

The background of the slide is a light pink color with a repeating geometric pattern of thin, dark pink lines forming various polygons and zig-zags. A large, dark grey rectangular box is centered on the slide, containing the title and author information. A small, solid pink rectangle is positioned at the top center of the dark grey box.

STRESS, HEALTH & COPING

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Lecture overview

What is stress?

How do we respond to stressors?

Models of stress

Introduction to coping

What is stress?



Any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain



Your body's response to anything that requires attention or action



Stress occurs when demands exceed a person's resources to cope

Stressor vs stress response

Stress has many components

Stressors = internal or external events that trigger a stress response

E.g. Stressed when sitting an exam

- External stressor = exam

E.g. Stressed because you are conflicted between helping a friend in need or revising for the exam

- Internal stressor = your conflicting desires

Stressors can be divided further (type or duration)

- Acute events (e.g. the death of a friend)
- Chronic stressors (caring for a sick relative)
- Daily hassles (e.g. problems getting to work)
- Traumatic stressors (e.g. an assault)
- Role strain (e.g. balancing home and work roles)

The stress response



STRESS RESPONSES ARE THE
WAY IN WHICH WE
RESPOND TO A STRESSOR

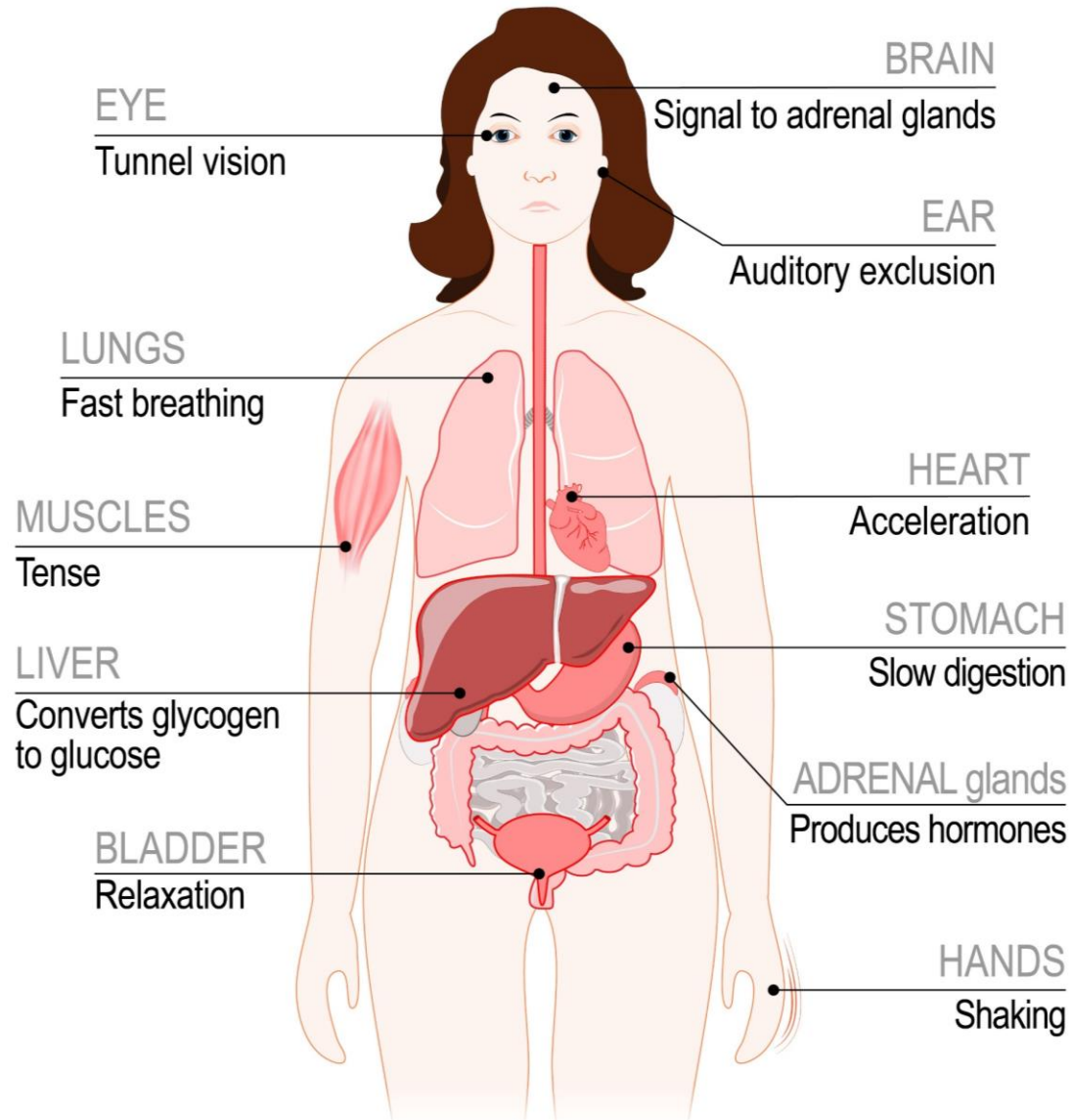
COGNITIVE

AFFECTIVE (EMOTIONAL)

BEHAVIOURAL

PHYSIOLOGICAL

Fight-or-flight response



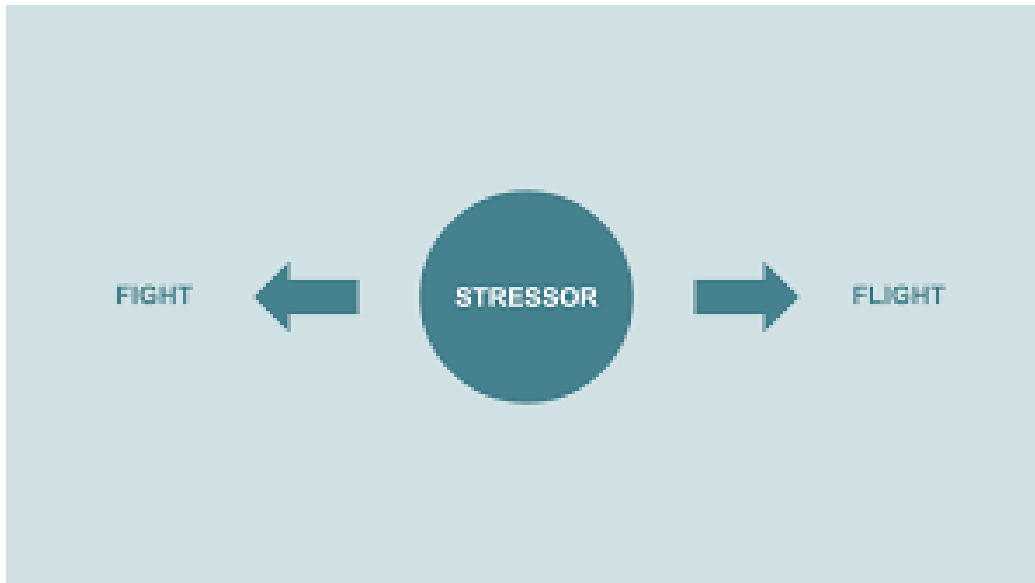
The physical response to stress

- Crucial to understanding the link between stress and disease
- Early research (1950s) comes from the fight-flight response
- Think about when you are asked to give a presentation – how do you feel?



Fight or Flight

- Survival mechanism – helps us react to danger
- Hormonal and physiological responses in the body allow us to run to safety ASAP or have the strength to fight the threat
- Automatic nervous system – two components
 - The sympathetic nervous system, which triggers the FoF response and fills the body with energy
 - The parasympathetic nervous system which promotes 'rest and digest, calming the body when the danger has passed
- Constant stress = the hypothalamus triggers an alarm system that stays on



Physical reactions during FoF

Our heart rate, blood pressure and breathing speed up,

Our muscles become tense,

Fat and sugar are released to provide energy to the muscles. This can also cause trembling,

Digestion and urine production are put standby as they're not needed in this situation,

Sweating occurs. This keeps the body cool and makes us harder to grab if we're attacked,

Our pupils dilate so that more light can enter and we can see the threat more clearly,

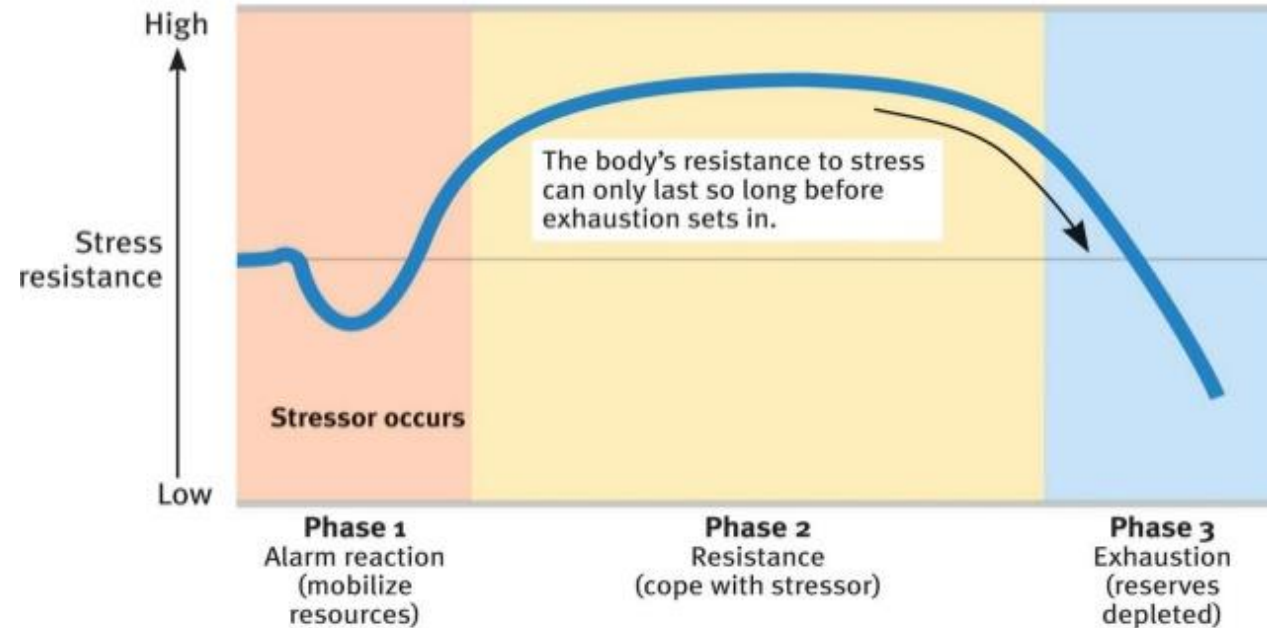
Salivation shuts down, making our mouth feel dry,

Blood vessels open wide, flooding the skin with blood. This causes our face to redden.

General Adaptation Syndrome [GAS]

(Identified by Hans Selye):

Our stress response system defends, then fatigues.



GAS (Selye, 1956)

Physical response to stress can be understood as a general adaptation syndrome with three stages

1. *Alarm*: immediate physical response to prepare us for fight or flight
2. *Resistance*: body attempts to resolve the stress and return to normal, but if stressor remains, body remains in a physiologically active state
3. *Exhaustion*: if stressor continues indefinitely the physical strain on our body will lead to exhaustion, illness, or death

GAS (Selye, 1956) cont.



Alarm
Fight - Flight



Resistance
Irritability
Frustration
Poor concentration



Exhaustion
Fatigue
Burnout
Depression
Anxiety
Decreased stress tolerance
Weakened immune system

The role of life events

Life events are usually measured with a checklist of different types of stressful events such as;

Divorce

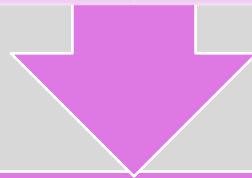
Bereavement

Marriage

Financial
problems

Injury

Illness



This approach is criticised for ignoring individual differences in the perception of stress during these events and measurement checklists are impacted by recall bias

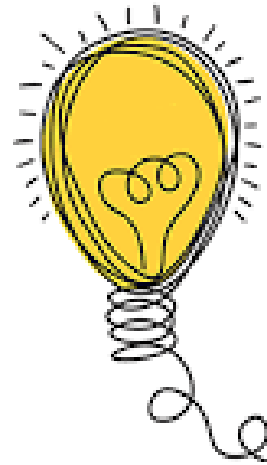
For each question choose from the following alternatives:

0 - never 1 - almost never 2 - sometimes 3 - fairly often 4 - very often

- _____ 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- _____ 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- _____ 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
- _____ 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- _____ 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- _____ 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- _____ 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- _____ 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- _____ 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- _____ 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Alternative to measuring perceived stress

- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al. 1983)
- Focuses on appraisal and stress responses
- Still suffers from a lack of clarity between stressors, stress responses and coping responses



Can you remember how many stressful events you have been through in the last year?

