

Stress Reduction Activities for Students

Introduction

Stress is a natural part of every young person's life. Stress is any change, internal or external, positive or negative, to which a young person must adapt; simply, "stress is anything that causes physical and/or mental wear and tear on the body and mind" (Joyce V. Fetro, Personal & Social Skills, 2000).

Students' stress is usually related to everyday experiences, worries and challenges at school, home, in the community and within their peer group. For example, young people may experience stress resulting from bullying, name calling, social isolation, not getting what they want, body image, academic difficulties, and unsafe neighborhoods. While each student will respond to and resolve stress differently, the impact of ongoing and/or unresolved stress can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, poor concentration, aggression, physical illness, fatigue, sleep disturbance and poor coping skills such as tobacco, drug and/or alcohol use.

Therefore, young people, like adults, can benefit from learning and practicing stress management skills. Students who develop stress reduction skills learn how to feel and cope better without hurting themselves or others. Identifying and acknowledging the causes of stress and expressing feelings about them are usually the most effective tools students have to reduce stress, in addition to learning practical stress reduction skills.

The attached classroom activities are designed to teach students a variety of practical and fun stress reduction techniques. These activities may be used to address a stressful situation in the moment (such as: during a lockdown, before and/or after a morning full of testing, or following difficult transitions). It is important to practice these skills prior to the onset of a stressful event (for example: incorporate as part of health lessons, use as an activity for morning circle/carpet time).

When introducing the concept of stress management to students, it is useful to review the following general behaviors and techniques that will help students manage stress (as part of the discussion, have students brainstorm other ideas and strategies that work for them):

- Eat healthy meals with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Maintain daily routine and schedule
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid caffeine (can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation)
- Do things you enjoy (for example: art, listening to music, being outdoors, dancing, writing poetry, reading, etc.)
- Get good amounts of rest and sleep
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and drugs
- State feelings in a clear way (for example: "I feel angry when you yell at me.")
- Decrease negative self talk (for example: transform "My grades will never get any better." to "I may not be doing to well now, but my grades can improve if I get extra help and I do all my homework.")
- Be with friends who help you cope in a positive way
- Learn relaxation techniques (such as: deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation)
- Talk to caring adults
- Humor/laughter