

**Managing Stress**

The **BIG** Idea

- What are some healthy ways to reduce stress?

**AGENDA**

- Approx. 45 minutes
- I. Warm Up: Who's Stressed? (5 minutes)
  - II. More or Less STRESSED (15 minutes)
  - III. Symptoms of Stress (5 minutes)
  - IV. Take a Breather (15 minutes)
  - V. Throw Out Your Stress (5 minutes)

**MATERIALS**

- STUDENT HANDBOOK**
  - Student Handbook page 34, Managing Stress
- FACILITATOR RESOURCE**
  - Facilitator Resource 1, DO NOW: Managing Stress
  - Facilitator Resource 2, Teen Help Resources (one copy per student)
- Overhead projector
- Garbage bucket or bag
- Scrap paper (one sheet for each student)

**OBJECTIVES**

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Identify causes of stress for middle-school students.
- Recognize that people have different ways of perceiving the same situation (stressful or not).
- Identify one or more healthy ways to reduce stress.

## OVERVIEW .....

In this lesson, students will discuss the meaning of stress and brainstorm the causes of stress for people their age. They will rate how stressful they find different situations, learn a simple breathing technique to deal with stress, and, in groups, develop a list of coping strategies.

## PREPARATION .....

NOTE: Please obtain permission from your school administrator to distribute the “Teen Help Resources” page, and include local resources they recommend.

Also, please check with your school guidance counselor re: issues that may come up so that you’re aware of what referrals are desired and/or required by law. You may wish to invite your school counselor to participate in this class.

- Create an overhead transparency of (or copy onto chart paper) **Student Handbook page 34, Managing Stress** and **Facilitator Resource 1, DO NOW: Managing Stress**.
- Read through the lesson. To prepare for the fourth activity, practice the breathing exercise so that you can properly demonstrate it for the class. On the Web, visit the Mayo Clinic for information on stress relievers:  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-relievers/MY01373/NSECTIONGROUP=2>
- List the **BIG IDEA** and the day’s activities on the board.
- Make copies of **Facilitator Resource 2, Teen Help Resources**, one per student. Check to make sure links are working, add appropriate local resources, and make sure to get administrative approval before distributing.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....

Children and adolescents experience stress the same way adults do. Middle-schoolers, in particular, can be very prone to stress because of the vast physical, emotional, social, and intellectual changes they experience during these years.

NOTE: The discussion in this lesson can raise sensitive topics (e.g. stressful home situations, eating disorders, relationships, etc.). You should think about how to react, what information to give students, and when to refer problems to the school counselor if these issues come up in class.

## IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS .....

### DO NOW:

(You may choose to present the Warm Up activity as a written DO NOW. Present the questions on the board or overhead, and have students write only their answers on index cards.)

If you've ever felt stressed out, you're not alone. In 2005, a survey sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University\* asked 600 young people, ages 14 to 18, about a number of subjects, including stress. The question was: "In general, how often do you experience stress in your daily life?" Here were their choices:

Never, Rarely, Sometimes, or Frequently

1. Which response do you think most students chose? Explain why you chose that answer.
2. How would you rate your own experience with stress in your daily life? (This is for your benefit only.)

[Give students two minutes to complete this question. Then allow the students to respond and fill in the percentages for each category, as stated in the **Warm Up**.]

\*SOURCE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/artsandliving/HighSchoolNational.pdf>

### Activity II: More or Less Stressed

If your classroom is too crowded to have students stand at the board, after you read a statement have the students who are "not at all" stressed sit in their seats, the "mildly stressfuls" stand, "the stressfuls" can raise their arms, and the "extremely stressfuls" stand with their thumbs pointed toward the ceiling, so that all students are indicating their choices at the same time.

You may also wish to have students write their numbers on a whiteboard or piece of paper. Then students can raise their paper or whiteboard to show their answer.

### Activity IV: Take a Breather

If you are interested in teaching another method of dealing with stress during **Activity IV: Take a Breather**, you can lead your students in a visualization activity. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine themselves on a tropical island. Tell them to picture themselves floating on a beautiful

raft on the ocean. On this raft they have all of the water they need, a huge basket of tropical fruit, and they are listening to their favorite music and reading their favorite magazines. Then tell them that they have landed on the shore and discover that a picnic of all of their favorite food has been set up for them on the beach. Tell them that once they have eaten and are full, they retire to a hammock that is strung between two trees and the island breezes slowly rock them into a deep sleep. Ask them to slowly open their eyes and leave their stress in the ocean. You can add to any part of this story, just make sure that you speak in a calm, slow voice and keep encouraging students to “picture the words as you say them.” (You may adapt this activity using a different location students find soothing.)