How accurate do you think you can be?

Despite the difficulties with the life events approach, there is evidence to suggest that more life events are associated with illness and sometimes death.

E.g. bereavement studies suggest that older people are more likely to die in the year after their spouse dies than other people of the same age and health (Subramanian et al. 2008)

Interactional approach (Lazarus et al., 1965; Steptoe & Vogele, 1986)

- How we respond to stress depends on the interaction between a person and their environment
- This approach argues that stress occurs when a person appraises the demands of a situation as being greater than their ability to cope with them
- Appraisal processes are central and explain why there is so much variation in how people respond to stressful circumstances

Three processes of appraisal:

- **Primary:** the demands of a situation are evaluated as benign, challenging, or stressful/threatening
- **Secondary:** a person evaluates their resources and capacity to cope
- **Reappraisal:** a person considers the situation once they have tried to cope with it. This may lead to reappraisal of a situation as less or more stressful than originally thought, depending on the effect of their coping responses

Transactional Model of Stress & Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

- Draws the link between stressful events and our ability to cope
- A persons ability to cope with a stressor is a direct consequence of the interactions that occur between them and their environment
- The model focuses on **perceived stress, appraisal, and coping**
- Stress is described as a two-way process including two functions:
 - The production of stressors from the environment and;
 - The response of the individual
- The role of cognitive appraisal is described as the individuals perceived threat of the stress and the assessment of resources required in order to reduce, tolerate or eliminate the stressor and the stress produced



Threat or challenge?

The process of primary appraisal allows the individual to classify whether the stressor or situation is a threat or challenge.

When the stressor is viewed as something that could cause future harm, it is viewed as a threat, if it is viewed as a challenge, a person will develop a positive stress response.

THREAT = NEGATIVE STRESS RESPONSE

CHALLENGE = POSITIVE STRESS RESPONSE

Transactional model of stress and coping

Primary appraisal

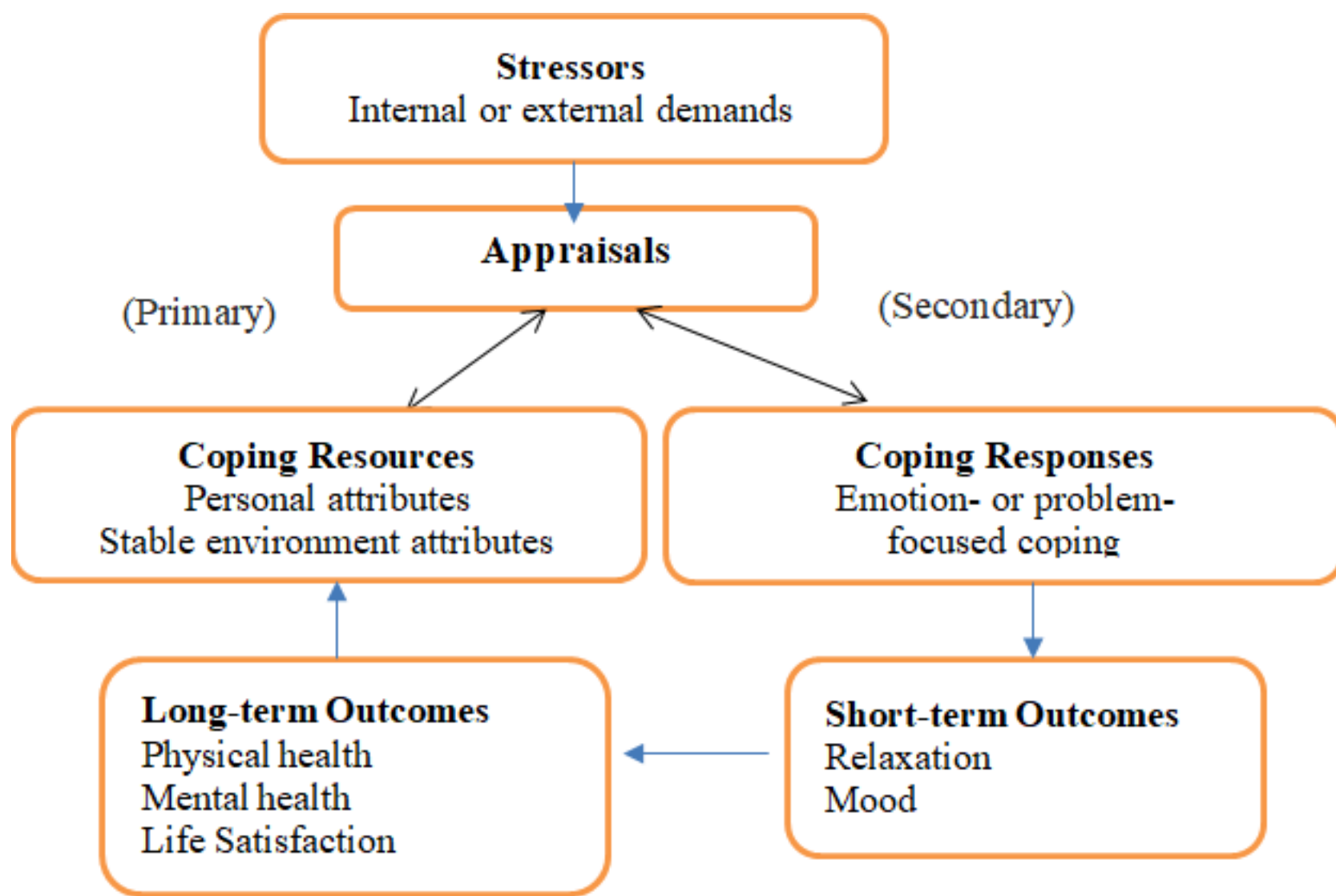
“What is at stake in this encounter?”

