

TARGET GROUP

Doctoral researchers and postdocs from all fields

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The doctoral and postdoctoral phase is an exciting but also challenging time. Young scientists invest a lot of time, energy and passion in their project. But sometimes the work-life balance gets out of control. **Constant stress, lack of rest, intrinsic stress amplifiers and external pressures can lead to reduced performance and health problems in the long term.** Recent studies have shown that young scientists are at a special risk of developing mental health problems like e.g. depression and anxiety¹.

It is therefore **important that young scientists reflect on their own stress response, develop suitable coping strategies and increase their resilience.** This hybrid course is specifically designed for young researchers and has the following goals:

- **Create awareness for stress induced mental health issues** among young scientists and **facilitate self-reflection and assessment** of participants' **current stress responses and (potentially unhealthy) coping strategies.**
- **Teach tools and methods to improve self-management, reduce stress and enhance resilience** and support the participants in **integrating these methods in their everyday life.**
- Foster exchange and cooperation between course participants to **develop a peer support network.**

COURSE STRUCTURE

Dealing with stress in healthy ways and becoming more resilient cannot be taught in the classroom within a few hours. It requires time for self-reflection, trying out tools and methods and incorporating them into everyday life in order to achieve behavioral changes in the long-term. To increase transfer into everyday life, this course is offered as an eight-week long program in a hybrid format with the following components:

1. **Kick-off workshop** (preferably on-site), 4 hours
2. **8-week long online program** with self-study, group work and fortnightly webinars with the lecturer, 10 hours
3. **Wrap-up session** (on site or online), 2 hours

FOR DETAILED COURSE CONTENT SEE PAGE 2 →

¹ [Levecque K et al. \(2017\)](#), [Evans T et al. \(2018\)](#), [Hazell CM et al. \(2020\)](#)

COURSE CONTENT

1. KICK-OFF WORKSHOP: Participants get an **overview over mental health topics** and the theory behind stress and resilience. **Participants get to know each other** and a **collaborative and trusting work environment** is established. **Self-reflection exercises and group exchange** creates awareness and motivation for change.

Welcome & Round of introductions

- Housekeeping Rules
- Introduction of the trainer & participants

MENTAL HEALTH & Stress of young scientists:

- The scientific facts (summary of studies on mental health in science)
- Individual reflection on own experience

Let's talk about **STRESS**:

- What is (acute/chronic) stress?
- Stressors, stress amplifiers (e.g. perfectionism) and stress reactions
- Procrastination – stressor or stress reaction?
- What to do about stress: (Un)healthy coping mechanisms

The basics of **RESILIENCE**:

- What is resilience?
- **The Resilience Toolkit:** What can we do to become more resilient?
 1. **Mindfulness Practice & Self-Care**
 2. Develop **Purpose & Goals**
 3. **Flexibility & the Growth Mindset**
 4. **Social resources:** Connect with others

Let's get active:

- Explanation of the self-study program and online course platform
- Mindfulness “Teaser”: Short intro to mindfulness and explanation of introductory exercise “Daily diary of positive / negative moments”

2. EIGHT-WEEK ONLINE PROGRAM: Participants **explore the four topics of the resilience toolkit**, put the methods and tools into **practice** and reflect on and **exchange their experiences with their peers**. They explore and **develop their resilience skills step by step**.

FOR BI-WEEKLY SCHEDULE SEE PAGE 3 →

Week 1+2: Mindfulness Practice & Self-Care

Webinar:

- Theory: The power of thinking – How our thoughts impact our feelings
- Practicing Mindfulness (Formal and informal practice)
- Combining mindfulness with nature
- Self-care: What helps you to live well and stay healthy? (e.g. exercise, sleep routine, food...)

Self-Study & Group Exercises:

- Participants engage in mindfulness and relaxation exercises with help of the provided online resources
- Experiences and effects of the exercises are shared in small groups
- Participants keep a “diary” of their stress reactions and their coping strategies
- Positive and negative effects of the coping strategies and alternatives are discussed in small groups

Week 3+4: Develop Purpose & Goals

Webinar:

- Recap of week 1+2: Sharing and open questions
- Theory: Purpose and Meaning – the road to happiness?
- Who are you and who do you want to be?
- From dreams to goals: Combining visionary thinking with SMART goal setting
- Life in Academia and Career Planning: Should I stay or should I go?
- Making plans in a VUCA world

Self-Study & Group Exercises:

- Participants learn more about themselves by engaging in self-reflection exercises focused e.g. on values, personal preferences and by exploring their biography
- Participants create a vision board for their future and derive short- and long-term goals
- Participants share their goals in small groups and design flexible action plans
- Participants collect examples of career paths in and outside academia

Week 5+6: Flexibility & the Growth Mindset

Webinar:

- Recap of week 3+4: Sharing and open questions
- Theory: Learning from failure and embracing challenges
- Negative thoughts and beliefs and how to develop a positive pattern of thought

Self-Study & Group Exercises:

- Participants collect their greatest failures and what they learned from them
- Participants analyze their reactions to failure/challenges and their typical negative thoughts
- Group discussion: Participants share their negative thoughts and identify positive alternative thoughts

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Week 7+8: Social resources: Connect with others**Webinar:**

- Recap of week 5+6: Sharing and open questions
- Theory: The importance of relationships and being connected
- How to build a personal and professional network – best practices

Self-Study & Group Exercises:

- Participants draw their social network and discuss it in pairs
- Participants identify potential for development of their network
- Participants get active (e.g. grow their network, talk to people, go to a social event...) and share their experiences with the group

3. WRAP-UP SESSION: Participants develop an **individual or group action plan** on how to build their resilience further and **sustain transfer to everyday life**.

Welcome and warm-up:

- Individual reflection on own progress
- Share of experiences

Next steps

- Development of individual or group action plan

METHODS

Kick-off Workshop & Wrap-up session: Short lectures, introspection / individual work with coaching exercises, work in pairs and small groups (idea generation and collection on whiteboards), discussions and sharing;

Self-Study on online course platform: Access to worksheets and instructions for individual and group exercises; audio files for guided mindfulness and relaxation exercises; course forum and comment function for interactive 1:1 feedback; application of tools and methods in real-life setting;

Webinars: Short lectures, work in pairs and small groups, discussions and sharing;

Technical information: Online course platform is hosted on Elopape.com and can be accessed for free by course participants. Webinars take place via Zoom. Group work and group exercises are facilitated by use of Miro Team collaboration software. Licenses for Zoom and Miro are provided by the course lecturer.