

# Strategies for Managing and Reducing Faculty Stress

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# Agenda

- Key definitions
- Stress Management Strategies for Faculty
- Strategies for Department Chairs



What is  
stress?

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***“a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation... Everyone experiences stress to some degree.”***

World Health Organization

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# Categories of Stress

*(American Institute of Stress)*

<b>Acute Stress</b>	<b>Chronic Stress</b>	<b>Eustress</b>	<b>Distress</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Activation of your fight or flight response</i></li><li>• <i>Full body response</i></li><li>• <i>Can take around 90 minutes for the body to return to a state of homeostasis</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Repetitive stressors that are pervasive</i></li><li>• <i>These tend to "pile up" and compound</i></li><li>• <i>If not addressed, these can take a serious toll on your physical and mental health (see studies on toxic stress and ACEs)</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Stresses in life that are associated with more positive situations</i></li><li>• <i>Examples: getting married, having a new baby, starting a new job</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Situations in life that are associated with more negative situations</i></li><li>• <i>Examples: getting a divorce, getting injured, a negative financial change, work challenges</i></li></ul>



# Symptoms of Stress

*(Cleveland Clinic)*

Stress can lead to **emotional and mental symptoms** like:



**Anxiety or irritability.**



**Depression.**



**Panic attacks.**



**Sadness.**

**Physical symptoms** of stress may include:



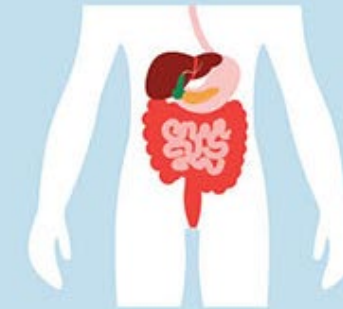
**Exhaustion.**



**Headaches, dizziness or shaking.**



**High blood pressure.**



**Digestive problems.**



**Chest pain.**



**Muscle tension.**



**Aches and pains.**



**Sexual dysfunction.**



**Weakened immune system.**



What is  
burnout?

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***"a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment"***

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**Maslach & Leiter, 2016**



# Burnout Risk Factors

## WORKPLACE FACTORS

- Work that seems unpredictable or meaningless
- Work involving long periods of emotional suppression or expression
- Micromanaging and lack of autonomy
- Role ambiguity and role conflict
- Poor administrative supervision
- Workplace bullying and harassment
- Lack of social support
- Work hours/workloads that inhibit work-life balance

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Specific personality traits (e.g., neuroticism)
- Type A personalities
- External locus of control
- Extreme high expectations
- Overinvolvement with work
- Lack of coping strategies
- Low self esteem
- Low levels of resilience

(Psychology Today, 2023)



What is  
wellness?

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***“the active pursuit of activities,  
choices and lifestyles that lead  
to a state of holistic health.”***

--The Global Wellness Institute

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# Stress Management tips for Faculty



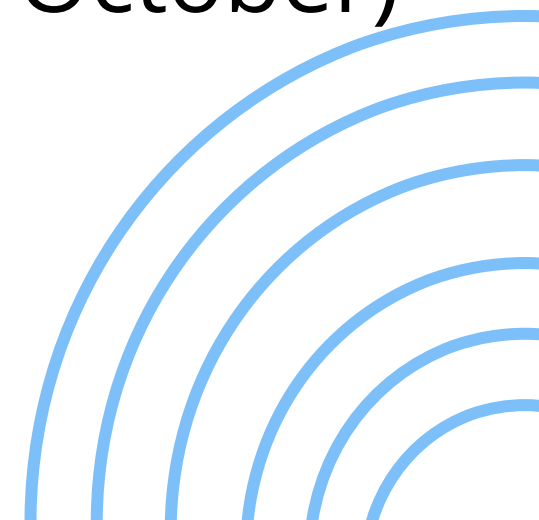
# Identify your stress triggers

Figure out what (*or who*) is setting you off.

