Stress Management and Discipline towards Self and Societal Growth: A Case of Edmund Rice Catholic Education Centre

Workshop presented to the administration and the teaching staff on 26th February, 2025
Presented by John Bosco Kiingati

Introduction

The human being is endowed cognitively (Decety & Wheatley, 2017), emotionally, and behaviorally (Gupta, 2023; Bawa & Sharma, 2025). Similarly, the human being is a social being, and with this comes the economic, psychological, cultural, environmental and spiritual-ethical realms (Ethics Unwrapped, 2022). With the continued expansion of technology, the human being has also moved from being localized, to being global (Lawson, 2023). All these factors, interact intra and inter-personally, making the person a complex human being.

Within the person, different faculties inherently inter-relate in ways that at times elicit coherency and consistency (Coning de, 2009), while at other times they experience conflict and disparities (Vallacher, Norwak. & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2013). In the second phase where conflict and disparities are experienced, stress is realised. Stress therefore, is part of the human person, and its management, is consequently a human requirement, for continued individual and societal growth. For stress to be appropriately managed, discipline is required.

In learning institutions, the word "discipline" is largely used if not overused (Mariene, 2012; Bodovski, Nahum-Shani, & Walsh, 2013; Ngwokabuenui, 2015). Hardly do educators and learners sit back to clearly define its literal and metaphorical meanings. As a result, its uses, could easily fall into the realm of misunderstanding, and thus add to the stress, instead of facilitating stress management. It is on this backdrop that the paper deals with discipline within the confines of stress management.

Aim of the Study

It is hoped that at the end of the reflective workshop, and the subsequent study, the participants shall be clear on the understanding of both stress and discipline, and that they shall be aware of factors leading to, as well as the effects of stress. In addition, it is anticipated that the participants shall then have narrowed down to causes of stress in learning institutions, improper as well as proper ways of dealing with stressors, towards improved individual and societal growth. In the process, it is also hoped that the role of discipline in facilitating appropriate stress management, shall be elucidated. As an entry, the study starts by defining stress.

What is Stress?

Stress is defined as "a person's physical, mental, and emotional reaction to a certain stimulus (stressor)" (Sujaritha, Deepa, Nandhini, Vandhana & Mahalakshmi, 2022, p. 2). The terms "stressor" and "trigger" are used interchangeably. Stress is indeed the ability of our human systems to respond to specific demands (Pearlin 1981 quoted in Sujarintha et al., 2022, p. 2). On that note therefore, stress is a human bodily ability. Lack of that ability would otherwise lead to increased vulnerability.
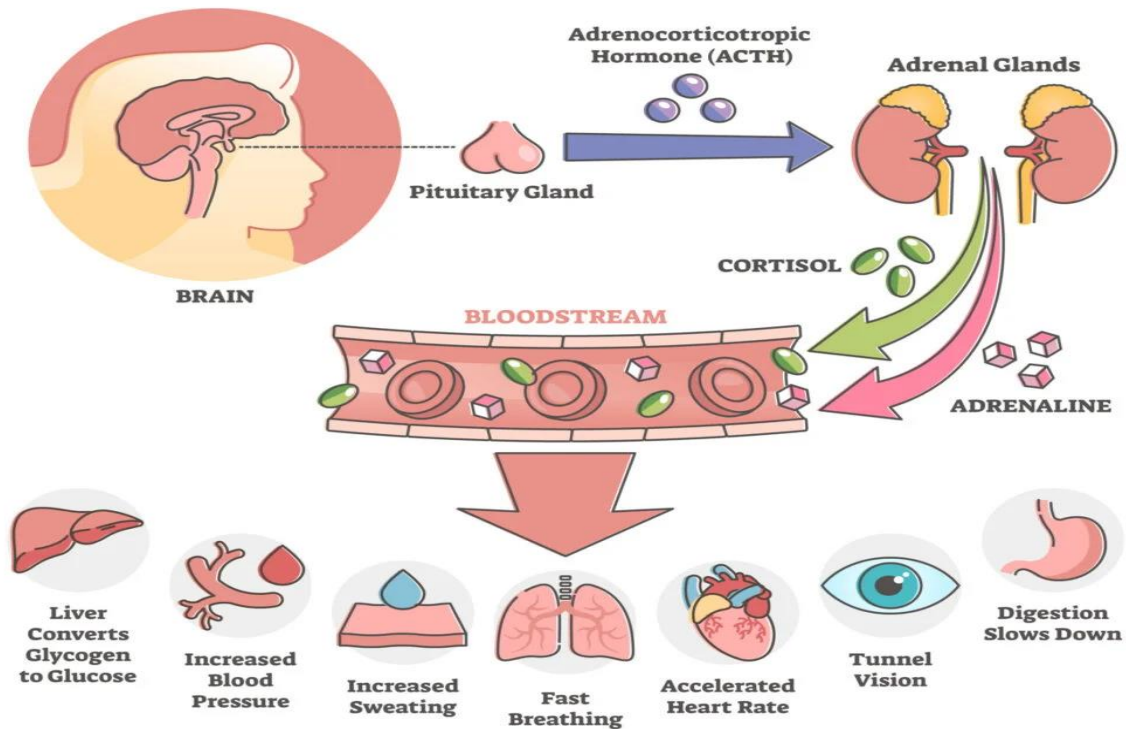
STRESS RESPONSE

