



# **STRESS & SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

a workbook for managing  
through crisis



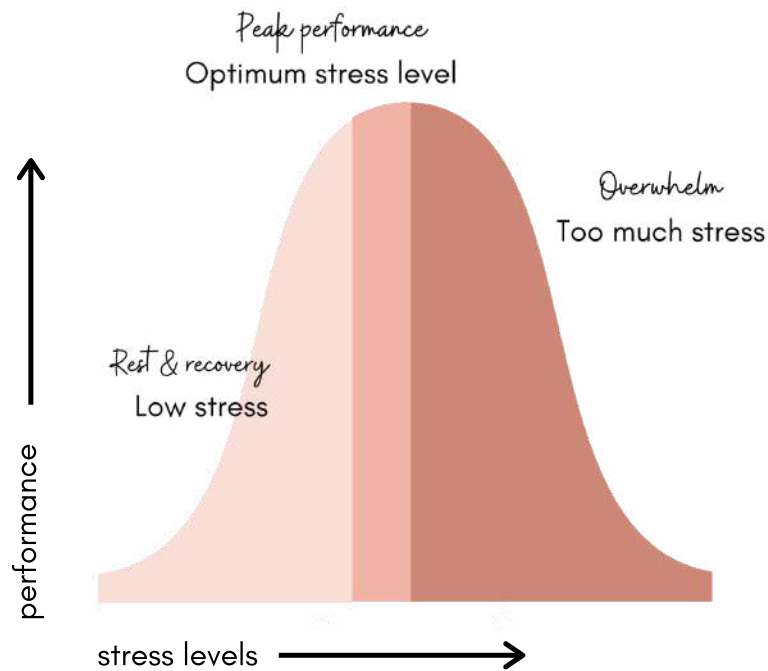
## Hey there, your work matters.

Most social enterprise leaders are well adapted to many of the stressors of their work. They put up with those stressors because they feel passionately about the issues involved, and they're often naturally well suited to work in challenging conditions. It's why you have made it so far and are here today!

But natural ability will only carry you so far in the face of long term or unusual pressures. We instinctively know this and that is also probably why you're holding this workbook. If you think about peers who are good at working in this space- not only "successful" but they seem to truly live life well- they are probably intentional about the way they care for themselves in a number of different ways.

You can build those unique strategies for yourself as well. We know that the more intentional and proactive you are about resilience, the better equipped you are for this type of work. For this reason, we created this workbook to help you understand stress, and develop ways to build resilience as both a preventative and life enhancing strategy.

# How does stress affect us?



Stress is our natural response to life's high demands on us. At certain levels, stress allows us to react and perform under pressure. This simple chart shows the impact of stress on our performance and engagement at work or in our homes and communities. As stress increases, we approach our peak performance. But if it increases too much, or for too long, we enter a state of overwhelm where our ability to perform or engage falls.

It tends to be most healthy for us to manage our stress levels so that we go back and forth between "Peak Performance" levels and "Rest & Recovery" levels.

## When stress becomes unhelpful...

Sometimes stress can lead to negative outcomes, particularly if there is just too much of it, or it lasts for too long and we don't get a break. Signs of unhelpful stress are:

- Sleep problems
- Anxiety and irritability
- Fatigue
- Memory and concentration difficulty
- Inefficiency and reduced impact
- Eating problems
- Restlessness
- Tension and headaches
- Poor immune system
- Heart disease



# Chronic stress

The chart on the previous page is a simplified depiction of the effects of stress. But in the real world, there is also a third axis to the stress chart: **time**. Without rhythms of rest and the chance to restore, true optimum stress is impossible to maintain. Even stress that was helpful to us in the past can start to take on the feeling of more chronic and unhelpful stress in the face of prolonged crisis. The problem is that with so many challenges worthy of our best efforts, those of us in social enterprise can often just keep pushing even when stress keeps accumulating. Who can blame us? Not only does it often work (at least in the short term), but the world also needs social enterprise more than ever.

Still, it's important to address chronic stress and resist the narrative that we can "just keep pushing." The better we understand the sources of chronic stress and its particular signs, the more quickly we can address it before we reach a point of overwhelm or burnout.

## Sources of chronic stress

There can be numerous sources of chronic stress in our lives. In fact, a number of items on this list can be pretty manageable for a short period of time. However, many of them tend to have a longer duration.

- Excessive workload
- Competing demands & priorities
- Personal finances & housing
- Funding uncertainty
- Travel
- Feeling under-appreciated
- Conflict with colleagues
- Stressed colleagues
- Family—chronic illness or special needs



Journal, discuss, or reflect: Do any of these challenges resonate with you right now?