#### **Activity V: Throw Out Your Stress**

If you don't think your students will be able to responsibly handle **Activity V: Throw Out Your Stress**, or if you are running short on time, feel free to omit it from the lesson.

## ACTIVITY STEPS

### I. Warm Up: Who's Stressed? (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** This class is called *Roads to Success*, but today we're going to deal with a road *block* to success. That roadblock is stress.

If you've ever felt stressed out, you're not alone. In 2005, a survey sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University\* asked 600 young people, ages 14 to 18, about a number of subjects, including stress. The question was: "In general, how often do you experience stress in your daily life?" Here were their choices:

[Write these on the board.]

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Frequently

Which response do you think most students choose? Why do you think that?

[Allow students to respond, and then fill in the following percentages: Never (5%), Rarely (19%), Sometimes (48%), and Frequently (25%). Give these numbers a context: Only 1 in 20 students said they're "never" stressed, 1 out of 2 said "sometimes," 1 out of 4 said "frequently."]

\*SOURCE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/artsandliving/HighSchoolNational.pdf>

### II. More or Less STRESSED (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now that we know that most teens are stressed at least some of the time, let's list some of the things that can cause stress. A reminder: simply talking about stress can be stressful. Please respect your classmates' opinions and privacy. What's said in this class should stay in this class. Also know that if I think you're in danger, I'm required by law to share this with people who can help you.

[Place a transparency of **Student Handbook page 34, Managing Stress**, on the overhead projector.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** For the next five minutes, I want you to work with a partner to

create a list of things seventh-graders find stressful. I'll get you started. On line one, write "transition." [Write this on the overhead projector.] This word describes leaving a familiar situation and entering an unfamiliar one. Even though the new situation may have lots of exciting possibilities, it can leave you feeling stressed. Starting a new job is a transition. So is buying a new house, or getting married. "Transition" applies perfectly to leaving elementary school and beginning middle school. What are some of the things you've had to adjust to as a seventh-grader?

3. [Allow students to answer. Then give them a few minutes to come up with a list of specific situations that produce stress.]
4. [When students have finished, ask for volunteers to share answers with the class, and add them on the overhead. Include some of the following if students don't mention them: *going to a new school, having too much homework, having too many responsibilities, trying out for a team, taking tests, doing difficult assignments, having problems with a friend or at home, doing poorly in school, being bullied, feeling disorganized.*]
5. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Does everyone experience the same situations as stressful? Let's try an experiment to see. In this activity, there are no right or wrong answers. It's your opinions that count. I am going to read an example of a potentially stressful situation. For each situation, you are going to rate your stress.

[Direct students attention to the board. Then read the four different choices. Explain the difference between the four ratings for stress. Answer any questions the students have about the scale. Explain to students that for each scenario you read they will need to move to the sign that matches their stress level.

Use as much of the board as you can to write the following scale:]

Not at all Stressful	Mildly Stressful	Stressful	Extremely Stressful
1	2	3	4

For example, if I said, "Dropping your tray in the school cafeteria," where would you stand?

Here's the first statement. Listen first, and when I give the signal move to the place that shows how you feel.

[Read aloud the first situation from the list brainstormed at the start of this activity. After you read it, ask students to come to the board and stand in front of the number that best represents how stressful they find that particular situation. Repeat the process with several additional situations. (See **Implementation Options** for suggestions.)]

6. [Afterwards, ask the class what they learned from this exercise. Allow students to respond. Ask: “Why do you think certain situations are stressful for some people and not for others?”
  - People's past experiences, positive or negative, affect the way they feel about new situations.
  - Some people can be naturally more prone to stress.
  - Some people have learned ways to cope with potentially stressful situations.]

### III. Symptoms of Stress (5 Minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** See that stressed-out character in the middle of the page? In the bubble beside her head, I'd like you to list any physical problems people experience due to stress.
2. [List students' ideas on the overhead projector. These could include headache, stomachache, trouble with sleeping or eating, fearfulness, getting angry or frustrated easily, and the inability to concentrate and do your best. You may need to clarify what a symptom is. Explain that these are the physical signs or clues that you are experiencing stress. They do not cause your stress; instead, they are the result of your stress.]

### IV. Take a Breather (15 Minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** The good news is that there are many ways to relieve and manage stress. I'll start by showing you a fantastic tool that you can use *anytime, anywhere*—deep breathing.

Breathing slowly and deeply can relax you instantly. It's a very effective strategy that a lot of people use. All you have to do is slowly inhale through your nose and fill your belly with air. [Demonstrate.] Hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this a few times and it will have an automatic calming effect. Once you feel more relaxed, you'll be able to make better decisions about how to deal with whatever situation is causing you stress.