Adrenocorticotropic Hormone (ACTH)

Adrenal Glands

Pituitary Gland

BRAIN

CORTISOL

BLOODSTREAM

ADRENALINE

Liver Converts Glycogen to Glucose

Increased Blood Pressure

Increased Sweating

Fast Breathing

Accelerated Heart Rate

Tunnel Vision

Digestion Slows Down

Figure 1 derived from Nona Child Development Center (2021), indicates that stress is a body reaction (release of adrenaline[1] or cortisol[2]) based on the threat elicited by the trigger. Ideally, the level of the body reaction should be equivalent to the degree of the threat. Nevertheless, depending on the intensity of the threat, its frequency, the time it occurs, and the state of the body, the reactions differ, hence the types of stress. The body reaction is meant to allow the body to fight or flee. The fight/flee response can either be short or long term. The response entails release of adrenaline/cortisol (Ranabir & Reetu, 2011). Then the body gets ready for action through "increasing heart rate, decreasing digestion, shunting blood flow to main muscle groups, and altering numerous other autonomic nerve activities, [including] providing a burst of energy and strength to the body" (Sujarintha et al., 2022, p. 3).

Types of Stress

In studies on stress, the following types arise: Eustress, distress, acute stress, and chronic stress, cumulative stress, and traumatic stress.

Eustress: is defined as the "good" or "positive" stress (Kupriyanov & Zhdanov, 2014). On the one part, it is looked at as emanating from pleasurable moments such as during a marriage ceremony, on receiving results of success or even job promotion. On the other part, it is viewed as the release of sufficient adrenaline/cortisol, to allow one appropriately deal with the threat. During an academic examination, a learner may require a release of adrenaline and cortisol, enough to make one recall what is needed in the answering of the question. An athlete, who desires to break a high-jump record, may require just enough to get him/her over the bar. A hunter who is abruptly attacked by a vicious animal, may require adequate strength to overcome the danger. Such is eustress.

Distress: Sujarintha et al., (2022) define distress as negative or "bad" stress. The authors associate it with hazards, unusual, unjust, or painful experiences such as loss, death, long-term illness,

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1   a substance that is released in the body of a person who is feeling a strong emotion (such as excitement, fear, or anger) and that causes the heart to beat faster and gives the person more energy.

