

# PSYCHOLOGY *for* NURSES

**Psychology for Nurses** is a comprehensive book written for those taking diploma and degree programmes in nursing. It is also for the registered nurses (RN) who would like to enrich their nursing practice. Psychology as a subject must provide adequate insight for those who are embarking into the nursing profession, a healthcare profession which requires adjustment to the behaviour of the patients and those around them; understanding the patients' anxiety, fear or pain; and self-acceptance by the nursing care givers in order to function independently within the areas of their responsibility.

This book is unique in that the author who is a psychologist and a mental health nurse practitioner has introduced new concepts that are relevant to the nursing practice. Among these concepts are psychology of nursing care; psychological interventions, like the therapeutic smile; and the therapeutic use of self or presence. The basic concepts of psychology are also presented in this book since, as the author views it, it is very important that all nurses know and understand the origin and the development of psychology as a science.

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PSYCHOLOGY for NURSES

• Arnel Banaga Salgado •



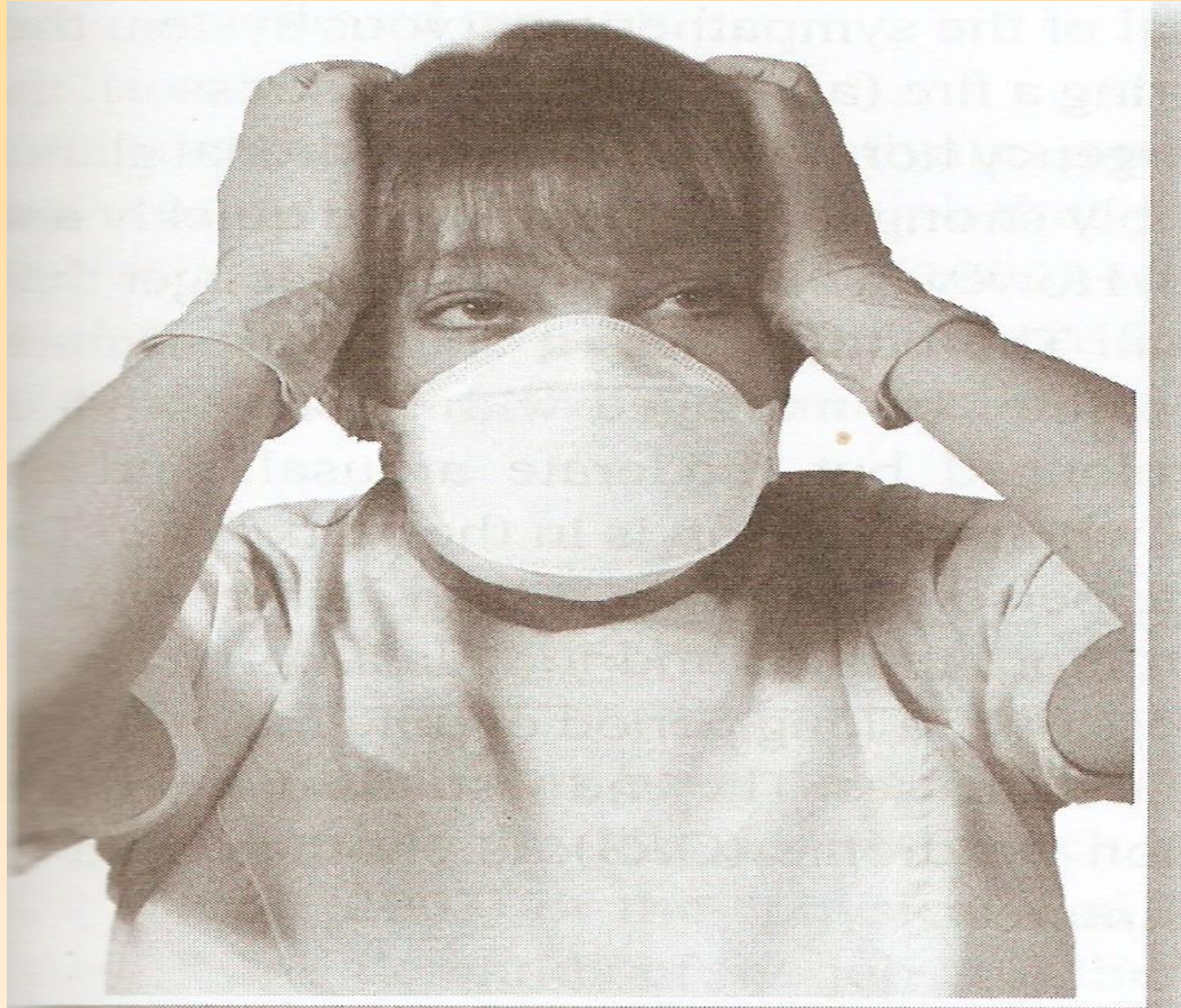
# PSYCHOLOGY *for* NURSES



Arnel Banaga Salgado

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# Chapter 11



# Chapter 11

## Stress, Conflict, and Coping Mechanisms

# EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this chapter, you are expected to:

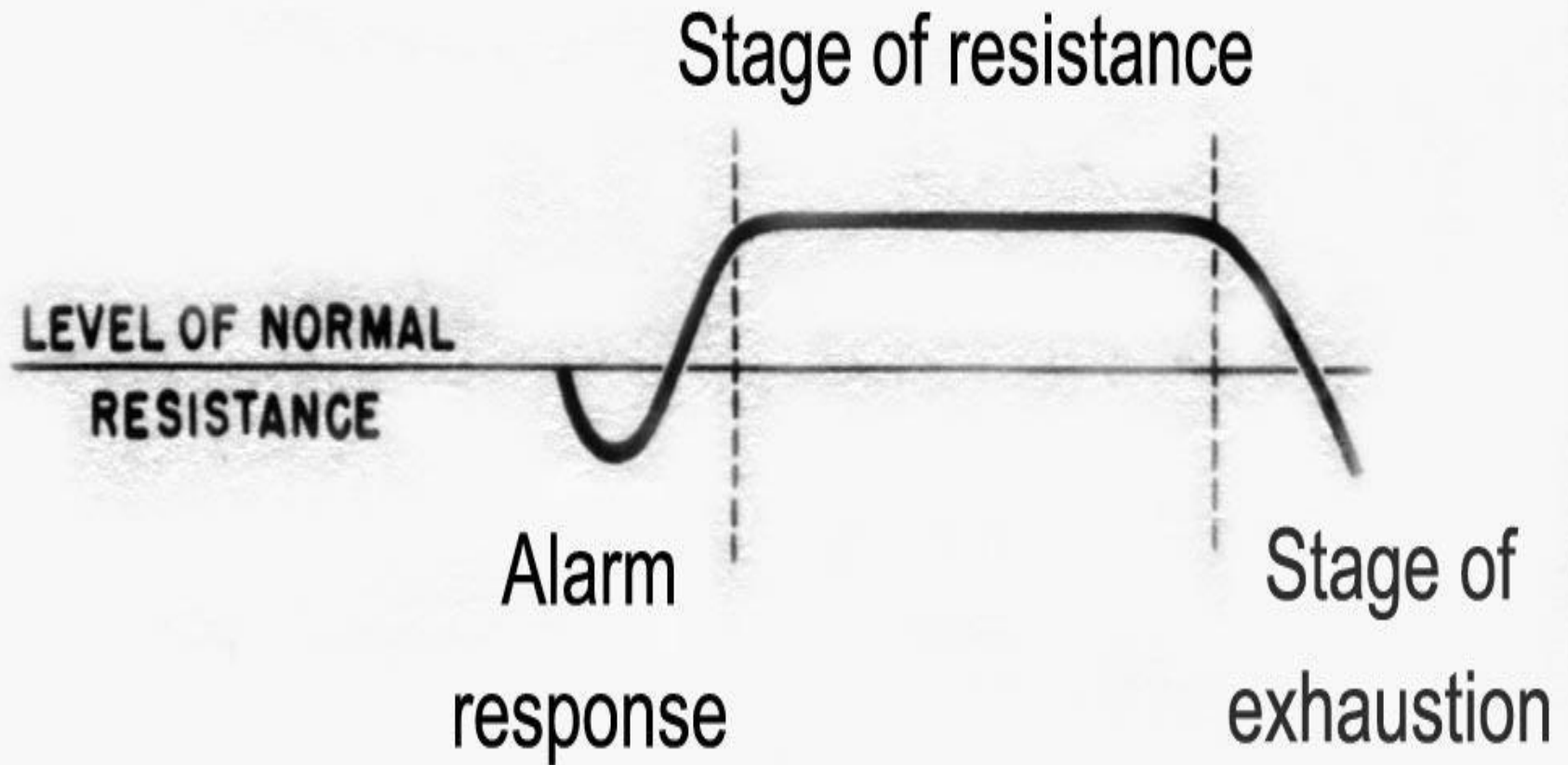
1. identify your stressors, their nature and how you adapt or adjust to them;
2. discuss the stages an individual goes through in responding to stress;
3. discuss the effects of stress;
4. utilize the coping strategies when you or someone is stressed; and
5. demonstrate some relaxation techniques in relieving yourself of distress

