

# Stress and Wellbeing: A Life Stage Model

Sheila Panchal<sup>1</sup>, Stephen Palmer<sup>1</sup>, Siobhain O’Riordan<sup>1</sup> &  
Alexander Kelly<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

For stress management practitioners, counsellors, coaches, coaching psychologists and health professionals working with individuals across the lifespan, it can be useful to consider the types of stressors that typically influence wellbeing. This article provides a Stress and Wellbeing Life Stage Model, which can aid this process. It has been influenced by previous work regarding physical health and life stages (Kelly, Palmer & Panchal, 2010) and developmental coaching across the lifespan (Panchal & Palmer, 2011; Palmer & Panchal, 2011).

**Keywords:** *Stress – Wellbeing – Developmental coaching – Life Stage Model – Coaching – Coaching Psychology*

## Abstrait

*Pour les praticiens de la gestion du stress, les conseillers, les entraîneurs, les psychologues entraîneurs et les professionnels de la santé travaillant avec des individus à travers la durée de vie, il peut être utile d'examiner les types de facteurs de stress qui influent généralement sur le bien-être. Cet article fournit un modèle Stress et bien-être Life Stage, qui peut aider ce processus. Il a été influencé par des travaux antérieurs sur la santé physique et les stades de la vie (Kelly, Palmer & Panchal, 2010) et sur le développement de l'entraînement tout au long de la vie (Panchal et Palmer, 2011; Palmer & Panchal, 2011).*

## Mots clés:

*Stress - Bien-être - Coaching de développement - Modèle de Stage de Vie - Coaching - Psychologie du Chasse*

## Corresponding author

Sheila Panchal  
email: contact@sheilapanchal.com

## Affiliation

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Positive Transitions  
156 Westcombe Hill  
London SE3 7DH, UK

## Copyright

© National Wellbeing Service Ltd

## Funding

None declared

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest in respect to their authorship or the publication of this paper.

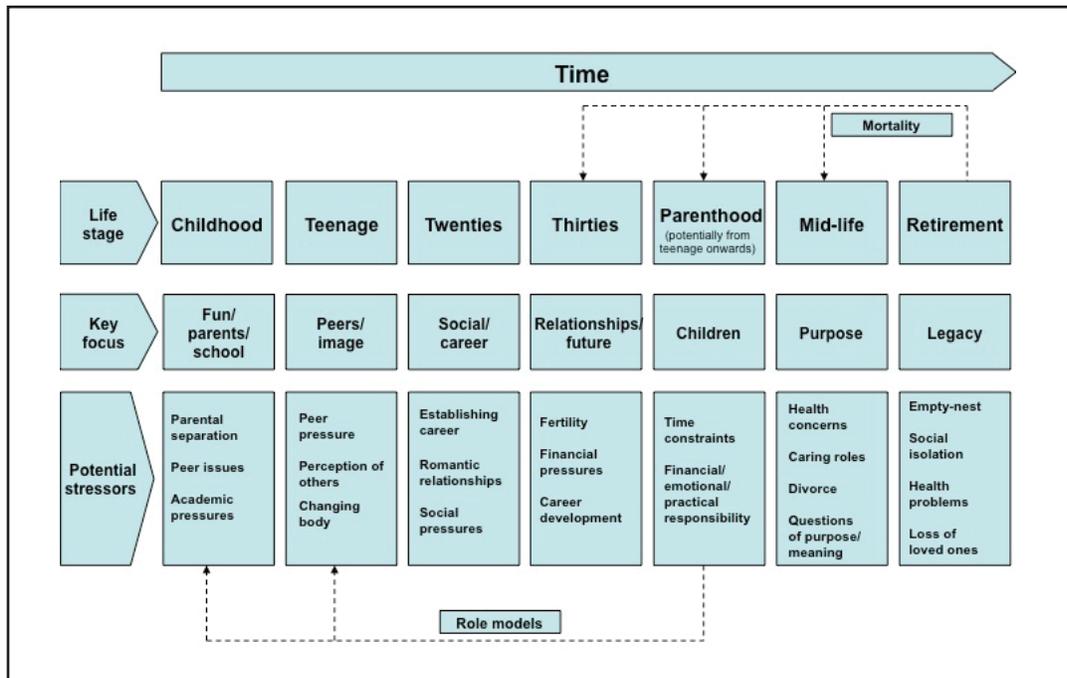
## Acknowledgments

None declared

Research undertaken investigating age and happiness reveals the pervasive finding that a U-shaped curve exists (e.g. Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008), with happiness levels higher at the start and end of life, and a dip during mid-life. This data challenges popular assumptions associating wellbeing with youth, and depression with old age. The U-shape could be explained by the optimism of youth, and the

need within old age to live life to the full, with a time during middle age when life stressors can be more significant.

