

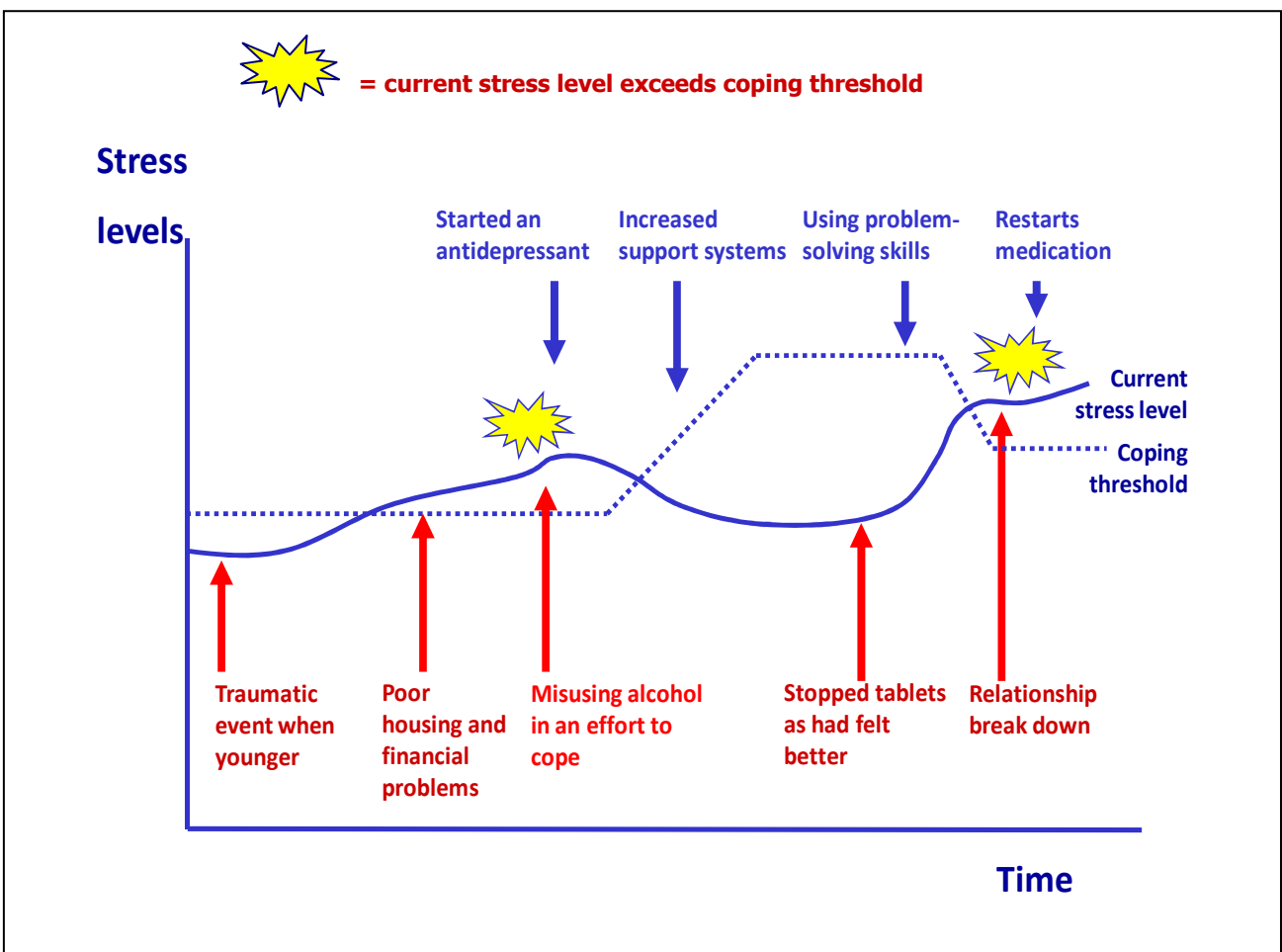
Stress Vulnerability: understanding the need for taking action

You may have noticed a link between times when you have felt very stressed and times when you have become unwell. You may also have noticed that some of the things that you have tried to do have not actually helped, and may in fact have made things worse.

However, it is important to recognise that just because you feel stressed doesn't mean that you will definitely relapse or experience symptoms – it just means that it is more likely.

We all have different levels of vulnerability, which is rather like having a coping threshold – *if we experience something that pushes us beyond our coping threshold, then we may experience symptoms*. Some events will be more stressful than others, and two stressful events that occur at the same time are likely to have more effect on us than one stressful event.

To try to ensure that stress does not push us beyond our coping threshold, we can be prepared by learning various methods and techniques for managing stress. This will have the effect of keeping our stress levels low, so that it is well within our coping range and, in fact, increase our coping threshold – as we learn new coping strategies. *An example of this shown is shown by the dotted line in the diagram below.*



By discussing this with your named nurse / care coordinator or doctor, try to identify the things that cause you stress and things from your past or personal characteristics that might make you vulnerable – they may include some of the following examples:

this makes me	example	tick if this applies to you
<i>Stressed</i>	difficulties at school, university or work	
<i>Stressed</i>	loss of relationship	
<i>Stressed</i>	problems within the family	
<i>Stressed</i>	isolation / lack of support	
<i>Stressed</i>	drinking alcohol / using drugs	
<i>Stressed</i>	housing problems	
<i>Stressed</i>	financial problems	
<i>Vulnerable</i>	a family history of mental health problems	
<i>Vulnerable</i>	having a sensitive personality	
<i>Vulnerable</i>	traumatic things that happened in your past	

Exercise:

Write down your own list of the things that tend to cause you stress or that make you vulnerable, and then add some of the things that help you when feeling stressed or vulnerable. Your named nurse / care coordinator or doctor will be able to help you to complete your list.

Things that cause me stress / make me feel vulnerable:

Things that help to manage stress:

You may also find it helpful to sketch this out as a timeline – your named nurse / care coordinator or doctor will help you to do this.

John Butler – Consultant Nurse (2008)
 PSI Resources: brief description of key interventions