# Introduction

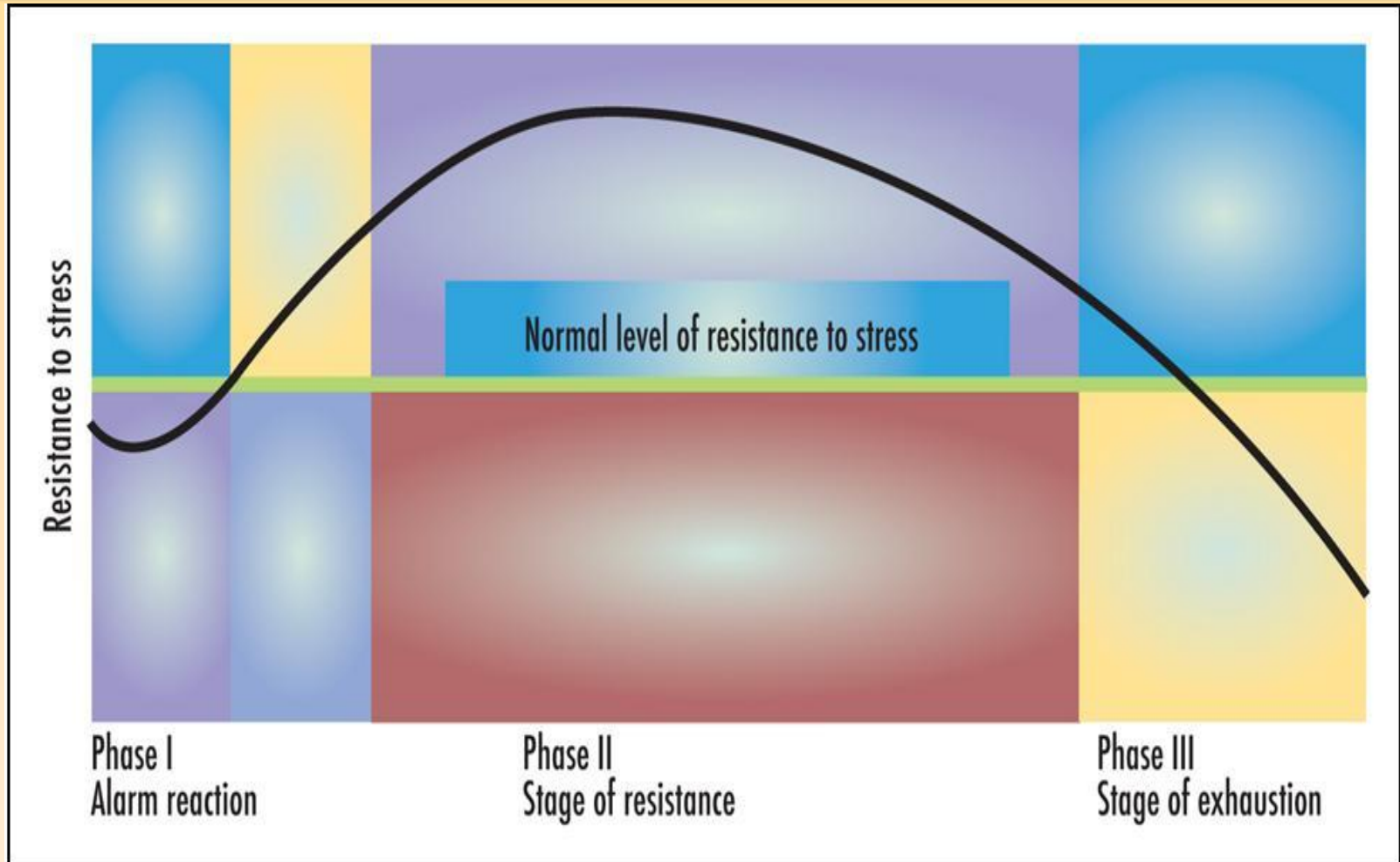
- Nurses are always subjected to stress everyday; starting from the time of their training until the time they start working as registered nurses.
- Some nurses can attribute their success in facing the stressors in their job by simply acknowledging their weakness and strengths.
- Stress is a multi-faceted process that occurs in reaction to events or situations in life which are termed as stressors.

