Maintaining Customer Service

The Importance of Stress Management and Positive Attitudes

Participant Handouts
Version 1.1

Developed by the Southwest Institute for Family & Child Advocacy
NMSU School of Social Work
in collaboration with CYFD Protective Services

Acknowledgments

The Stress Management Curriculum has been adapted and modified from the Cultivating Customer Service Curriculum created by the National Resource Center for Retention and Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Parents at Adopt US Kids.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how stress personally affects people and its impact on customer service.

2. Understand how negative customer interactions can add to stress.

3. Employ stress management strategies to minimize effects of stress.

4. Seek appropriate help to manage stress and prevent burnout.

5. Understand the critical importance of attitude in providing both internal and external customer service.

6. Practice welcoming and helpful behaviors in interactions with customers.

7. Treat customers with kindness and respect in person and on the telephone.

8. Maintain professional image and demeanor in the workplace and in the field.

Agenda

- Introductions

- Turnover of Families and Stress

- Stress and Distress

- Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- Break

- Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge

- The Magic of a Smile and Personal Engagement

- Managing Your Own Stress

Four Categories of Stress

Survival Stress	**Internally Generated Stress**
Occurs in cases where survival and or health are threatened, when one is put under pressure, or when one experiences some unpleasant or challenging event Can include a reliving of survival situation such as in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	Can come from anxious worrying about events beyond one's control, from a tense and hurried approach to life or from relationship problems caused by one's behavior Can be related to one's history or genetic disposition
Environmental and Job Stress	**Fatigue and Overwork**
Stress caused by one's living or working environment; causes of stress include noise, crowding, pollution, untidiness, dirt or other distractions Needs and demands of family members such as health issues, child disciplinary issues, or conflict with one's spouse	This type of stress builds up over long periods of time; can occur when one tries to achieve too much in too little time without effective organizational and time management strategies Can occur when there is prolonged overwork and not enough time out for rest, reflection and recreation

How Stress Can Affect a Person

Body & Brain	Emotions & Feelings	Behavior
Heart races, high blood pressures	Promotes negative thinking; may isolate and withdraw	Over or under-eat; can't sleep or sleeps too much
Backaches, headaches, tightness in back and neck	Feel useless and not effective Fragile and volatile emotions; damages self-confidence	May become a martyr; ignore personal needs
Fatigue; feelings of being in a fog; lowered energy	Easily angered, argumentative; turns challenges into threats	Make inappropriate or inconsistent decisions; inability to make decisions or set priorities; poor judgment
Reduces fine motor control	Reduces enjoyment or humor	Excessive drug or alcohol use
Loss or gain in appetite	Rigid and inflexible	Take it out on others; being critical and judgmental
Obsessive thinking or negative self-talk; difficulty concentrating	Less tolerance, clouds judgment and narrows attention span	Become sarcastic or cynical; erodes idealism, promotes risky behaviors

Case Study: Sandra

Sandra has been a foster care worker for the last five years. She enjoys the fast paced work of recruiting and studying foster families. She is very proud of the fact that she has been involved in several successful campaigns to recruit families for the older, waiting children that the organization serves. She prides herself on her work ethic and has always had a good reputation with foster parents as being timely and competent. Sandra lives in the community that she recruits and studies families in and it is not unusual for her to run into them outside the office. Sandra knows that her positive attitude and work ethic is important to the organization's reputation in the community. Recently however, Sandra has not been feeling so positive about her job. Ever since there has been an unfilled vacancy in her unit she has been feeling overworked and underappreciated. Her stress on the job is compounded by the fact that her daughter has recently been diagnosed with a learning disability. With so much on her mind, Sandra has been having trouble sleeping.

This morning Sandra is rushing to work from a meeting at her daughter's school. She knows she is going to be late for supervision and she hates to be late. Sandra gets to the meeting and her supervisor makes a comment about the time. In the meeting Sandra complains about the back log of families waiting to be studied. Her supervisor tells her that they were having a hard time hiring another foster care position and that it could be several months before the vacancy would be filled. She suggests that Sandra try to be more efficient with her time. Sandra leaves her supervisor feeling upset and overwhelmed. She knows that the organization will end up losing families that they desperately need if they are left to wait too long to be studied.

Sandra's phone is ringing as she reaches her office. When she takes the call, Mrs. Lott is on the line. Tamara and Henry Lott are a family who Sandra recruited to foster sibling groups. They have the potential to be a great resource for the organization, but they are on Sandra's backlog of families waiting to be studied. Sandra tenses when she hears Mrs. Lott's voice. Mrs. Lott is of course asking for the third time this month when they might expect to have their study started. Sandra interrupts to say: "Mrs. Lott, it isn't going to do any good for you to keep calling me. I told you last week that I would call you when I get some time. I am just one person and there are a line of families waiting to be studied who are in front of you! If you have a problem with this, I suggest you call my supervisor."

