

IMPILLO



Understanding Stress
in Your Work

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A Story from Our Mining Community

Imagine Thandi, a strong community caregiver in a remote mining town in Limpopo. Every morning, she wakes before the sun, like the women fetching water from the distant river in the old village days. She ties her baby on her back with a colourful blanket and starts her long walk to visit families.

Thandi helps little ones from birth to five years old – orphans left behind when parents go to the mines far away, abandoned babies found alone, or children in danger because families are struggling. She checks if they have food, love, safety, and play – the things every child needs to grow strong, just like a young baobab tree needs good soil and rain.

But Thandi's work is heavy, like carrying a full bucket of water on her head for many kilometres.

- **Long distances and dusty roads** — She walks or waits for transport that comes late. Few colleagues mean she often works alone, far from help.
- **Emotional cases** — One day, she finds a tiny abandoned baby crying under a tree. Another day, a family in crisis – maybe the mother is sick, or the father lost his job in the mine. Her heart hurts seeing the children's fear.
- **Fear of mistakes** — What if she misses something important? What if a child stays in danger? This worry sits heavy on her chest.

These pressures are normal in our work. In South African child protection, many caregivers face **burnout** and **secondary trauma** from hearing sad stories every day. Studies show this happens a lot in our communities because of poverty, mining family breaks, and hard conditions.

Stress is like a pot of pap cooking on the fire. A little heat is okay – it helps you focus and protect the children. But too much heat, and it boils over. If we don't manage it, we get drained and can't help the children properly.

Signs that stress is building up:

- Feeling very tired, even after sleeping.
- Worrying all the time, like a hyena circling at night.
- Feeling alone, even in a crowd – missing that ubuntu connection.
- Getting irritable or sad for no clear reason.

When we are drained, we can't give the nurturing care the children need – the hugs, the play, the safe homes. Our high-pressure duties protect them, but only if we stay strong ourselves.

How uKukhula Coaching Helps Us Stay Strong

uKukhula means "to grow" in Zulu – growing like a healthy child, or like a tree reaching for the sun. uKukhula Coaching uses three simple, proven ways to handle stress: **Mindfulness**, **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**, and **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**. These tools come from experts worldwide and work well for caregivers like us.

Mindfulness – This is like sitting quietly by the river, watching the water flow without jumping in. You breathe slowly and notice your thoughts without letting them pull you away. Research shows: Studies from health experts (like the American National Institutes of Health) found that mindfulness training reduces stress and improves mental health for family caregivers. It helps you feel calmer even in tough jobs.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – This helps change negative thoughts, like turning "I can't handle this heavy load" into "I can take one step at a time, like climbing a hill slowly." Research shows: Evidence proves CBT lowers stress, anxiety, and wrong thinking in caregivers. It makes you feel more in control during hard work.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) – This uses words and actions to anchor good feelings, like touching your fingers together to remember a time you felt strong and proud. Research shows: Some studies found NLP helps people cope better with job stress and feel less overwhelmed.

These tools are simple – no big words or fancy things needed. In the next parts of this module, you'll learn them step by step, with stories like Thandi's.

Remember, sister or brother in this work: You are not alone. By understanding your stress, you grow stronger – for the children, for your family, and for yourself. Let's walk this path together, like a community lifting a heavy log.





Understanding Stress in Your Work as a Caregiver

Here is a simple step-by-step process to help you, as a ~ caregiver, identify and understand the stresses in your daily work. Follow these steps like Thandi in our story – take it slowly and honestly.

- **Step 1:** Pause and think about your day
- **Step 2:** Name the common pressures
- **Step 3:** Notice the signs in your body and heart
- **Step 4:** Connect the stress to the children you help
- **Step 5:** Accept that stress is normal
- **Step 6:** Share with someone

Understanding Stress in Your Work as a Caregiver: Detailed Steps

Step 1

Pause and think about your day.

Find a quiet moment, even if it's just five minutes. Sit under a tree, on a stoep, or in your room – like resting after carrying water from the river. Close your eyes if it helps and breathe slowly.

Ask yourself questions like: "What made my heart feel heavy today? Which visit or case stayed in my mind? Did I feel rushed or worried?" This pause is the start of mindfulness from uKukhula Coaching. It helps you notice things clearly, without rushing like a busy day in the mining town. By pausing, you begin to see the stress before it grows too big.



Step 2

Name the common pressures

Now, list or speak the things that make your work hard. You can write on paper, use your phone, or just say them out loud to yourself. Common ones in our communities include: travelling long dusty roads with little transport; having few colleagues to share the load, so you feel alone like a lone antelope; dealing with emotional cases, such as finding an abandoned baby crying in a shack or helping a family where parents are sick from mine dust or loss; and the fear of mistakes – worrying that one wrong decision could leave a child in danger.

Naming them is powerful, like calling a wild animal by its name to face it. This step uses ideas from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in uKukhula – by naming the pressure clearly, you start to take away some of its power over you.



Step 3

Notice the signs in your body and heart

Listen to your body like listening to the wind telling you rain is coming. Check for these warning signs: constant tiredness that sleep doesn't fix; worry that circles in your head like a vulture; feeling cut off from others, even in a busy community; getting cross or tearful quickly; headaches, tight chest, or upset stomach. These signs show stress is building, just as cracks in dry earth show the land needs rain. In uKukhula Coaching, this noticing comes from mindfulness – being aware of your body and feelings without judging them. Research from health experts shows that spotting these signs early helps caregivers avoid bigger problems like burnout.



Step 4

Connect the stress to the children you help

Think about why your work matters so much. Your duties – visiting remote homes, assessing risks for orphaned or abandoned little ones, finding safe families – protect children from birth who need nurturing care: food, health checks, love, play, and safety. But when stress drains your energy, like a river running low in dry season, it's harder to smile, listen patiently, or make good decisions for them. Remember stories from our communities: a strong caregiver helps a child grow like a healthy mopane tree. This connection motivates you – managing your stress means better care for the children. uKukhula's CBT helps here by linking your well-being to your purpose.



Step 5

Accept that stress is normal

Be kind to yourself. Say gently: "This heaviness is normal because my work is important and hard – like the fire needed to cook good pap. A little heat helps me stay alert and protect children, but too much can burn." In African ways, we know life has ups and downs, like seasons of rain and drought. Accepting this reduces shame or self-blame. This step draws from all three uKukhula tools: mindfulness to observe without fighting, CBT to reframe negative thoughts, and NLP to anchor calm feelings. Studies show acceptance lowers stress faster than trying to push it away.



Step 5

Share with someone

Don't carry it alone – that's our ubuntu strength. Talk to a trusted colleague over tea, a friend in the community, or family at home. Share what you noticed in the earlier steps: "Today the long walk and sad case made me tired." Sharing is like many hands lifting a heavy pot together – it lightens everyone's load and brings new ideas. In remote mining areas, where isolation is common, this builds support networks. uKukhula Coaching encourages this as a positive action, backed by research showing talking reduces caregiver stress and prevents trauma from building up.





By following these steps
regularly, you build
understanding and strength.

You become a better trainer and
caregiver for the vulnerable
children in our communities.

Keep practising – growth comes
one step at a time.

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