Large-class CBT for common mental health problems
What is Stress Control?

Stress Control is a six session, 90 minute, didactic CBT/wellbeing transdiagnostic ‘class’ (never ‘group’) approach for the common mental health problems: anxiety, depression, panicky feelings, insomnia and poor wellbeing.

It was developed over 30 years ago by Dr Jim White for use in a low-intensity clinical psychology NHS service in Glasgow. Now used across the world, well over 100,000 people have attended a Stress Control class.

It is extensively used in the NHS, HSE (ROI), occupational health settings and voluntary care settings.

There is no discussion of personal problems thus there is no limit on the numbers who can attend. Typical NHS classes run with 20-100 participants, making Stress Control a highly cost-effective intervention.

Stress Control aims to teach individuals to ‘become your own therapist’. This aim is supported by ‘Stress Control in nine words’: Face your Fears, Be more Active, Boost your Wellbeing.

‘Trainers’ are supported by PowerPoints, audio and video. The class avoids jargon and the eleven booklets (plus supplements) which accompany the class are ‘easy’ to understand (Flesch-Kincaid reading ease).

Stress Control aims to help people with any level of anxiety or depression (‘stress’) – mild, moderate or severe – and, for those with common and enduring common mental health problems, to help keep ‘heads above water’. It can also be used as a relapse-prevention approach or as early intervention/prevention.

Stress Control is among the best-evidenced psycho-educational approaches for common mental health problems in the world. Independent IAPT studies show that ‘recovery’ and ‘reliable and clinically significant improvement’ data are equivalent to IAPT individual therapy.
"This course is potentially life changing, definitely life enhancing" So said one of the many hundreds of participants who have attended the Stress Control courses I have delivered in Ireland. Dr White has developed the single-most effective tool to identify and manage anxiety and depression I have ever encountered. And there are numerous academic research reports to back up its effectiveness. Stress Control presents searing practicality with comprehensive information in a format that is easily understood. As a professional, I have never participated in a more satisfying piece of work. Stress Control rocks!

Dr Mark Harrold, Senior Clinical Psychologist with the Irish Health Service. Author, broadcaster and regular contributor to the Irish Times Newspaper.
Why should you consider Stress Control?

In an NHS where demand will always outweigh supply, Stress Control offers an evidence-based approach that low-intensity CBT therapists can be trained to deliver after only a two-day course. As a guided-self-help approach, it offers genuine choice for service-users. Participants can join the class at any session, allowing rapid access to help.

Data from Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS show that Stress Control is much more effective than individual therapy in attracting ‘hard-to-reach’ groups: men (45% of classes), those from minority ethnic groups and those from deprived communities. The ban on personal disclosure, no writing in the class, the lowering of barriers (self-referral is the most common route into classes) and offering evening as well as day-time classes help considerably with this.

Stress Control can help other parts of the service: CMHT and CAT service-users with severe and enduring problems can attend Stress Control classes to deal with the highly comorbid problems of anxiety and depression, thus, potentially, reducing the number of sessions of one-to-one required.

In individual therapy, if the service-user fails to attend, the therapist’s time is wasted. In Stress Control, if one person fails to attend, the therapist still has a large class to teach. However, with average completion rates of over 70%, it is a highly efficient approach that compares well to any other NHS mental health intervention.

In tough economic times, Stress Control offers inexpensive evidence-based care. Radhakrishnan and colleagues (Beh. Res. & Ther., 51, 2011) estimated costs of £1043 per ‘recovered patient’ in low-intensity IAPT services. Stress Control costs, per attendee, are around £71