Case Study: Sadie

Sadie is a unit secretary for a very busy child welfare organization. She acts as the support person for Bill, the unit manager, and for eight foster care workers. Her job is fast paced and requires a host of skills that Sadie has had to develop over the six months that she has been working on the unit. Before coming to the organization, Sadie was a secretary at her church, which was a much quieter and slower paced environment. Bill took a chance when he hired Sadie, but he has been pleased with her performance. She has become very skilled at the technical aspects of her job by seeking out information from other more experienced support staff as well as through her determination to work at something until she has it right.

Even though this type of work environment is new for Sadie, she has adapted well. The more experienced staff have taken her under their wing and she has a winning personality. She has learned how to manage the different work styles and personalities of nine staff people. She is also very good with the foster parents who call with an emergency. She goes all out for them. Sadie works very hard to be liked by everyone.

At 22-years-of-age, Sadie is a single mother with two small children. She lives with her mother and her 2-year-old daughter and 4-year old son are in day care. This week Sadie's daughter is sick for the third time this month and the day care has called her to pick her up. Sadie was able to get her sister to take care of the baby, but that means that she has wasted valuable time talking to the day care and calling family member for help during a day that has one deadline after another. She is feeling the pressure and to top it all off she thinks she is getting the baby's cold. No wonder she is sick, she has been up with the baby all night at least a dozen times in the last month and she has taken to skipping lunch to meet her work dead lines. She is exhausted!

Just as she hangs up the phone with her sister, Bill comes in to pick up his quarterly report for the director's meeting the next day. When Sadie tells him that she needs a bit more time to format the changes, he reacts with impatience. He reminds Sadie that the director's meeting is important and his boss wants to review the report prior to the meeting. He points out that it is already 4:30PM and tells her she has 30-minutes to have the report ready to go. Just as she gets to work on making the final changes to Bill's report, Jason comes in with a last minute request for help with a court report that is due in the morning. Sadie looks up from her computer and bursts into tears.

Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills of Good Customer Service

Attitudes	Knowledge and Skills
• *"We exist to serve. It's a pleasure to help."* • *Natural, matter of fact* • *Smile* • *Respect* • *Lack of defensiveness* • *Reliable* • *Promise-keeper* • *Flexibility; its o.k. to change your mind* • *Honesty* • *Going beyond what is asked for* • *Quick response* • *Advocacy* • *Perseverance*	• *Good listening skills; really hearing more than just the words (hearing emotions, needs, etc.)* • *Values infused and reinforced throughout the organization* • *Empathy* • *Communication skills* • *Problem solving skills* • *Cultural competence skills* • *Information and tools at hand to provide a good helpful response* • *Well-trained in the tools and information* • *Latitude to problem solve* • *Knowledge of mission and how their work fits into it* • *Self awareness and self-knowledge* • *Understanding customer motivations*

