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ABSTRACT

One of eight papers from Project Seed, this paper describes a stress management project undertaken with high school sophomores. Managing Stress is described as an interactive workshop that offers young people an opportunity to examine specific areas of stress in their lives and to learn effective ways to deal with them. The program described consists of a 90-minute session that was incorporated into the 10th-grade health curriculum, but the program has been adapted for use with other populations as well. Four project goals are enumerated: (1) to learn to define stress; (2) to examine some causes of stress in one's life; (3) to describe the effects of stress on overall health; and (4) to demonstrate productive methods of managing stress. Resources needed to implement the program are discussed, and procedures and instructions are given in six steps. Materials to be used in the workshop are included at the end of the paper. (NB)

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"MANAGING STRESS"

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Project
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Managing Stress

Research shows that stress has become one of the most significant health issues of our culture. Young people are not immune and often voice concern about an increasing build-up of their own daily stresses. Although many of these stresses (such as success in school, fitting in, or experiencing their new-found independence) are typical of adolescents in any generation, many are indicative of rapidly changing lifestyles as we approach the 21st century.

The Project

MANAGING STRESS is an interactive workshop that offers young people an opportunity to examine specific areas of stress in their lives and to learn effective ways to deal with these stresses. The workshop was originally designed as a 90 minute session for 10th grade health classes. Over 200 students have participated in the workshop as part of the required semester course, *Health Skills for Living*. The content has been adapted for other specific audiences such as graduating seniors and adults in a staff development activity. The developers feel the content may also be appropriate for middle level students.

MANAGING STRESS was a highly subscribed workshop at the annual Mt. Ararat School Senior Symposium. Students explored preventative techniques which allowed them to cope more successfully with an eventful senior year. Evaluations from participants were overwhelmingly positive.

The time allotment has ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours depending on which activities were utilized or embellished.

Jan Wilk and Donna Muto are two Mt. Ararat School teachers who began this project a year ago in response to students' concerns about the many pressures they faced on a day-to-day basis. Both teachers feel the project was most successful with the energy generated through a team approach.

Project Goals

The overall goal of this project is to offer young people the opportunity to develop skills that will enable them to manage everyday stress. Through an interactive process students will:

1. Learn to define stress
2. Examine some causes of stress in their lives
3. Describe the effects of stress on overall health
4. Demonstrate productive methods of managing their own stress

Resources

MANAGING STRESS can be implemented at a low cost. The technical equipment is available at most schools and the expendable supplies needed are inexpensive.

Materials include an overhead projector or large flip chart, a tape recorder (optional), decks of playing cards, colored markers, large sheets of newsprint, a student booklet for each participant, and a lesson plan. A relaxation tape is optional. The room should be equipped with tables and chairs for individual and team work, and have an area with carpeting or floor mats.

The activities included in this project have been described by participants as “helpful”, “useful”, and “lots of fun.” The developers consider MANAGING STRESS a “starter project” and hope adaptors will use it as a foundation upon which to build their own activities that are helpful and fun. Therefore, additional resources and materials may be necessary and add to the cost of the project.

Procedures and Instructions

1. Introduction: Ask students to close their eyes and pretend they are receiving specific news that may affect them. The teacher should develop several introductory stress statements to read aloud. The following are two examples of stress statements:

“You are moving to another city.”

“You have failed English.”

Discuss with the students what physical and emotional changes they felt as each statement was read.

2. Definitions: (Use flip chart or overhead.)

- * Stress
- * Distress
- * Stressor

Optional Activity: House of Cards

Divide class into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a deck of playing cards. Tell them they are going to participate in a contest to see who can build the highest house of cards in 5 minutes. Tell the students to “Get ready” . . . and then shout “Go!”.

Call out the time every 30 seconds for the first 4 minutes, and every 10 seconds through the fifth minute.

When you reach the last 30 seconds, count off every second. When contest is over, ask how students are feeling. Are they feeling a rush of energy and focused on the task? This is POSITIVE STRESS.

3. What causes stress at different life stages?

- * Elementary School Children
- * High School Students
- * Adults - Age 21+

Teacher may want to have participants generate a list for their age group and record on newsprint. Newsprint lists for the other two age groups may be prepared ahead by the teacher.

4. Stages of Response

- * Alarm Reaction - body reacts with an increase in heartbeat, tensed muscles and fast breathing, ie. hearing a sudden noise.
- * Stage of Resistance - body focuses all its energy on reducing stress symptoms. The body is more susceptible to illness.
- * Stage of Exhaustion - One can't adapt indefinitely. Exhaustion sets in if a stressor is particularly severe or prolonged. Very vulnerable to illness.

