

Facing our feelings and stomping on stress

SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

Recognize that individuals can choose their own emotional reactions to events and thoughts

Establish personal guidelines for expressing feelings

Develop personal strategies for dealing with stress/change

Analyze and apply effective age-appropriate strategies to manage change

- acknowledge situations that may affect a change in feelings or stress levels
- understand the relationship between stressful events and our feelings
- learn and practice a variety of relaxation techniques

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

5.1 Opening activity: Samples of stress and feelings that follow (10 minutes)

5.2 Rules for relaxation (30 minutes)

5.3 Review: Personal preferences (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

HANDOUT 5.1: Samples of stress and feelings that follow

HANDOUT 5.2: Rules for relaxation

Chart paper

Notebooks



5.1 Opening activity: Samples of stress and feelings that follow (10 minutes)

Have the students brainstorm a list of events that create stress in their lives. Record responses on chart paper to post on the bulletin board. The following is a list of suggestions that you may want to draw from the class:

- Changing because you are growing up and getting older
- Experiencing peer influence
- Moving to a new neighbourhood
- Attending a new school
- Desiring to do well in school
- Being bullied
- Making friends
- Fitting in with others
- Doing school homework
- Being bored
- Arguing at home
- Experiencing money difficulties at home
- Going through a divorce in the family
- Grieving as a result of the death of a loved one
- Striving to improve in a sport or hobby



Once the list is complete, ask the students to explain the feelings that result from experiencing any one of the stresses identified. Encourage the students to think of a variety of expressive words. For example:

1. Moving to a new neighbourhood might make you feel homesick
2. Making new friends is intimidating
3. Doing school homework can be overwhelming

Record student responses on HANDOUT 5.1: Samples of stress and feelings that follow.

5.2 Rules for relaxation

(30 minutes)

Divide the class into pairs or small groups and distribute HANDOUT 5.2: Rules for relaxation. Explain that the students will read through seven techniques they can use to help them manage stress. Once they have read through everything, they will go back to the beginning and select a couple of techniques that they wish to practice. How many they complete will depend upon the time available. Encourage the students to practice the techniques they find the most interesting, as they will not have time for all seven. Ask them to consider the question at the bottom of HANDOUT 5.2. This will be discussed at the end of the activity; therefore, it is important that the students identify which techniques they find the most beneficial and why.

Clarify that all of the relaxation rules give detailed instructions; this is for individuals who plan to make use of these techniques on their own time. More general instructions are also provided, which describe practice techniques for the students to use during this lesson.

Alternatively, you may prefer to read HANDOUT 5.2 and work through some of the techniques as a large group, rather than dividing the students into pairs or groups.

5.3 Review: Personal preferences

(5 minutes)

With a show of hands, tally the top three favourite techniques. Discuss the question provided at the bottom of HANDOUT 5.2, which is as follows:

What is your favourite rule for relaxation? Think about:

- Why this is your favourite technique
- When it will help you most
- How often you will use it
- The results you expect to see

Have the students keep HANDOUT 5.2 in their books for easy reference to the relaxation techniques.

As an extension to this activity, you can ask the students to write about one of these experiences as a homework assignment. You can also have them illustrate and title their favourite technique; and display work samples on the bulletin board, near the chart of stressful situations.

Check the class envelope and respond to any questions asked.



Samples of stress and feelings that follow

Stressful Situations

Feelings Experienced

1. New neighbourhood

1. Being homesick

2. New friends

2. Being intimidated

3. School homework

3. Being overwhelmed

4. → 4.

5. → 5.

6. → 6.

7. → 7.

8. → 8.

9. → 9.

10. → 10.

Rules for relaxation

Read through each of the relaxation techniques below. After reading all of them, go back and try out a couple with a classmate and think about how they make you feel.

Rule 1: Positive self-talk

Think of a variety of positive statements you can say to yourself when you need a boost of confidence. Write down a list of ideas and commit this list to memory.

With your partner, discuss three positive statements you will include on your list.

Rule 2: Tensing and relaxing muscles

Sit or lie down in a quiet place. Close your eyes and try to relax. Start at your toes. Tense all of the muscles in your toes and hold for about ten seconds. Next, relax your toes for another ten seconds. Move to your feet. Tense all of the muscles in your feet and hold for ten seconds. Relax your feet for another ten seconds. Continue doing this with your calf muscles, your thigh muscles, your stomach muscles, etc. Work slowly all the way to your facial muscles.

Try this out with your partner. Begin with your fingers first, your hands next and your arms last. Remember to close your eyes, clear your mind and focus on the task at hand. Your partner will count to ten for you as you tense and relax. Afterwards, you will count for your partner.

HANDOUT 5.2b

Rule 3: Visualizing

Example (a) Close your eyes. Imagine a picture of a peaceful place you would like to be. This can be a place you have already visited or a place you have only heard about. Try to imagine every detail. See yourself relaxing in the picture.

Example (b) Close your eyes. Imagine achieving a goal you have identified for yourself. This picture should be still, like a snap shot. You feel proud because you have succeeded. Think about who else is in this picture with you.

Together with your partner, close your eyes and imagine a picture. This may be a picture of a peaceful place or a picture of personal success. After about one minute, tell your partner about your picture.

Rule 4: Deep breathing

Find a quiet place to sit or lie down. While counting to five slowly, take in a deep breath through your nose. Hold your breath for another five seconds. Next, let your breath out through your mouth while counting to five slowly. Repeat this several times.

Have your partner count for you as you breathe in, hold and breathe out. Repeat this five times before counting for your partner. Try to breathe, making as little noise as possible.

Rule 5: Exercise

Exercise is a popular way of dealing with stress. Many people jog, work out at the gym or participate in sports. You can choose any form of exercise that you enjoy. You may choose to exercise alone or with a friend. Try to allow yourself time each day to be active and to exercise.

At the same time as your partner, complete a series of jumping jacks for one minute. If you feel yourself getting tired, simply slow down your pace. Try not to stop before one minute passes. When you finish, relax for one minute.

Rule 6: Lighten Up

Laughing, having fun and taking time to enjoy the moment are other popular ways of dealing with stress. Make a list of ways to “lighten up!” Think of activities, sayings or jokes that help you smile and cheer you up. Try to do at least one thing from your list each day. Your list can have as many as 50 items on it. Start small and add new ideas each week.

With your partner, brainstorm five items you would like to include on your list. Here are a few examples:

- Play with a pet
- Start a pillow fight
- Make up a silly song
- Run through the sprinkler
- Invent a new laugh

Rule 7: Reward Yourself

Reward yourself regularly! Think of a treat to give yourself each day. Remember, a treat does not have to be something that you buy.

Talk about ideas for treating yourself with your partner. Together, you can think of a variety of rewards. Some examples are:

- Eating a favourite snack
- Watching a T.V. show
- Making a craft
- Playing a video game
- Giving yourself a sticker

Question to Consider

What is your favourite rule for relaxation? Think about:

- Why this is your favourite rule
- When it will help you most
- How often you will use it
- The results you expect to see