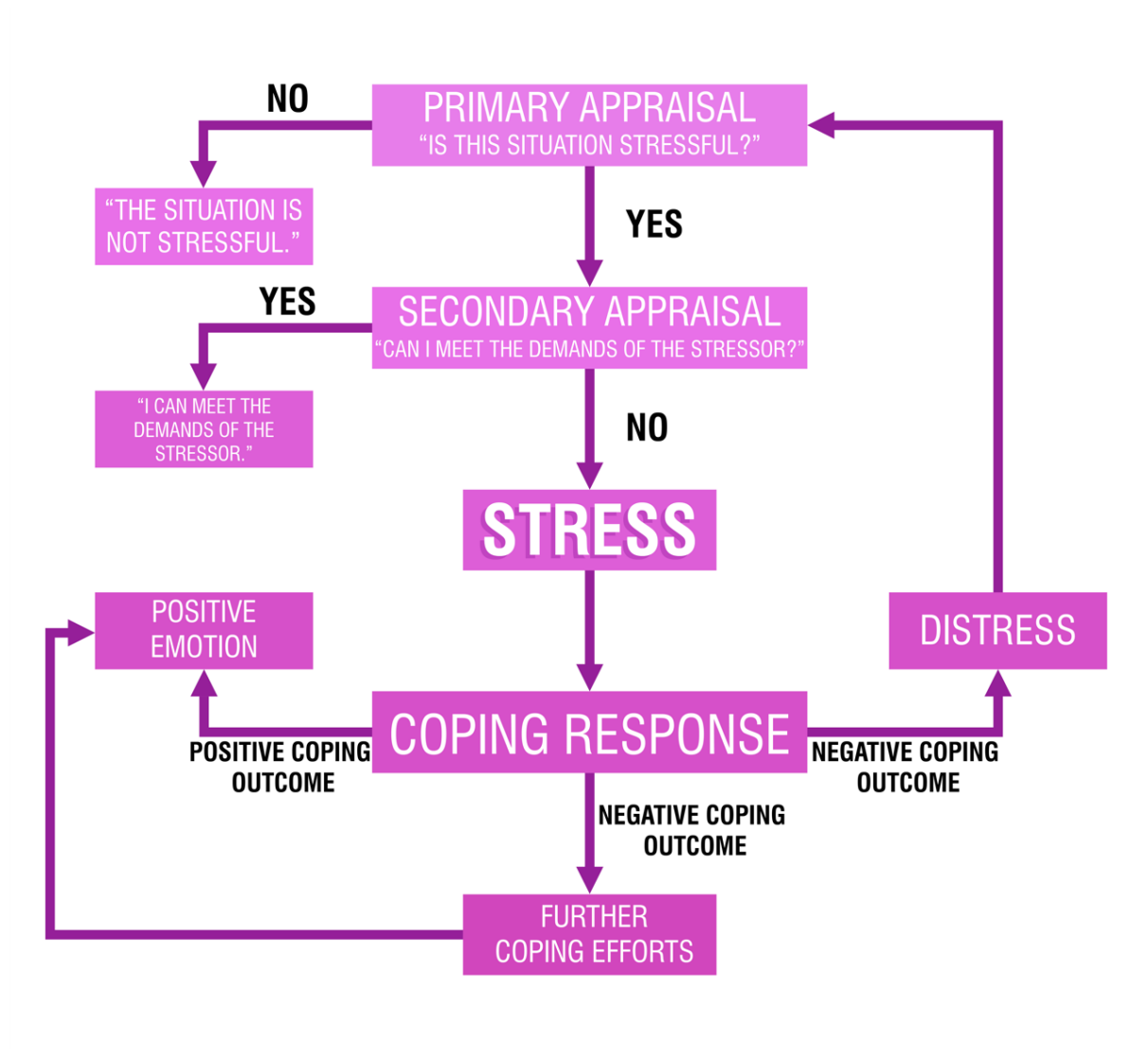
- Motivational relevance
- Motivational congruence

Secondary appraisal

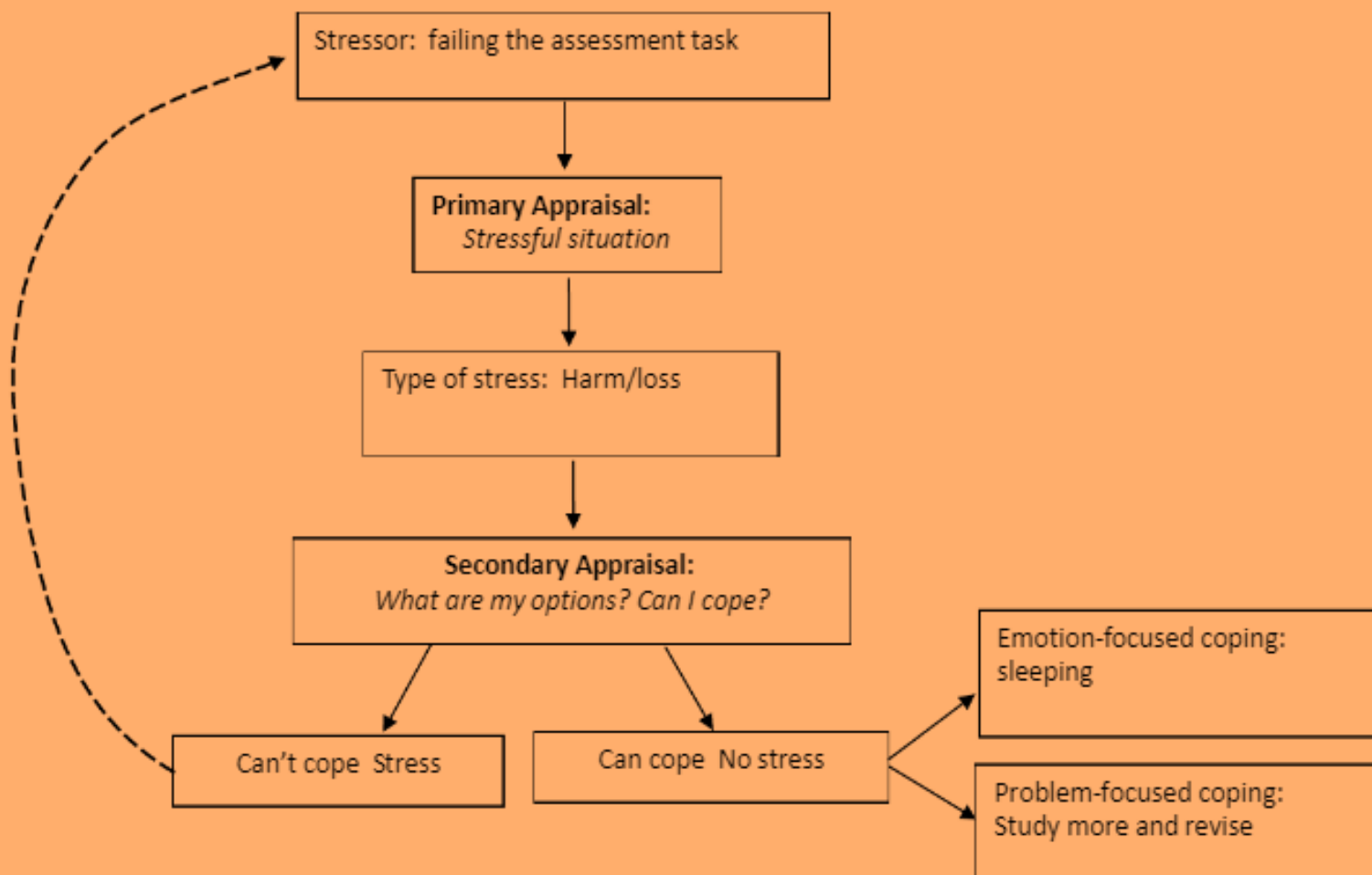
“What can I do to cope and how effective will this be?”