2   A hormone made by the adrenal cortex (the outer layer of the adrenal gland). It helps the body use glucose (a sugar), protein, and fats.

injury or even divorce/separation. When not addressed adequately the phenomenon may result in depression (Kiingati, 2023) and even suicide (Kiingati, 2024). As it is with Eustress, distress may also be defined as the release of too much adrenaline, to a level that the surplus adrenaline/cortisol, becomes pathological to the physiological system. A mother, aware of dangers befalling young girls, may be so scared of her daughter's lateness coming home. At the time the daughter finally arrives home safely, the mother's anxiety levels may be too much for her to handle, leading to pathology. More on effects of stress, shall be discussed later in the paper.

Acute Stress: Sujarintha et al., (2022, p. 50) define it as "a type of stress that lasts for a short period of time" and could either be eustress or distress. The indicators are sweating and increased breathing rate. After a short period, the body tends to normalize. Bryant and Harvey (2000) address it as a disorder. Such stress may be realised when one is asked to do something in front of a group, such as lead in a song. Due to the acute stress decision making may be negatively influenced (Toppings, Ferguson & Kirigolson, 2020), following a mental down-shift.

Chronic stress: Shchaslyvyi, Antonenko and Telegeev (2024), comprehensively discuss chronic stress from a health perspective. Though they do not give an express definition of chronic stress, they state how it "significantly alters gene expression, impacting inflammation, immune response, and tissue development" (p.6). On his part, Yusof (2023, p. 4) defines chronic stress as a state of the body when it is "exposed to stressors with such frequency or severity that the autonomic nervous system does not have adequate chance to activate the relaxation response on a regular basis". Chronic stress, as the name suggests occurs persistently and recurring and is associated with causing illness.

Cumulative stress: This refers to an accumulation or composition of accounts that expose one to chronic stressors that have persisted for at least six months (Epel, et al., 2018) and are experienced over a variety of areas (work or even relationships). These chronic stressors become cumulative when they are experienced across time (Slopen et al., 2018). An individual who loses money at a time when they are marking exams, and not so long ago had received a warning letter, may experience cumulative stress. The situation would be more dire if the same individual went home and found that the children had been sent home for school fees arrears.

Chronic stress is associated with pathology, to a level that there is an open access peer reviewed journal by the name "*Chronic Stress*". The journal publishes all aspects of stress including pre-clinical and clinical studies, as well as stress-related psychiatric disorders (e.g. mood, anxiety, and trauma disorders).

Traumatic stress: This is often studied as a disorder called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It entails the

> exposure to an experience or experiences that is[are] traumatic [shocking, frightening, or dangerous, and may be associated with death and] can cause emotional and physical harm for[to] the individual...[the experience(s) affect(s) its [integral human] functioning, "overloading" it with reminders of the trauma in various ways, causing anxiety, driving it to try to avoid them, and ending up "shutting down" to itself, or in other cases, constantly projecting its negative emotional state (Bryant et al., 2019, quoted in Mairi & Konstantopoulou, 2024, p. 31).).

Traumatic stress, unlike other stress types, is often vivid to the persons close to the affected. This is because it strongly alters or even hinders an individual's operations, rendering him/her incapacitated. The stress emanates from pre-during-and/or post events (Qi, et al., 2016). Thus, it is rare that it is a one-off event. Having discussed the types of stress, the next section looks into causes of stress.

Causes of Stress

Omwenga and Mweti (2024, p. 276) come up with four categories of causes of stress affecting teachers. These are stressors associated with the organization, the job, the individual, and the body (response to stress). They state that these stressors affect the educator's performance.

(i) Organizational stress has variables that include control/delegation, organizational climate, and organizational design;

(ii) Job-related stress has factors that include task overload, time constraints, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload;

(iii) Stress elements associated to an individual include income level, financial limits, competing demands, career advancement, and job stability.

(iv) Body related stressors factor in the physiological response to stressors which in turn act as increased stressors. These are "anxiety and profuse perspiration, difficulty feeling relaxed, chronic pain or muscle discomfort (back, neck, and shoulder, among other body parts), bloating or upset stomach, and shortness of breath" (Omwenga & Mweti, 2024, p.277). By extension, the psychological is also affected leading to "[a]pathy/loss of interest in work, low morale, reduced productivity, bad work relations, and absenteeism" The last two tend towards behavioural stressors.