Think about any major/minor changes to health, finances, home life, work, etc.

Identify your heavy stress times (e.g., beginning of the semester; finals; October)

If you're not sure, try journaling.





# Establish Boundaries

Practice saying “No”

Communication

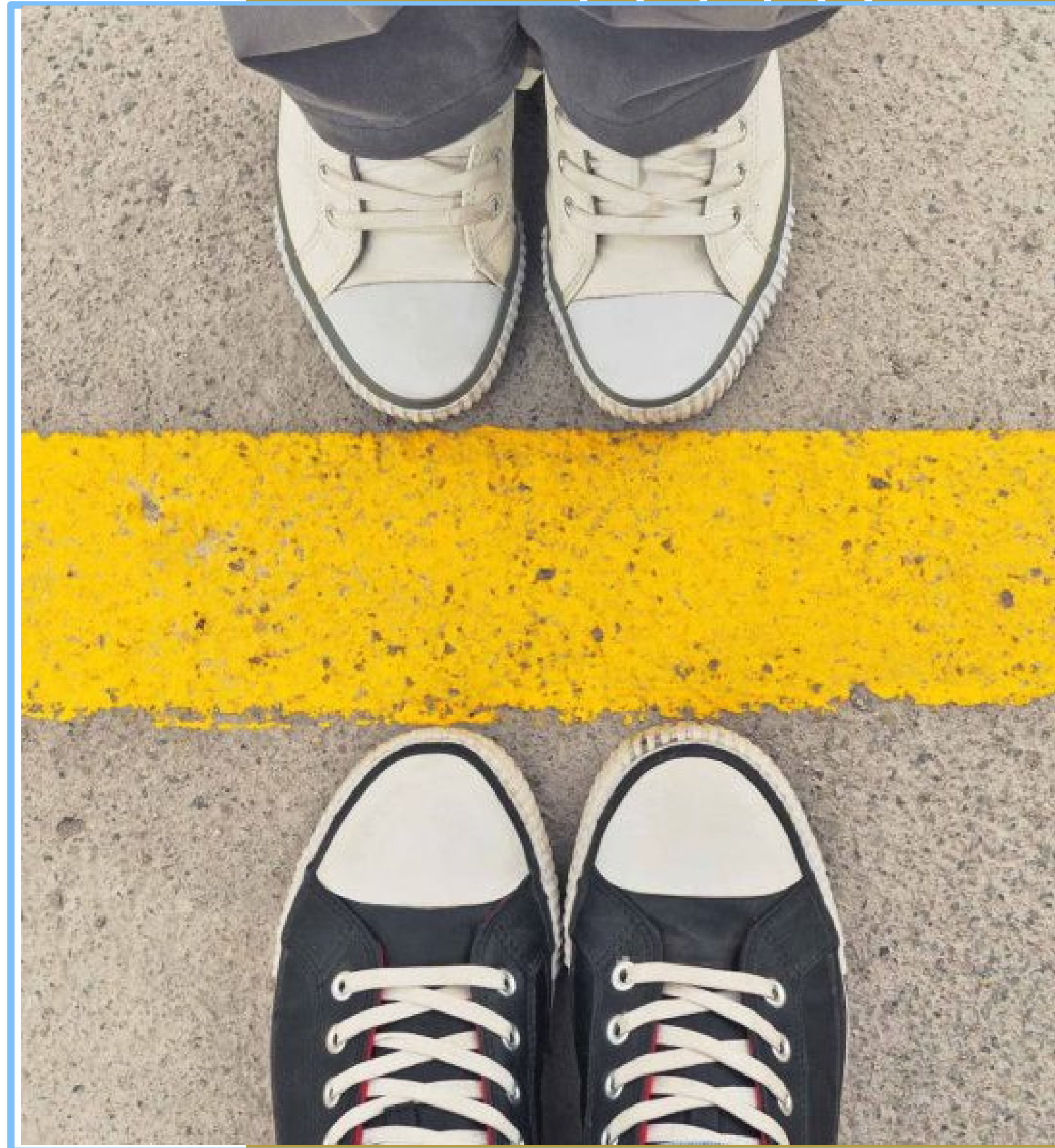
Technology

Time

Workspace

Considerations for virtual work

***To the extent possible, build these into  
your syllabi and other structures.***





# Set up an optimal workspace

Resources: *What do you need?*

Vibe: *Minimalist or Maximalist?*

Comfort items: *Chair, lighting, eye care, etc.*

Considerations for shared space

Set reminders and cues: Smart tech, timer lamps, etc.





