



The Road To
Resilience:
Strategies to Manage
Stress and Thrive

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Welcome!

Welcome to The Road To Resilience: Strategies to Manage Stress And Thrive training session with Nicky Thackray, Founder of My Zendays. In this guide, we will explore essential concepts and techniques that can help you effectively manage stress and enhance your overall wellbeing.

About Nicky Thackray:

Nicky Thackray is a seasoned leader with over two decades of experience in prominent Fortune 500 companies. Her journey into stress management and mindfulness began when she faced the profound impact of stress in her own life. Nicky's personal experience led her on a transformative path where she discovered practical tools and techniques that proved to be life-changing.

Inspired by her own journey, Nicky founded "My Zendays," a platform dedicated to empowering, equipping, and enabling individuals to take control of their mental and emotional health in simple and enjoyable ways. Nicky is passionate about sharing her knowledge and expertise to help others lead more balanced and fulfilled lives.

Why Stress Management Matters:

Stress is an integral part of our lives, and while it can motivate us, excessive or chronic stress can have detrimental effects on our mental, emotional and physical health. It can impact our focus, wellbeing, and overall quality of life. Problems start when we experience too much stress, over a prolonged period, without managing it properly.

That's why this session is specifically designed to provide you with practical tools to manage stress effectively, that will benefit you on a personal and professional level.

This booklet accompanies The Road To Resilience training session and serves as a reference guide. Here, you'll find a summary of key concepts covered during the training, as well as practical exercises and tips that you can incorporate into your daily life.

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The Three Golden Rules of Stress Management & Resilience

1. Take Control
2. Breathe Deeply
3. Stay Present

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Understanding Stress

“Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.”

Health & Safety Executive

Stress is a natural response to the challenges and demands of daily life. It can manifest in various forms and affect us mentally, emotionally and physically. In this section, we will delve into the fundamental aspects of stress, helping you better understand its impact and how it can be managed.

What is Stress?

Stress is the body's natural reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. This response is often referred to as the "fight or flight" response, which prepares the body to deal with perceived threats. In some situations, stress can be beneficial, motivating us to perform at our best. However, when stress becomes chronic or overwhelming, it can have detrimental effects on our wellbeing.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress:

Stress can manifest in various ways, affecting our thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. Some common signs and symptoms of stress include:

- Physical symptoms: headaches, muscle tension or pain, fatigue, sleep problems
- Emotional symptoms: anxiety, irritability, mood swings, overwhelm
- Cognitive symptoms: difficulty concentrating, memory problems, racing thoughts
- Behavioral symptoms: increased substance use, changes in eating habits, social withdrawal
- Physical health issues: weakened immune system, elevated blood pressure
- Emotional and mental health issues: increased risk of anxiety and mood disorders
- Potential for burnout

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Common Causes Of Stress

Stress can be triggered by a wide range of factors and situations, and what may cause stress for one person may not affect another in the same way. Recognising the common causes of stress can help you identify potential stressors in your life.

Here are some common sources of stress:

- Work-related stressors: workload and tight deadlines, constant decision-making, multitasking
- Relationship-related stressors: relationship conflicts, communication issues
- Financial stressors: financial pressure
- Emotional and cognitive stressors: negative thinking patterns, perfectionism, comparison, mental load/cognitive load becomes overwhelming, busy mind (we have an average of 60k thoughts/day), negative thinking patterns
- Life challenges: unexpected/unpredictable challenges, overwhelm (demands outweigh capacity)
- Digital stressors: constant connectivity or digital overload

It's important to note that stress is a natural response to challenges and changes in life. While some stressors are unavoidable, learning how to manage and cope with stress can significantly improve your overall wellbeing.

In the upcoming sections, we will explore how breathing techniques, meditation, mindfulness can be used as practical strategies to manage stress effectively. These tools can help you navigate the challenges presented by common stressors, both at work and at home.

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Time To Reflect

1. What are the major stressors in YOUR life?

2. What can you do to address or minimize these stressors?

3. What help do you need / from who?

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Understanding The Stress Response

The Stress Response:

When we encounter a perceived threat or stressor, our body activates the stress response. During this response, several physiological changes occur:

1. **Release of Stress Hormones:** The body releases hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which prepare us for action (“fight or flight”).
2. **Increased Heart Rate:** Your heart rate rises to pump more blood to muscles and vital organs.
3. **Dilation of Airways:** Airways in the lungs open up to allow more oxygen intake.
4. **Heightened Senses:** Senses become more acute, preparing us to react quickly.