# Pandemic-related chronic stress

Especially as what many initially thought would be a short term situation of social distancing in response to COVID-19 turns into a very long term situation, these adjustments and challenges have **entered the realm of chronic stress**. For a point of reference, studies of past epidemics teach us that it really only takes about 10 days of self-isolation to start experiencing prolonged stress effects. If we are stressed continually for too long then we start to suffer. Many of us are at this point now, or at least people we are close to are wrestling with this kind of stress.

Here are some forms of pandemic-related chronic stress that you may identify in yourself or others:



Anxiety, worry, or panic  
Overwhelm, helplessness



Frustration, anger, irritability  
Impatience with self or others



Social withdrawal  
Sadness and loneliness



Difficulty concentrating  
Increased boredom  
Lost of interest



Increased sensitivity to physical sensations  
Hypervigilance to health for ourselves and others



Journal, discuss, or reflect: In what ways have you seen these signs play out in yourself, your home, or your community?



# Traumatic & Vicarious Stress

While this workbook does not dive deep into these two additional forms of stress, it is important to be aware of them in our work as social entrepreneurs. A pandemic can create traumatic stress on top of chronic stress. For example, many people are experiencing the death of loved ones and/or have a reasonable fear of grave illness or death themselves.

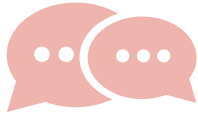
Vicarious stress is another type of stress that can accumulate over time like chronic stress. The difference is that it is a kind of combination between chronic and traumatic stress. When we are exposed to intense stress or trauma in other people's lives, it affects us too.

	Traumatic stress	Vicarious stress
sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exposure to intense events (such as death, injury, crisis)</li><li>• Examples: natural disasters, abuse, violence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exposure to the suffering of others</li><li>• Hearing stories from those who suffer</li></ul>
common responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intrusive worries, memories, and/or dreams</li><li>• Feeling on guard and hypervigilant</li><li>• Persistent negative thoughts and feelings</li><li>• Avoidance of trauma reminders</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling overly responsible and burdened</li><li>• Feeling guilty</li><li>• Questioning purpose of our work</li><li>• Compassion fatigue</li></ul>



Please refer to the following resources as starting points to better understand traumatic stress and vicarious stress:

- [Traumatic stress](#)
- [Vicarious stress](#)



# Reflect & Discuss

Now that you've learned about the basic sources and signs of stress, we encourage you to take some time to reflect on these themes and discuss them with a friend. Here are some questions to guide you.

- What are the greatest sources of stress for you?
- What elements have become more challenging recently?
- What is your most noticeable stress reaction?



Use the space below to write or draw your thoughts:



# Let's talk about **resilience**.

Resilience is a buzzword these days. We want raise resilient kids, build resilient businesses, and foster resilient communities. But how do we define this quality, particularly as it relates to the many stressors across our work and our daily lives?

Here's the definition we use:

Resilience is the ability to learn, adapt, and grow in meaningful ways following life's challenges.

When it comes to resilience, we are all on a lifelong journey. Each challenge gives us the opportunity to build that ability to respond with a willingness to learn, adapt, and grow. So how do we build this muscle on a regular basis so that we *can* be resilient when stressors abound?

## 3 keys to building resilience



Finding meaning and purpose



Strong personal practices



Social support and connection





# Finding meaning & purpose

**Why it matters:** Meaning motivates truly rewarding & resilient action.

**How to begin:** Think about your ideal day working in your role, and answer the questions below through expressive writing. Discuss your responses with others, and revisit your reflections regularly to keep your deepest commitments front and center.

Why did you choose this work? Who do you want to offer your best to?

What do you love about your work? What frustrates you or challenges you?

What aspects of this work reflect your highest self?

What small actions can you take today that align with your answers above?

## **More resources:**

For inspiration of different personal core values that might provide meaning and purpose to your work use this [Values Checklist](#).

We are more than our work. Try using this [Values Questionnaire](#) to gain some clarity around the core values that give meaning and purpose in different domains of your life.

Values come alive with action. Take a big picture look at committed action with this [worksheet](#) and lay out the [visual "choice point"](#) to pursue your valued direction.



# Strong personal practices

**Why it matters:** Personal practices turn our core values into committed action. They boost our physical and emotional strength, giving us the ability to bounce back from stress.

**How to begin:** Commit to just one or two of these practices for 30 days. Invite your family, friends, or team to keep you accountable.

## **Go on a brisk walk daily, aiming for 30 minutes total.**

Leading experts recommend that you aim for 30 minutes per day in total of physical activity. This activity should be at about the effort level of walking quickly when you are behind schedule. They also recommend that you aim for 3 different 10 minute chunks if it doesn't feel like you have 30 minutes. When we chunk it, we are more likely to at least get the first 10 minutes in which can have dramatic differences over the course of our lives. Of course, more effortful exercise is beneficial, but if you are struggling, start small!

