

Module 3:

Tools to help me understand my experience



This module will show you:

- the stress bucket, which is a tool that will help you understand vulnerability and stress – the things that put you at risk

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Plan for today's session

How was your week?

What would you like to talk about today?

Evaluating today's session

Summary of what we talked about today

What will I do during the week?

How was today for me?

Name: _____ Date: _____

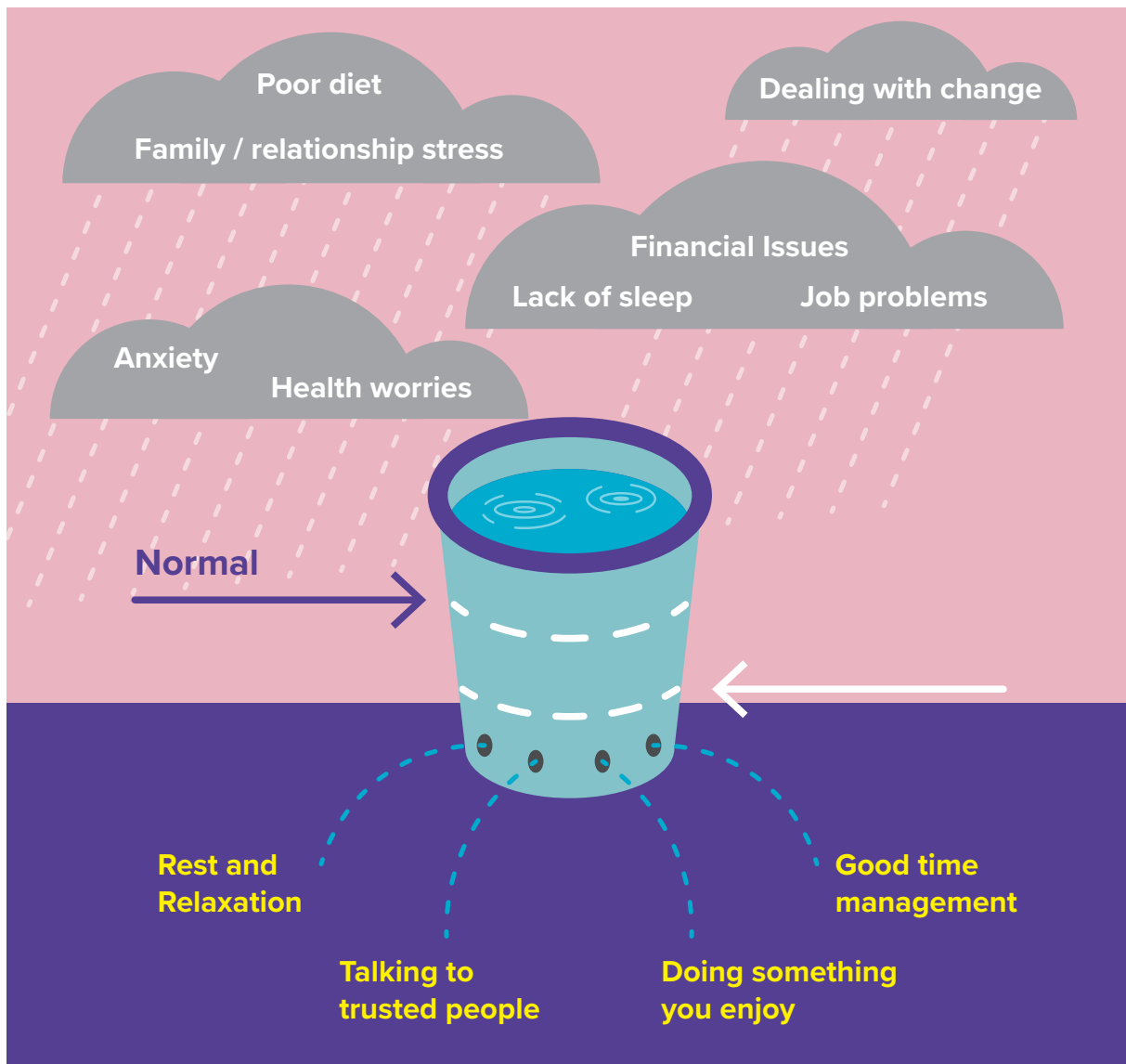
The Stress Bucket

When we become mentally overwhelmed, we are like a bucket overflowing with water. Instead of water, our buckets sometimes contain lots of problems that our buckets just can't hold.

Everyone has a different capacity for stress – a different-sized bucket. So if we have a small bucket, we are going to be more at risk when we are stressed.

Sometimes there are things in our buckets that reduce the amount our buckets can hold. In a real bucket, these are things like stones and rubbish. In our life buckets, these are things like using drugs, denying we have problems and not asking for help.

We can also use helpful coping skills to empty our bucket which help to take pressure off the bucket and make us feel more relaxed.



Source: <https://www.mentalhealth-uk.org/stressbucket>

How to use coping skills to help empty your stress bucket

When we use helpful coping skills to empty our bucket, it is like putting a good tap onto our bucket. We can turn the tap on and off when we need to. It helps empty the bucket and keeps our bucket strong.

When you know what size your bucket is and have skills to help you cope with overflow, you can recognise when your bucket is getting too full. You can then do something about it.

On the previous page is an example of an overflowing stress bucket with lots of different stresses and vulnerabilities going into it. There are also some examples of ways which help us to take some of the pressure off the bucket.

Anxiety is usually a sign that you have become overwhelmed by stress. It can help you to decide to look for help or find ways to cope which can ease the anxiety. Anxiety usually tells us that we need to open a tap to release some of the stress or pressure we are experiencing.

