

# Self-Control Strategies for Stress Management: A Critical Discussion

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**Abstract:** Everyone in the present-day complex world experiences stress. There are a number of stress management techniques that can be used to minimize the level of stress. Among them, self-control strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, relaxation, etc., are adapted to manage the stress level. The effectiveness of self-control strategies for stress management depends on many factors, such as individual characteristics, determination, persistence, etc.

This paper highlights the different self-control strategies adopted for stress management. Further, it also tries to show the stages of effective and efficient self-control strategies. The paper also discusses about the factors responsible for effective self-control strategies for stress management.

Keywords: self-control strategies, stress management

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common phenomenon in everyone's life. In today's complex world, it is encountered by human civilization in every corner. Stress is a psychological and physical reaction brought about by internal and external pressures. People around the globe try to explore different types of interventions to mitigate the growing levels of stress pressures. As such, the management of stress is indispensable. Stress management techniques are some critical spontaneous built-in response mechanisms in the same way as a stress reaction and stress relaxation techniques. In case of stress response during a 'fight or flight' situation, the body spontaneously releases some hormones in order to replace the lost carbohydrates and fats to make up the energy level. As a result, the stress is released. However, we could not get time for stress relaxation due to our busy schedules. However, for stress mitigation, we must adopt stress relaxation techniques.

Self-controlled strategies involve cognitive and trade-related skills that are adapted by individuals in order to manage stress levels. We have a number of self-control strategies, such as behavioural strategies, cognitive strategies, self-control training, and self-management. Self-control strategies are effective in managing stress. According to Tangney Baumeister and Boone (2004), Self-Control is the process through which one can control and regulate one's emotional desires, thought process, and behavioural outcomes in the backdrop of his/her impulses. Self-control strategies are the techniques used to manage stress and regulate emotions. Studies show that appropriate self-control is effective in reducing the stress level. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) found that mindfulness-based stress reduction reduced stress levels and emotional well-being compared to the control group. Self-control strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving, and emotional regulation effectively reduced stress levels in academic performance (Lattimore, Pearsons, and Anderson, 2019). However, individuals with strong personalities, determination, cognitive ability, and strong motivation can find more effectiveness in reducing their stress levels than other individuals (Oaten and Cheng, 2006).

' Self-Control Strategies for Stress Management: A Critical Discussion' aims to highlight the different self-control strategies in stress management and investigate the stages of self-control strategies for managing stress. Further, it tries to explore the factors that influence the effectiveness of self-control strategies.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To highlight the different self-control strategies adopted to manage stress.

2. To discuss the different stages of self-control strategies for stress management.
3. To highlight the factors that influence the effectiveness of self-control strategies.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study conducted by **Rosebaum (1989)** pointed out that coping with stressful situations requires self-regulation, and he identified three categories of self-regulatory behavior. The first one happens consciously or automatically, termed redressive behavior, which is more suitable for coping with acute stress. The second and third forms of behavior are under the person's voluntary and cognitive control systems. The second form of behavior is termed a 'reformatory control system,' which is often resorted to breaking through a regular routine and adapting a new behavior to cope with stressful events. The study's findings unveil that highly resourceful individuals can more effectively resort to behavior that requires a reformatory control system.

Another study by **Rosenbaum 1993** focussed on the third function of self-control behavior, 'experiential self-control.' His investigation unveils the importance of this function for the growth and development of humanity to refrain from experiencing stress.

**Cameron & Nicholls (1998)** conducted a study on students entering college to analyze the effectiveness of writing tasks as a self-regulatory stress-coping measure to reduce medical clinic visits and ease their adjustment issues. Using dispositional optimism, he categorized students as pessimists and optimistic and assigned three tasks- a self-regulation task, a disclosure task, and a control task. A fall in illness-related medical clinic visits was observed the following month because of self-regulation tasks and disclosure tasks among optimists and only because of self-regulation tasks among pessimists.

A study conducted by **Schmidt & Neuback (2007)** investigated whether the self-control demands in association with role ambiguity act as a source of work stressors. The findings of the study reveal that each form of measured self-control demand jointly contributed a significant portion of incremental variance to the forecast of various measures of stress.

A study conducted by **Wang & Saudino (2011)** reveals a close association or linkage between emotional regulation and stress coping by analyzing the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. Some common neural structures that act as a response to stress and are involved in emotional regulation, such as the anterior cingulate cortex, prefrontal cortex, etc., are taken into consideration to explain the linkage between stress coping and emotional regulation.

The investigation made by **Achtziger and Bayer (2012)** reveals that self-control acts as a mediator between stress and perfectionism. It was found that on the one hand, perfectionist concerns of stress (i.e., discrepancy; Slaney et al. 2001) were positively correlated to stress, and on the other hand, perfectionist strivings (i.e., high standards; Slaney et al., 2001) were negatively correlated to stress.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study will adopt a qualitative and explanatory research design to attain the stated objectives. The data to be used in this study will be primarily based on secondary sources collected through a review of the literature. The study will adhere to the ethical aspect of research.