## **Brief, simple yoga or stretching.**

Yoga is a great way to release muscle tension, build strength, and connect our mind and body. Not only does it integrate the practices of physical training with mental focus, but it also helps us to appreciate our bodies and develop a deeper attitude of self-care and awareness. If you're looking for friendly, free yoga training at home, we recommend these very approachable videos by [Yoga with Adriene](#).

## **Pause for deep breathing throughout the day to recalibrate your body.**

Breathing seems so simple that we can hardly call it a practice – but it can be a powerful tool especially when we're stressed or anxious. When we breathe, the increase of oxygen in our blood slows our heart and tells our brain that our body is safe. In other words, we can "trick" ourselves into experiencing physical calm in the midst of crisis simply by taking several slow breaths.

## **Commit to sleeping 7-8 hours per night.**

We all know that we should sleep more, but we often neglect this when we have too much to do. The best way around this is to consider the increased efficiency of our mind and body when we have had sufficient rest. The extra hours of sleep are worth the improvement in performance, not to mention your long-term health. Need a resource? Try [The Sleep Revolution](#).



# More personal practices

## **Try mindfulness meditation 1-2 times a day**

Mindfulness has become a popular word that is often misunderstood. Mindfulness is not simply a way to relax (although sometimes it has that side-effect). Instead, using apps such as [Headspace](#) or utilizing free recordings from places like [UCLA](#) can help us to train our attention and change our brains and bodies at a fundamental level. Consistent mindfulness meditation practiced over a few months rewires our brain to boost our default network and even changes how our genetics are expressed.

## **Develop a gratitude practice: write down 3 things you're grateful for**

While simple, there is overwhelming evidence that gratitude can play a role in our overall wellbeing. To cement this practice, dedicate a notebook to writing down 3 things you are grateful for every evening. Make sure they are specific to the day, rather than general (e.g., "receiving a kind text from my brother" vs. "family"). The more detailed you can be, the better.

## **Use spiritual practices to connect to purpose in the midst of stress**

Research shows us that spiritual practices such as prayer can enhance our wellbeing. Regardless of your tradition, you can leverage the practice of exploring your concerns and desires through writing or meditation. In this process, release from your own shoulders the burdens that are not yours to carry, including what is beyond your control. This is a time to both acknowledge the challenges you face and experience compassion.

## **Identify and reset your intentions as you transition between activities**

When there are many demands on us from work and personal life, we tend to rush from one obligation to the next without pausing. Integrate a pause between activities by taking 30 seconds to reflect on the following: *What did I appreciate about the last hour that I want to hold onto? What do I want to release? How do I want to show up in this next activity?* If you can, integrate some physical stretching as you do this.



# Social support and connection

**Why it matters:** Social support improves the brain's ability to cope with stress and recover from its impact. Amazingly, this is true whether giving or receiving.

**How to begin:** To build effective social support and connection, these questions may help you develop quality relationships beyond clichés.

## **Priorities:**

What relationships are most important to me, and how can I nourish those relationships today?

## **Vulnerability:**

Do I ask for help when I need it?  
Who can I seek support from today?

## **Service:**

Who can I meaningfully encourage today? What will lift their spirits?

## **Boundaries:**

When might I be offering too much support to others? What boundary could I experiment with today?



# Reflect & Commit

Now that you've learned about 3 keys to building resilience and have some ideas at your fingertips, it is time to reflect on what you need most and make a commitment to move forward. Remember that while these concepts and actions are simple, they can also be very impactful when implemented with consistency.



Use the space below to write or draw your reflections:

1) Which aspect of resilience will you focus on this week?

2) Which 1-2 practices do you plan to try?

3) Who will you invite to keep you accountable?



## a final word from the authors

An endeavor as important as social change is almost always, by definition, fraught with difficulty. As we stand for inclusion, justice, peace, opportunity, and a better future, we place ourselves in the uncertain space between the world as it is and what we can create together. In this space, it is easy to see ourselves as small and insignificant while also bearing immense burdens that come from the very systems and assumptions we hope to transform. Do not allow this to lead you to neglect yourself, particularly as it pertains to stress. We need you in this for however long you feel called to it. We hope you will choose to build resilience for the sake of yourself, your family, and your community, and that you will invite others into your resilience practices too. While you do, we'll cheer you on and accompany you, because we go far when we go together.

*Daisy & Aaron*

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[admin@startbrio.org](mailto:admin@startbrio.org)