The Stress Continuum

Personal reactions to increased complexities fall on a continuum. You may feel little to no impact, or you may feel an increased stress response. When stress is ongoing or severe, this can lead to severe distress, burnout, or traumatic responses. Personal experiences, support systems, coping mechanisms, external stressors, early life experiences, and the length of time we have felt increased stress can contribute to where we fall on the continuum of reactions. Expect that where you are on this continuum can change. It’s also important to remember that people will react differently to the same situation, and that is ok.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thriving</th>
<th>Surviving</th>
<th>Struggling</th>
<th>In Crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I got this.”</td>
<td>“Something isn’t right.”</td>
<td>“I can’t keep this up.”</td>
<td>“I can’t survive this.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thriving**
- Calm and steady with minor mood fluctuations
- Able to take things in stride
- Consistent performance
- Able to take feedback and to adjust to changes of plans
- Able to focus
- Able to communicate effectively
- Normal sleep patterns and appetite

**Surviving**
- Nervousness, sadness, increased mood fluctuations
- Inconsistent performance
- More easily overwhelmed or irritated
- Increased need for control and difficulty adjusting to changes
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Activities and relationships you used to enjoy seem less interesting or even stressful
- Muscle tension, low energy, headaches

**Struggling**
- Persistent fear, panic, anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness
- Exhaustion
- Poor performance and difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Avoiding interaction with coworkers, family, and friends
- Fatigue, aches and pains
- Restless, disturbed sleep
- Self-medicating with substances, food, or other numbing activities

**In Crisis**
- Disabling distress and loss of function
- Panic attacks
- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Unable to fall or stay asleep
- Intrusive thoughts
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Easily enraged or aggressive
- Careless mistakes and inability to focus
- Feeling numb, lost, or out of control
- Withdrawal from relationships
- Dependence on substances, food, or other numbing activities to cope

For resources in addressing stress, moral distress, trauma responses, and burnout, visit: cohcwcovidsupport.org