- Stress, as defined by Hans Selye (1979), is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.
- Every demand in the body evokes certain specific responses as well.
- The body responds in one way to the loss of fluid, in other way to lack of sleep. But all demands on the body evoke generalized, nonspecific responses.

# Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome



# Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome





- According to Selye, the body goes through three stages in its response to stressors.
  1. The first stage is *alarm*,
  2. The second stage is *resistance*.
  3. The third stage is *exhaustion*.

# Stress Among Nurses

- Nursing by its very nature is a profession that yields high levels of emotion that could sometimes be overwhelming and stressful to the individuals.
- Every day nurses put up with the pressure of the profession with the aim of making a difference.
- They offer their endless care and hospitality to their clients and their families, concentrating all their energy on their duty to serve to the needful and promote wellness among their clients.

- In order to understand the aspect of nurses experiencing stress, first we must gain an understanding of stress in general.
- McGarth (1970) cited in Walker, Payne, Smith & Jarrett (2004), refers to stress as “an imbalance between a perceived demand and the perceived ability of the individual to respond to it.”
- Coon (2004) simplifies stress to be the “condition that occurs when a challenge or a threat forces a person to adjust or adapt to the environment”.

1. **Eustress**, the positive force that spice up life by adding excitement and challenges to life, providing a sense of well being to the individual.
2. **Distress**, which is the negative force that threatens effectiveness and is driven by prolonged, unrelieved tension. (Tomey, 2000)

# WORK PLACE STRESS AND NURSING

- Workplace stress is described by DiMartino (2003) as “Physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the employee.”
- (Seaward, 2002) describe Workplace stress as the “physical and emotional outcomes that occur when there is disparity between the demands of the job and the amount of control the individual has in meeting those demands”.

# Common Stressors In Nursing Workplace (Hospital, Industry, School)

1. Heavy Workload (Tomey, 2000), (Kozier et.al, 2004).
  - Too many works, limited time, being under-staffed, lack of support from other colleagues, patient and relatives, unplanned sick-leaves do contribute to heavy work force nurses experience in their duty.
2. Dealing with death, and terminally ill patients (Tomey, 2000),(Kozier et.al, 2004)

### 3. Conflict with physicians.

- Both nurses and doctors are working for the benefit of the patient, but how they approach to achieve this goal is different and controversial, giving way to conflict of idea.

### 4. Inadequate preparation.

## 5. Problems with peers and colleagues.

- Nurses work in collaboration with nursing staff within the department and from other departments, physicians and other allied health care workers. Difference in opinions, views and beliefs, personality clashes, use of power and designations create the emotional turmoil that gives rise to stress.



## 6. Pressure due to conflicting demands of work and home.

- Nurses are often facing the dilemma of being a nurse with their role as a friend, a mother, a sister, a daughter etc. sometimes, nurses find their family life conflicting with that of her job and vice-versa, straining themselves out.

## 7. Problems with supervisor.

- Junior nurses, and newly joined nurses work under the supervisors who have high expectations of the new staff.

## 8. Bullying or sexual harassments

9. Office politics and competition

10. Uncertainty concerning treatment

11. Patients and family.

- Nurses are there to serve their clients and their families. High demands pressed on the nurses exert high levels of pressure on the nurses, which results in stress for the caregiver.

## 12. Pressure from care giver role

- This results from unfulfilled role expectations due to lack of control over the work situation; shortage of resources; concern for the quality of nursing; and lack of cooperation among patients, families, and staff members (Chang, Hancock, Johnson, Daly, & Jackson, 2005) cited in (Silen, Tang, Wadensten, Ahlstrom, 2008)

13. Adjusting various work shifts (Kozier et.al, 2003)

- Nursing is an around the clock service. Hence, nurses work around the clock, adjusting duties, usually in rotation. Hence, they rarely have a fixed duty time.

14. **Constant changes in the organizations where nurses work** (Clegg, 2001) in (Silen, Tang, Wadensten, Ahlstrom, 2008)
  - which includes changing responsibilities, policies, organizational rules and regulations.
  
15. **Technological developments in health care industry** (Maville & Huerta, 2001).

# Symptoms Of Workplace Stress

- 1. Cognitive symptoms** which includes forgetfulness, Indecisiveness, poor concentration and loss of focus, clouded thinking giving rise to poor judgments, pessimism, anxiety, racing thoughts, constant worrying, and fearful anticipation that something will happen are indicators of stress.

**2. Physical symptoms** which includes headaches, backaches, muscle tension, diarrhea or constipation, nausea, dizziness, insomnia, rapid palpitations, perspiration, rapid pulse, weight gain or loss, skin breakout, loss of sex drive, frequent colds, and ingestion also indicates stress.



**3. Emotional symptoms** such as moodiness, agitation, restlessness, short temper, irritability, impatience, inability to relax, feeling tense, and feeling overwhelmed, loneliness or isolation, and depression.

**4. Behavioral Symptoms** like eating more or less ,sleeping too much or too little, isolating yourself from others, neglecting responsibilities ,using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing) ,teeth grinding or jaw clenching, overdoing activities like exercise and shopping, overreacting to unexpected problems ,picking fights with others.

# Types of Stressors

## CONFLICT

- happens when the person is made to choose between two opposing or competing goals. Conflict comes in four types – the approach-approach, the avoidance-avoidance, the approach-avoidance and the multiple approach-avoidance.

# APPROACH-APPROACH CONFLICT

- In an approach-approach conflict the individual is torn between two attractive goals.
- The problem, of course, that by choosing the other goal, the individual will sacrifice the satisfaction of the other.

# AVOIDANCE-AVOIDANCE CONFLICT

- The avoidance-avoidance conflict involves choosing between two unattractive goals.
- In this type of conflict, the person is torn between two repelling alternatives.

# *Approach-avoidance conflict*

- *Approach-avoidance conflict* involves the pursuit of a single goal that has both attractive and unattractive aspects.
- Approach-avoidance conflict is common and may be very stressful. This conflict means you always have to take risks or sacrifice something valuable to you in order to attain a desired goal.

# ***MULTIPLE APPROACH-AVOIDANCE***

- ***Multiple approach-avoidance.***
  - It occurs when a person is confronted with making decisions about alternatives with multi-faceted positive and potential outcomes.
  - For instance, in making major decisions, we are sometimes need to consider a lot of factors – conflicting demands of family, spouse, children, friends, society, which may also conflict with our personal choice.

# CHANGE

- Stress is also due to life changes or alterations in one's living circumstances that require readjustment.



- Like what can be found below on the 10 most stressful life's events:
  1. Spouse's death
  2. Divorce
  3. Marriage separation
  4. Jail term
  5. Death of a close relative

6. Injury or illness
7. Marriage
8. Fired from job
9. Marriage reconciliation
10. Retirement

# Pressure

- This type of frustration occurs when an event becomes so intense that we can no longer adapt to it.
- There are two common types of pressure.
  1. The first is known as overload, which is particularly a problem among some employees and students.
  2. The other type of pressure comes in the form of over expectation. Individuals may set performance standards that are too high that work cannot be satisfactorily completed at a given time.

# Effects of Stress

## 1. Impaired Task Performance.

- Stress interferes with our ability to successfully perform task and responsibilities expected of us.
- The demands of work may lead to an experienced overload or pressure which oftentimes lead to an impaired or poor performance.

## 2. Disruption of Cognitive Functioning.

- People who are under stress are likely to experience loss of concentration, disorientation, and forgetfulness.

### 3. Unhealthy Lifestyle.

- People who experience stress are likely to engage in unhealthy activities as a way of coping with stress.
- Smoking, drinking, and overeating (or lack of appetite or skipping meals), and lack of time for exercise are some of the unhealthy behaviors as escape activities of persons who are less tolerant and are inadequate in managing their stress.

## 4. Psychological Problems and Disorders.

- Stress may lead to some psychological problems and may interfere with effective intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior of an individual.
- For instance, individuals may suppress anger and eventually develop migraine headaches.

## 5. Burnout.

- Burnout can be defined as the end result of stress experienced but not properly coped with, resulting in symptoms of exhaustion, irritation, ineffectiveness, and discounting of self and others.



## 6. Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.

- Post Traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition in which prolonged and extreme stress results to feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Victims and survivors of catastrophe, wars, heinous crimes are likely to suffer from PTSD. PTSD is characterized by frequent nightmares, outburst of anger, constant unhappiness, and guilt.

## 7. Physical Illness.

- The onset or progress of health problems may be affected by stress.
- Emotional stress may also lead to physiological stress and this results in an eventual breakdown (disease) of a target organ system.

# Beneficial Effects

1. First, stressful events help satisfy the need for stimulation and challenge.
2. Stress can also promote personal growth or self-improvement.

3. The present stressful events experienced by individuals can inoculate them so that they are less affected by future stressors.
4. Other beneficial effects of stress include the development or improvement of the individual's optimism, conscientiousness, self-control, and resistance.

# Coping with Stress in the workplace

1. Nurses need to understand the down side of over stressing themselves. Look out for common stressors in the profession and work around it.
2. Nurses need to recognize their scope of practice and work with in that scope of practice (Aguilera, 1998) cited in (Potter and Perry, 2005) to reduce added stress that may result from any misdeeds.
3. Learn to co-operate with other collogues and establish a worker friendly environment, so that there will not be excessive sick- leave and grumpy co-worker to deal with.

4. Have humor; share a laugh with colleagues, clients and relatives. This will definitely unwind stress.
5. Organize your work and time by planning.
6. Balance the time between work and family life, leaving aside time for own self (help guide, 2007).
7. Prioritize your work and cut down the to-do lists.
8. Be assertive and learn to delegate work rather than trying to do it yourself.

10. Keep work life and home life separate from one another as to avoid stress in the individual as well as others (Potter and Perry, 2005).
11. Learn to grab the best out of the situation at hand(Tomey,2000).For example, take the time delayed to deliver the medical supply to get another task that need to be done rather than stressing out over it.
12. Continuing education and staff development programs will enhance quality of care as well as reduce anxiety and stress related to work by giving the worker the knowledge that is required to work efficiently with advancements in health care.

13. Developing systems for effective two-way communication among the employees, be it nurses, doctors, or even the organization heads(Arnold and Boggs, 2003)
14. Employers can give proper job descriptions and performance expectations that are expected of the staff on the time of recruiting.
15. Promoting prompt and constructive resolution of conflicts with in work area
16. Psychological counseling and therapy should be easily accessible and available for troubled staff members.



17. Staff who are having too much stress should seek medical advice.
18. Health care organizations can give compensation remedies for shift work. For example giving night duty allowances will motivate nurses to do night duty rather than taking it as a burden.
19. Health care organizations should establish a safe working environment for their employees.
20. Health care organizations can promote motivation in their employees through positive reinforcements

21. Recruit enough staff that is competent, both practically and theoretically to avoid work overload and minimize sick leaves.
22. Nursing schools can emphasis on stress in the profession; teaching student nurses how to identify common stressors and strategies to cope effectively with the stress of being a nurse.
23. Nursing curriculums can emphasis on the psychological aspect of the disease conditions, which will decrease surprise and anxiety when they become graduate nurse.