5. Symptoms of Stress

Generate list from participants. Be sure to include physical, emotional and behavioral responses to stress.

6. Minimizing Stress

- * Perception and Perspective (Refer to picture of lady. What do you see?)
- * Communication
- * Diet
- * Exercise
- * Sleep
- * Relaxation Techniques
- * Sense of Humor
- * Laugh! Laugh! Laugh!

Discuss, using the Student Handout. Practice the Relaxation Response and Relaxation Techniques with participants. This has been a highly successful and utilized piece of the workshop. Allow time - it's fun!

Conclusion

Young people face a rapidly changing, complicated world. This workshop offers participants an opportunity to learn about and practice simple and effective techniques that can enhance their personal health.

Handling
Stress

The
Balancing
Act



J. Wilk
D. Myto
April 1993

Life Changes and Stress

Change is stressful. Sometimes change can be so stressful that a person can become ill. Researchers have given "stress points" to the life changes listed below. The experts have determined that a person who accumulates between 150 and 299 stress points in one year has a 50 percent chance of getting sick.

While you are waiting for class to begin, add the number of points given to events that have affected you over the past 12 months.

Rank Score	Event	Stress Points	Your
1.	Death of a parent	98	
2.	Death of a sister or brother	95	
3.	Death of a friend	92	
4.	Divorce or separation of parents	86	
5.	Failure in one or more school subjects	86	
6.	Getting arrested	85	
7.	Repeating a grade in school	84	
8.	Family member's alcohol or drug problem	79	
9.	Starting to use alcohol or drugs	77	
10.	Loss or death of a pet	77	
11.	Family member's serious illness	77	
12.	Losing money you've saved	74	
13.	Breaking up with your boyfriend or girlfriend	74	
14.	Quitting or being suspended from school	73	
15.	Pregnancy of a close friend	69	
16.	Father or mother losing a job	69	
17.	Being seriously sick or hurt	64	
18.	Arguing with parents	64	
19.	School troubles with teacher or principal	63	
20.	Discomfort and problems with weight, height, acne	63	
21.	Going to a new school	57	
22.	Moving to a new home	51	
23.	Change in physical appearance because of braces, glasses	47	
24.	Arguing with sisters or brothers	46	
25.	Having someone, such as a grandparent, move in	35	
26.	Mother's pregnancy	31	
27.	Beginning to go out on dates	31	
28.	Making new friends	27	
29.	Marriage for sister or brother	26	
		Total	_____

RESPONSE TO STRESS

PHYSICAL RESPONSE

INCREASED BLOOD PRESSURE
INCREASED HEART RATE
SWEATING
HOT AND COLD SPELLS
QUICKER BREATHING
MUSCULAR TENSION
G.I. DISORDERS

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE:

ANGER
ANXIETY
DEPRESSION
LOWERED SELF-ESTEEM
NERVOUSNESS
IRRITABILITY
RESENTMENT
SCHOOL OR JOB DISSATISFACTION

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE:

DECREASED PERFORMANCE
ABSENTEEISM
HIGHER ACCIDENT RATE
ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE
IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR
DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATION

Ways to Minimize Stress

1. PERCEPTION AND PERSPECTIVE. How you see yourself affects how you perceive certain events and even the world. Not feeling good about yourself can make you misjudge a situation, causing distress.

Keep a positive perspective on life. Remember, no stress is forever. Be a lemonade maker.

2. COMMUNICATION. Facing stress seems to help in handling long-term stress. Those of you who face stress head on are problem-solvers and seem to handle life's problems better than those who ignore it or block it out.

Talking things out and sharing your problems with others is one way of facing stress head-on.

Trying to communicate effectively and assertively (not aggressively) keeps you from internalizing the problem.

Practice saying "No". Say "No" to things you really don't want to do or don't have time to do. (This, of course, doesn't mean school work!)

3. DIET. Things that you eat or drink can create stress or help manage stress.

High salt, high fat, high sugar and high caffeine foods can cause stress. You may feel more tired an hour after a "high" from a sugar food than you were before eating it. You may feel guilty after eating high calorie foods - this can certainly cause stress. Alcohol and drugs can cover-up and/or cause stress in a really big way!

Since stress causes physical reactions and even illness, it makes sense to keep the only body you've got in good physical condition by eating a well-balanced diet.

Some foods, such as chocolate, can actually comfort us. Yes! Hormones are released that say, "This tastes good. This feels good in my tummy!" In moderation, these 'comfort foods' may help relieve a stressful moment.

4. EXERCISE. This, too, can be a cause of stress or a great management technique. Exercise releases those "feel-good" hormones too.

Choose some regular exercise that you enjoy: jogging may work for some, aerobics for others.

Regular exercise doesn't make you tired. It actually gives you more energy and zip for other things. You can also lose weight and trim down that body which may help you feel better about yourself.

5. SLEEP. Sleep gives your body time to slow down and restore itself. Sleep shouldn't be used too often as a way to blot out things that cause stress.

Some of those hormones that keep you alert and ready to face stress during the day can also keep moving around in your body at night and keep you from sleeping. See DIET and EXERCISE.

Be good to yourself. Take time to relax, 'veg out' and get enough sleep.

6. RELAXATION TECHNIQUES. You have probably found many ways to relax. Try some of these if you haven't. Conscious relaxation techniques are to be used after the fact - after you feel stressed. Keep practicing them - they work!

Full directions on following page

7. SENSE OF HUMOR. If you don't have one, get one! It's a must for stress management. A smile also helps. Smiles help exercise your face muscles and they make other people feel good too. Let a smile be your umbrella and all that.

LAUGH LAUGH LAUGH! Laughter feels so good. It can help get rid of pain. It, too, gives you exercise. It reminds us that life goes on...

THE LADY*



Originally drawn by W. E. Hill and published in Puck,
November 6, 1905. First used for psychological purposes
by E. G. Boring, "A New Ambiguous Figure," American Journal
of Psychology, 1930.

The Relaxation Response

1. **Assume a comfortable position.** The best position is flat on your back on the floor. Your eyes should be closed and your arms should be loose at your sides. Uncross your feet. Initially, lying flat on your back on the floor may seem uncomfortable, but try it. Usually, after you start to relax, you don't notice the hard floor, and this position is the best one for your body.

If you choose to sit in a chair, remember to uncross your legs and let your arms rest loosely at your sides.

2. **Maintain a passive attitude.** Don't worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. Don't try to work at relaxing. Disregard distracting thoughts and sounds.

3. **Concentrate on a pleasing phrase or image.** For some people a particular word such as "out" or "one" works well. Other people find visual images such as cloud formations or the ocean useful for this purpose. Repeat the word or image effortlessly.

4. **Breathe easily and naturally.** Breathe through your nose with your mouth open slightly. Keep your muscles loose, limp, and relaxed.

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING*

Description

One way to achieve the relaxation response is through diaphragmatic breathing. The instructions for this technique include several variations. Adapt this exercise so it works best for you.

Procedure

1. Assume the relaxed position (eyes closed, passive attitude, comfortable position, quiet room).
2. Begin to focus on your breathing. Allow your breathing to become regular and natural as you inhale and exhale through your nose. Remember that breathing is a peaceful, natural process.
 - Each time you exhale, allow some tension to leave your body, and allow the relaxation to come in.
3. As you begin to feel more and more relaxed with each breath, try one (or more) of the following vehicles to deepen your feeling of relaxation:
 - Imagine the air that comes to you as a cloud. The cloud comes to you, fills you, and then leaves you.
 - Imagine your lungs as a balloon (you may want to put your hand on your chest.) As you inhale your lungs expand like a balloon, and as you exhale your lungs deflate.
 - As you inhale say the word "in" to yourself. As you exhale say the word "out."

Try each of the above at different times to see which works best for you. For some people the visual images are more powerful, while for others the word formula (such as "in" and "out") works better.

Try to focus on one of these images or word formulas for several minutes. Tell yourself to relax more and more with each breath. You may discover that your mind will wander from the image or word from time to time. This is normal. Simply return to your word or image and continue to relax.

4. You may want to deepen your relaxation now by using one of the following methods:

- Slowly count backward from 10 to 1. With each count allow yourself to feel heavier and more relaxed.
- Imagine that you are on the top of a long, winding stairway. Picture yourself descending the steps. Feel a new wave of calm with each step that you take.

5. It is now important to return. You will now come back to the real world feeling calm yet alert. You will feel the benefits of this relaxation throughout the day. Come back to the room slowly by counting from 1 to 5, gradually becoming more alert. At the count of 5 your eyes should open. Get up slowly.

STRESS QUIZ

Answer true or false to each of the following statements:

- ___1. Stress is important for living.
- ___2. Stress is all mental.
- ___3. Teenagers do not suffer from stress.
- ___4. If there are physical effects from stress, the individual cannot tell what is happening.
- ___5. People who are competitive do experience high levels of stress.
- ___6. Change is a major producer of stress.
- ___7. It is better to keep things to yourself when you are under extreme stress.
- ___8. Stress means the same thing as distress.
- ___9. A healthy lifestyle is an effective way to manage stress.
- ___10. Healthy people avoid stress.