While these responses can be helpful in situations requiring immediate action, prolonged or repeated stress responses can take a toll on our health.

Why Understanding Stress Matters:

Understanding stress is the first step in effective stress management. By recognising the signs and symptoms of stress and understanding its impact on your body and mind, you gain the ability to take proactive measures to manage it.

Stress can affect your performance, focus, emotional wellbeing and both personal and professional relationships. By learning to manage stress effectively, you can improve not just your performance at work but your overall quality of life.

Now that we've explored the fundamentals of stress, we'll move on to practical techniques and strategies for managing and reducing stress. In the following sections, we will delve into breathing techniques, meditation, and mindfulness, and how to incorporate these practices into your daily life.



Benefits of Mindfulness and Stress Management

There are many profound benefits that mindfulness and other proactive stress management strategies can bring to your life. By understanding these advantages, you'll gain greater motivation to incorporate these practices into your daily routine.

1. Stress Reduction:

One of the well-documented benefits of mindfulness is to reduce stress and anxiety. By addressing stress promptly, you can prevent it from escalating and negatively impacting your mental and physical wellbeing.

2. Improved Mental Clarity:

Mindfulness practices can significantly enhance your focus, concentration, and mental clarity. These cognitive benefits can translate into better performance; by training your mind to stay present and focused, you can make quicker decisions, react more effectively, and maintain a more clear and agile mental state during challenging times.

3. Enhanced Emotional Resilience:

Emotional resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back from challenging situations. It's a crucial skill for both personal and professional growth. Mindfulness practices can help you develop emotional resilience by teaching you to respond to stressors with greater composure and calm.

4. Improved Relationships:

Stress can take a toll on your relationships, both at home and at work. When you manage stress effectively, you're more likely to communicate more clearly, empathise with others, and maintain healthier relationships. This can positively impact team dynamics and create a more supportive and harmonious experience for people.

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Benefits of Mindfulness and Stress Management

5. Better Sleep Quality:

Stress often disrupts sleep patterns, leading to insomnia or restless nights.

Mindfulness practices, particularly relaxation and meditation techniques, can promote better sleep quality. Adequate rest is essential for physical and mental recovery, making it a crucial aspect of your overall wellbeing.

6. Enhanced Physical Health:

Stress can have adverse effects on your physical health, including elevated blood pressure and weakened immune function. By reducing stress through mindfulness and stress management, you can support your body's overall health and immune system, ensuring that you're physically prepared for the demands of your daily life at work and at home.

7. Increased Self-Awareness:

Mindfulness practices encourage self-reflection and self-awareness. As you become more in tune with your thoughts and emotions, you can better understand your strengths and areas for improvement. This self-awareness can guide your personal and professional growth, helping you reach your full potential.

8. Enjoyment of the Present Moment:

Mindfulness teaches you to savour the present moment and find joy in the little things. This ability to appreciate the here and now can enhance your overall quality of life, both at work and at home. It can also help you stay grounded during high-pressure situations.

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Breathing Techniques

Breathing is a fundamental and often overlooked aspect of stress management. The way you breathe can influence your body's stress response, helping you stay calm and centered. In this section, we'll note some of the essential breathing techniques covered in your training session:

1. 4-7-8 Breathing, also known as “The Relaxing Breath”:

- Put your tongue behind your top two front teeth, keep it there for the full breathing exercise
- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale completely through your mouth (around your tongue) for a count of 8.
- Repeat this cycle 4 times, focusing on your breath and the counting.

Benefit: 4-7-8 breathing is a powerful technique known for quickly reducing anxiety, improving sleep quality, enhancing focus, and promoting overall wellbeing by activating the body's relaxation response. Useful to use “in-the-moment” to create calm, though the true benefit lies in practicing consistently over time.

2. Balloon Breathing:

- Imagine you have a balloon in your stomach, and your job is to blow it up by breathing in and sending the breath down into your abdomen.
- Inhale slowly through your nose, visualising the balloon filling with air.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, visualising the balloon deflating.
- Continue this deep, rhythmic breathing pattern, inflating and deflating your "balloon."