# Create routines

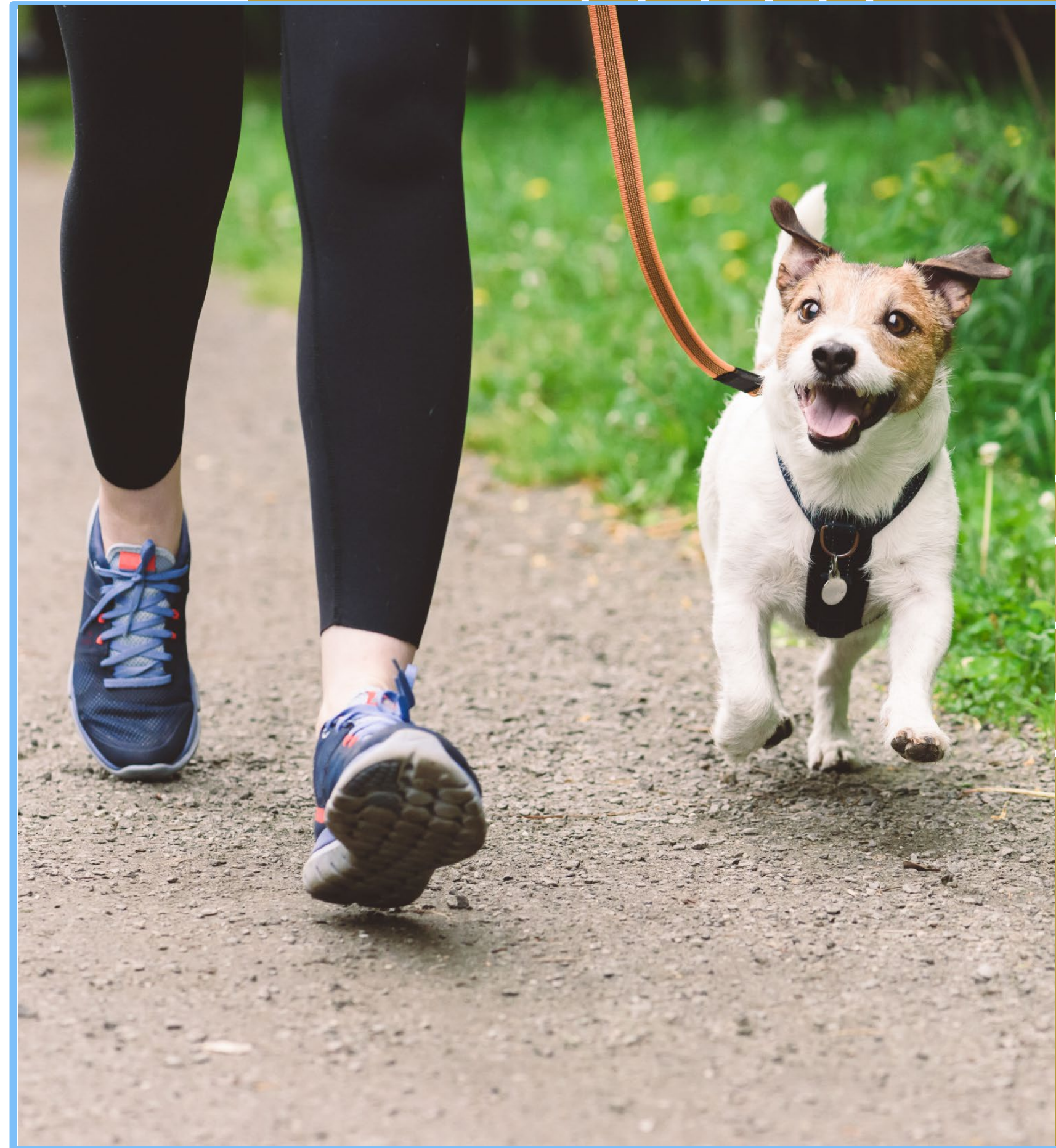
Morning warmup

End-of-day unwind

When do you check your email?

Rituals to help with transitions

Hobbies & volunteering: *Have a life  
outside of work!*



# Stress management in Scholarship

Schedule writing/research time

Map out a scholarship agenda for the year

Avoid "Shiny New Project Syndrome" and "Academic Otters"

Collaborate

Celebrate successes!