Effects of Stress

On matters relating to the effects, item number (iv) (Omwenga & Mweti, 2024) discussing causes of stress, sheds light.

(i) Physiologically: The individual becomes anxious, has increased perspiration, difficulty in relaxing, and has chronic pain and muscle discomfort. In addition, the person may suffer bloated and stomach upset and shortness of breath. The person may also experience lots of fatigue.

(ii) Psychologically: The individual may experience apathy (loss of interest in work), low morale, and reduced productivity. Emotionally, one may experience increased boredom, irritability and anger, as well as hopelessness and despair.

(iii) Behaviourally: The individual struggles with work relationships, and may find the self-engaging in absenteeism. S/he may start struggling with appetite.

(iv) Spiritually: Religiosity is associated with stress in that the former is used to regulate emotions and nurture hope, thus managing the latter (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002). Spirituality is also associated with meaning in life and subsequent purpose. Nevertheless, the individual who suffers stressed states, may experience struggles on matters of faith; attempting to understand the role that God is playing in the struggles, and may experience abandonment and hopelessness; "*Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani*" (Mark 15:34).

All rounded effects of stress on the individual, may in turn affect one's relationships with others, thus influencing their social relationships. It can also be inferred that the economic wellness of the individual is affected. When one is unable to deliver at work and relate well with others, they may lose their job, or when in business, be unable to relate well with customers. These may in turn negatively influence one's financial (economic) standings.

Stress affecting Educators in Learning Institutions

The educator is a complex human being acting on (and being acted upon by) other complex human beings within a complex environment (cf Bhagoji, 2024). In these intra and inter-actions, stress emanating from within and from without, become imminent. In the learning institutions, the educator cannot avoid stressful moments, as noted previously, emanating from

(i) the organization and its stakeholders (government, proprietors, management, administration, benefactors, and parents, among others). State politics influence policies that in turn affect the educator.

(ii) the job, including tasks to be accomplished, relating with other teaching and non-teaching staff and with learners.

(iii) the individual (personality, competencies and deficiencies, identity: - role-based, ethnicity, social position (family, community, church)). One also has other roles that they play, which include son/daughter, sibling and even parent. These stressors from the individual also bring to play one's desires and ambitions, versus one's reality.

(iv) one's body (experiential identity: - gender and age). A question at this juncture may be to what degree is the person comfortable with their looks.

(v) the environment, in which one lives, the type of house and the demands of the neighbourhood:- the infrastructure to/from and around.

(vi) one's economic standings, where the financial ability versus one's ambitions may also be an added stressor. Financial stressors interrogate one's earnings versus one's expenditure. The expenditure includes the day-to-day expenses, short and long-term investments. With increasing consumerism and materialism, finances become a stressor. On this note, leisure places, including supermarkets where attractive displays may lure instinctive buyers, may add to the financial-related stress levels.

Temporal/Reactive ways to Deal with Stress (Defense Mechanisms)

Triggers generally emerge from our common senses/perceptions: What do we see, hear, smell, taste, feel? At times through telepathy, we may have unexplained inner dispositions that affect our systems (Petrič, 2020). There are times when we have control over what we perceive: what TV station do I watch? What social media do I engage with? Where do I go to? Whom do I associate with? Nevertheless, there are moments when we hardly have control over what we perceive. When in public transport, we may not choose whom we sit next to, and how fast and reckless the vehicle is driven. Apart from voting, occasional contributions through social media and "chief's barazas" (gatherings held by local administration), we may have little choice on how the country is governed. Unconsciously, whenever we sign a contract with the employer, we say "yes" to quite a number of consequences that we may never have given deep thought. Such is the case with other issues that we have little control.

Whether we have control or not, we shall perceive and get affected by the triggers. Thus, our systems shall react whether we are conscious or not. At this juncture we have emotional-driven and cognitive-driven reactions.

