***Stress Management Training***

Session two: Lecture Script

***Muscular Tension and Relaxation Training***

Long-term stress can contribute to the development of muscular tension. The parts of the body where such tension is generally held are the neck, the upper back, the jaw, and the shoulders. This tension can cause chronic muscle pain, tension, headaches, sleeplessness and irritability. Muscular tension also leads to chronic fatigue; holding muscles in a tense position is actually very hard work.

These habits of tension are acquired over many years of reacting to stress. When we feel under threat, we tense our muscles for fight or flight. When there is no danger to respond to, our bodies can’t act, they can only react to the alarm signal, causing our muscles to remain tense for long periods of time. *Such habits of muscular tension can, with practise, be reversed*. The physical effects that accompany relaxation are opposite to those that are characteristic of stress. Thus, when your body is relaxed, you are much less likely to feel the effects of stressful situations. Muscular relaxation is the first intervention we can make in the stress spiral.

Learning to relax is the same as learning any other skill, it needs disciplined and regular practice. The relaxation exercises presented in the course should be practised for at least half an hour every day for the duration of the Course, and probably for several months after the Training has been completed. At first, you may find it difficult to relax. Some people worry about succeeding with relaxation and may find themselves trying too hard. For others, concentration can be an initial problem. You may find that you fall asleep during the exercises.

There may be odd physical sensations such as tingling or shaking, and often the first sign that you are beginning to relax is your stomach rumbling. Also, if you have been holding high levels of tension, this can lead to a habit of rigid control, which may make you fear the loss of this control when you begin to relax. Relaxation can also cause old hurts, which may have contributed to high levels of stress, to rise to the surface again. However, the more you practise the Stress Management Relaxation Exercises, the better you will feel. Remember, it is up to you to decide, how much, or how little tension, you are ready to let go of, each time you practise a relaxation exercise.

When you practise the exercises at home, make sure you have half an hour free when you won’t be disturbed. With regular practise, you will find the exercises become easier to do and you will find that you are able to concentrate better. *After several days of regular practice of both Passive Progressive Relaxation and Active Progressive Relaxation Exercises, you will find that you beginning to learn these exercises ‘off by heart’. Once this occurs, you will be able to use these exercises as skills to enable you to cope with the stresses of your daily life.*

In Stress Management training, just doing the Exercise, either in the class or at home, is not enough. *You must also train yourself to use the relaxation skills which you have learned, before, during, and after, any situation that causes you stress.* This course will provide you with a range of such skills. The object of the Course is to train you to use these skills to reduce harmful stress in your daily life. You cannot just use these exercises passively, as though they were a tranquiliser. Research shows that a substantial reduction in stress levels will only occur if the individual understands Muscular Relaxation, together with the other skills taught in this Course, are active coping skills to be practised and applied to daily life. A greatly increased control of their stress reaction is an important result for people who successfully complete Stress Management Training. *This result can only occur if the Trainee is an active participant in The Training. You will find, with practise, that you are able to use the exercises to modify your response to stressful events and situations in your daily life.*

When Stress Management Training is used as a coping skill in stressful situations, it not only induces relaxation, but it also develops within the individual, a feeling of being in control. You will find that you develop a feeling of having begun to take responsibility for the management of your own life and health. This will not only lead to greater relaxation and a reduction in stress. You will also find that you have improved self-esteem, you will feel stronger and much more able to tackle both stressful events, and your own response.