

Course Description:

Stressed out? Overwhelmed? Struggling to focus, in the midst of life's pace? This course will provide a "biopsychosocial" overview of stress--how stress affects the body, cognitive processes, and emotions; how it can be both useful and destructive; indicators that it's out of balance; and strategies to manage it to our advantage. Each class meeting will feature guidance in the practice of science-backed stress-regulation techniques. Lecture and discussion will focus on a little neuropsychology and a lot of exploration of positive human behavior.

Instructor:

Dr. Carole W. Sebenick

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Carole W. Sebenick, PhD, is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in Virginia with more than 30 years of experience in private practice and in university and government settings, specializing in psychotherapy and career counseling. She has taught as an adjunct faculty member at several local universities, including a widely enrolled psychology of happiness course at the University of Maryland, and as a STL for Spring OLLI course on the same topic. An active community volunteer, she has served on nonprofit boards and taught English to adult learners.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, group members will be able to:

1. Define stress, distress, and eustress.
2. Understand the stress response, basic neurobiological processes associated with stress reactions, and the importance of stress-relaxation patterns and pacing.
3. Identify negative and positive outcomes of stress management.
4. Build a repertoire of stress-management techniques to integrate into everyday life.

Course Format:

This course meets in-person for three sessions. Class sessions will feature lecture, structured discussion, and guided practice of brief stress-regulation techniques.

Reading Requirements:

There are no mandatory readings to complete outside of class.

Curriculum Outline

Session 1: What is Stress?

- Stress terminology
- The role of attention and perception
- The stress response and importance of completing it
- The relaxation response and working toward biological balance
- Two techniques for regulating stress and activating relaxation

Stress 101: Tame It and Find Balance

Carole W. Sebenick, Ph.D., Licensed Clinical Psychologist - Virginia

Session 2: Chronic Stress

- Sources of stress in today's world
- Chronic stress, adaptation, and "allostatic load"
- Navigating between achievement and health in unjust conditions
- Two techniques to build cognitive resilience

Session 3: Proactive Strategies and Post-Stress Growth

- Using resilience models to build strength and repair
- Developing a personal stress management plan
- Two techniques for post-stress recovery