



Promoting Stress Busters at the Organizational Level

In addition to client interactions, where else can Stress Busters “show up” at your organization? You can further support clients (and staff) by evaluating your organization’s operations, services, and physical environment and considering additional ideas for promoting Stress Busters.

This chapter provides examples from the lived experiences of community partners and clinical expertise about how Stress Busters could be integrated into practices at the organizational level.

Supportive relationships

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
Do our programs and services help clients build their relational health?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Hold some activities after hours or on weekends to include working parents and caregivers. ✔ Incorporate “play therapy” and parent-child activities into existing programming. ✔ Start dyadic parent-child programs like support groups or workshops. ✔ Hold community dinners or other events. ✔ Host support groups for caregivers. ✔ Provide financial assistance for family ceremonies, such as traditional Native weddings, quinceañeras, Lunar New Year, etc. ✔ Provide financial services for families with relative caregivers (e.g., grandparents raising grandchildren). ✔ Offer group activities (e.g., weekly walking group). ✔ Offer “fun time” groups to support connections between family members (e.g., game nights, dinner nights, movie nights, art gatherings); consider asking volunteers to work together to run them.
Would our clients benefit from peer support services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Hire or train peer support staff. ✔ Form advisory boards to lift up lived experience and inform programs and services.
Does our organization have systems that support consistent, supportive relationships with clients?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Address staff turnover to create consistency in staff-client relationships. ✔ Develop systems that enhance longevity of relationships between staff and clients rather than switching to different staff (e.g., keeping the same coach, counselor, case coordinator for clients) while allowing for client choice.

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<p>Do we have policies or practices in place at our organization to create an environment of safety, trust, and autonomy around physical interactions with clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Invite caregivers to participate in activities. ✔ Consider implementing practices to ask clients for permission before physical interactions (e.g. offering a choice of a high-five, placing a hand on the shoulder, sharing a hug, or words of comfort).
<p>Does our organization provide a safe and welcoming environment where clients feel their privacy and safety are prioritized?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Honor privacy by avoiding the unnecessary request for or use of documentation related to individuals' identification or other sensitive information, as some may fear implications (e.g., potential deportation, legal consequences), which may then discourage people from seeking support. ✔ Consider having a plan for organizational response to requests for federal partnership (e.g., Immigration and Customs Enforcement).
<p>Does our organization aim to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Consider that clients may have barriers such as literacy level, English language learner, visual impairments, and learning differences that make connecting with services difficult or stressful. ✔ Provide resources to team members around cultural humility. ✔ If you think a client may be having difficulties navigating a website or application (they may be embarrassed and not tell you why), consider offering to look at the application together. If the client agrees, you can offer to type in their answers, since you are on your computer already. ("Would it help if I read this document/website out loud because it is a little complicated?" "I can just type in the answers you tell me.")
<p>Does our organization encourage supportive relationships for staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Schedule monthly or quarterly team-building activities in place of a meeting. ✔ To boost feelings of appreciation, at monthly staff meetings highlight great teamwork and ask staff members to share what they are grateful for. ✔ Assign staff "buddies" and sponsor buddy events or buddy days, provide a budget for buddies to get lunch together.

 **Quality sleep**

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>Do our opening and closing times meet client and staff needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Change opening and closing times to better align with the needs of the individuals you support, such as after-school hours for teens (vs. early mornings), weekends for working parents, etc. ✔ Empower staff to start and end work when they want or work remotely.
<p>Do we support quality sleep with our programs and services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Support tobacco cessation (using tobacco products can increase sleep problems). ✔ Provide easily visible and accessible information and educational materials about the health benefits of sleep (e.g., posters or pamphlets in waiting areas). ✔ Offer programs like an aromatherapy group for clients (e.g., clients can make lavender sachets or room sprays).
<p>Are there ways we can promote quality sleep on site?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Set up a quiet nap room for people to rest. ✔ Encourage other Stress Busters that support sleep (e.g., mindfulness practices, physical activity).
<p>What practices can we integrate into our culture and the way we work to support quality sleep?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Encourage staff to be offline after work hours (i.e., not monitoring emails or working into the night). To get everyone in the habit, leadership may need to openly and regularly model this behavior.