# Stress management in Teaching

Establish grading procedures and timelines

Schedule class prep time

Recognize your needs before & after class

Utilize the Center for Teaching Innovation and consult with other faculty



# Self Regulation Activities

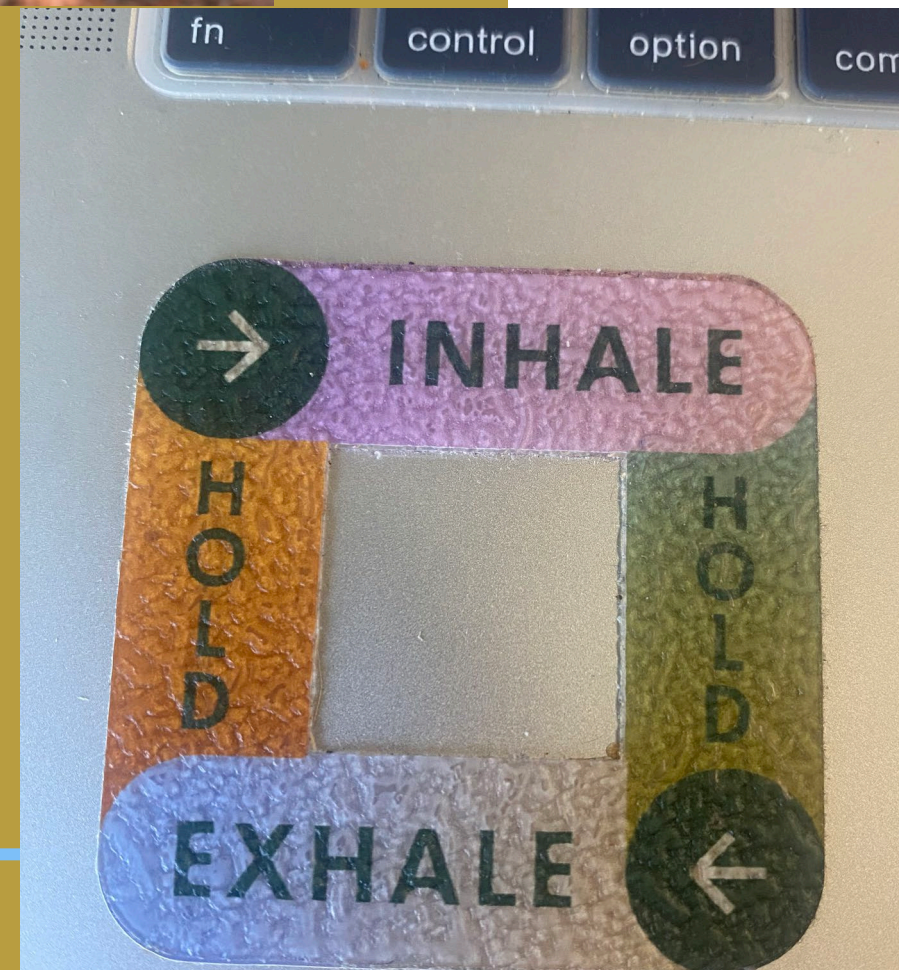
Breathing exercises

Engage in nature

Guided meditations

Body Scan

Mindfulness apps (e.g., Smiling Mind, UCLA Mindful, Healthy Minds, Insight Timer)