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Positive Attitudes Result In Success
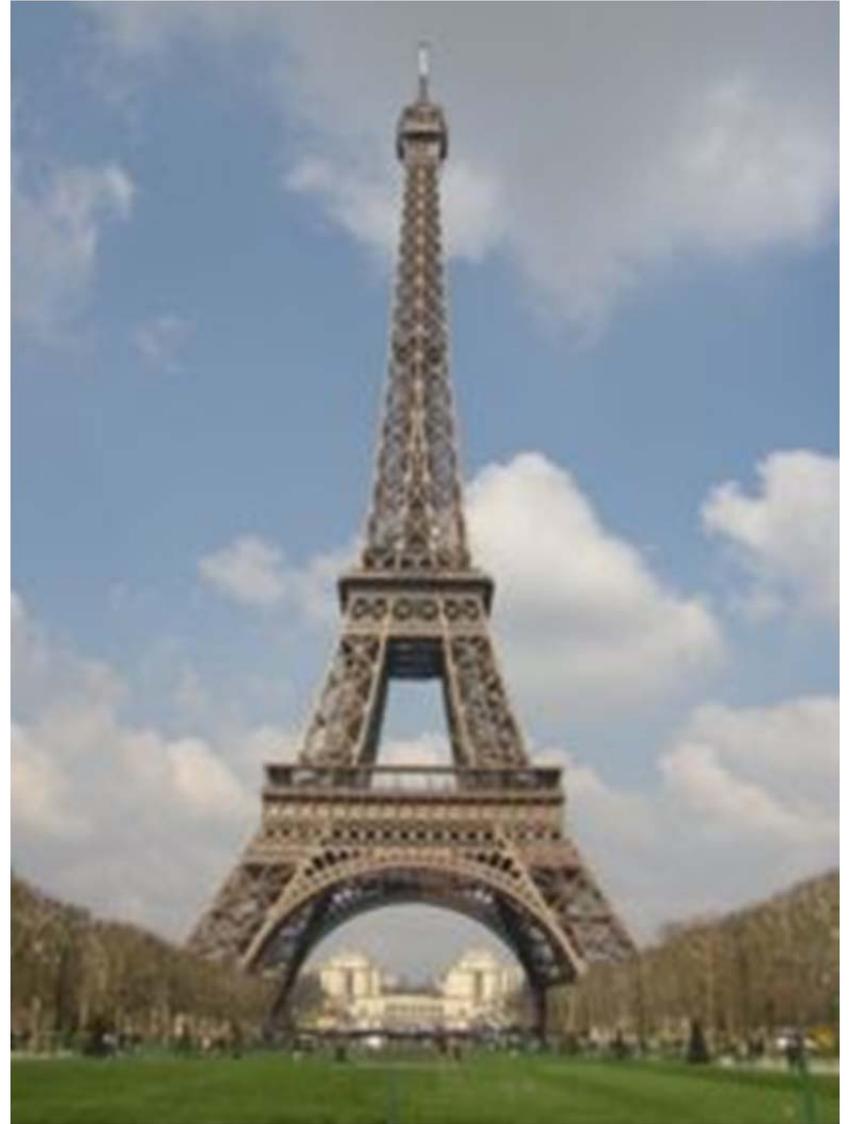
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Telephone Responsiveness Worksheet

What It Means	Our Organization's Expectation	What We Can Do
1. Answer the phone responsively ➤ Do I answer the phone immediately? ➤ Do I use proper protocol in answering the phone? ➤ Can people hear the smile in my voice? ➤ Do I listen with complete attention? ➤ Do I avoid using jargon and acronyms? ➤ If I have to put someone on hold, do I do it properly and with respect?		
2. Help the caller get what they need: ➤ Do I show that I care? ➤ Do I refrain from passing people around when they need help? ➤ Do I ask open questions to further clarify the situation? ➤ Am I part of the solution, not part of the problem? ➤ If I can't help the caller, do I find someone who can? ➤ Do I make a plan with them to call back as soon as I have an answer?		
3. Go one step further ➤ Do I ask if there is something else that I can help with? ➤ Do I provide needed information, even when it's not asked for? ➤ Do I communicate to others in the organization who need to know about the call?		
4. Return calls responsively ➤ Do I really care? ➤ Does my voice message show I care? ➤ Do I have a personal standard for returning calls? ➤ Do I communicate my personal standards and stick by them with families? ➤ Do I give an alternative way for getting their immediate needs met?		

Service with a Smile: Ways to Be Hospitable and Individualize People

Dos	Don'ts
• Ask open-ended questions (ex. how can I be most helpful to you today?) • Ask questions to welcome someone new (ex. is this the first time you have called or visited the organization? Can I help you find your way?) • Find something in common (ex. I see from your bag you shop at Wal-Mart? How do you navigate the construction around there?) • Direct their attention (ex. I see you have a little one with you, our play area is just off to the right and we have a volunteer there who can help you out, if you're interested.) • Offer compliments (that is a very cool stroller, how did you ever find it?) • Be appropriate (if someone is going through a personal tragedy or under stress, be serious and not too smiley-faced)	• Bring up political or controversial topics • Don't invade personal space (especially be sensitive to cultural differences)

Coping Strategies for Handling Distress

Healthy	Unhealthy
Nurture collegial and cross-functional relationships	Isolate yourself from others in the organization, e.g. always eat alone
Take advantage of learning opportunities	Pass up training because you are too busy to attend
Make time to recognize and celebrate accomplishments and personal milestones	Ascribe to the theory that taking time to "affirm" and "play" detracts from the workplace
Set appropriate boundaries regarding accessibility to others	Have an "open door" policy that doesn't allow some uninterrupted time each day
Set up and follow through on regularly scheduled meetings with your supervisor	Skip regular supervisory meetings because you are too busy to take time away from your job
Create and maintain a balance between work and your personal life	Always come into work early and stay late to exemplify your work ethic to others
Plan ahead and anticipate when you will need help and ask for it	Continue to stay in crisis mode, until you are exhausted

The Things I Will Do to Take Better Care of Myself

Day-to-Day Coping Strategies	What I can do by next week

1. My first step will be to:

2. I will ask for help from _____ to:

3. I will know that I am making progress by:

4. I will reward myself by: