

# **Health Education Strategies for Coping with Academic Stress**

by

**Tohid Moradi Sheykhjan**

Research Scholar in Education

University of Kerala

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## **Health Education Strategies for Coping with Academic Stress**

**Tohid Moradi Sheykhjan \***

### *Abstract*

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The purpose of the study was to find out the significance of health education strategies for coping with academic stress. Comprehensive health education strategies for coping with academic stress can help students obtain the greatest benefits from education and become healthy and productive adults'. One child out of four has an emotional, social, or physical health limitation that interferes with learning. Such problems include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, substance abuse, family and social violence, mental health problems, and factors during pregnancy affect child development. Teachers and parents are in a unique position to influence young people's physical, mental, and social well-being. The following sections of this report summarize strategies that can be used by academic centers, parents, and students to alleviate academic stress. All events in life brings about a reaction, but there are varied ways through which people reacts or responds to them, coping with stress is the attempt to manage or deal with stress. In their view, coping does not necessarily result in success. They comment that successful coping includes becoming aware of incidents and situations that one perceives as being stressful, and recognizing stressors means being aware of how your body responds to stress. Even though the counseling centre advices individual students who avail themselves for counseling on time management, it is envisaged that workshops, seminars and conferences on "techniques in managing stress" and "time management" for all students will go a long way to equip students with ways of coping with stress.

**Keywords:** *Health education, Strategies, Coping, Academic Stress.*

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### **Introduction**

Studies have recently called attention to high levels of student stress in academic centers. Surveys have found that most students identify academic pressure as the main reason for their stress. Consequently, researchers have chronicled increases in cheating, sleepless nights, depression, drug use, and self mutilation. While it has long been

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\* Research Scholar in Education, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, India

assumed that struggling students are most prone to academic stress, recent studies indicate that high achievers are especially vulnerable to academic stress. Chronic academic stress often leads to physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, such as frequent illnesses, depression, irritability, decreased academic performance, drug or alcohol experimentation, and cheating. Causes of academic stress include high-stakes tests, pressure from parents, overly demanding academic content, overbooked schedules, and pressure to gain admittance to prestigious colleges and universities, and conflicts with teachers. Researchers have identified strategies of academic centers, parents, and students could be used to manage academic stress. Academic centers strategies include reducing the preoccupation with “grades for the sake of grades,” incorporating stress education into the curriculum, and revising student work and testing policies.

Parents can use several strategies to help their children cope with academic stress, such as emphasizing learning over grades, talking openly with their children about the pressures at school, college and university, limiting extracurricular activities, and building their children’s feelings of self-worth. Student strategies for reducing stress include setting realistic goals, learning stress management skills, finding time to relax, and talking to a trusted adult about their problems.

## **Preparation for Health Education**

Research indicates that in order to influence students' health knowledge, skills, and behavior, well-prepared teachers must implement developmentally and culturally appropriate instructional strategies that provide basic information, engage participants to practice and apply relevant skills, and are of sufficient duration (Parker, 2001; USDHHS, 2000). It follows that the effectiveness of health educators depends on the quality of their professional preparation (Kolbe, 2002; Peterson, Cooper, & Laird, 2001; Summerfield, 2001).

College and university programs must prepare health-literate teachers who have the capacity to access and analyze functional health information and services as well as

the competence to apply such information and services in ways that enable students to learn health concepts and skills (Peterson et al., 2001). One means of assessing the quality of teacher training is professional program approval and accreditation; rigorous preparation programs at accredited colleges and universities have been demonstrated to enhance teacher quality.

Entry-level teachers should be able to integrate the health education curriculum for students with relevant health content into skill-based lessons. Lessons should enable students to solve problems, make decisions, set goals, effectively communicate, manage risks, access valid information, analyze influences, and advocate for healthy practices. In addition, teacher-training programs should provide a foundation in general pedagogical research or the most current best practice including applying principles of child development in lesson planning; establishing an environment conducive to learning; engaging students in the learning process; applying appropriate assessment techniques for diverse student groups; and effectively communicating to students, parents, other school staff, and community stakeholders (AAHE, 2002; Danielson, 1996).

In summary, evaluation studies of health education programs conclude that effective curricula implemented by well-prepared teachers can reduce risky behaviors among youth (Lohrman & Wooley, 1998).

Teachers trained according to health education curriculum can have a positive impact on students' health knowledge, skills, and behaviors by effectively delivering comprehensive health education.

## **Consequences of Chronic Stress**

A certain amount of stress is good and has been found to foster motivation and healthy competition in the classroom, on tests, and in extracurricular activities. But chronic stress, as a result of the feeling that one cannot possibly meet all of the demands placed upon him, has been consistently associated with negative outcomes. Continued exposure to school-related stressors often leads to physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, such as fatigue, irritability, depression, and decreases in academic

performance (Sedere, 2010; Conner et al., 2009; Copeland, 2008; Wilde, 2008; Muir, 2006).

The most frequent consequences of intense or ongoing stress include:

1. Physical illness;
2. Insufficient sleep;
3. Anxiety and depression;
4. Irritability or unusual emotionality or volatility;
5. Decrease in academic performance;
6. Social withdrawal;
7. Drug or alcohol experimentation;
8. Cheating.

## **Causes of Academic Stress**

Different students respond to academic pressures in different ways. Academic centers are not the only source of stress for students. Parents, other students, and government policies, and the school, college and universities admissions process all play a role in increasing students' stress levels (Conner et al., 2009).

Following is a summary of the most common causes of academic stress.

1. Developmentally inappropriate classrooms;
2. High-stakes tests;
3. Pressure from parents;
4. Demanding academic content;
5. Peer relationships;
6. Fear of failure;
7. Lack of preparation;
8. Excessive homework;
9. Overbooked schedules;
10. Pressure to maintain high grades;
11. Pressure to gain acceptance to prestigious colleges;

12. Conflicts with teachers;
13. Transitioning to secondary school;
14. Poor diet and lack of sleep.

## **Health Education Strategies for Coping with Stress**

Comprehensive health education strategies for coping with academic stress can help students obtain the greatest benefits from education and become healthy and productive adults'. One child out of four has an emotional, social, or physical health limitation that interferes with learning (Dryfoos, 1994; Tyson, 1999). Such problems include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, substance abuse, family and social violence, mental health problems, and factors during pregnancy affect child development (Swingle, 1997). Teachers and parents are in a unique position to influence young people's physical, mental, and social well-being.

The following sections of this report summarize strategies that can be used by academic centers, parents, and students to alleviate academic stress.

Researchers have suggested that academic centers could be the ideal place in which to conduct stress intervention and prevention programs because so many stressors are directly related to the academic environment and these stressors affect students' performance in academic center. In response to high levels of students anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse, and disengagement, educators and health specialists creating research-based intervention at the academic centers . The initiative, challenge success, works with academic center to design and implement site-based policies and practices that could be in reduce student stress and promote greater student engagement, academic integrity, and physical and mental health.

While the stress reduction process varies based on academic centers unique circumstances, some strategies that have been used successfully at academic centers include:

1. Reduce the preoccupation with "grades for the sake of grades" and shift the focus to learning and understanding;

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2. Identify students demonstrating high levels of stress;
3. Incorporate stress education into the curriculum;
4. Change the academic centers daily schedule;
5. Revise homework policies;
6. Revise testing policies;
7. Reduce test anxiety;
8. Ensure that students receive adequate support;
9. Communicate with all stakeholders about the causes and consequences of academic stress;
10. Promote healthy behaviors;
11. Help students develop effective coping strategies.

### ➤ **Parents strategies for coping with stress:**

Parents should pay attention when their child complains of stress, anxiety, depression, or hopelessness. Different children show stress in different ways, so it isn't always easy to recognize when a child is affected. There are many children who don't or can't verbalize their stress. In these cases, parents should be on the lookout for other signs and symptoms, such as frequent physical ailments, a drop in academic performance, or unusual irritability (Conner et al., 2009; Wilde, 2008; Pomfret, 2004).

Following are strategies which parents can use to help their children to manage academic stress.

1. Emphasize learning over grades;
2. Encourage healthy habits;
3. Set a good example;
4. Increase family time;
5. Talk to children;
6. Provide structure, stability and predictability;
7. Limit extracurricular activities;
8. Monitor television viewing;

9. Build feelings of self-worth;
10. Suggest ways of coping with difficult situations.

➤ **Student strategies for coping with stress:**

Researchers have identified strategies that can help students deal with their academic stress.

1. Eat well;
2. Exercise;
3. Sleep well at night;
4. Don't use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco;
5. Set realistic goals for yourself;
6. Learn stress management skills, such as relaxation techniques and problem solving;
7. Don't over-schedule activities;
8. Find time to relax;
9. Keep a schedule;
10. Get organized;
11. Be optimistic;
12. Build resiliency;

Researchers have identified qualities that make some people naturally resilient even when faced with high levels of stress. To build resilience, TeensHealth (2007) recommended that adolescents work on developing the following attitudes and behaviors:

- a) think of change as a challenging and normal part of life;
  - b) see setbacks and problems as temporary and solvable;
  - c) believe that working toward goals will lead to success;
  - d) take action to solve problems;
  - e) Build strong relationships with family and friends and ask for help if needed.
13. Talk to an adult about unmanageable stress.



## **Conclusions and Implications**

All events in life brings about a reaction, but there are varied ways through which people reacts or responds to them, coping with stress is the attempt to manage or deal with stress. In their view, coping does not necessarily result in success. They comment that successful coping includes becoming aware of incidents and situations that one perceives as being stressful, and recognizing stressors means being aware of how your body responds to stress.

Students should manage stress by creating a positive meaning for it in terms of their personal growth and feeling. Students have to understand that positive stress and coping with negative stress can change them in a good way.

It is therefore recommended that the counseling centre of the academic centers should put in place improved services such as social support groups made up of lecturers, administrators and students. With this, supportive skills like talking and sharing could be developed. This will enable students to feel comfortable and free enough to express their feelings. Even though the counseling centre advices individual students who avail themselves for counseling on time management, it is envisaged that workshops, seminars and conferences on “techniques in managing stress” and “time management” for all students will go a long way to equip students with ways of coping with stress.

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