#### Theoretical Foundation of Self-Control Strategies

The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura primarily guides the foundation of self-control strategies. According to this theory, an individual's behaviour is guided by a number of factors, such as his attitude, way of thinking, beliefs, and the environment where he belongs. Bandura advocated that this belief, self-efficacy, and expectations are crucial factors in deciding the behaviour that the individual is likely to attempt along with his self-motivation.

One of the vital aspects of self-control techniques is self-instructional training, which is advocated by Donald Meichenbaum. According to him, the learning process of controlling one's behaviour starts in childhood, depending on potential instructions. He believed that self-instructional training provides individuals with knowledge about their self-statements, assesses whether they are beneficial, and modifies the wrong self-statements with acceptable and adoptive ones.

Frederick Kanfer was of the view that individuals can achieve self-control through monitoring, examining, and modifying their behaviour. He advocated that for positive self-control outcomes, one should set realistic goals, and plan, organize, monitor consistently, and develop positive talks.

### **Types of Self-Control Strategies**

The broad classification of Self-Control strategies is as follows:

**Environmental Strategies** include changing one's environment or surroundings to make self-control practically possible and easier. Examples include:

- Removing temptations: Eliminating these environmental hindrances that lead to impulsive behavior or distract one's concentration from expected goals.
- Creating a supportive environment: Eliminating the group of people or avoiding the objects and creating a supportive group of people or object in an environment that encourages and reinforces self-control.
- Creating Cues: Establish visible cues that facilitate engaging in expected behaviour and avoiding undesirable ones.

**Behavioural Strategies:** These strategies involve altering or modifying one's behaviour for self-control. These include :

- Establishing a definite goal: It refers to adequately identifying and setting the purpose and breaking it into achievable parts.
- Time Management: Setting time for each task based on priority
- Creating a plan: Setting a consistent and achievable routine, developing habits in conformity with self-control, and eliminating decision overlapping.

**Cognitive Strategies:** These involve changing one's beliefs and thoughts to achieve better self-control. This involves:

- Self Talk: Adopting positive and encouraging self-talk to motivate oneself to resist temptation and focus on the desired goal.
- Cognitive reframing: Replacing negative thoughts through more positive and adaptive ones.
- Mental Imagery: Imagining success and benefits of the outcomes of self-control.

**Emotional Strategies:** These strategies refer to controlling one's emotions for self-control:

- Emotional awareness: Developing mindfulness and self-awareness to identify and control emotions that may influence self-control.
- Management of excitement/ tension: One should engage in some activities such as physical exercise, meditation, and deep breathing to avoid excitement and tension.
- Coping with triggers: After identifying the emotional triggers, develop appropriate coping strategies to prevent or control them.

**Social Strategies:** Social strategies include:

- Creating a partnership with some accountable ones: Establish a friendship with someone with similar goals for maintaining self-control.
- Member of supportive group: Be a member of a supportive group that focuses on self-control and provides assistance and required communication.

### **Self-Control Strategies for Stress Management**

Self-control strategies may be adopted as effective stress management techniques. Past studies showed that people who can effectively control their emotions and behaviours, may potentially be less vulnerable to experiencing the

adverse effect of stress. Some of the effective self-control strategies discussed below may be effective for stress management:

1. Identify the source of stress: Develop self-awareness in order to identify the stimulus or events that create stress for someone. Recognizing this stimulus can help prepare for their effects and give respondents strong self-control.
2. Deep breathing: Involve yourself with deep breathing and relaxation strategies. This involves muscle relaxation, meditation, etc. Following these techniques, one can calm one's body and mind, control one's stress, and enhance self-control.
3. Time Management: Developing appropriate time management techniques to reduce stress levels and prioritize tasks are the most critical steps in this case. Establishing achievable goals and breaking enormous tasks into smaller ones is equally important for accomplishing tasks on a predetermined timeline.
4. Healthy lifestyle: Lifestyle is crucial to maintaining stress levels and adequate self-control. A balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and constant stimulation are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. These will help not only to minimize stress but also to develop strong self-control habits.
5. Cognitive restructuring: Avoid negative thoughts that enhance stress levels. Replacing negative thoughts with positive and realistic ones can reduce stress and sound self-control practices in challenging situations.
6. Establish clear boundaries: Setting clear boundaries to maintain a time-based routine for emotional well-being. Try to say 'no' instead of making excessive commitments, which may create stress for you.
7. Social support: Seek support and assistance from friends, family members, or other groups. They can provide you emotional support and advice, etc, to combat your stress. Social support can provide support to control stress and maintain self-control in challenging situations.
8. Relaxation and stress-reducing activities: Involve in some activities that relax you to reduce your stress and be relaxed. Involvement in hobbies, spending time with nature, listening to music, physical exercise, etc. can help relax, reduce stress, and enhance self-control.

As such, one can control stress and maintain self-control by developing effective strategies and adopting them.

