

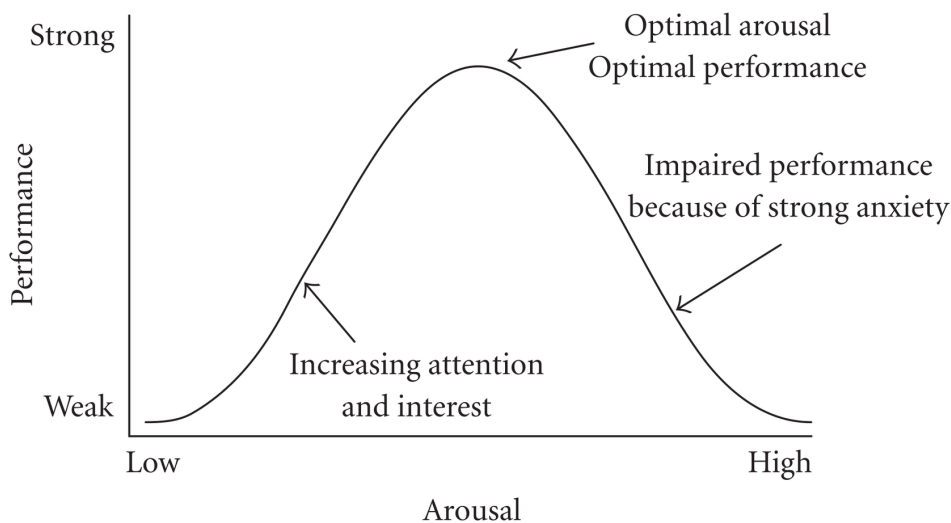
Yerkes-Dodson Law:

STRESS & PERFORMANCE

Family Therapy Center of Bethesda

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Did you know that not all stress is bad? Psychological research shows that there is a certain level of stress that enhances performance. We can see this through the **Yerkes-Dodson law** on the graph below. It basically states that **If arousal is too low, then there is not enough attention and motivation. If arousal is too high, performance is impaired due to high anxiety.**



Arousal in the Yerkes - Dodson law has to do with a person's level of stress and motivation. High levels of arousal come with increased heartbeat, and anxiety. If someone has low arousal, then they are very relaxed and feel no pressure.

If arousal is too low, there is no motivation to complete a task to the best of your ability.

Optimal arousal occurs when you have enough motivation to do your best, but not so much that you are anxious about it.

When arousal is too high, you may experience a fight, flight, or freeze response, inhibiting performance.



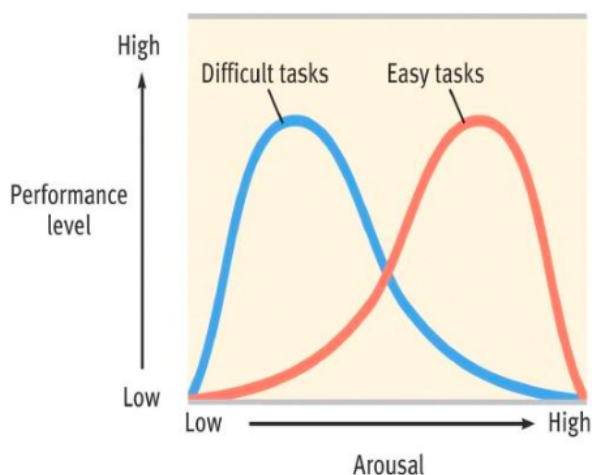
**FAMILY THERAPY
CENTER OF BETHESDA**

Child, Teen, Family & Individual Therapy

HOW CAN I USE THIS INFORMATION TO HELP ME?

Find a level of stress that works best for you. Everyone works best under a different level stress. Optimal arousal looks different for everyone - what may feel optimal to one person could feel extremely high-stress and debilitating to another.

The Yerkes–Dodson law also takes into account **complexity and difficulty** of the task. On the graph below, you can see that optimal arousal is lower for more difficult tasks, and higher for easier tasks.



For example, if you are about to take a really hard test, your optimal amount of stress will likely be **low**. This may be a good time to use some relaxation techniques.

Use stress management techniques. If you find yourself often in a place of high arousal and anxiety that inhibits your performance, look into different ways to manage this stress. This could entail several techniques like:

- **Deep breathing**
- **Taking breaks**
- **Limiting procrastination**
- **Mindfulness exercises**
- **Meditation**
- **Prioritization of tasks**
- **Progressive muscle relaxation**
- **Increasing free time**
- **Engaging in hobbies**
- **Journaling**
- **Getting enough sleep**
- **Regular exercise**
- **Setting boundaries**

Confidence is key. People perform better under pressure when they feel confident. If you feel under pressure, try to take on an **"I've got this"** attitude, and encourage yourself with positive affirmations. Think of times in the past when you have had success!