- Emotion-focused coping potential
- Problem-focused coping potential



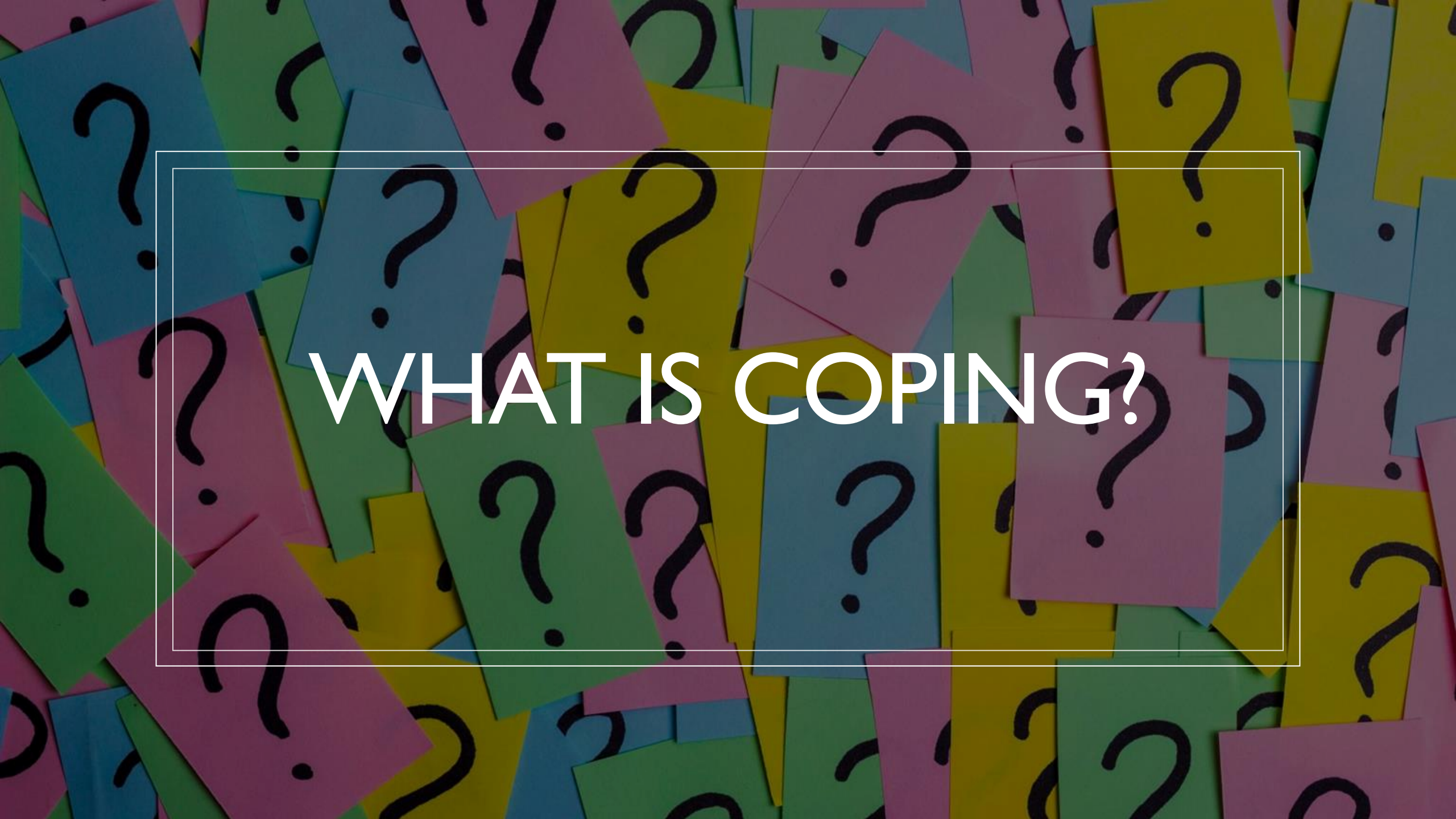


2. A student has just failed a very important University assessment task.



Modified model of L&F; Obbarius et al., 2021

- Focused on the person-environment interaction in order to see how much this accounted for the individual stress response in a group of psychosomatic inpatients
- Self-report measures to examine resources, sense of coherence, self-efficacy and optimism, perceived stressors, coping, stress response and psychological well-being
- Model supported the idea that resources and perceived stressors have an impact on the overall stress response
- This affected psychological wellbeing by predicting levels of depression
- Supports the need to strengthen psychological resources (psychological/psychosocial support)

The background consists of a dense, overlapping collage of small, rectangular paper scraps in various colors: teal, purple, yellow, and green. Each scrap features a large, black, stylized question mark. A white rectangular border is centered on the image, framing the text.

WHAT IS COPING?

Coping



A response to negative events or emotions, and involves cognitive and/or behavioural efforts to manage or adapt to the stressful situation



Psychological theories of coping attempt to identify the mechanisms through which individuals cope with events that are perceived to be stressful or threatening.



Emotions and coping often considered to be part of the same adaptational system.



(E.g. Lazarus & folkman, 1984)

Problem- focused coping (PFC)

Problem focused coping (PFC) is aimed at resolving the stressful situation and working out ways to diminish the stressor.

PFC strategies usually take the form of information seeking, the removal or reduction of stressful stimuli, planning and taking direct action (Carver, Sheier & Weintraub, 1989) and generally taking control of the stress (Carroll, 2013)

PFC largely allows for the evasion or reduction in the threat of the stressor (Carver & Vargus, 2011) by evaluating the pros and cons of potential outcomes and what actions can be taken (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Emotion- focused coping (EFC)

Emotion focused coping (EFC) reflects when a stressor elicits distress emotions (Carver & Vargus, 2011)

EFC manifests in behaviours such as venting of emotions, seeking out social support, denial, relaxation exercises and mindfulness based techniques (Carver & Vargus, 2011).

Problem-focused coping generally results in a positive outcome, whereas the variation in emotion-focused coping strategies means that there can be both positive and negative outcomes

Denial (as part of emotion-focused coping) is strongly linked with avoidance coping and illness beliefs. If an individual is in denial about the severity of their illness, they are less likely to engage in problem-focused coping strategies (Baker, Berenbaum, Howard, 2007)

Avoidant coping

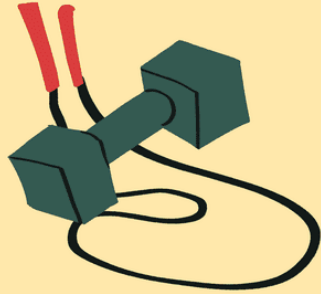
Can avoiding the situation at all costs ever be a good thing?

Avoidance may be adaptive at an early stage in a stressful encounter, when an individual lacks the resources to engage in problem-focused coping

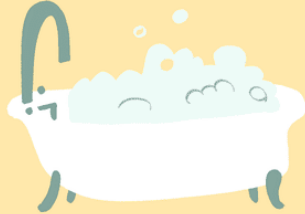
However, in the longer term, and if faced with an ongoing stressor, avoidance will prevent adaptation to and mastery over the situation

Some types of avoidance (e.g. drug/alcohol misuse) are more dangerous and less adaptive than other types of avoidance (e.g. distraction)

Emotion-Focused Coping Skills



Exercise



Take a bath



**Give yourself
a pep talk**



Meditate

Problem-Focused Coping Skills



**Work on
managing time**



Ask for support



**Establish
healthy boundaries**



**Create a
to-do list**

Rebound effect

Attempts to suppress intrusive thoughts about a stressful event can subsequently result in more intrusive thoughts

Wegner et al., (1987) classic study:

***Before this presentation ends....try
not to think about a white bear!***



How do you cope?

Think about a stressful event in your life and whether you engaged in an emotion-focused, problem-focused or avoidant coping strategy



THANK YOU FOR
LISTENING