# Mental health resources

Connecting with a mental health professional

Check in with colleagues and your personal network

Recognize signs of burnout (*emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, low personal achievement*)

Employee Assistance Program

Books & Podcasts





# Resources for new faculty

## **Books:**

- *Small Teaching* by James Lang
- *Teaching What You Don't Know* by Therese Huston
- *The Slow Professor* by Berg and Seeber
- *Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout* by Cal Newport
- *The Busy Professor* by Timothy Slater
- *The Coach's Guide for Women Professors* by Rena Seltzer
- *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul* by Kerry Ann Rockquemore & Tracey Laszloffy

## **Blogs and Websites:**

- [How to Live in Paradise: A Guide for New and Disgruntled Professors](#)
- [National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity](#)
- ["How I \(sometimes\) achieve academic work life balance"](#)
- [Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega's personal blog](#)
- ["Get Yourself a NO committee"](#)

# Strategies for Chairs and Administrators



# Consider your Leadership Style

- **Authoritarian Leadership:** the leader dictates what others are to do
- **Democratic Leadership:** the leader seeks perspectives and feedback of those who are led
- **Distributed/Shared Leadership:** leadership is shared within a group that makes decisions together
- **Laissez-faire Leadership:** the leader is vague and seemingly aimless, hands-off, and/or uninvolved
- **Servant Leadership:** the leader has service as a core value and carries out leadership as a means to serve the greater good
- **Transformational Leadership:** the leader empowers the leadership of others



# Attend to group dynamics

Problematic subgroups and social exclusion

Monopolizers

"Help-Rejecting Complainers"

Silent members





# Communication

Provide clear and thorough expectations

Provide and ask for feedback

Be available (within reason)

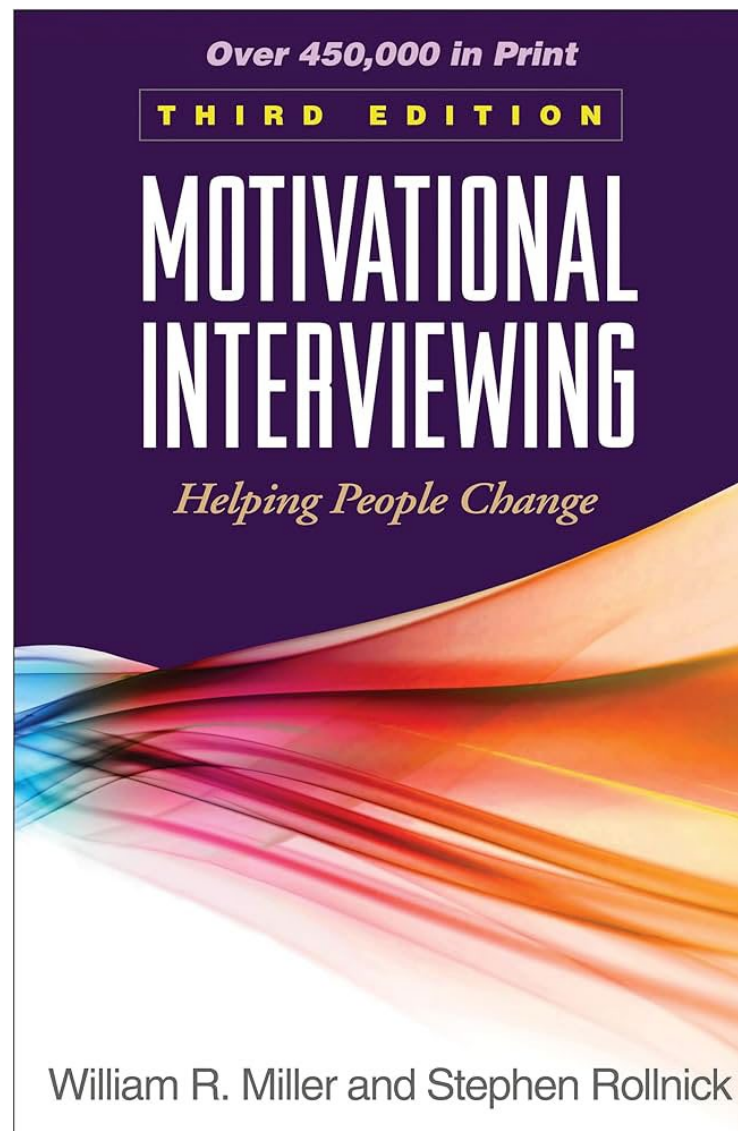
Be transparent (when possible)

