

HANDLING STRESS

A G E N D A

- Starter
- Where Does Stress Come From?
- What Does It Look Like?
- Putting Stress to Rest
- Conclusion
- Questions for Assessment

Objectives

Students will identify sources of stress in their lives.

Students will identify behavioral and emotional signs of stress.

Students will identify methods for managing or eliminating stress.

Materials Needed

- One sheet of drawing paper for each student, drawing supplies (Starter, Part I)
- One copy of the “Stress Factors” activity sheet (#1) for each student (Part III)

Starter (5 minutes)

Announce that you will start today's class with a pop quiz. Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and a pencil. In fairly quick succession, ask the three following questions:

- In what year did the Civil War begin?
- What is the distance between the earth and the sun?
- You have just entered a room full of people and dogs. There are a total of 72 legs in the room. How many people and how many dogs are in the room?

After telling students that time is up, ask if they feel stressed after this experience. Assure them that the quiz was not real. Explain that situations like a surprise quiz can make a person feel nervous, scared, tense, upset, and even angry. These feelings are signs of stress. Explain to students that today they are going to talk about how to recognize and handle stress.

Part I Where Does Stress Come From? (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students draw pictures that illustrate stress and identify its source in their lives.

1. STUDENTS DRAW REPRESENTATIONS OF STRESS.

Ask students to think about what stress feels like. Distribute sheets of drawing paper, and give students a few minutes to draw a picture of stress.

After a minute or two, ask students if they have drawn their pictures in a setting. If they haven't, suggest that they add to their drawings to show where the stress is taking place.

2. STUDENTS IDENTIFY SOURCES OF STRESS.

Focus students' attention on what they have drawn. Direct them to choose a word that describes their pictures of stress and write it down. Have them label where their drawings take place, and write one or two words that tell what causes the stress.

Explain that stress is tension, or feelings of pressure or anxiety. Point out that stress can happen when people, events, or situations make us feel powerless or out of control. Say, "Let's take a look at your examples."

Draw three columns on the board, and label them "Feelings," "Places," "Causes." Ask students to share the words they wrote to describe their pictures. Write responses under the "Feelings" column on the board. Then, ask students to name where their pictures take place. Write these responses in the "Places" column. Proceed in a similar manner with the causes of stress that students have identified.

3. STUDENTS MAKE OBSERVATIONS.

Have students review the list and identify major sources of stress common in all their lives. Write their responses on the board. Through questions and comments, guide students to identify such sources as the following:

- School (homework, tests, and grades)
- Parents (expectations for behavior and achievement)
- Friends and peers (pressures for behavior, relationships, and conformity)

Point out that many of these things are not stressful in themselves, but they become sources of stress because of how we perceive them. Tests, for example, are usually stressful when we are not prepared for them. If we are prepared, we might feel a little nervous, but we would probably not feel stressed about it.

Explain to students that if they can identify what causes them to feel stress, then they can learn how to deal with it, and even turn it into something positive rather than negative.

Part II What Does It Look Like? (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify behavioral and emotional signs of stress.

1. STUDENTS IDENTIFY BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF STRESS.

Point out that in their pictures, students drew what stress feels like. Challenge students to analyze their pictures and describe how these feelings might reflect on their outward appearance. (*Students might respond: hyperactivity, fidgeting, nail biting, laughing or talking too loudly, becoming pushy and aggressive, becoming very quiet and withdrawn, cracking knuckles, doodling instead of paying attention.*)

Explain that these behaviors are all physical signs of stress. Make the observation that everyone reacts differently to stress, both physically and emotionally.

2. STUDENTS IDENTIFY EMOTIONAL SIGNS OF STRESS.

Direct students' attention to the "Feelings" list on the board, and explain that emotional signs of stress cannot be seen so easily. Challenge students to add other emotional signs of stress if the list is not inclusive. Your list should reflect such signs as feeling angry, nervous, worried, afraid, troubled, pressured, tense, anxious, upset, powerless, frustrated, and so on.

Explain that certain behaviors and feelings are clues to stressful situations. Tell students that these clues will tell them when a stressful situation is occurring. Once they recognize this, they can begin to deal with the stress. Explain that there are things they can do to reduce or relieve feelings of stress in these situations.

Part III Putting Stress to Rest (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students learn about and choose methods for managing or eliminating stress.

1. STUDENTS IDENTIFY PERSONAL STRESS FACTORS.

Hand out copies of the “Stress Factors” activity sheet (#1). Direct students’ attention to the “Stress Creators” column, and ask students to check the factors that apply to them. Have them add other factors that cause them to feel stress at the bottom of the column.

After a few minutes, point out the “Signs of Stress” column. Ask students to check behaviors that apply to them and list other personal reactions to stress at the bottom of the column.

2. STUDENTS BRAINSTORM WAYS TO HANDLE STRESS.

Prompt students to think about ways to keep from feeling stressed. Through questions and comments, guide students to review what they have learned about the importance of health and physical fitness and how it relates to their general well-being. (*Students might respond: The food you eat affects your energy level. If you are eating poorly, you will not be able to deal with everyday pressures and problems very well. The amount of sleep you get affects your mood, energy level, and performance. If you do not get enough sleep, you’re probably getting stressed out more often than you should be. Exercise increases your energy, makes you physically and emotionally stronger, and relieves tension and stress. More exercise equals less stress.*)

Ask students to brainstorm relaxation techniques that can help them gain control of themselves in stressful situations. (*Students might respond: Count slowly backward from five. Take three deep breaths as you bend over to tie a shoe or pull up a sock. Take one step backward. Stretch. Take a moment to gather yourself, think, and regain your calm. Call up a friend and vent. Talk about the situation with someone you trust and ask for advice. Read a poem, a favorite book, or a magazine. Make an action plan to avoid the stress—plan to study for your tests, for example.*)

Remind students that stress comes from our reactions to a situation, not from the situation itself. Therefore, we should always recognize stressful situations and be prepared to deal with them.

3. STUDENTS CHOOSE WAYS TO HANDLE STRESS.

Draw attention back to the “Stress Factors” activity sheet (#1) and give students time to fill in the center column. Emphasize that students should choose things that they can and will do. Suggest that they keep this activity sheet in their folders and refer to it occasionally. Also, suggest that students update the sheet periodically.

Conclusion (*2 minutes*)

Ask students if stressful situations are unusual. Ask them to identify ways to deal with stress. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Recognizing what causes stress is the first step to dealing with it.
- Our behaviors and feelings are clues to stressful events or situations. It is important to listen to them.
- You have the power to reduce or relieve stress in your life.

Questions for Assessment

1. List some of the physical and emotional signs that someone is under stress. List as many of each as you can.
2. List three things that you can do to relieve stress.
3. Describe something in your life that causes you stress and three things that you can do to help reduce this stress.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Extension: Using Quotations

Quote: “I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.” –Charles Swindoll

Activity: Have students brainstorm a list of stressful events that have occurred today. Have students assign a stress level to each event (from one to 10, with 10 being the most stressful), and share their answers with class. Discuss the idea that the same event can trigger different reactions in people.

Extension: Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Activity: Have students read pages 347–348 of *Speaker’s Sourcebook II* by Glenn Van Ekeren for 10 suggestions for reducing stress. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the techniques. Have the groups prepare and present a role play in which middle schoolers put their technique into action.

Have students rehearse their role plays and share them with the class.

Extension: Writing in Your Journal

Activity: Discuss writing as an opportunity to vent frustrations and clarify problems. Have students use their journals for this purpose at least once during the week.

Have students share their work with a partner or teacher if they wish.

Extension: Using Technology

Activity: Have students search the internet for sayings that help them manage stress.

Have students design posters that incorporate their chosen quotes or proverbs. Display the posters around the classroom.

Extension: Homework

Activity: For one week, have students keep a list of situations that made them feel stressed and what they did to relax (e.g., they got into trouble, and then called a friend to let off steam).

Have the class create a graph of the most frequently used stress relievers and discuss what works best.

Extension: Additional Resources

Activity: Invite a guest speaker (e.g., a gym teacher, school psychologist, aerobics instructor) to demonstrate stress-reducing exercises and answer questions about handling stress.

Have students make a list of steps they can take to reduce their stress.

STRESS FACTORS

Stress Creators

- tests
 - trouble in the family
 - secret activities
 - fear of danger
 - arguments
 - confrontations
 - divorce
 - friendships
 - personal values
 - problems at school
- _____

Can Lead To . . .

Ways to Reduce or Relieve Stress

Signs of Stress

- headaches
 - anger
 - eating or sleeping too little
 - eating or sleeping too much
 - lack of energy and interest
 - intolerance
 - frustration
 - isolation
 - poor concentration
 - tension
- _____