1 Assuming 20 classes per year, 70 in each class, run by 2 PWPs and an annual license for a population of 400,000.
### The six sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is stress?</td>
<td>The common signs; the ‘thoughts, body, life’ model; vicious and positive circles. Stress Control in nine words’</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Controlling your body</td>
<td>How our bodies feed stress; fight/flight/faint/freeze</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: Caffeine, belly breathing, exercise, progressive relaxation²</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Controlling your thoughts</td>
<td>How our thoughts feed stress; radars, grasshoppers, and blinkers.</td>
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<td>Skills: Building the foundation; the Big 5 Challenges; Breaking stress up</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Controlling your actions</td>
<td>How our actions feed stress; avoidance and behaviour.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Skills: Face your fears; Stepping out of your Comfort Zone; Problem Solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Controlling panicky feelings</td>
<td>How panicky feelings feed stress; combining previous themes: body, thoughts and actions. The role of interpretation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Skills: combining all the skills already learned; prevention skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Getting a good night’s sleep</td>
<td>Why we need to recharge our batteries; sleep cycles.</td>
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<td>Skills: Sleeping tips (hygiene); Retraining your sleep (stimulus control)</td>
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<td>6a</td>
<td>Boost your wellbeing</td>
<td>‘languishing’ and ‘flourishing’.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Skills: ‘Four a day’; everyday mindfulness; gratitude and compassion</td>
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<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Controlling your future</td>
<td>Tying it all together.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: Dealing with setbacks; ‘Setting your compass’: values</td>
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² All relaxation and mindfulness audio tracks are available on a free-to-access website/app
Recent research findings

  “The effectiveness of Stress Control in routine practice appears to be comparable to that of other brief interventions including individual guided-self-help and CCBT. The delivery ratio (up to 100 participants per 2 facilitators) and minimal need for clinical-patient contact are unique aspects that enable Stress Control to considerably enhance access to psychoeducational support and low cost” (p160-161)

  “Stress Control appears comparatively clinically equivalent to the other IAPT interventions and produced higher recovery rates than the Green et al (2014) and Firth et al (2015) analyses of one-to-one PWP work”. (p140)

  “Stress Control was effective and feedback was overwhelmingly positive on the course. There remains no pressing need to address course content or its delivery” (p7)
Lessons from Ireland

Stress Control has been successfully rolled-out across the HSE, the Republic of Ireland’s equivalent to the NHS. It has also been rolled-out across the NHS in Northern Ireland. Two examples of clinical excellence stick out:

Malahide

Malahide, a town of 16,000 inhabitants, holds the current record for the largest Stress Control class. Run by clinical psychologists, Dr Mark Harrold and Dr Alison Rooney and made possible by community fund-raising and effectively advertised through radio, press and social media, this class, held in the Ballroom of the Grand Hotel, started, and finished, with 450 people. This shows the extent of the unmet need in our communities and how, by thinking that bit differently, we can help much greater numbers than can currently access our services.

Donegal

The HSE team in Donegal have been highly successful in not only running classes in the main towns in the county but also in getting into the most remote and small communities, e.g. villages such as Dunfanaghy with a population of 312 and, in Bloody Foreland, running a class for 25 people in the front room of the Parochial House after the local community requested Stress Control be delivered there.
What do people think about the class?

Liz, interviewed about attending a class in Belfast on BBC Radio Ulster in 2015:
“The benefit was that there were so many people there; of all age groups. I could just walk in. There was no pressure on me to explain who I was or where I had come from”

Harry:
“The course is delivered in a way that respects my ability to apply the techniques myself”

Diane “I felt relaxed and could take on board everything in my own time and way”

The above two quotes led Mills and colleagues\(^3\) to state: “There was an almost palpable satisfaction with Stress Control that manifested in unprompted expressed gratitude [towards the trainers]”

Rod “Before the class I felt totally overwhelmed by my stress. Stress Control was sensible, practical and gave me everything I needed - easily understood information about stress, great skills, no jargon, no nonsense and enough belief in myself to sort out the stress and get back on top of life. I must also say that it was very enjoyable. The trainer quickly made you feel at ease and, as the class promises, gives you the confidence to become your own therapist”

\(^3\) Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine. doi:10.1017/ipm.2015.56.
Examples of some of the slides used in Stress Control

**Ingrid, 81, retired nursing assistant**

I do feel tense a lot but I mainly just feel so flat all the time. I used to be such good fun and now I'm sure people just want to stay clear of me. I just can’t be bothered and I can’t get myself organised to even do the housework. I’m ashamed to have let things get this way.

**Challenge 1**

**What are the chances.....?**

Putting your money where your mouth is

**Let’s try it once without the parachute.**

**Believe in yourself**

Because you matter
Stress Control Developments
Schools

Around half of all adult mental health problems start before the age of 15 and with a significant increase in adolescent mental health problems and with CAMHS services able to see only the tip of the iceberg, there is a need for schools to offer straightforward interventions to help those teenagers with existing problems and those who may be at risk of developing problems later in life. Stress Control Young Persons aims to do this.