Benefit: Balloon breathing is an effective technique for reducing stress, promoting relaxation, and enhancing overall wellbeing. By visualising your breath like inflating and deflating a balloon, you can quickly alleviate tension and find inner calm.

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Breathing Techniques

3. Box Breathing:

- Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth for a count of 4.
- Pause and hold for a count of 4 before beginning the cycle again.
- If it helps, you can imagine drawing a square with your finger, as we did in the session.

Benefit: Box breathing is a calming technique that improves focus, reduces stress, and enhances mental clarity. By regulating your breath in a square pattern, you can quickly attain a state of relaxation and composure.

All of these breathing techniques offer several benefits for managing stress:

- **Calming Effect:** Deep and controlled breathing triggers your body's relaxation response, reducing the production of stress hormones.
- **Enhanced Focus:** Focusing on your breath helps clear your mind and improves concentration.
- **Improved Oxygenation:** Proper breathing ensures your body receives an optimal supply of oxygen, promoting overall wellbeing.
- **Reduced Muscle Tension:** Deep breathing can alleviate muscle tension associated with stress.
- **Instant Stress Relief:** These techniques can be used anytime, anywhere, providing immediate relief in stressful situations.

To get the full effects of breathing techniques, it's important to continue practicing them regularly. Incorporating these techniques into your daily routine can help you build resilience to stress and maintain a sense of calm in challenging moments.

In the next sections, we'll explore meditation and mindfulness, which complement these breathing techniques, offering a holistic approach to stress management and wellbeing.



Meditation Basics

Meditation is a powerful practice that can bring profound benefits to your mental and emotional wellbeing. In this section, we'll explore the fundamentals of meditation and how you can incorporate this practice into your daily life.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is a technique that often involves focusing your mind on a particular object, thought, or activity (e.g. your breath) to achieve mental clarity, emotional calm, and a heightened state of awareness. Your body is relaxed, and your mind is alert. It is a practice that has been used for centuries to promote relaxation and inner peace.

Here are some meditation basics to help you begin your practice at home:

1. Find a Quiet Space:

- Choose a peaceful and quiet location where you can sit or lie down comfortably without distractions.

2. Comfortable Posture:

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. You can sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, sit cross-legged on a cushion, or lie down on your back. The key is to find a posture that allows you to be relaxed yet alert.

3. Close Your Eyes (Optional):

- Closing your eyes can help you focus inward and reduce external distractions, but it's not necessary if you prefer to keep them open.

4. Focus on Your Breath:

- Begin by taking a few deep breaths to center yourself. Then, bring your attention to your breath. Notice the sensation of each inhale and exhale. You can count your breaths or simply observe the rhythm of your breathing.

5. Let Go of Thoughts:

- As you meditate, thoughts will arise and it's entirely normal. Meditation isn't about reaching a state where you have no thoughts at all. It's simply about becoming the observer of those thoughts. Instead of getting frustrated, acknowledge the thoughts then let them go and gently bring your focus back to your breath or chosen point of concentration.

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Mindfulness Basics

Mindfulness is a practice that complements meditation and can be integrated into your daily life to promote greater awareness, presence, and stress management. In this section, we'll explore the fundamentals of mindfulness and how you can cultivate it.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying deliberate attention to the present moment without judgment. It involves being fully engaged in whatever you're doing and embracing each moment with openness and curiosity.

Here are some mindfulness basics to help you begin your practice:

1. Be Present:

- Mindfulness starts with being fully present in the here and now. Whether you're eating, walking, or even just sitting, focus on the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

2. Engage Your Senses:

- Use your senses to anchor yourself in the present. Pay attention to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical sensations around you.

3. Non-Judgmental Awareness:

- Practice observing your thoughts, emotions, and sensations without judgment. Instead of labeling them as good or bad, simply notice them as they arise.

4. Mindful Breathing:

- One of the simplest ways to practice mindfulness is through mindful breathing. Pay close attention to each breath, the rise and fall of your chest or the flow of air in and out of your nostrils. Try to breathe more fully and deeply.

