

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry
Stress Personalities
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA June 2022

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting:

“Here, today, in this place and with these people,
May we listen so that we can hear;
May we hear so that we can feel;
May we feel so that we can know; and
May we know so that we can change ourselves and this world.
May this chalice we light,
Light our Way.” - *Erik Walker Wikstrom*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share.

Topic: Stress Personalities

Who are you? Now, who are you under STRESS?

Obviously, you are essentially the same, but stressful situations can make you FEEL like an entirely different person.

Stress can push all of our buttons at the same time, exacerbating vulnerabilities that might otherwise be largely within our control.

Faced with stressors, we develop both conscious and unconscious reactions to cope. And while some of those work for us, others can cause us to behave in ways that ultimately aren't useful ... leaving us wishing we'd chosen a different path.

Researchers have identified a number of different patterns of “stress personalities,” ways in which people behave differently when the heat is on:

Some people *internalize*. Others *over-react*. Some become *less flexible* or *push harder* or *are more critical of themselves and others*.

There are *problem-solvers*, *minimizers*, *collaborators*, and those who just *deny there's a problem*. Some folks *run away*, literally or metaphorically, or *find another way to avoid* the situation.

Perhaps you've recognized some of these stress personalities emerging in yourself or in the people around you: friends, family or colleagues.

Today, we make space to take a look at these patterns. To slow down, take a breath, and recognize that even in stressful situations, we have the

freedom and ability to choose the best responses, in the best possible order.

We can follow the steps we teach our children: “Wait... Watch... Words.”

“Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response TO what happens. And RESPONSE is something we can choose.” - *Maureen Killoran*

“I’m not suggesting you deny or suppress your emotions, but just discover for yourself what it takes for you to handle your emotions and stay balanced.” - *Wendy Hearn*

“The truth is that stress doesn’t come from your boss, your kids, your spouse, traffic jams, health challenges, or other circumstances. It comes from your thoughts about these circumstances.” – *Andrew J. Bernstein*

“Within you, there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself.” – *Hermann Hesse*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- When you were a child, what kinds of examples did you see around you with regard to handling stress, difficult situations, or big emotions? What was your take-away?
- When you are under stress, how do you tend to respond?
- What kind of things might affect which of (or whether) your stress personalities will appear?
- How do you respond to stress personalities you have observed in the people around you?
- Can you find any thought or behavior patterns of your own that might ultimately increase your stress?
- Have you found any techniques for helping yourself not fall into unhelpful stress responses?

Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words “We must have a pie. Stress cannot exist in the presence of a pie.” - *David Mamet*