

Cycle of Strong Feelings

Stage One: Trigger—A “Trigger” can be an idea, word, or behavior that “pushes someone’s buttons”. The person’s body moves into an automatic and escalating response pattern. Physiological symptoms might include: rapid and shallow breath, increasing heart rate, dilating eyes, tensing muscles. Blood is moving into survival parts of the brain, because danger or threat has been signaled.

Stage Two: Escalation—The process escalates and symptoms heighten. The person is unable to stop the process and must move through it somehow. The palms and face may become sweaty. The body moves toward crisis.

Stage Three: Crisis—A maximum amount of blood and blood sugar is available to the most basic survival part of the brain. This part makes “fight, flight or freeze” decisions. The brain is deciding if the person should strike out, hide, run away, shout, or take other drastic action.

Stage Four: Recovery—The blood stream begins to absorb the chemicals that had been sent to the survival part of the brain and to the large motor muscles. The breath becomes slower and deeper. The person may laugh or sigh or wiggle as he or she becomes more relaxed.

Stage Five: Depression—The blood sugar is temporarily depleted. The person can slip into a temporary physiological depression. Feelings of shame, remorse, and guilt for strong feelings or actions can accompany this stage.

What can your body tell you about how you deal with stress?

Check the items that best describe how your body responds to a conflict situation.

Blushing

Heart Pounding

Tightening of
throat muscles
(lump in throat)

Blotching

Increased heart rate

Voice changes

Pallor

"knot in stomach"

Breathing changes
 Rapid

Headache

Stomach pain

Shallow
 Deeper
 Slower

Eye squinting

Teary eyes

Dry mouth

Vision changes

Grinding teeth

Locked knees

Shakiness in legs

Clenching teeth

Slouching

Cowering

Stiffness

Leaning

Tightened calf muscles

Turning away

General "shakiness"

Tightness in chest

Crossing arms

Cold sweat

Muscle weakness

Put hands on hips

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____