INTERRUPTING THE STRESS RESPONSE

This exercise guides you through the process of interrupting the stress response to break out of this automatic reaction so that you can choose the most appropriate response for the situation.

There are 3 steps to Interrupting the stress response:

Step 1 Notice your early warning signals

Step 2 Create a pattern interrupt

Step 3 Use the gap to choose a different response

Step 1 Notice your early warning signals

• Notice your body’s early warning signals, your thoughts, emotions, and reactions immediately before you go into the stress response

• You can do this by recalling and tuning into a recent situation where you went into the stress response

• What happens just before the stress response takes hold? What happens before that?

• Some examples of early warning signals are: tension and pressure in the head; fast breathing; fast heart rate; tight tummy; cold and clammy or hot and sweaty skin; clenching fists; feeling nauseous; being judgmental, blaming, and critical; taking things personally; taking offence; a feeling of closing down.

• Make a note of your early warning signals
Step 2 Create a pattern interrupt
The way to interrupt the stress response is to create a pause. As you notice your early warning signals you can choose to create a pause by taking a deep breath into your belly; actually pausing and stopping what you are doing or anything else that creates a pause for you.

Step 3 Use the gap to choose a different response
As you practise this you will notice that:

• You create a six- to ten-second gap

• Eventually you will be conscious enough to use this gap to choose your response by tuning into the situation and what is required

• Many clients say that when they start to interrupt the stress response the first thing that happens is they are aware of their early warning signals and acknowledge that they are going into stress response which in itself interrupts it. Eventually they feel present enough to notice the 6 to 10 second gap but are not conscious enough of what is going on to choose a different response. With practice they are able to choose how to respond. At first this feels a bit clunky but as you repeat this process and create a new neural pathway it gradually becomes your natural way of responding in potentially stressful situations.

Start to try this out next time you notice your early warning signals.