### **Stress Management Plan through Self-Control**

Primarily, stress management involves developing one's perspective to optimize and balance the needs of one's life.

The following points should be noted before initiating a stress management plan through self-control strategies:

- a. Identify what are the actual needs and what are not.
- b. Get aware of how to meet these needs.
- c. Be determined with one's own needs and be able to prevent others' manipulation.

It is essential to clarify value expectations within the social restrictions and physical limitations in order to satisfy basic needs. Further, it is necessary to develop a positive attitude and positive emotional spirit considering the interpersonal manipulations and exploitations, ultimately developing all important elements of this perspective.

### **Developing a Personalized Stress Management Plan through Self-control**

Adopting the following stages allows an individual to create an effective, lasting lifestyle change to control stress.

Stage 1: Challenge: Changing process essentially needs motivation. It is the basic foundation of the change process. It is driven by some problematic events that affect the individual's comfort zone, which, in turn, causes them to become aware of their problems. However, if the individual is content with their lives, he/ she never feels the need for change. Perhaps, in everyone's life, they have to face specific stressful incidents that induce them to know and learn about stress coping strategies of self-control and lead them to lifestyle change.

Stage 2: Awareness:

The next step of change, the individual enhances his awareness level relating to his problems. Here, the individual must be aware that he has some issues or problems, and efforts are to be made to gather information for solving these issues.

Subsequently, he learned by participating in discussions, reading books, or consulting with experts on stress management techniques. This stage is important as it strengthens the foundation of the individual's change process. Knowing and gathering more informations, the individual's mind started to act to mitigate the stress response. In this step, the individual makes up his plan, which suits him the most for stress management.

Stage: 3 Preparation:

This stage arises when the individual knows how to handle the crisis through a customaries plan for making the required changes. The schedule is further developed when a person prepares a necessary schedule for making the changes.

In this place, one must make up his plan and how to make the desired changes. To mitigate stress levels, one must choose the appropriate method. After making a list of techniques, one must select the appropriate method considering his strengths, preferences and limitations.

Stage: 4 Action:

A person's behavior tends to change from this stage after adopting the appropriate strategy. Here, the individual is committed to change, and preparation has been completed. Considering the appropriate implementation of one's plan, it becomes easy for him to use self-control strategies such as physical exercise, meditation etc. One can see the progress and effectiveness by making firm convictions to adopt such practices and monitoring their developments.

Stage 5: Maintenance

Stress control techniques have been internalized into one's routine in this stage. Now it requires some periodical maintenance of the changes. However, it may sometimes require to revisit of previous stages to modify the current routine to respond to the changes.

In this stage, the individual's endeavor is to move from a general understanding of the five stages of self-control strategies to a particular one to achieve a less stressful lifestyle. For a better result, one can develop a customaries personal plan to add regular stress management techniques to one's life and execute the plan to make it a reality.

### **Factors that Influence the Effectiveness of Self- Control Strategies for Stress Management**

Stress-control strategies for stress management depend on individual preferences and the specific stressor at hand, but some common factors that influence its effectiveness are discussed as follows:

1. Awareness and understanding of the stressor: Developing an awareness of the stressor and understanding how it affects the individual can help to choose the appropriate self-control strategies; for example, taking some rest or engaging with some other tasks may be useful, provided the stress is related to workload.
2. Coping skills and resources: Persons who possess a strong coping ability with potential resources are in a position to control stress in a better way. These skills include social support, problem-solving ability, and the ability to control emotional excitement.
3. Personal Temperament: Person with various natures opts for different self-control techniques. An introverted person may prefer solitary activities such as meditation, yoga, etc., whereas an extrovert may prefer other social activities.
4. Environmental Factors: Environment is one of the important factors that influence the ability of the individual to manage or control stress. These environmental factors include lighting, temperature, noise etc., which may affect the individual's stress level. In these cases, the individual needs different kinds of stress control strategies.
5. Health Status: Physical status, both mental and physical aspects, influences the ability of the individual to manage and control stress. A person with some mental or chronic physical issues may need different kind of self-control strategies than an individual with a sound and mental condition.

Precisely, a result-oriented effective self-control strategy for stress control needs a customaries approach based on individual requirements, preferences, and the nature of the stress.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Self-control strategies may be adopted as an effective and better way to control stress levels. Past studies showed that yoga, meditation, deep breathing, and relaxation are some of the better self-control strategies for managing stress. One of the most significant aspects related to this area is that these strategies create almost no adverse health outcomes. Further, these strategies involve altering the individual's thought process and responding to stressful situations. These ultimately provide an ability to the individual to regulate his emotions better to reduce the effect of stressful events and thereby provide physical and mental well-being.

It is significant to note that experiencing better outcomes from self-control strategies requires regular and consistent practice. However, in the case of chronic stress, the individual may need professional help from a therapist or counselor.

Finally, incorporating self-control strategies in the daily programme of an individual may be effective for controlling stress and promoting well-being.

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