Emotional-driven reactions tend to be quite sporadic. Emotions are reactions that follow triggers. They are mainly categorized into energy giving (anger and happiness), and energy draining (sadness and fear) (Sensoy, 2021). These are largely de-linked from cognition. Together with emotions come defence mechanisms. Bowing (2004), states that the defence mechanisms, have a "cognitive distortion with some containing elements of dissociation". In this context, they act as sieves or even as blocks to cognitive dealings with the threat. They offer temporal reprieve.

Freud and Anna Sigmund defined them as ""unconscious resources used by the ego" to decrease internal stress" (Parekh et al., 2010, p.1). Table 1 gives a summary of the defence mechanisms and brief explanations of each. The information is derived from Bailey and Pico (2025).

Defense Mechanism	Explanation	In the Context of the Educator
Primitive Defense Mechanisms		
Acting out	- Development of detrimental behaviors that distract attention & energy away from other stressors; may be present in conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder.	Educator may attempt to ignore stressful triggers and focus on other topics. s/he may also opt to be rude or ignore/be (appear) disinterested.
Avoidance	-Dismissing thoughts or feelings that are uncomfortable or keeping away from people, places, or situations associated with uncomfortable thoughts or feelings; may be present in post-traumatic stress disorder, where one avoids the location of a traumatic motor vehicle accident or avoids driving completely.	An educator may avoid an environment where they experienced a traumatic experience including job loss
Conversion	- Development of physical symptoms that cannot be explained by patho-physiology or physical injury; recognized in conversion disorder, also known as functional neurologic symptom disorder.	Educator may struggle with conditions that may not be readily explained medically, emanating from a psychological state.

Denial	-Dismissing external reality & instead focusing on internal explanations or fallacies and thereby avoiding the uncomfortable reality of a situation. This defense mechanism may be present in someone who continues to shop for expensive designer clothes despite being in serious financial debt.	Educator may "refuse" to accept their role to a problem; What is my contribution to the existing challenge? May it be my attitude or even my vulnerabilities?
Identification	- Internalization or reproduction of behaviors observed in others, such as a child developing the behavior of his or her parents without conscious realization of this process. Identification is also known as introjection.	Educators may find themselves unconsciously acting out roles of people or even positions that they admire.
Projection	-Attributing one's mal-adaptive inner impulses to someone else. Example is someone who commits an episode of infidelity in their marriage and accuses their partner of infidelity or may become more suspicious of their partner.	Educators who may be dishonest and short of integrity, may start blaming others of the mal-practice.
Regression	- Adapting one's behavior to earlier levels of psychosocial development. For example, a stressful event may cause an individual to regress to bed-wetting after they have already outgrown this behavior.	Educators may find themselves regressing into substance abuse including behavioural addictive behaviours such as social media.
Repression	-Subconsciously blocking ideas or impulses that are undesirable. The mechanism may be present in someone who has no recollection of a traumatic event, even though they were conscious and aware during the event.	Educators who struggle with lies, may do so, so repeatedly that they hardly tell lies from truth.
Schizoid fantasy	- Creating an internal retreat into one's imagination to avoid uncomfortable situations. The mechanism may present commonly in children or later in development, may be present in schizoid personality disorder.	Educators may struggle with displaced imaginations that may at times be linked to metaphysical (religio-spiritual) fanatic overtones.
Splitting	- Failing to reconcile both positive and negative attributes into a whole understanding of a person or situation, resulting in all-or-none thinking. Splitting is commonly associated with borderline personality disorder.	Educators may choose to either see the half-empty or the half-full part of the learner or of their colleague, ignoring the integral nature of the individual.
Higher-level Defense Mechanisms		
Anticipation	-Devotion of one's effort to solving problems before they arise. The mechanism may be present in someone who prepares for an important job interview by practicing their answers to the toughest questions.	Educators may live in the future/fantasy of the new job or the new promotion and fail to seize the day
Compensation	- Focusing on achievement in one area of life in order to distract attention away from the inadequacy or fear of inadequacy in another area of life. The mechanism may be present in a student who receives poor grades on their report card and then devotes more time and effort to extracurricular clubs and activities.	Educators may choose to only focus on their successes and remain oblivious of their limitations.
Displacement:	- Transferring one's emotional burden or emotional reaction from one entity to another. The mechanism may	Educators may transfer their work challenges to their families at home or vice versa.

