



Better to prevent than cure

A psycho-educational program for
stress control for students at
K.U.Leuven

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Background

Developmental tasks in the adolescence **often** causes **stress** and **adaptation difficulties**

Not all these students need therapy!

Enhancing their coping strategies may be sufficient and is important in the prevention of mental health problems

A psycho-educational program in stress-control

Shortcomings in the way mental health is organized according to **Jim White**:

- High prevalence of psychological problems
- Individual therapy is still the golden standard, but has limitations:
 - High threshold
 - Not cost-effective
 - Focus on treating (instead of preventing)

A psycho-educational program in stress-control

Jim White proposes an approach that is:

- Educational
- Preventive
- Accessible and cost-effective

As a first step in a stepped-care model of mental health

A short course in stress management for a large group of students

- 6 weekly sessions of 2h
- Not a group therapy, but a course!
- No therapist-patient contact but a teacher-student contact
- Workbook included
- Aim:
 1. increase knowledge about stress
 2. increase skills for handling stress
- Based on cognitive behavior therapy principles

Implementation in SHC

Arguments

- We can reach up to 60 students
- Adolescence period as critical period for learning coping skills
- Educational form = familiar setting for students

Adjustments

- Illustrations and examples of studentlife
- Instead of workrelated problems, study-related problems:
 - Fear of failure, procrastination

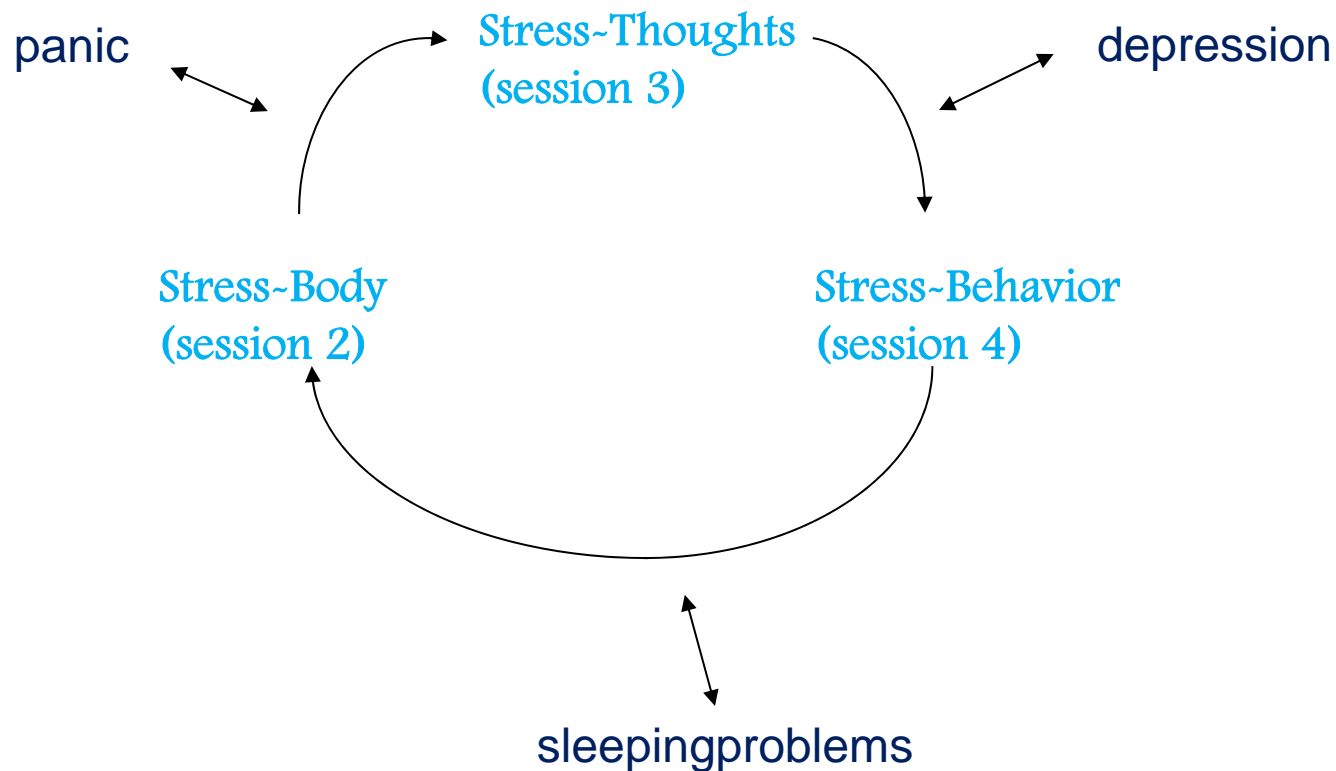
Content of the course

1. General introduction and information about stress

- Aim of the training
- Content of the other sessions
- Workable model of stress
- Vicious circle: thoughts, actions, physical aspects
- Personal assessment

It can be caused by a
wide range of factors
but we focus on what
keeps it going

When we get stressed:



Content of the course

2. Physical aspects

- Stress and fight-flight mechanism
- Basic principles of relaxation
- Exercise in ventral respiratory and progressive relaxation
- CD and relaxation diary: practicing!

Content of course

3. Cognitive aspects

- Negative automatic thoughts and thinking styles
- Practicing through ABCD schedules (Ellis & Beck)

Content of the course

4. Behavioral aspects

- Problem-solving skills (8-step plan)
- Exposure-principle: confrontation
- Assertiveness

Content of the course

5. Specific stressrelated issues:

Anxiety, Panic and Sleeping problems

- Panic: approach on 3 ways (phys, cogn, exposure)
- Sleep difficulties

Content of the course

6. Specific stressrelated issues:

Depressive feelings and Study related problems

- Depressive feelings
- Fear of failure and procrastination
- Brief summary
- Get to work!

Characteristics of the course

- Educational nature
No personal contribution from students expected in sessions
- Free and non-committal character
They come and go whenever they want
- Very accessible
- Aimed at enhancing self-confidence and sense of control

- a change in our perspective towards stress

Our goal is not to delete stress (because stress is inevitable) but to search for the best way to deal with it

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aDXM5H-Fuw>

Stresstraining at SHC: practical

- Started in 2004, > 1000 students have participated
- Open to: all faculties of K.U.Leuven, incl. PHD students
2 high colleges in Leuven
- Published on the website and by mailing
- On a weekday evening, in a seminar room, ppt

Findings and conclusions

- Drop-out rather small
- Little interaction during the session
- Most personal questions in break or after class
- Feedback = very positive
- Since 2004 a permanent treatment in our center