

## CLIENT HANDOUT 1.1.

### Session 1 Summary for Clients: The Stress–Pain–Appraisal Connection

#### GOALS FOR THIS TREATMENT PROGRAM

- To learn about the connection between stress and pain.
- To reduce the frequency of your pain flare-ups by learning to think differently about stressful situations.
- To learn what is most and least helpful in coping with stress and pain.
- To learn and use promising coping techniques that help during a pain episode.

#### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE LEADERS

- We will teach you skills and help you problem-solve.
- We will collaborate with you in your treatment.
- *Confidentiality*: As therapists, we do not reveal personally identifying information to anyone outside the group. But there are important exceptions: We are legally required to report any cases where a client presents a clear threat of imminent harm to self (e.g., potential suicide), imminent harm to others (e.g., potential homicide), or suspected child abuse or elder abuse.

#### WHAT THE LEADERS EXPECT FROM GROUP MEMBERS

- *Regular attendance*: You are important contributors to this group. Without your regular attendance, the group is likely to be less helpful for everyone.
- *Active participation*: Our treatment requires you to take an active role in changing the way you think about, and act in response to, pain and other stressors.
- *Between-session activities*: Practice the skills learned in between sessions.
- *Reporting back*: Share with the group what you have learned that has helped, as well as places you get stuck.
- *Confidentiality*: Feel free to discuss what you learn with others outside the group. *But* protect the privacy of group members! It is *not okay* to use group members' names or other identifying information outside the group.

#### THE STRESS–PAIN CONNECTION

- Pain produces stress. Stress increases pain. Managing stress reduces pain.
- What is the stress response?
  - The stress response is a three-part reaction to something (an event, emotion, physical feeling) that you think you cannot cope with. These are the three parts of the reaction:
    - *Biological*: Increased blood pressure, muscle tension, stress hormones; lowered immune response.
    - *Emotional*: Anxiety, sadness, anger, embarrassment, shame, depression.
    - *Cognitive*: Thoughts and images about the event and about yourself.

(continued)

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## Session 1 Summary for Clients: The Stress–Pain–Appraisal Connection (*page 2 of 2*)

- Anything that triggers the three-part stress response is a “stressor.”
- Pain is a stressor: Chronic pain itself can be a major ongoing stressor, and can lead to the stress response (see above).
- Physical changes, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors can all be (non-pain) stressors that can trigger pain flare-ups.

### THE STRESS–APPRAISAL CONNECTION

- Any situation can be “stressful” if you think you may not be able to cope with it.
- If you think you can relax, it’s not a stressful situation.
- How we judge (that is, “appraise”) a situation *and* our coping ability is more important than the actual situation.
- Stressful situations can be appraised (that is, judged) as threats, losses, or challenges. For example, a young couple wishing to have children, but unable to conceive for 6 months, may think of this situation as:
  - A *challenge*: “Let’s learn all we can about optimizing our chances to conceive, and then give it our best shot.”
  - A *threat*: “This may mean we will not be able to have children;”
  - A *loss*: “Our inability to conceive a child has robbed us of a critical part of our life.”

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The stress response is biological, emotional, and cognitive (mental/thoughts).
- Chronic pain is a stressor.
- Any stressor (pain or non-pain) can trigger pain flare-ups.
- The way we judge stress can shape what we think, feel, and do about the stress.

### HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- Using the Stress–Pain Connection Worksheet, continue adding to your list of pain-related and pain-unrelated situations that are stressful for you and/or you identify as eliciting pain. Try doing this each day.
- Beside each stressor, write down how you appraise that situation (threat, challenge, loss, other).
- Note how the stressor (and your appraisal of the stressor) might have an impact on your focus of attention, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Are you aware of any specific thoughts you have about the stressful situation? If so, write these down. (Hint: These could be images as well as thoughts.)
- Bring your homework to the next session, and be prepared to discuss what you have learned.

### Stress–Pain Connection Worksheet

Stressful situation	Appraisal category (threat, loss, challenge)	Impact on emotions, thoughts, behavior	Any specific thoughts associated with stressful situation? (can also be an image)	Comments/other notes to self