Specific life events can be sources of stress across the lifespan. Holmes and Rahe (1967) developed the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), which lists stressful life events for adults, and they also created a similar scale for ‘non-adults’. This scale is well used and remains



**Figure 1:**  
**A Stress and Wellbeing**  
**Life Stage Model**

a useful indicator today; the top five events for adults are death of a spouse, divorce, marital separation, imprisonment and death of a close family member. For 'non-adults' they are death of a parent, unplanned pregnancy/abortion, getting married, divorce of parents and acquiring a physical deformity. Paying attention to these types of events during particular life stages can help identify times when an individual can be under significant pressure. Also Gerst, Grant, Yager and Sweetwood (1978) in their study stated that their research suggested that whereas 'normals' (i.e. participants in their study who were 'non-patients') maintain temporally stable perceptions of the impactfulness of life change, the same may not be true for patients with psychiatric disorders. Later work, from a study looking at data from a three year period, has suggested that the effects of life events on current symptoms is less of a predictor than previous psychiatric symptoms (Grant, Patterson & Olshen, 1987). However, could suffering from a mental health issue be a life event in itself?

**A Stress and Wellbeing Life Stage Model**

The model in *Figure 1* indicates potential stressors that individuals may experience at different stages across the lifespan. Awareness of these stressors can be helpful to coaches and coaching psychologists as they work with various age groups. As always, it

is critical to use this information as indicative only, and to avoid generalisation and stereotypes.

Cultural and generational influences can also influence individual's experiences of these life stages. For example, the experience of mid-life for today's cohort may be impacted by factors such as technology and the economic climate, which create a different climate than for the same age group twenty years ago (see Palmer & Panchal, 2011).

The model indicates mortality as a key focus and potential stressor that influences individuals from thirty years old onwards (including parenthood). It also highlights the role of parents as role models to their offspring with regard to how they handle the inevitable life stressors that come their way, potentially equipping their children with coping strategies that could last a lifetime.

**Conclusion**

For practitioners, this model could serve as a useful way to explore stressors experienced by their clients or coachees, and to initiate discussions about effective coping strategies. When considering coping, it may be of value to enquire about coping methods that were helpful during previous life stages, as some may be consistently effective (e.g. social support), whereas others may necessarily differ between life stages, for example the ability to exercise may be limited by physical constraints in later life. ■

## Citation

Panchal, S., Palmer, S., O’Riordan, S., & Kelly, A. (2017). ‘Stress and wellbeing: A lifestage model’. *International Journal of Stress Prevention and Wellbeing*, 1, 5, 1-3.  
Retrieved from: <http://www.stressprevention.net/volume/volume-1-2017/volume-1-article-5/>

## References

- Blanchflower, D. G., & Oswald, A. J.** (2008). Is wellbeing u-shaped over the life cycle? *Social Science and Medicine*, 66,1733-1749.
- Gerst, M. S., Grant, I., Yager, J., & Sweetwood, H.** (1978). The reliability of the social readjustment rating scale: Moderate and long-term stability. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 22(6), 519–523.
- Grant, I., Patterson, T., Olshen, R., & Yager, J.** (1987). Life events do not predict symptoms: Symptoms predict symptoms. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 10(3), 231.
- Holmes, T. H., & Rahe, R. H.** (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 11(2), 213-221.
- Kelly, A., Panchal, S., & Palmer, S.** (2010). Physical Health and Wellbeing: A Life Stage Model. *Coaching Psychology International*, 3(2), 13-15.
- Palmer, S., & Panchal, S.** (2011). *Developmental Coaching: Life Transitions and Generational Perspectives*. Hove: Routledge.
- Panchal, S., & Palmer, S.** (2011). Life transitions and generational perspectives. In S. Palmer and S. Panchal (Eds), *Developmental Coaching: Life Transitions and Generational Perspectives*, 1-28. Hove: Routledge.

## Biographies

**Sheila Panchal CPsychol** is a business psychologist with a focus on positive psychology and transitions. She is co-author of *Turning 30: How to get the life you really want* (with Jackson, 2005) and co-editor of *Developmental Coaching: Life transitions and generational perspectives* (with Palmer, 2011).

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7254-677X>

**Dr Stephen Palmer PhD** is Coordinating Director of the ISCP International Centre for Coaching Psychology Research, and Founder Director of the Centre for Stress Management, London. He is the Honorary President of the International Stress Management Association and the International Society for Coaching Psychology. He is an Adjunct Professor of Coaching Psychology at Aalborg University and Visiting Professor of Work Based Learning and Stress Management at the Institute for Work Based Learning, Middlesex University. He has written or edited more than 50 books and has published over 225 articles.

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0108-6999>

**Dr Siobhain O’Riordan PhD** is a chartered psychologist and chartered scientist. She is a Fellow of the International Society for Coaching Psychology and member and Trustee of The International Stress Management Association (UK). Siobhain is also a trainer and course co-director on the stress management and coaching programmes at the Centre for Stress Management.

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3216-2939>

**Alexander Kelly** has a BA in Economics from the University of Leeds, and is a qualified personal trainer. He has competed in a range of endurance events including triathlons and ultramarathons.

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0039-6183>