[Show the class the breathing exercise again and have them try it—remember when you breathe in, you are filling up the stomach and when you exhale, you are deflating it.]

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** This is also a great thing to do if you're having trouble sleeping, right before a test, or any other time you want to relax or focus. Now let's see if we can come up with some longer-term strategies for managing stress.

[Write Coping with Stress on the board and underneath, list exercise and *get enough rest (eight hours)*. Have students list other strategies in the middle section of **Student Handbook page 34, Managing Stress**, as you add their suggestions to the class list on the overhead.

Prompt them with questions like:

- What kinds of things can you do to relax?
- What kinds of things can you do to stay in good health?
- How can you relieve stress about upcoming challenges?
- Who can you talk to about a problem?

Add the following strategies to the list if they are not mentioned: *doing things you enjoy like listening to and/or playing music; challenging negative thoughts about yourself; getting good nutrition; planning for potentially stressful situations; breaking large tasks/problems down into smaller ones; getting organized with a schedule/planner; finding classmates to call for missed assignments; not using caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, or drugs; talking to a trusted friend or adult.*]

3. [Discuss why some of these strategies work: *Being physically active can release endorphins, which are natural stress relievers. Caffeine, tobacco, and other drugs affect your nervous system and often increase feelings of stress.*]
4. [In the bottom section of **Student Handbook page 34, Managing Stress**, have students add the names of two people they can talk to when they're feeling stressed.]
5. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Most of these are great strategies you can do on your own. But it's important to remember that when stress becomes too overwhelming, you should always seek help from an adult—a parent, teacher, school counselor, or other adults you know and trust.
6. [If it's not already on the list, add "Ask an adult for help or advice." Distribute **Facilitator Resource 1, Teen Help Resources**, and point out the toll-free and local list of hotlines and websites where they can go for more help.]



**V. Throw Out Your Stress (5 minutes)**

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Earlier in class you learned how deep breathing could reduce your stress. Sometimes it's helpful for us to imagine that we are getting rid of the stress in our lives and throwing it out.
2. [Give each student a sheet of scrap paper and a pen. Tell them to write down one thing in their life that is stressful.]
3. [When all students have finished writing, ask them to ceremoniously crumple their sheet of paper. While you walk around the classroom with the garbage bag, have them throw out the stress in their lives.]
4. [Reiterate to students that physical activity—even for just 20 minutes a day—is one of the very best things they can do to relieve stress. Suggest a yoga class, pick-up basketball, bike riding, even just walking. Let them know it will do wonders for their mood and concentration!]

## DO NOW: Managing Stress

**Directions:** You will have three minutes to read the excerpt below and then answer the questions below. (You do not need to write the questions down, just your responses.)

If you've ever felt stressed out, you're not alone. In 2005, a survey sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University asked 600 young people, ages 14 to 18, about a number of subjects, including stress. The question was: "In general, how often do you experience stress in your daily life?"

Here were their choices:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently

1. Which response do you think most students chose? Explain why you chose that answer.

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2. How would you rate your own experience with stress in your daily life?  
(This is for your benefit only.)

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## Teen Help Resources

### Boys Town National Hotline

1-800-448-3000

<http://www.boystown.org/AboutUs/hotline/Pages/Crisishotline.aspx>

The Boys Town National Hotline is a 24-hour crisis, resource, and referral line. Trained counselors can respond to your questions every day of the week, 365 days a year. The Boys Town National Hotline has helped more than eight million teens, parents, and families in the past 20 years. And over the past decade, more than six million callers have found help at the end of the line.

### Childhelp USA

1-800-422-4453 (1-800-4-A-CHILD)

<http://www.childhelpusa.org>

This is a hotline you can call if you or someone you know is being abused. Counselors can tell you where to get more help—right where you live.

### Covenant House Nineline

1-800-999-9999

<http://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-youth-programs/nineline-crisis-hotline>

Are you or a friend looking for answers to tough questions? Covenant House Nineline can help. Call for advice about anything - anywhere, anytime. The call is free and confidential.

### National Runaway Hotline

1-800-786-2929 (1-800-RUNAWAY)

<http://www.1800runaway.org>

This is a 24-hour hotline if you are a runaway or are thinking of running away from home.

### Local Numbers

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## MANAGING STRESS

**CAUSES:** List five causes of stress among seventh-graders.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**SYMPTOMS\*:**



My symptoms of stress are . . .

*\*symptoms: signs you know you're stressed.*

**COPING:**

List three healthy activities that help reduce stress.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List two people you can talk with to relieve stress.

- 1.
- 2.