5. Acceptance and Letting Go:

- Mindfulness involves accepting each moment as it is, without trying to change it. It's about letting go of trying to control things and allowing things to unfold naturally.

6. Daily Mindfulness Moments:

- Incorporate moments of mindfulness into your daily routine. This can include mindful eating, walking, or even mindful listening during conversations.

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HOW TO INTEGRATE MINDFULNESS INTO DAILY LIFE

Morning: Set the Tone

1. **Wake Up with Gratitude and Intention:** Before you even get out of bed, take a deep breath and identify one or two things for which you are grateful. Set an intention for your day with affirmations like “Today, I will be open to all opportunities that come my way”.
2. **Resist starting your day with digital noise** like checking emails or social media. Instead, spend your first few minutes in quiet reflection, deep breathing or mindful stretching.
3. **Savour Your Breakfast:** Engage all your senses as you eat - notice the colors, textures, smells, and tastes of your food. This not only enhances gratitude but improves digestion.

Throughout the Day: Cultivate Presence

1. **Single-Tasking:** Wherever you are, be fully there. Whether you’re in a meeting, having coffee with a friend, or eating a meal, commit your full attention to that task. This will enhance efficiency and satisfaction.
2. **Get Out In Nature:** Spend time outdoors, even if it’s a brief walk. Look at the sky, feel the air, notice the colors around you. Nature has a profound way of grounding us and clearing our mind.
3. **Mindful Breathing Pauses:** Before transitioning between tasks, take a “breathing break.” Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and center yourself. This creates mental space and reduces the feeling of rush.

Evening: Reflect and Unwind

- **Passion Time:** Dedicate time to an activity you love - no matter how small. This isn’t about productivity - it’s purely about joy and fulfillment.
- **Mindful Recap:** Reflect on your day, acknowledging successes, and learning opportunities. Recognize moments that felt good, things that went well, and express gratitude for them. “Sift for gold”.

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CREATE YOUR PERSONAL SELF-CARE STRATEGY

The best self-care strategy you can possibly create is the one you'll actually DO! Consider each of the 4 dimensions of wellbeing below and see which activities (at least one per quadrant) you would like to build into your personal self-care strategy.

MIND

(PSYCHOLOGICAL / MINDSET)

Read, study, learn and grow skills
Visualise / Mental Rehearsal
Declutter your environment
Master your self-talk
Seek inspiration

HEART

(EMOTIONAL)

Process your emotions
Journal
Therapy
Coach
Self-compassion
Practice gratitude

SPIRIT

(SPIRITUAL)

Meditate
Spend time in nature
Simplify your life
Connect with others
Connect with yourself
Practice silence

BODY

(PHYSICAL)

Nutritious food
Hydrate
Exercise / sweat!
Massages
Meaningful rest and relaxation
Sleep

Which self-care activities will you do?

When will you do them?

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Time To Reflect

1. What insights or new understanding did you gain about stress and its impact on your mind and body during this session?

2. Consider the stress management techniques introduced in this session. Which ones resonate with you the most? Why do you think they will be productive for you?

3. Set a plan for incorporating these stress management techniques into your daily life. Can you pick a “Day 1” and commit yourself to The 7 Day Challenge?

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7 DAY CHALLENGE

DAILY HABIT TRACKER

First you make your habits, then your habits make you.

healthy habit

M T W T F S S

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reflection

Join My Zendays Community

If you found value in this session and want to continue your journey towards better stress management, mindfulness, and personal wellbeing, we invite you to join the My Zendays community!

1. Follow Us on Social Media:

Stay connected and inspired by following us on Instagram and Facebook. We regularly share tips, insights, and updates to support your wellbeing.

- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/myzendays/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/nickyzendays>

2. Subscribe to Our Weekly Email:

Join our community of like-minded individuals by subscribing to our weekly email newsletter. You'll receive exclusive content, resources, and updates delivered directly to your inbox. Sign up here: www.myzendays.com

3. Join The Zen Lounge Membership:

Discover a wealth of tools, trainings, meditations and mindful living practices inside The Zen Lounge Membership all designed to help you stress less and thrive (Annual pass £190).

Thank you for attending the session and we hope you become a valued member of our community, and we look forward to supporting you on your journey to a calmer, more balanced and mindful life.

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