



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

HOW WILL YOU BE THE CHANGE:

SMALL ACTIONS. BIG IMPACT.

A Purple Paper by The Stress Management Society



www.stress.org.uk

HOW WILL YOU BE THE CHANGE?

The start of a new year often brings good intentions and a desire for change. Yet change can feel daunting. Stress, uncertainty, and old habits can make it hard to move forward, even when we know what we want to be different.

This paper is an invitation to pause and consider what change could look like in real, everyday terms.

What if small, intentional actions could create meaningful impact, not just for you, but for the people around you too?

Being the change does not mean fixing everything or starting over. It means noticing what is happening, understanding where your control sits, and choosing actions that feel realistic and sustainable.

As you move through this paper, you will explore how awareness becomes action, why small steps matter, and how change often begins with you.

Take what is useful.

Leave what is not.

Small actions are enough.



AWARENESS AND ACTION

Understanding the difference

Becoming aware of stress is often the first sign that something needs attention. Awareness helps us notice pressure, change, and the impact they are having on us.

What matters next is what we do with that awareness.



Awareness alone: What happens when we notice but do not act?

Awareness is important. It helps us recognise stress, pressure, and change. But awareness on its own can sometimes increase discomfort.

When we notice what is wrong without knowing what to do next, our sense of control can drop. This can lead to higher anxiety, overwhelm, and burnout. We may feel stuck, alert, or constantly thinking about the problem without relief.

Awareness without action often sounds like:

"I know this is stressful, but I cannot change it."

"I can see what is wrong, but I do not know where to start."

Over time, this can drain energy rather than restore it.

Awareness with action: Why small steps change how stress feels?

When awareness is followed by action, the experience of stress shifts.

Action increases our sense of control, even when the situation itself has not changed. This sense of choice helps calm the stress response and supports confidence, coping, and relief.

Action does not remove stress. It changes our relationship with it.

Even small actions remind us that we are not powerless.



THE SCIENCE BEHIND SMALL ACTIONS

Stress is not just about what is happening around us.

It is also about how much control we believe we have.

Feeling in control lowers stress



When we feel we have choices, the brain and body respond differently. The stress response begins to settle, even if the situation itself has not changed. A sense of control signals safety and capability.

Doing something builds confidence

Each small action reinforces the belief that we can cope. This builds confidence over time and makes future challenges feel more manageable.

Helping others helps us too

Supporting someone else increases connection, purpose, and emotional balance. These experiences are protective against stress and support overall wellbeing, for both the giver and the receiver.

What we practise becomes our habit

The brain learns through repetition. When we practise small, calm, intentional actions, those responses become easier and more automatic over time.

This is why small actions matter. They do not fix everything, but they change how stress feels and how we respond to it.



THE T.O.P. PRINCIPLE



Focusing your energy where it helps most

Stress often increases when our attention stays on what we cannot control. It eases when we return to what we can. The T.O.P Principle is a simple way to sort situations so your energy goes where it makes the biggest difference.

T. Totally within my control

These are things you can decide or change yourself.

You might notice this includes

- How you respond to a situation
- How you speak to yourself
- Taking a break
- Setting boundaries
- Asking for support
- Choosing your next small step

Focusing here increases clarity and confidence

O. Outside of my control

These are things you cannot change directly.

This often includes

- Other people's reactions or decisions
- Past events
- Organisational or system-wide change
- Uncertainty in the wider world

Spending energy here can increase frustration and tension.

P. Partially within my control

These sit between the two. You may not control the outcome, but you can influence parts of the situation.

Examples include:

- How you communicate your needs
- What you prepare for
- When and how you raise an issue
- How you manage your time within constraints

This is often where the most helpful action sits.



THE T.O.P. PRINCIPLE IN PRACTICE

When something feels stressful, pause and ask:

Is this totally within my control, partially within my control, or outside of my control?

Use the next exercise to practice.

Write down 3 situations/worries that you often think about or are currently challenged with:



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If the problem is outside of your control, then there is absolutely no point in attempting to solve it, we have to refocus our energies onto things that we can have an effect on.

How would you classify each of your 3 worries? Circle the respective letter.

1. **T** **O** **P**
2. **T** **O** **P**
3. **T** **O** **P**

If the problem is totally within my control or even, partially in your control, what are 3 small action you could take to support yourself this week?



FINAL REFLECTION

Being the Change

Change does not begin with big decisions or perfect plans. It begins with noticing, choosing, and acting in small ways.

When awareness is paired with action, stress becomes easier to manage. When energy is focused on what is within your control, confidence grows.

You are not expected to fix everything. You are not meant to carry pressure alone.

Each small action creates movement. Each choice creates impact. Over time, these moments shape how you feel, how you cope, and how you influence the world around you.

Being the change is not about doing more. It is about doing what matters, one small step at a time.

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BIGGER



Inspired by "Be the change you wish to see in the world" (Gandhi), this theme recognises the power each of us has to shape our experience of stress and to ripple that change outwards.

Through small, mindful choices, acts of kindness, and compassionate boundaries, you can make a real difference for yourself and those around you.

In April, we'll be sharing:

- Daily tips, reflections, and practical techniques to bring "Be the Change" to life
- Resources, tools, and activities for individuals and organisations
- Stories, news coverage, and ways to celebrate positive change together

JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

Get in touch with Judy@stress.org.uk to find out how you, your team, or your organisation can take part.

Small steps matter. Let's make change happen, together.





We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

Find Us Here:
Suite 8, Quay West
Salamander Quay
Harefield, Middlesex
UB6 9NZ

Call Us On:
Switchboard: +44
(0) 203 142 8659

Email Us On:
info@stress.org.uk

Visit Us On:
www.stress.org.uk
www.wellbeing.work

We have supported many organisations, including:



The Commonwealth

