***Stress Management Training***

**Session Five: Lecture Script**

***The Complete Breath and Square Breathing***

Breathing is the one important function of our bodies over which we can have voluntary control. We can also choose to leave it to take care of itself automatically. Breathing is a bridge between the conscious and unconscious parts of ourselves. From the day we are born we breathe automatically and unconsciously, yet we can also take a deep breath at will or decide to hold our breath for a while. We automatically breathe from our chests when we are active and working, but we also need to be able to experience the deep abdominal breathing that goes together with peace, quietness and relaxation. When we breathe out, we let go of energy and can experience a feeling of release. When we breathe in, we charge ourselves up with energy, which we associate with a feeling of being in control. *When the natural rhythm of the breath is interrupted by stress, we can develop breathing habits that leave us feeling tense and out of control.*

The close connection that exists between our breathing and our emotional state can give us an important opportunity to influence the effect of stress upon us. Deeper, regular breathing can make us feel much calmer and more relaxed. It should be remembered, however, most people who practise Stress Management Training would greatly prefer to cope with these feelings for a short period than to continue living with the disadvantages of long-term stress.

*Deeper, regular breathing slows down the heart rate and reduces sympathetic nervous activity. In practice, this means that the Fight or Flight Syndrome is far less likely to be unnecessarily activated when we are breathing deeply.* In order to begin to learn how to breathe more deeply, experts recommend that we concentrate on breathing out rather than on breathing in, and especially concentrate on the pause between the breaths, that we learned about in Session Three. If we breathe out properly, that is, completely, the quality of the breathing-in that follows will be greatly improved. Research shows that the two most important elements in learning a better breathing pattern, are, increased abdominal breathing, and slowing down the rate of breathing, that is, reducing the number of breathing cycles per minute.

The Stress Management breathing exercises on your audio file will help you to do this in the following ways: ***The Exercise for the Complete Breath*** w*ill allow you to increase your abdominal breathing*. The ***Square Breathing Exercise*** *will help enable you to slow down the rate of your breathing*, *as will the* ***Trust of your Breath Exercise*** that you learned in Session Three.

One of the easiest ways to improve our breathing patterns is to use ‘**Triggers’.** ‘Triggers’ are a device which we use to remind us to do something, in this case to remind us to use the Complete Breath and Square Breathing Exercises. The coloured bits of paper provided will act as the ‘triggers’ and will help you to change your breathing habits throughout your daily life. This is how they work: If you wear a watch you can tear off a small piece of one of the labels and stick it onto the centre of your watch. Every time you look at your watch and see this label, you should take one Complete breath. This will greatly increase the number of deep breaths which you take every day. If you don’t wear a watch, try putting a label on a clock or on the television and using that to remind you to take a Complete Breath; begin by breathing out as far as possible. ***Breathing out fully is the key to better breathing.***

The other sticky labels can be placed where you will see them often. Good places to put them on are on the telephone at work or at home, in your car, or around the house. The fridge, over the sink, on a mirror, on a light switch, are all useful household places for ‘triggers’. Every time you catch sight of the sticky-label ‘trigger’, you should practise the Square Breathing Exercise three times. This will help you to relax at many intervals during your day, and in doing so will help to teach you better breathing habits. Using ‘triggers’ enables you to get on with your life without having to continually think about your breathing. Yet you can manage to make significant changes in your breathing habits, thereby contributing greatly to a reduction in stress and tension.

When you have been using these ‘triggers’ for a time, you will find you no longer need to use them, as good breathing habits become ‘second nature’.