Avoid toxic positivity in messaging



# Basic Motivational Interviewing

Developed for use in clinical therapy, MI “is a directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence”



## Key Principles:

- Joining & Coming Alongside
- Rolling with Resistance
- Pointing out Discrepancies / ambivalence



# Active listening

Engaging with the conversation's content, showing empathy, and openness to fully comprehend the speaker's message.

- **Paraphrasing or summarizing** what the speaker has said shows that you understand and are following along accurately.
- **Asking Open-Ended Questions** helps clarify ambiguities and encourages the speaker to elaborate on their thoughts.
- Refraining from interrupting, giving advice, or jumping to conclusions helps keep the focus on the speaker's message.
- **Reflecting feelings:** Validating the speaker's emotions by acknowledging them (e.g., "It sounds like you're feeling...") shows empathy and encourages openness.



# Rolling with Resistance

Resistance often stems from fear of change.

Confronting resistance directly leads to arguing. Instead, reframe & reflect:

- Paraphrase and reflect
  - *“You don’t like this idea”* (reflect content)
- Reflect tone
  - *“It sounds like you’re feeling hopeless and stuck.”* (reflect tone/feeling)
  - *“You’re tired of having this conversation”* (reflect tone/feeling)
- Attend to the process of the conversation
  - *“We seem to be moving toward an argument.”* (stop and reset)
  - *“I think I’ve gotten us off track here.”* (stop and reset; take the blame)
- Support autonomy
  - *“This decision is really up to you.”*
  - *“You’re in charge of deciding what your next steps are.”*





# Highlighting Discrepancies & Ambivalence

Gently highlighting discrepancies between behaviors and goals can bring insight on current stressors. Remain non-judgmental.

- Develop discrepancy

- *“I know you really want to improve your skills in the classroom. And you’ve skipped several workshops offered by Faculty Affairs on this topic. I’m curious about what’s going on.” This will hopefully encourage them to discuss what’s not working with the workshops or other challenges to attending (e.g., conflicts, time management)*

- Reflect ambivalence. Use double-sided reflections.

- *“On one hand, you’re eager to improve your scholarship productivity, and on the other hand, you’re feeling overwhelmed with where to begin.” This validates both feelings they’re having and should help them discuss the roadblock more*



# Help faculty feel seen and supported

Recognize good work

Build an opportunity for celebrations into faculty  
meetings

Try to avoid rewarding competence with more  
work

Open lines of communication with junior faculty



# Conclusions

- Help new faculty acclimate to the role and senior faculty reset
- Help faculty identify resources and strategies
- Model wellness behaviors
- Determine your leadership style
- Attend to group dynamics
- Communicate effectively
- Use nonjudgmental active listening skills to support struggling faculty

# Questions?

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