	be present in someone who has a stressful day at work and then lashes out against their family at home.	
Humor	Decreasing or combating the negative emotions associated with a situation by using comedy. For example, telling a funny story about someone during a eulogy.	Educators may look for slightest moments to make jokes out of serious issues or laugh out when being challenged
Intellectualization	The development of patterns of excessive thinking or over-analyzing, which may increase the distance from one's emotions. Example is when someone diagnosed with a terminal illness does not show emotion after the diagnosis is given but instead starts to research every source they can find about the illness.	Educators may argue intellectually trying to justify their mistake rather than accepting and working towards improvement.
Isolation of Affect	- Avoiding the experience of an emotion associated with a person, idea, or situation. The mechanism may be present in someone who describes the day their house burnt down in a factual way without displaying any emotion.	Educators may choose to avoid emotions even and rather focus on only the cognitive/facts
Rationalization	-Justification of one's behavior through attempts at a rational explanation. This mechanism may be present in someone who steals money but feels justified in doing so because they needed the money more than the person from whom they stole.	Educators may easily justify their learners' performance and failure based on their (learners') limitations, ignoring their (educators') role in the result.
Reaction formation	- Replacing one's initial impulse toward a situation or idea with the opposite impulse. This mechanism may be present in someone who teases or insults a romantic interest whom they like. Conversely, reaction formation may be present in someone who is overly kind to someone whom they dislike.	Educators who spend time and joke with the learners they dislike and vice versa
Sexualization:	- Associating sexual aspects to one's experience of certain people, places, objects, or ideas. Sexualization can refer to the development of one's sexual identity in general. Alternatively, sexualization can refer to the development of specific fetishes or sexual references to conventionally non-sexual entities.	Educators who may over-use sexual connotative terms and at times insults with sexual overtones
Sublimation	-Transforming one's anxiety or emotions into pursuits considered by societal or cultural norms to be more useful. This mechanism may be present in someone who channels their aggression and energy into playing sports.	Educators who transform their uncomfortable emotions into work. May be workaholics, or may even over-indulge in addictions
Suppression	- Consciously choosing to block ideas or impulses that are undesirable, as opposed to repression, a subconscious process. This mechanism may be present in someone who has intrusive thoughts about a traumatic event but pushes these thoughts out of their mind.	Educators may opt to avoid discussions of uncomfortable topics, including death, sickness etc

While Defence mechanisms have a role to play in momentarily protecting our systems from harm, they are not appropriate ways to deal with issues. Over-time, others realise the defense mechanism and consequently render the user immature. Maturity entails having appropriate methods

of dealing with stressful issues, for integral individual and social development. Discipline falls into the category of appropriately dealing with stressors.

Appropriate Methods of Dealing with Stress (Discipline)

Prior to initiating mechanisms to deal with stressors, individual educators are invited to be aware of the "Serenity Prayer":

God,
grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and
the wisdom to know the difference.

This prayer seeks to categorize stressors into two: those that we cannot effect change; those that we can effect change. The focus is on personal strengths and abilities. It is an acceptance of my limitations as a human being and avoidance of the attempts to be the Supreme Deity; sin against the first commandment.

Following the serenity prayer, the process invites the individual to redress one's self-awareness. Awareness of the self in relation to one's strengths and limitations is a notable prerequisite of maturity. The self is the instigator as well as the first beneficiary of any carried-out efforts. It is thus, required that the individual is aware of the self as the principal actor, and upon whom success and failure lie. With the gifts of life, health and time having been granted, utilization of these resources among other inherent and acquired capacities, is recipe for development.

The second aspect of awareness entails one's environment. This includes the social as well as the physical environment. A steady guide is the 5W and 1H: What is happening" Who is involved? When did it happen? Where was it? How did it happen? Finally, Why (How come) it happened? It is prudent to be cautious of the Why questions as they are apparently intrusive and may be challenging to respond to.

On the question of the who, the persons that surround the individual, and are willing to journey with this individual, are important. The location, from which one operates, is equally important. Together, the aspects of social and physical environment, present to the individual, the opportunity to co-create. It is through an appropriate engagement with the environment that one's potentials and competencies are realised.

In awareness of the self and of one's environment, there is an unsaid invitation to be cognizant of God's role in the activities of the individual. One may do all that is humanly possible but still not realise the anticipated outcome since it is not in accordance to God's will. Constant search for God's Willis discernment and it is an exercise of prudence. It grants rest and authentic serenity.

Whenever stressors emerge, the speed with which the individual system accepts the outcome, is the promptness with which the human system starts to deal with the issue. While it is challenging to readily accept traumatic phenomena such as news of terminal illnesses, and other losses, including death, the more one stays in the experience of the moment, the more they are likely to effect healing. Rather than argue, pray and hope that things were different, the more we accept, and the more we help others to accept, the better and the quicker, the healing starts.

Whenever triggers can be avoided, without compromising one's growth, they should be. However, as situations dictate it is not always possible to avoid. In such circumstances, one has to deal with the situations. For hurt or stress to be realised, the following components largely tend to be present:

(i) relationship with the self, with significant others and with the environment
(ii) expectations derived from the relationship(s)
(iii) breach of the expectation(s)
(iv) interpretation of reasons surrounding the breach
(v) decision to act in a particular way depending on the interpretation.

In addressing each of the stages of the hurt/stress process, let it be realised that the individual has it in their docket to control the relationships in which they engage. When the individuals surrounding the individual are not dependent on one's choices, the individual still has the role of setting clear boundaries on the interactions; fluid boundaries easily lead to increased hurt. In addition, at the level of the expectations, the more realistic they are, the less the chances of getting hurt. Also, the slower the process of raising expectations, the lesser the chances of hurt, and the more the individual is able to critically interrogate the levels of these expectations.

Whenever there is a breach to the expectations, there is a chance to re-look and interrogate whether they were fallacious, too high or even very hastily arrived at. It is an opportunity to re-look, learn and improve for a better future. A speedy interpretation, often marred by emotions, blurs cognition. This leads to increased hurt and broken relationships. The same goes to decisions made in the process. Decisions are a cognitive faculty (not an emotional one). It is therefore prudent that the right ambiance is used in making decisions.

Conclusion

The term "discipline" is associated with research, knowledge and education. It also entails pursuit of set principles and order. Addressing discipline from a reductionist perspective of reward and punishment; reinforcement and weakening of behaviour (Bandura, 2004) is a dis-service to the imminent term. One that is disciplined becomes a disciple; a follower of a certain pathway. This anticipates relationships with the self, with significant others, and with the environment. Awareness of the self and of the surrounding, and the subsequent systematic process of dealing with stressors, is discipline, whose consequences are increased happiness and wellness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Inversely, allowing an emotional "avalanche" to blur the cognitive path of dealing with stressors is indiscipline, and leads to increased hurt.

Work to do

Task process:
1. Participants come up with cases, that they have encountered (may be hypothetical), and which led to stressful moments.
2. Participants share the cases or even act it out in short (two minute) skits.
3. Participants discuss the case(s) identifying the stressors, tempting defence mechanisms, and appropriate ways to deal with the issues.

Cases are in the areas of:
1. *Administration (stakeholder, parent, teacher, learner)*
Administrator:
Teacher:

2. *Welfare (Child safe-guarding/sponsorship)*
Welfare Officer:
Teacher:

3. *Teacher (teacher)*
Teacher:
Teacher:

4. *Teacher (non-teaching staff)*

Teacher:
Non-Teaching Staff:

     5. *Parent*
Teacher:
Parent:

     6. *Learner*
Teacher:
Learner:

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