbing you of the restorative sleep that we all need to keep our life in balance and keep our mind clear. As long as we have good sleep, we can keep a good perspective during the day.

I've noticed the following regarding the impact of distress on my responsibilities and relationships:

- I find things more difficult to do than usual
- I am not getting much done and others have noticed at work
- I lose my patience easily and others have noticed
- my significant other and I argue most of the time now

My level of stress impacts the quality of my life more than moderately.

This level of stress is almost intolerable.

You have indicated you might be a danger to yourself. Having these feelings and thoughts means that you have run out of options and can't find a better way to solve the problems of your life. You have temporarily lost hope. It also means you have lost confidence in your ability to solve the problem and reduce the stress. That is why seeing a counselor is so important.

You have indicated that your distress symptoms are significantly interfering with your life. This is a clear indication that you need help and that you have worked the problems of your life as far as you can but they are now getting the best of you. When that happens, getting help is essential.

The fact that you find your stress situation almost tolerable can be interpreted two different ways... and only you know the correct way.

On one hand you may be the kind of person who can handle a heavy load of stress and contain it to such a degree that it doesn't interfere too much with the conduct of your life. On the other hand you may not be aware of how much stress is bothering you.

If it's the former, you might consider therapy as a way of reducing the load on you. Even though you can tolerate it, it doesn't mean it is not taking a toll on you!

What can therapists do?

- In an emergency situation, they can help you sort out and find the best course of action.
- They can help you think of new options for solving problems when you run out of options.
- They can guide you through an adaptational process when going through transitions or dealing with difficult and major life events.
- They can help mobilize and refer you to additional support or information services.
- They can prescribe medication to give you quick relief from the symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety, and sleep problems.
- They can help you gain perspective so you avoid hasty or self-defeating behavior as well as avoid being too hard on yourself or too blaming of others.
- They can help you change behavior as needed and learn new skills.
- They can give you advice on how to handle others or how to put other people's behavior into perspective.
- They can help you learn to modify and control your anger, guilt, or self-doubts.
- They can help you think through your goals and major life course decisions.