Sometimes when we are overwhelmed by stress, we can get unusual experiences that seem frightening or threatening. We might feel under threat or as if something bad is about to happen. Sometimes we can see or hear things that others cannot. Unfortunately, this can be a new stress to manage and makes the unusual experiences continue.

When this happens, it can be difficult to know what is causing the unusual experiences or keeping them going. It can be hard to work out what will help you to feel better. However, most people do find some helpful ways of coping.

What can make you vulnerable to psychosis?

Family history

If there is a history of mental illness in our families, we are more likely to develop a mental health problem. For example, children who have a parent with schizophrenia have a 13% risk of getting schizophrenia. For people who do not have a parent with schizophrenia, the risk is only 1%.

These statistics suggest that some mental health problems are inherited. But they also suggest that lots of other things contribute to problems with mental health. This is similar to other conditions where family history is important. For example, a person who has a family history of diabetes may not develop diabetes if they are careful with what they eat and have enough exercise.

Many people who develop mental health problems have no family history of similar problems. Your family history may play a role, but other things could be more important.

Physical health

Illnesses and accidents can put us at more risk. Some of these are:

- problems in pregnancy and childbirth like infections or difficult births;
- childhood health problems like:
 - illness
 - poor nutrition such as a lack of vitamins
 - head injuries and
- age – most people who develop psychosis (80%) do so between the ages of 16 and 30.

The effects of physical illness or injury on the brain might be caused by

Neurochemicals –substances in our bodies that affect our nervous system. They can change how you feel and how you experience the world around you.

Stresses in life

Experiences as children

We may forget experiences that happened to us when we were babies or children, but some of these make us who we are as adults. Some of these events can be harmful events such as accidents or abuse. Sometimes there is no one event that we can identify. Our childhood can shape how we think and feel about ourselves, the world and others.

Experiences as adults

As adults, we might also experience family conflicts, illness, employment difficulties or bereavement. These can place extra demands on us and lead us to feel stressed, frustrated, anxious, angry or sad.

Sometimes stresses can be long-term, such as an unhappy relationship, chronic illness or poor housing.

Positive events

Positive events, such as starting a new relationship, having children, or moving house, can also cause a lot of stress.

Drugs and medicine

If you are vulnerable, any drug can increase your risk of experiencing psychosis. This includes **all** drugs, not just illegal drugs. When you think about drugs in relation to psychosis, think about all these:

- Illegal drugs:
 - LSD (acid)
 - cannabis (weed)
 - ecstasy
 - heroin
 - cocaine
- “Head-shop” or “designer” drugs – usually made to act like illegal drugs but chemically different to avoid being classified as illegal:
 - Mephadrone (Meow-Meow or M-Cat)
 - Cathinones (Snow Blow)



- XLR-11 (Spice, Hammer Head)
- Prescription medicine. Examples:
 - methamphetamine (Ritalin/Concerta)
 - steroids
 - pain killers
 - alcohol
- Solvents: lighter fluid and aerosols like deodorants
- Sleeping tablets

Trigger events

A **trigger event** is something that has been associated with the start of psychosis.

These situations are considered trigger events:

- a family atmosphere with a lot of difficult and stressful emotion
- a recent death or grief
- not getting enough sleep
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- using drugs
- being in a hostage situation
- being in solitary confinement such as being locked in a cell for 24 hours a day
- sensory deprivation, such as not being able to see or hear

People often ask “Why Me?”

People often ask why do I have these experiences and others don't.

For some people a small event such as smoking cannabis can trigger psychosis.

For others it can be a series of events over the years.

For some it might take a major stressful event like trauma to trigger psychosis..

If your stress bucket is very small, a small event such as smoking cannabis may trigger psychosis. For someone with a large stress bucket, it might take a major stressful event like a trauma to trigger psychosis.



Remember, no one person, event or experience is the cause of psychosis. Instead, a number of things may contribute to psychosis.

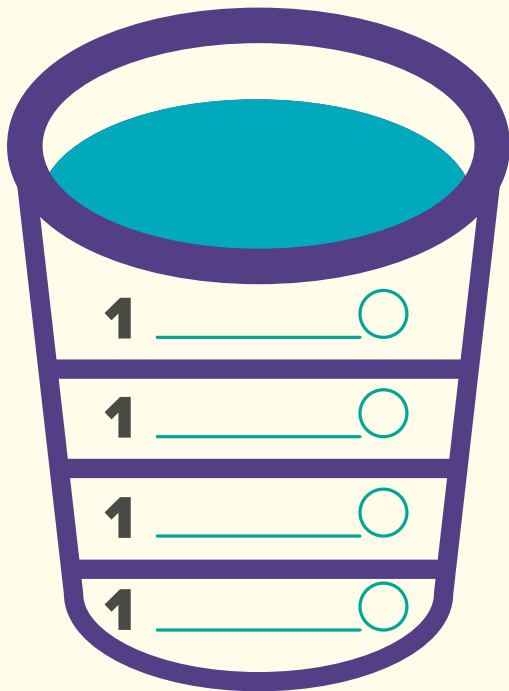


Why me?

What stresses and vulnerabilities do you have? Write them at **1** in your bucket.

What coping skills do you have? Write them outside your bucket at **2**.

Underneath it, write down what you think about your Stress Bucket.



2 _____

2 _____

2 _____

2 _____

What do you think about your stress bucket?

Would talking therapies help you?7

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7 This worksheet is adapted and taken from Canada Life Group Insurance.
<http://documents.canadalife.co.uk/manager-resources-stress-bucket-exercise.pdf>