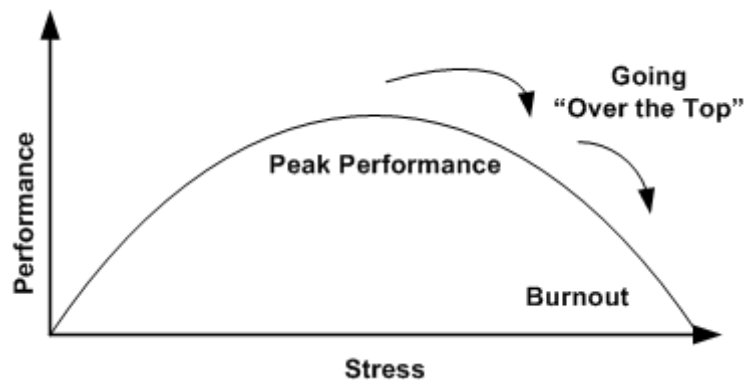


HEALTHY MINDS – Parent Supplement

Module 7 – Understanding Stress; Self-criticism vs Self-compassion

Key Concepts

- Stress, while often seen as a negative thing that most people would like to do without, is actually neither inherently good nor bad. Having some stress is helpful in motivating us, helping us to be at our best. Having no stress would mean a life in which we have few thrills or challenges, and would be boring. Being over-stressed is unpleasant and also prevents us from being at our best.



- The Yerkes-Dodson law (depicted in the graph above) tells us that there is a specific ‘peak performance zone’ that is the right amount of stress for us to be at our best.
- Many people believe that if they are tough on themselves, then it will help them to achieve more in life. They end up being quite self-critical, especially in the event of mistakes, failures, or when things just aren’t going well. Often, the way we treat ourselves is harsher than the way we would treat others we cared about.
- Self-compassion is a very important attitude and set of behaviours toward oneself that is healthy and helpful. In contrast to a harsh self-critical attitude, self-compassion is about treating ourselves with kindness, forgiveness, and encouragement while being accepting and understanding of mistakes, failures, and painful emotions. Self-compassion teaches us that experiencing painful emotions at times is a part of the human experience, and is something we have in common with every human being on the planet.

Key Student Activities

- Role-play of the critical vs encouraging coach. Which leads to better performance?
- Identifying our own 'stress signature'
- Watch the video of Professor Mark Leary explaining self-compassion.
- Self-compassion group meditation
- Self-compassion letter – imagine a wise, old, being who is totally compassionate and kind, and who knows everything about you. Students are guided to consider something that has been bothering them about themselves – perhaps something they feel insecure or ashamed about, or some way in which they feel not good enough. They are invited to write a letter to themselves from this wise compassionate being. What message of acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion do they have for you?
- Self-compassion diary

Discussion Points

- In what ways can we be kind to ourselves? HINT: How would we treat a close friend or loved one when they were going through a difficult time?
- When are the times or circumstances when we should push ourselves harder, and when should we cut ourselves some slack? Discuss this point openly with your child in relation to each of you.

Parent Self-reflection Questions

- What is my stress signature? [What are the things that you might notice about yourself, or others might notice about you, that tell you that you are in the 'over-stressed zone' of the Yerkes-Dodson curve?] What can you do during those times to bring yourself back into the middle?
- When I am having a difficult time, do I see painful emotions as something that isolates me from others, or do I recognise that everyone at times feels the same kinds of emotions?
- Am I able to step-back when I need to and ask myself what I can do to treat myself kindly?
- Do I model self-compassion to my child?