Aimed at 14-15 year olds, Stress Control trains pastoral care teachers to run the class over 8 single, weekly periods. By including this in Personal and Social Development, all pupils are taught the skills, thus ensuring hard-to-reach individuals have to take part. Research carried out at St Pauls Secondary School, Glasgow, in one of the most deprived areas in the UK, showed significant change pre to post with gains maintained at 9 month follow-up. Parallel classes for parents (and teachers), run in the evening in the school, allows teenagers and parents to better help one another.

**CAMHS** (available mid-2017)

This more involved version, for CAMHS staff, can be used for teenagers attending Child and Adolescent Services either as a stand-alone intervention or as a supplementary approach for those involved in individual therapy.
With mental health problems costing employers £26 billion each year in the UK through lost working days, staff turnover and low productivity, companies are well-placed to offer employees Stress Control as a way to decrease absenteeism and the much more common problem of presenteeism. Designed to be delivered by non-CBT trained OH/HR staff, this six session version covers the same issues and teaches the same skills but is designed for use in non-clinical settings. Examples are the HSE in Ireland using it for employees as a way to boost wellbeing at work.

Continental, the multi-national company, began offering the class to employees in its Germany plants. Due to the success of this venture, they have now rolled-out Stress Control and offer the class routinely to all employees in its factories across the world, e.g. Romania, Slovakia, Mexico, USA and China.

“Stress Control is a core piece of our Continental Mental Health Prevention Program. It offers exactly what we were looking for: An efficient, well-evaluated stress management training suitable for everyone from production worker to engineer. Stress Control helps us to prevent chronic stress, burnout, depression and anxiety in our workforce. We use it as a global tool and are highly satisfied with the results.”

Dr. Anja Rivera de la Cruz  Director, Corporate Health
Mental health problems are the norm in prisons. These individuals are, typically, ‘hard-to-reach’ when they are in the community. Having them, literally, as a captive population, allows services to deliver straight-forward CBT (with very easily understood, shorter booklets) to large numbers of people who, otherwise, would be unlikely to receive any help.

Being offered materials designed for the general population can frustrate those who are living very restricted lives. **Stress Control: Prison** is a dedicated version that inmates should see as personally-relevant and offering skills to help them through their sentence and which can be used when back in the community.

> “Participants’ anxiety significantly decreased and their wellbeing increased after completing Stress Control. Prisoners were satisfied with the intervention and there was a small attrition rate”
Dr Jim White provides a two-day training for up to 24 CBT-trained therapists (clinical version) or 18 HR/OH/voluntary sector workers/teachers (other versions). This practical training will equip those attending to immediately set-up and run their own classes. Stress Control Ltd can only offer training to services and organisations - not individuals.

License

Services take out a three-year contract. The license cost is usually based on the size of population served. Contact Stress Control Ltd for a quote. The license allows the class to be run as often and for as many people as it wishes.

The package includes PowerPoints for each session along with two pre-session rolling presentations. ‘Stress Control slide-by-slide’ accompanies these presentations, explaining each slide and offering advice on how best to teach each session. There are 11 participant booklets plus three supplements. These are given in Word format. Services then print/copy booklets for participants, adding, if required, service logos. An online license allows service-users to access electronic booklets (and a comprehensive interactive self-assessment). This license, although more expensive, can quickly save on printing costs. Access to the relaxation/mindfulness website allows participants to stream/download exercises free-of-charge. Services may wish to burn some CDs for those who do not have online access. Session summary sheets and various practice forms complete the package.

Optional services include email support from Stress Control Ltd for trainers and six month/one year follow-up visits to help maintain quality.
Dr Jim White B.A., M.App.Sci, Ph.D,
Chartered Psychologist
Chartered Scientist
Fellow, British Psychological Society
Fellow, British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies
Co-editor, Oxford Guide to low-intensity CBT interventions
Creator of the ‘Glasgow STEPS’ low-intensity model

Jim developed Stress Control over thirty years ago as a way:

- to allow many more people access to evidence-based CBT
- to attract hard-to-reach individuals, particularly from deprived areas, who would not feel comfortable in an interactive group
- to simultaneously tackle the frequently co-existing anxiety and depression problems found in low-intensity services
- to offer alternatives to one-to-one therapy
- to get the best balance between clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness
For more information, please see www.stresscontrol.org or call 07966 704 194 or email info@stresscontrol.org