

# Stress Management

## SUMMARY

**Objective:** To help students understand their role and choices in how they respond to stress, and identify the supports they need in place to cope with stress in a healthy way.

**Process:** Students will participate in an activity where they build a bridge strong enough to withstand various stressors. This activity will help students explore what supports and areas of protection they need to cope with stress.

This lesson is one in a series of Grade 7 lessons. If you aren't able to teach all the lessons, try pairing this lesson with the "Understanding Influences," "Decision Making," or "Challenge the Influences" lessons.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Recognize and participate in personal strategies to manage stress, change and emotions.
- Identify stress management skills.
- Identify positive friendships, role models and personal support systems.
- Build a broad base of positive and supportive relationships.
- Commit to healthy supportive relationships with family and friends, including positive peer leadership.
- Know where to find support if required.

## CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 4.1 Stress (10 minutes)
- 4.2 Activity: Building Bridges (30 minutes)
- 4.3 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

### REQUIRED MATERIALS

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Arts and crafts supplies, such as those listed below, are needed to make the bridge. Also, you will need to supply items of various weights to act as stressors.

Straws

Popsicle sticks

Construction paper

Pipe cleaners

Tape

String

Play dough

Balloons

Various objects of different weights  
(e.g., paper clips, a stapler, a cup full of pennies, a book)

Scissors

### LINKS TO OTHER SUBJECTS

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- **Science:** Explore the concept of building bridges and explore the metaphor more
- **Physical Education:** Concentrate on exploring physical activities for personal stress management
- **Language Arts:** Write a journal entry about a recent stressful experience and how you managed it

Teaching about substance use and gambling can and should cross all subjects. Here are a few suggestions for use in subjects other than health.

## 4.1 Stress Discussion

(10 minutes)

Ask students for a working definition of stress. Stress is the body's response to any demand or pressure. It is a natural response. Learning to recognize sources of stress and how they effect us as individuals is important.

Ask students about the different stressors they face in Grade 7 and write down the answers.

Some examples of stress may include:

- needing to get good grades
- being bullied at school
- fitting in
- having problems at home
- having problems or uncertainties in relationships
- losing a loved one
- going through a change in a life situation  
(e.g., moving to a new place, parents divorcing)
- getting a job
- starting at a new school
- working on an important school project
- going to the first school dance
- making new friends
- performing in the school play or participating on a school sports team

Developing the awareness that we can often choose healthy ways to respond to stress is helpful in preventing problems related to substance use and gambling. Stress (or our lack of healthy ways to manage stress) can cause youth to turn to alcohol, drugs or gambling as a way of coping.

Ask students how they find outlets for, or manage their daily stresses, and why that is important. Write down their answers.

Stress management can help to strengthen students against the kinds of stresses that can motivate them to try using substances or gambling, as well as the many other benefits such as physical fitness and mental health.

Ideas on how to relax, unwind or manage stress could include:

- relaxing
  - reading
  - listening to music
  - visiting with friends or important people, such as grandparents
  - playing with a pet
  - getting a good nights sleep
- physical activity
  - going for a run, walk, skateboarding, etc.
  - playing sports
  - exercising
- reducing the stressful situation
  - talking with friends or a trusted adult for support
  - address the stress itself, rather than just responding to the body's reaction to it. (e.g., manage a conflict, learn to communicate effectively, think positively or avoid the situation if possible)

Conclude by emphasizing the importance of down-time and leisure as fuel for beating the stresses of Grade 7 and beyond.

## 4.2 Activity: Building Bridges

(30 minutes)

**Objective:** Students will participate in an activity where they will build a bridge strong enough to withstand certain stressors. This activity will help students explore what supports and areas of protection they need in order to cope with stress.

**Instructions:** Divide students into pairs or groups, and give them the mission that they are to build a bridge, using the available materials, that can support different amounts of weight.

As a large group, discuss the metaphor of the bridge representing their life and ask for suggestions as to what the various materials for strengthening the bridge could represent (e.g., tape is exercise, string is friends, etc.). Record these on the list of ideas to manage stress.

Ask what the different stressors represent (e.g., what would be an example of a “paperclip” stress? What would be a “book” stress?). Record these associations on the list of stressors.

As they go through the activity, ask them to look for ways in which the activity is like or unlike how they have responded to various stressors in the past.

Have students build their bridges. When students are finished building their bridges, gather around and test the bridges with the various objects representing stress, starting with the lightest to the heaviest. Also experiment with the cumulative effect of many small stresses, to illustrate the point that it is often accumulated daily stresses, which, when not dealt with, that can cause problems over time.

While you and your class are placing stress on the bridges, debrief the activity. If a bridge works, focus on the positive things that made it work. If not, focus on what needs to change to make it work.

- How did the bridge respond to stress?
- How is that like or unlike to how you respond to stress?
- How did the bridge respond differently to the different weights?
- What did you notice?
- What do the different stressors represent?

- What supports did you put into place in order to help support the bridge in anticipation of the upcoming stresses? Why?
- How do we need supports?
- Who and what are our supports?
- How does our need for support differ depending on the amount of stress?
- Does our need for support look different in short and long term ways?
- Can you think of examples of coping with stress you see in your family, friends, role models.
- How can not handling stress properly lead to **making** unhealthy choices?
- How is stress management a form of substance use and gambling prevention?

### 4.3 Closure: Key Messages

(5 minutes)

Remind students that stress is natural and normal. It is our body's response to any demand or pressure. The important thing is that we usually have control over how we choose to respond to stress. By having healthy coping skills and strong supports in place, we can strengthen ourselves against the kinds of stresses that can motivate us to try or use substances or gambling.