HEART & SOUL CURRICULUM

SESSION 5:

BUILDING SOUL POWER

Stress Relief



BUILDING SOUL POWER:

Stress Relief

Stress is a normal part of life. Everyone feels stressed at different times. Work, family, health, and money can all create stress. While a small amount of stress can sometimes help us get things done, too much stress over time can hurt our health and well-being.

Signs of stress. Stress can affect how you feel, think, and act. It can also affect your body. Signs of stress may include feeling worried, angry, tired, overwhelmed, or unable to focus. Stress can also cause headaches, muscle tension, trouble sleeping, or changes in eating habits. When stress continues for a long time, it can make it harder to take care of yourself and stay healthy. It can damage the heart and brain and may be linked to high blood pressure.

Learning to spot stress is the first step. Paying attention to how your body and mind respond to something can help you notice when you need to slow down, take a break, or ask for help. Everyone responds to stress differently. It is important to understand what stress looks like for you.

Managing stress effectively. When stress appears, there are healthy ways to manage it, take care of ourselves, and build our soul power:

- **Habits and practices** like getting enough sleep, staying physically active, eating healthy foods, taking deep breaths, spending time outside, listening to music, praying, journaling, doing something you enjoy, or talking with someone you trust.
- **People** around us can also make a difference. Support from family, friends, and faith communities can help us feel less alone when life becomes difficult. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Knowing when to reach out and having people to count on are important parts of caring for your health.
- **Faith** can also bring hope and strength during stressful times. Prayer, scripture, worship, and time with others can help us slow down, find peace, and remember that we do not have to carry every burden alone.

Also, check out the Sleep and Stress Management handout in the Supporting Healthy Weight Learning and Action Guide. It is an excellent tool with tips for managing stress.

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Interactive Activity

Fill in the **Stress Relief Toolbox** worksheet, identifying what works for you before, during, and after stressful situations. You can continue to refer to this toolbox of reminders and ideas when stress hits.



Heart & Soul in Action

There are opportunities to move this learning into collective action.

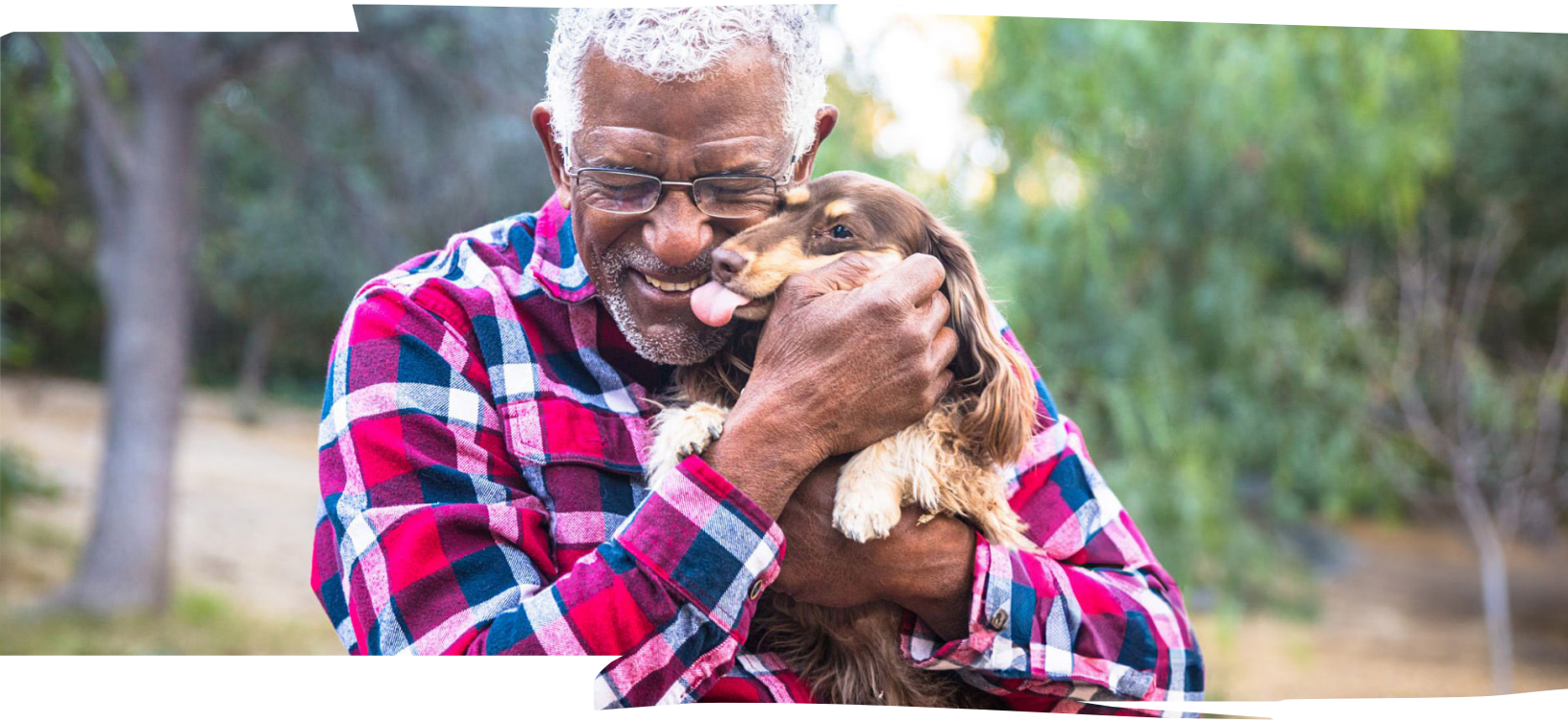
Actions in your faith community:

- Faith communities can support healthy ways to manage stress by creating spaces where people feel welcome, supported, and comfortable asking for help. Congregations can offer opportunities for prayer, fellowship, exercise, reflection, and connection. They can also help members find additional support when needed. Here are options ministries can consider for group activities.

Option 1: Stress-Relief Gathering	Option 2: Peer Support Circle
Host a member-led stress-relief event featuring several short activities: • Guided breathing • Gentle movement • Music • Creative activity • Healthy refreshments	Set up a regular social group where members can: • Check in about well-being. • Share healthy coping habits. • Encourage one another.

Advocacy for community health: If you or a family member needs support managing stress, speak with your doctor or a mental health professional.

- To help you plan for a health appointment, see the ACE Your Health Literacy Toolkit - Personal Advocacy in the Exam Room for information and tips. These tips apply to mental health care as well.



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Session Overview & Learning Goals

In this session, participants will explore what stress looks like and how it feels in their own bodies and lives. They will identify personal stressors, recognize healthy and unhealthy coping habits, and create a toolbox of personal stress relief practices, actions, and ideas they can refer to as needed.

The session also emphasizes the role of a support system and safe spaces. Participants will identify ways to build their "soul power"—the people, communities, and resources that help them recover, feel secure, and handle difficult moments.

By the end of this session, the goal is that participants will:

- Identify personal signs, triggers, and sources of stress.
- Choose healthy coping habits that build emotional strength.
- Develop a list of stress-relief tools.

Facilitator Checklist

Before the session:

- ☐ Review the Building Soul Power session content and facilitator guide.
- ☐ Print the Stress Relief Toolbox worksheet.
- ☐ Identify appropriate local/community support resources to have ready to share if needed.
- ☐ Review the organization's guidance on how to respond if a participant feels serious emotional discomfort or is having a mental health crisis.

Discussion Questions

During the session, you might ask:

- What does stress look like for you?
- How does your body tell you that you're stressed?
- What situations tend to increase your stress?
- How do you know you need a break?
- What helps you calm down when you're overwhelmed?
- Which stress-relief habits work for you?
- What coping habits feel good in the moment but don't help in the long run?
- What is one healthy habit you'd like to stick with?
- Who can you turn to when you're having a difficult time?
- What makes a person feel supported?
- What does a healthy, safe space look like?

Interactive Activity

Ask participants to create a **Stress Relief Toolbox** to use before, during, and after stressful situations. Have the worksheet ready to pass out and complete during the session.

The toolbox is divided into five parts:

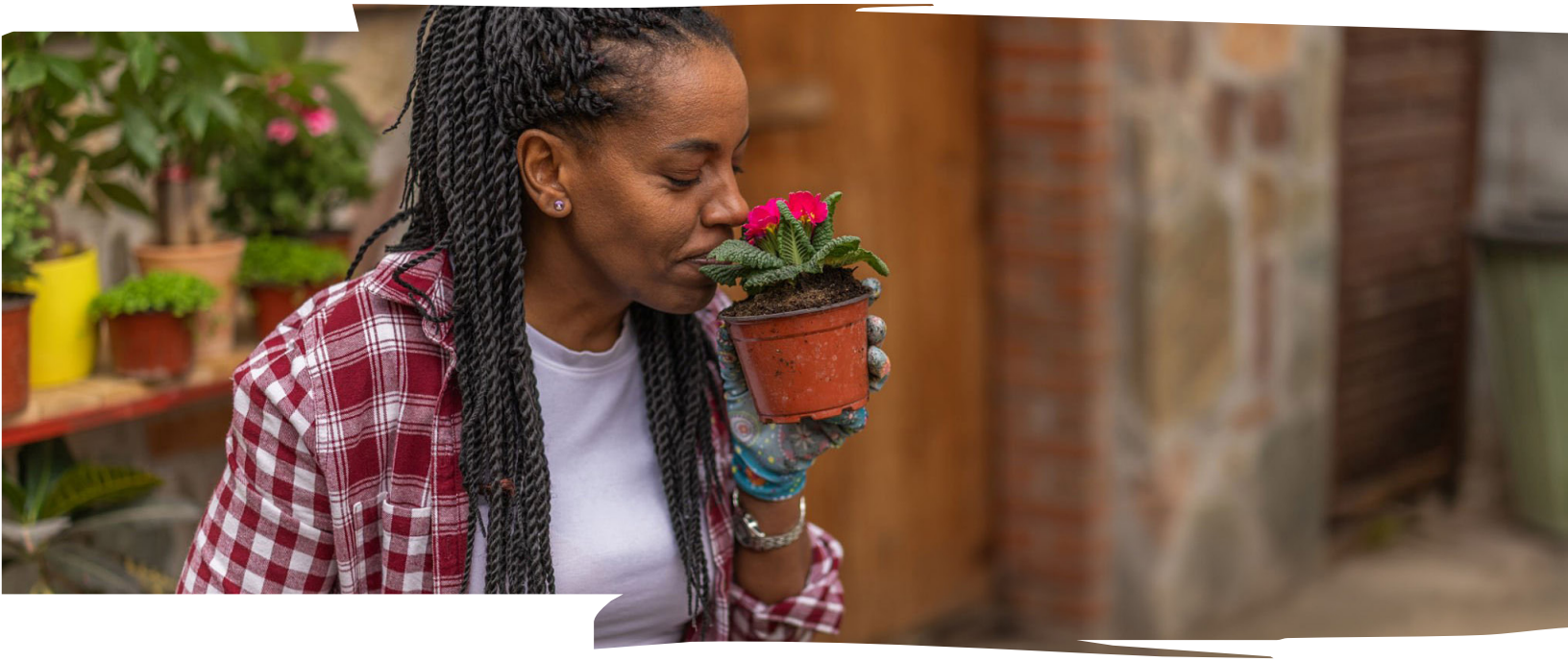
1. Know My Stress
2. Calm My Body
3. Clear My Mind
4. Connect & Recharge
5. My Go-To Prescription for Stress

Heart & Soul in Action

Let participants know that there are opportunities for this group and faith community to move into deeper learning, personal growth, and collective action on these health topics.

Point out the recommended **action steps** to take in the faith community and the tool for further learning and **community advocacy** to review and consider.

- Plan opportunities to support healthy stress management in the faith community by creating a welcoming, supportive space where people can ask for help and find fellowship, reflection, and connection.
- Seek health or mental health care if you or a loved one needs support managing stress; refer to our ACE Your Health Literacy Toolkit - Personal Advocacy in the Exam Room information and tips before your appointment.



Communication Templates

For a Bulletin/Flyer

Building Soul Power: Stress Relief
Join us for a much-needed session on how to spot stress and find healthy ways to recharge. We'll learn about personal coping habits and explore activities we can do together to relieve stress and build a safe, secure, welcoming spiritual home.

Let's start with a Stress Relief Toolbox for everyday life.

Come ready to reflect, connect, and heal. Take care of your whole self—heart, body, mind, and soul.

[add date, time, location]

For a Weekly Email

This week, we're focusing on **Stress Relief** as part of our Healthy Five journey.

Everyone feels stressed at some point. That's normal. But dealing with long-term stress is not healthy, and we all need ways to manage it and to be whole.

In the **Building Soul Power: Stress Relief** session, we learn how our bodies and minds respond to stress and how to recover and heal.

Join us and complete your Stress Relief Toolbox with your Go-To Stress Prescription. Our superpower is building a support circle and finding peace and strength in a faith community!

[add date, time, location]



STRESS RELIEF TOOLBOX

This is a personal reflection tool, not a clinical test. Read each sentence and mark the response that matches where you are right now and what might help.

Complete all five sections of this worksheet to create a toolbox of actions and ideas you can use and refer to before, during, and after stressful situations.

The toolbox is divided into five parts:

1. Know My Stress
2. Calm My Body
3. Clear My Mind
4. Connect & Recharge
5. My Go-To Prescription for Stress

1. Know My Stress

My common stress triggers:

My early warning signs:

When I'm stressed, I tend to::

2. Calm My Body

Things that help me physically reset:

- ☐ Deep breathing
- ☐ Stretching
- ☐ Walking/movement
- ☐ Resting
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Time outside
- ☐ Other_____

3. Clear My Mind

Things that help me physically reset:

- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Talking to someone
- ☐ Taking a break
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Meditation, prayer, reflection
- ☐ Focusing on one thing at a time
- ☐ Positive self-talk

4. Connect & Recharge

People I can reach out to:

_____

Places where I feel supported:

_____

Activities that restore my energy

_____

One thing I can do today:

_____

5. My Go-To Prescription for Stress

When I notice _____

I will try _____ before my stress gets bigger.