



# Managing Stress

A guide for volunteers



# What is stress?

- **Stress = natural body response to challenges or demands.**
- **Can be physical, emotional, or mental.**
- **Short-term stress can motivate; chronic stress can overwhelm.**
- **For volunteers: stress may arise both from personal life and emotionally meaningful interactions.**

# **Common sources of stress in general:**

- **Work, family, finances**
- **Health concerns**
- **Time pressure & overcommitment**
- **Major life changes**

# Common sources of stress for volunteers

- Emotional intensity of visits
- Supporting distressed families
- Feeling unprepared or unsure what to say
- Witnessing illness and loss

# How stress affects the body & mind

- **Physical:** fatigue, headaches, muscle tension
- **Emotional:** irritability, anxiety, sadness
- **Cognitive:** difficulty focusing, racing thoughts
- **Behavioral:** sleep changes, withdrawal
- **Volunteer note:** After meaningful or heavy visits, these reactions can be normal and temporary.

# Acute vs. Chronic Stress

## Acute:

- Short-term
- Often situational

## Chronic:

- Ongoing
- Impacts immunity, mood, and resilience



Repeated emotional exposure can shift stress from acute to chronic if not managed proactively.

# Mind–Body Stress Management Techniques

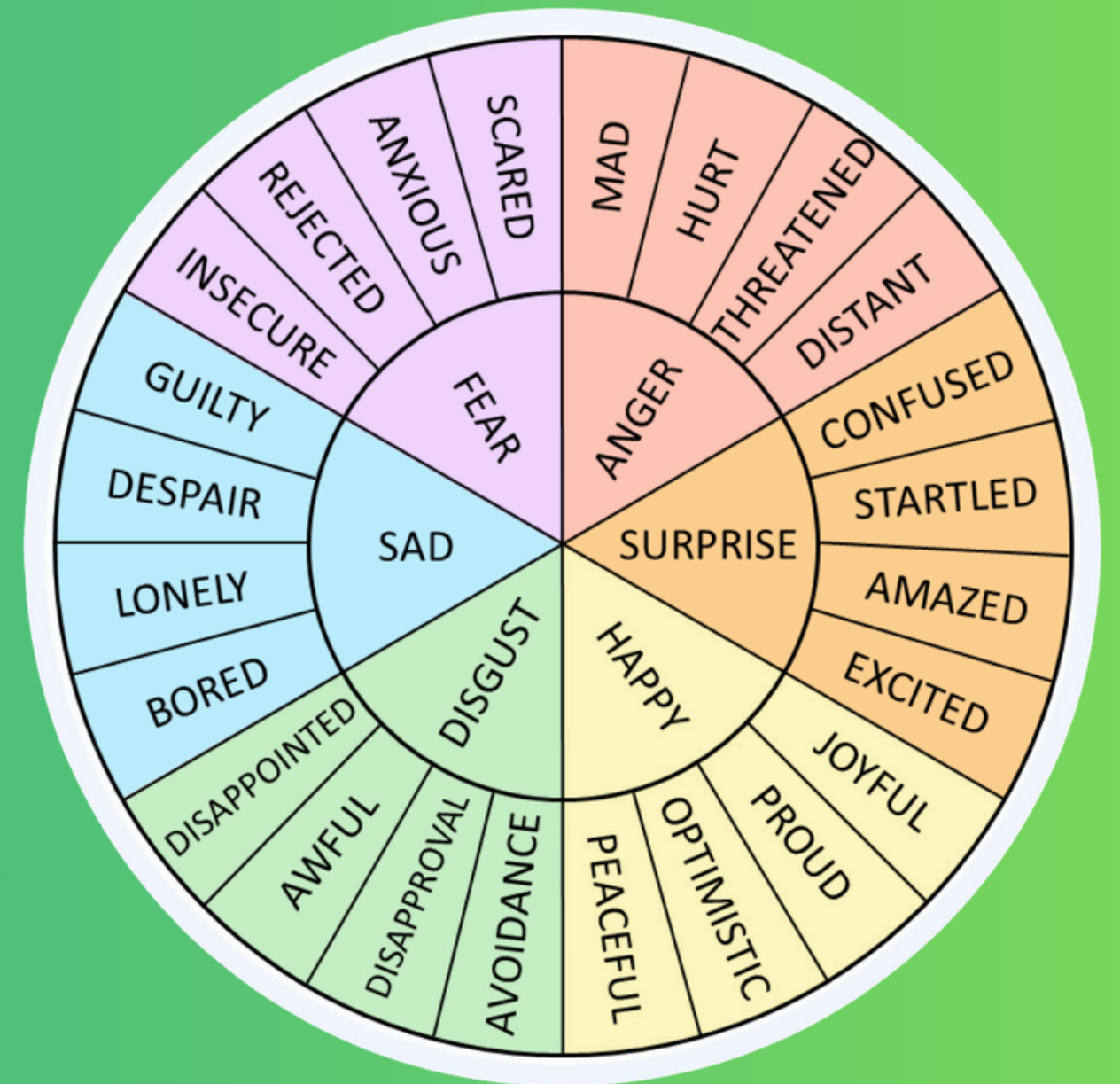
- Deep breathing
- Mindfulness
- Short meditations
- Stretching breaks
- Grounding practices



2–3 minute grounding exercise before or after a visit can reset your nervous system.

# Emotional Coping & Self-Awareness

- Name your feelings
- Journaling
- Talking to someone supportive
- Practicing self-compassion
- Debrief with coordinators or peers
- Allow space for grief processing over time



# Key Takeaways

- **Stress is universal and manageable**
- **Small daily habits increase resilience**
- **Emotional work (like volunteering) requires extra gentleness with yourself**
- **Caring for yourself supports caring for others**

# Resources

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress>

<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-health/>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>

<https://www.helpguide.org/family/caregiving/caregiver-stress-and-burnout>