 **Balanced nutrition**

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>Do we incorporate balanced nutrition into our programs and services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Provide nutrition classes that do not just teach people what to eat, but also strategies, such as using CalFresh nutrition assistance benefits at farmers' markets and how to cook culturally preferred foods in healthy ways, to make healthy eating possible in the context of various stressors and barriers. ✔ Incorporate activities such as cooking, shopping, and planning, and food resource management (ways for food-insecure individuals to acquire healthy and affordable food). ✔ Provide parents, teachers, and coaches with non-food-based incentives and rewards, such as event tickets, toys, games, a basketball, etc. ✔ Provide plenty of time for children and clients to eat their lunch. ✔ Implement policies for your organization and partners or subcontractors, such as most of the foods provided to the community should be low-sodium/low-sugar, no candy, etc. ✔ Host community potlucks and dinners. ✔ Create a community garden and grow fruits and vegetables that are common in the community's diet.
<p>How can we make balanced nutrition more accessible for clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Set up a food pantry on site for clients who have mobility issues, do not have access to transportation, or have young children, which can make it difficult to get to community food banks and wait in long lines. ✔ Partner with CalFresh to provide local resources and maps to community programs, including faith-based programs that give out food. ✔ Look up local "gleaning" or food recovery programs where clients can pick up fruits or vegetables for free. ✔ Create a list of local food pantries. ✔ Partner with other local community-based organizations that provide healthy nutrition services. ✔ Bring a farmers' market that accepts CalFresh and EBT to your organization once a week. ✔ Advocate for healthy, affordable markets and grocery stores in the community.

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<p>Does our organization support balanced nutrition for staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Provide plenty of time for staff to eat lunch, and consider providing healthy snacks in the break room. ✔ Promote staff eating lunch together. ✔ Provide healthy foods for staff, such as fruit, dark chocolate, etc. ✔ Stock vending machines with healthy foods.
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 **Physical activity**

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>Do we incorporate physical activity into our programs and services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Add indoor and outdoor physical activity to your regular programming (e.g., parent-child follow-the-leader or musical chairs at a preschool). ✔ Add active events (e.g., family swim day, ice skating day, bowling, etc.). ✔ Create a space at your site for physical activity; consider providing equipment like yoga mats, exercise balls, and jump ropes. ✔ Offer information about physical activity in the waiting room (e.g., health benefits, classes and programs you offer, list of local parks, gyms, etc.). ✔ Develop a trauma-informed activity program.
<p>How can we make physical activity more accessible for clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Offer group walking as a first step for clients who are just starting out with any physical activity, as it is low impact. ✔ Offer physical activity programs as part of your accessible and affordable programming or partner with local organizations to do so, and maintain a list for clients. ✔ Create opportunities for clients to build their resume, such as by instructing classes (e.g., Mommy and Me yoga, Zumba). ✔ Add activities that are culturally relevant to the community (e.g., powwow, Latin, and hip hop dance aerobics or workouts). ✔ Consider cultural needs to support accessibility when setting up programs. For example, for Muslim communities, create a private or women-only space to do certain activities like swimming or yoga.

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<p>Does our organization encourage physical activity for staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Encourage staff to take brief 5- to 15-minute physical activity breaks throughout the day (e.g., short walk, stretching). To get everyone in the habit, leadership may need to openly and regularly model this behavior. ✔ Schedule monthly team-building activities during the workday, like walks or hikes. ✔ Use icebreakers that involve movement during meetings. ✔ Consider standing desks or other ergonomic features so that staff can move around while working on their computers. ✔ Offer regular on-site, facilitated classes for staff such as chair yoga (check to see if your health insurance provider offers this benefit and others, such as a wellness stipend that could be used for a gym membership, etc.).
<p>Are there spaces in the community that enable physical activity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Identify (and work to create or advocate for) safe spaces in the community where people can be physically active – parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can do this through a process called “asset mapping,” which involves asking community members about resources in the area on a map. Then you can share the map and information with other community members. (For information, see this UCLA resource on how to do asset mapping.)
<p>Are program instructors and coaches trained in trauma-informed practices?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ There are multiple ways to train instructors and coaches, from online platforms to trauma-informed coaching certifications; do some research to find what works best for your organization. Examples of trainings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma Transformed: Focuses on organizational transformation and is geared towards public and community-based organizations; variety of services, including self-paced online training, in-person or virtual live workshops, and coaching. • Safe Spaces: Designed for educators and is helpful for anyone working with children; free two-hour online training that can be done in groups or individually.

 **Mindfulness practices**

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>Do we incorporate mindfulness practices into our programs and services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Offer programs like a weekly “be in the moment,” technology-free walking reflection group for clients and families, promoting mindfulness in combination with physical activity. ✔ Begin classes or group activities with a mindful moment (e.g., ask everyone to quietly pause for a minute to take deep breaths and observe to themselves how they are feeling).
<p>Does our organization support mindfulness practices for staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Create space for staff to practice mindfulness; put up posters about mindfulness techniques in the office, add calendar reminders to practice breathing before going into challenging meetings or programs, etc. ✔ Offer regular on-site, facilitated classes for staff such as chair yoga or meditation (check to see if your health insurance provider offers this benefit). ✔ Create a self-care Bingo card with different types of mindfulness practices; offer prizes for filling it out.
<p>What mindfulness practices can we integrate into our culture and the way we work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Establish a “no multi-tasking” rule during weekly staff check-in meetings. (“We are present with each other in the room.”) ✔ Practice different mindfulness exercises at team meetings (e.g., starting meetings with three deep breaths together or with a short guided meditation); this will benefit staff in the moment and also provide practice to enable staff to teach techniques to clients. ✔ Encourage having open conversations, “Zooming out” (taking a break), and using deep breathing techniques when a team member says they are feeling reactionary in the office.

