



Stress Management And Resiliency Training (SMART) Program

Dr. Amit Sood



Attention & Interpretation Therapy Session Handout

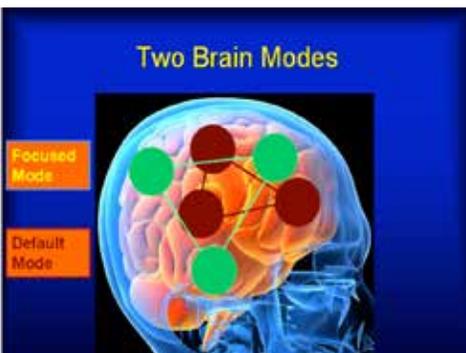
Instruction: This handout is to be used concurrent with the in-person session.



#1. What Causes Stress?

Stress is your mind's struggle with 'what is.' Stress is experienced when there is:

Demand/Resource Imbalance, Lack of Control, and Lack of Meaning. Stress primarily results from an interaction between the actual events in your life and how you perceive them. The reality is that the actual events may or may not be amenable to change. You, however, always have the option to control your perception and response. Resiliency is your ability to handle stress and bounce back.

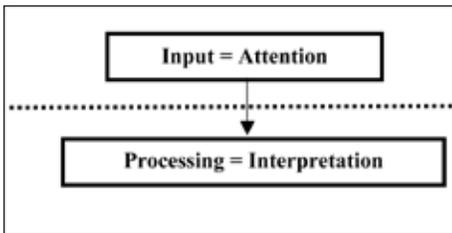


#2. The Two Brain Modes

The human brain is a giant network made of billions of neurons. These networks integrate to create two important functional modes:

1. Focused mode – Attends to novel, pleasurable and meaningful in the external world.

2. Default mode – Creates spontaneous mentation (the wandering mind) and monitors the external world. Generates self-focused thoughts (planning, problem solving, ruminations, worrying). Excessive engagement is associated with stress, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit.



#3. A Model of the Mind

The mind can simply be considered as the infrastructure software of the brain. Each experience has two key components – Input and Processing. At the level of the mind, these are represented, respectively, by attention and interpretation.

Attention helps you select and input the data that is relevant at that moment. The source of this data could be the external world, the body or the mind itself. Interpretation helps you comprehend the information you imbibe based on your knowledge, experience, and preferences. Our actions depend on attention and interpretation. Thus, addressing attention and interpretation is likely to impact each of your individual experiences.



#4. Attention

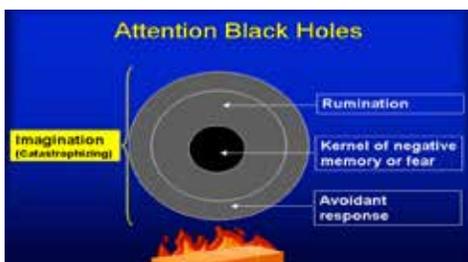
Instinctive untrained attention focuses on three primary entities: **Threat, Pleasure, Novelty.**

Of these three entities – threat is the primary draw for human attention for the simple reason that such a focus has survival value.

Untrained attention tends to be weak, fragmented, and unsteady.



In the modern, civilized world, greater threat and imperfections are in the mind, not the external world. These are in the form of hurts and regrets in the past and desires and fears in the future. All of these generate open files and attention sumps, that we call the Attention Black Holes.



Attention Black Holes are generated by a combination of: kernel of negative memory or fear + rumination + avoidant response + imagination (catastrophizing)



Thus, the mind gets filled with a lot of these black holes that usurp our attention and take away energy and joy from our life.

Recognize that a lot of this happens through no fault of anyone.

It is extremely difficult to sustain a state of joy if you have multiple Attention Black Holes in your mind.

5. Attention Training

So what's the way out? The two problems with attention that increase our stress are: focus on threat and directed inward (mindward). Thus, the obvious solutions might be: focus on novelty and directed outward (worldward). We accomplish these using two forms of attention: *Joyful Attention and Kind Attention*.



#1. Joyful Attention: Delay Judgment + Pay attention to Novelty, e.g. morning gratitude, time with nature, meeting loved ones as if meeting after a long time.

Many different exercises of joyful attention are covered in details in the reference books. Practice Joyful Attention at least four to eight times during the day.



#2. Kind Attention: "I Wish You Well Exercise"

Practice Kind Attention ten to twenty times every day.



#5. Interpretations

Interpretations can be guided by prejudices or principles. When excessive prejudices guide interpretations, they lead to stress and decrease well being.

Daily Theme

Monday	Gratitude
Tuesday	Compassion
Wednesday	Acceptance
Thursday	Higher Meaning
Friday	Forgiveness

Be kind to the self

Instead of prejudices, use principles to guide your interpretations. The core principles are: **Gratitude, Compassion, Acceptance, Meaning, and Forgiveness**. These are structured as a daily theme (shown on the left).

A few additional pearls covered in the class and the text include:

Scheduled worry time; What went right within what went wrong; An expression other than love is a call for help; You stop enjoying what you are trying to improve; We are all agents of service and love; Forgive, for you are forgiven.

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Daily Program Instructions

1. Attention

1a. Joyful Attention: Delay Judgment; Pay attention to Novelty

* Pick four to eight preferred times to train your attention for 10-20 minutes each.

Rest of the day deepen your attention.

- Suggested morning practice – Think of five things you could be grateful for, give your body a gentle stretch, feel the carpet beneath your feet, pay attention to your surroundings, pay attention to your sensory experiences (e.g. shower).
- Suggested day time practice – Spend 10-20 minutes with nature, preferably with your loved ones.
- Suggested evening practice – Meet your family / friends as if you are meeting them after a “long time.” (Focus on Novelty, Transience and Acceptance. “Say one good thing.”)
- Suggested practice – Attentive walking
- Suggested practice – Joyful eating
- Suggested relaxation practice – Five-breath relaxation

1b. Kind Attention: Attend with CALF (compassion, acceptance, love, forgiveness)

(I wish you well / Bless you exercise – to the first 20 people you see / talk to everyday)

Helpful thought during attention exercise: For the next 10 minutes, I have nothing to plan, no problem to solve

2. Interpretations

Decrease Prejudices; Interpret with higher principles: Gratitude; Compassion; Acceptance; Higher Meaning and purpose; Forgiveness

Monday	Gratitude		
Tuesday	Compassion		
Wednesday	Acceptance		
Thursday	Higher Meaning		
Friday	Forgiveness		
Saturday	Celebration		
Sunday	Reflection / Prayer		

Integration: Two options

Option 1 – Implement Joyful Attention + Kind Attention + Daily theme

Option 2 – Week 1 – Kind or Joyful Attention;

Week 2 – Kind + Joyful Attention (start with Joyful Attention only twice);

Week 3 – Kind + Joyful Attention (Joyful Attention four to eight times);

Week 4 – Kind + Joyful Attention + Interpretations

Handout Adapted from:

Sood, A: *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-free Living and The Mayo Clinic Handbook for Happiness.*

DaCapo Life Long Books. December 2013 and March 2015

Mindfulness Redesigned for the Twenty-First Century: Let's Not Cage the Hummingbird A Mindful Path to Resilience Paperback – January 27, 2018

<https://Resilientoption.com>

<https://www.myhappinespal.com/>

Resilience.mayoclinic.org

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