24. Nurses should be encouraged to adopt healthy life styles for themselves and put aside time for themselves everyday for relaxation and leisure in order to recharge themselves.(Potter and Perry, 2005)
25. Nurses should also be encouraged to adopt different coping mechanisms that they teach their patients for themselves and make use of these stress management techniques.
26. Health care agencies can develop in-service health promotion classes for the nurses. For example, healthy weight plans and routine exercise classes.

- Developing a different attitude. Stresses could be converted to positive stress otherwise called as “eustress.” Instead of harboring distress, we should enjoy life, forget your grudges and look at things positively. Count your blessings. You can change your reaction patterns. Desensitize yourself from tension-producing situations. Imagine yourself handling the situation calmly, repeat until you can see the scene without feeling tense. Keep cool.

- Relaxation. This is related to exercise. Also with Transcendental Meditation. Develop your Autogenic training techniques. Relax your muscles, your toes, legs, trunks, arms, head, till the entire body will be relaxed. See the example at the end of the chapter. This could be done in fifteen to 20 minutes. In this technique, make yourself comfortable. Relax, close your eyes, concentrate on your breathing. Say the word to yourself silently each time you exhale. Keep your mind blank in the mid-morning, mid-afternoon or have a meditation break.

- Richard Steers listed four ways of coping with stress. He advised the following: Developing self-awareness. Learn your own limits and recognize signs of potential troubles (Steers, 1991).

- Nursing is a stressful occupation due to its caring nature.
- Nurses, more than often tend to forget to take care of themselves in their desire to help clients, stressing out themselves and giving way to burn out.
- Nurses should be aware of the stress in the profession and learn how to manage stress for a better future for the profession.
- Health care agencies should target at minimizing stressors found at the workplaces of nurses.

Nurses who can manage their stress and help others deal with stress will benefit the profession as a whole.



# The following steps are suggested:

1. Implement continuing education and staff development programs, which will enhance the quality of care as well as reduce work-related anxiety and stress-by updating staff with advances in health care as well as their skills.
2. Develop systems for effective two-way communication among staff, including nurses, doctors, and hospital management.
3. Give proper job descriptions and performance expectations of staff at the time of recruitment.
4. Promote prompt and constructive resolution of conflicts at the workplace.
5. Make psychological counseling and therapy easily accessible and available to any troubled staff members.

6. Provide compensation for shift work, such as night-duty allowance, to motivate nurses to do night duty rather than viewing it as a burden.
7. Establish a safe working environment for staff.
8. Motivate staff through positive reinforcement.
9. Increase the workforce to avoid overwork and minimize sick leave.

10. During nursing training, highlight stress in the profession by teaching student nurses how to identify common stressors and what strategies to adopt to cope effectively with the stress of being a nurse.
11. During nursing training, emphasize the psychological aspect of disease conditions so that nurses will be better able to handle their patients when they are practicing.
12. Develop in-service health-promotion classes for nurses, for example, healthy weight plans and routine exercise classes.

# KEY POINTS

- Stress is a psychological process that occurs in reaction to events or situations in life. As defined by Hans Selye, stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it. The sources of stress are called stressors.
- When stressed, the body goes through three stages starting with alarm, which is a brief period of high arousal of the sympathetic nervous system to prepare the body for rigorous activity.

- When a severe and lengthy stressful state occurs, it weakens the immune system and leaves the individual vulnerable to illnesses. The symptoms of exhaustion include weakness, fatigue, loss of appetite, and a general lack of interest.
- The effects of stress include impaired task performance, disruption of cognitive functioning, unhealthy lifestyle, psychological problems and disorders, burnout, posttraumatic stress disorder, and physical illness.

- Stressful experiences may also be beneficial. Some individuals are challenged by pressure. Stress can also promote personal growth or self-improvement. It forces people to develop new skills, gain new insights, and acquire new strengths.
- Some positive strategies for coping with stress include, for psychological stress, meditation or autogenic training, recreation, music, and prayer, and for bodily stress, relaxation, reflexology, exercise, and walking.