 Experiencing nature

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>What green spaces or natural elements are in or near our organization's site? Are they accessible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Add plants to the office and put out a shared watering can for their care. ✓ Share seeds and plantings at the office (set up a "free" box for plant sharing). ✓ Add plantings to outside areas. ✓ Add seating to outdoor or atrium areas.
<p>How can we make nature more accessible for clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Share a map with clients of nearby green spaces and community gardens. ✓ Work to develop, advocate for, or increase access to community gardens and parks (e.g., reduce physical, social, and transportation barriers). ✓ Advocate at the city or town level for more parks or splash pads and recreation centers in under-resourced areas.
<p>Would it benefit clients if we partnered with organizations that offer outdoor programs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify local outdoor organizations and programs (e.g., 4-H clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts) and build relationships so you can directly refer individuals to their programs and activities. ✓ Partner with parks and recreation departments, the local zoo, and botanical gardens for free tickets for low-income families. ✓ Offer or raffle off field trips to local outdoor baseball games during Mental Health Awareness Month in May.
<p>Do we incorporate nature into our programs and services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Add outdoor and nature-based elements to your programming, such as group walks, walking sessions with clients, group outings to parks and gardens, and classes on plants for foraging (e.g., edible, native, and healing plants). ✓ Add a garden area that is open during the day for staff and clients; start a weekly gardening group. ✓ Host outdoor holiday celebrations for clients (e.g., barbeque for Labor Day, 4th of July, etc.). ✓ Incorporate seeds in giveaways or projects, such as paper bookmarks with wildflower seeds that can be planted.

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<p>How can we expand the reach of our nature-based programs in the community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Reach out to and educate local clinics and other community-based organizations about the nature-based programs you offer, the benefits these programs provide, possible collaborations, and how to refer individuals to your programs. ✔ Connect with your local 211 provider to have your nature-based programs listed as part of their services.
<p>How can we incorporate nature into our culture and the way we work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Have meetings outdoors, including “walk and talks.” ✔ Hold work retreats outdoors or with allotted time in nature on the agenda. ✔ Make staff celebrations outdoor affairs (e.g., barbecues, picnics).

 **Mental healthcare**

Questions to ask	Ideas to consider
<p>Do we offer programs and services that support clients’ mental health and well-being?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Provide case management and navigation services to connect clients to resources like housing, food, etc. ✔ Provide group sessions about mental wellness best practices (e.g., Stress Busters). ✔ Offer classes such as mindfulness, yoga, and Mommy and Me playtime, activities for parents and school-aged kids that support mental health; discuss the link to mental health. ✔ Provide youth enrichment programs (e.g., mentoring, after-school programs). ✔ Address the unique mental health needs of different groups, such as at-risk youth, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ people, neurodivergent people, and people with disabilities by providing programs and services that connect clients with clinicians, mentors, care coordinators, etc. who have similar backgrounds.¹ ✔ Offer mental health and well-being groups run by peer specialists.

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<p>How can we make mental healthcare more accessible for all clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Encourage staff to take mental/behavioral health trainings (see resources at www.acesaware.org/managestress/). ✔ Put up posters or offer brochures in the waiting area about the importance of mental health (see resources at www.acesaware.org/managestress/). ✔ If appropriate for the work your organization does, incorporate standardized screening tools and protocols to ask about ACEs, and trauma symptoms including both medical and mental health needs and concerns as part of the routine client intake and assessment. ACEs Aware has an implementation guide that may assist your organization in starting ACE screening. ✔ Create a list of referrals to appropriate external resources that offer mental health care services (including services covered by Medi-Cal). ✔ Hire mental health staff and interns in-house. ✔ Form a Youth Advisory Board to solicit input about mental health care programs and services from youth.¹ ✔ Ensure there are private, comfortable spaces for safe and confidential discussions with clients.
<p>Do we have mental health support for staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Check with your organization’s health insurance provider to see if they have corporate well-being programs and coverage for mental and behavioral health. ✔ Encourage practicing the Stress Busters by creating space to practice, adding calendar reminders to take time to care for oneself, incorporating Stress Busters into meetings and routines (e.g., 2-minute mindfulness at the start of every meeting, walking meetings, social lunches and potlucks, etc.). ✔ Offer regular on-site, facilitated classes for staff such as chair yoga or meditation (check to see if your health insurance provider offers this benefit). ✔ Create a self-care Bingo card with different types of mindfulness practices; offer prizes for filling it out. ✔ Schedule regular team-building events and opportunities to socialize during work hours. ✔ Cultivate a culture where taking time off for mental health is normalized.

References

1. Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory. US Department of Health and Human Services; 2021. Accessed February 6, 2025. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK575984/>