

### **Lesson Three: Listening to our bodies**

**(adapted from Mind Matters Resource Pack 'Stress – Life's Hassles' by Marilyn Harvey, Published by Youth Clubs UK, 1999)**

Aim: To help young people become more aware of the feelings and behaviours associated with stress.

Materials needed:

Photocopies of the worksheets for every student

Pens

Flip chart

Introduction:

Everyone feels stressed at times, however young or old they are. We all experience stress, usually in response to everyday pressures at home / school / work, or problems we may have in our relationships. In fact stress is essential to life – it keeps us on our toes and can motivate us to complete or undertake tasks. However there are many situations that can lead to us feeling stressed for longer periods of time, for example, being bullied or teased, too much school work, arguments at home etc. - which can lead to people developing physical & mental health problems, including Stress & Depression.

What to do:

Part 1

Facilitate a class 'Thought Shower' on what it feels like to be stressed. Record all the answers up on the board.

Discuss the answers highlighting that our bodies send us both physical and emotional warning signs when we experience depression. Distribute the worksheet 'Stress Warnings' to all pupils to encourage them to understand and recognise the difference between emotional and physical signs.

Part 2

Explain to the group that they will each be given the opportunity to discover how likely they are to experience stress – it is important to point out that this activity is useful to reflect on how lifestyle choices and situations influence how we will cope with stress, but that it should not be taken too seriously!

Give each participant a checklist and pen and ask them to complete the exercise, putting a score in each box for each question. Honesty is important so explain to all participants that they will not have to share their answers with the class. When all participants have completed the exercise and have their total score, read out the interpretation, giving the group time to digest the information.

Give the group the opportunity to discuss their results or anything that they were surprised or confused by - but only if they want to! Keep the discussion positive and where the group finds that they generally have a high score for a particular question, ask the rest of the group to look at ways people could improve their score.

### Part 3

Lifestyle choices and our personalities influence how we deal with stress – for example, being able to talk about our feelings, setting time aside for relaxation each day, healthy diets so our bodies can cope with the physical symptoms of stress etc. However it is a given fact that we will all experience stress at certain points in our lives. Split the class into small groups of 4 – 6 and distribute 'Dealing with Stress' Worksheets allowing them twenty minutes to complete the exercise. Participants should be encouraged to think about what lifestyle choices we could make to protect ourselves against stress and how we can deal effectively with stress when we experience it. Bring the groups back together and ask one person from each to feed-back their ideas. We have included a list of suggestions for teachers to encourage discussion if the group struggles to come up with ideas.

### Ending points:

Sometimes – no matter what we do – stress gets on top of us and problems just seem to go on and on and keep building up. You can feel very trapped and begin to feel like there is nothing we can do about things and that everything will just keep getting worse. When we feel like this it is very important that we speak to someone. Other people will be able to help us get a different perspective on things and come up with solutions that we couldn't see because we were so 'stressed'.

If any of the participants feel they have a particularly high score, they may be worried about the amount of stress they are under. It is important that you offer the participants the chance to seek advice from yourself / outside organisation if appropriate.

## Stress Warnings

Warning signs of Stress can be physical or emotional –  
what are the following?...

Place a tick the appropriate column...

	Warning Signs	Physical	Emotional
1	Lack of appetite		
2	Not being able to sleep		
3	Feeling constantly irritable		
4	Not being able to sit and relax		
5	Bursting into tears easily		
6	Feeling bored most of the time		
7	Frequent headaches		
8	Not able to have a good laugh		
9	Feel that you can't talk to anyone about your problems		
10	Not able to concentrate		
11	Unable to enjoy activities		
12	Frequent heartburn or stomach pains		
13	Frequent diarrhoea or constipation		
14	Feeling that everything has got on top of you		
15	Rarely feeling hungry		
16	Feeling dread about something		
17	Feeling really tired most of the time		
18	Putting on / losing a lot of weight		
19	Feeling uneasy most of the time		
20	Muscle spasms or twitches		

How vulnerable am I to stress?

Always	= 1 point	Almost Never	= 4 points
Almost Always	= 2 points	Never	= 5 points
Sometimes	= 3 points		

	Questions	Score
1	I eat at least one hot, healthy meal a day	
2	I get seven to eight hours of sleep at least four nights a week	
3	I give and receive affection regularly	
4	I have at least one adult who I am close to and that I can rely on	
5	I exercise at least three times a week	
6	I smoke none or less than half a pack of cigarettes a day	
7	I take fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week	
8	I have some spiritual beliefs	
9	I regularly attend clubs or social activities	
10	I have a good group of friends	
11	I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters	
12	I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth)	
13	I am able to speak about my feelings when angry, worried or sad	
14	I have regular conversations with the people I live with about everyday life for example, work, money and everyday experiences	
15	I do something for fun at least once a week	
16	I am able to organise my time effectively	
17	I drink fewer than three cups of tea, coffee or cola a day	
18	I have quiet time to relax each day	
	<b>Total score:</b>	

## INTERPRETATION

### 20-44: Slightly vulnerable

You are making good lifestyle choices and are in a good place to cope with stress effectively.

### 45-69: Somewhat vulnerable

You may have a moderate stress level. There may have been a lot of change in your life which is totally natural when we are in our teens. Keep a check on your stressors think about what you could do to cope better.

### 70-95: Seriously vulnerable

You may have a high stress level. This type of stress is potentially harmful and there is a chance that this could develop into a mental health problem. Decide on lifestyle choices and actions you can take to reduce your stress levels.

### 95+ : Extremely vulnerable T

This is a very high score. You may need to talk to someone to get support in reducing your stress levels. Remember we have loads of options to deal with stress but sometimes as a result of the confusion we experience when 'stressed' it is difficult to figure out what they are. Talk to someone for advice – they could give you ideas you had never thought of. No matter how difficult things may feel or seem there is always something we can do to make things better.

## Coping With Stress...

In your small groups can you give ten tips for preventing stress and dealing with stress.? It may be helpful to think of a time when you felt stressed and what helped you to deal with it. What can we do every day to help us prevent ourselves becoming stressed?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What can we do when we feel stressed to help us to deal with it?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

## **Ideas for coping with stress**

### **Lifestyle Choices...**

Exercise daily, have a healthy diet and make sure you are getting enough sleep

Learn to plan ahead and set realistic goals

Make time to relax each day – know what activities help you to relax

Learn to talk over your problems with someone you trust

Positive Thinking – Positive results – Try not to predict failure or imagine things that might not happen

Make a 'To Do' list each day

Make time for fun every day

Don't be afraid to say 'NO'

Take time to be proud of what you do accomplish

### **Coping when we are stressed...**

Take steps to overcome problems - Make a list of things that you could do or could happen that would make your situation better. Think about who you could speak to help change things. A problem shared is a problem halved.

Don't bottle up your feelings - Talk to someone about what you are experiencing. Other people will be able to help us get a different perspective on things and come up with solutions that we couldn't see because we were so 'stressed'.

Practice breathing for relaxation – in and hold for three / out and hold for three.

Take time out for yourself – nothing is worth becoming ill over.

Don't try to be perfect – keep things in balance and be realistic.

Try to avoid drugs & alcohol as they will only add to the stress in the long run.

Cut out any unnecessary tasks and refuse to take on extra work.

Make an appointment with your GP or other support organisation for advice. There are medications available for stress which will help reduce the symptoms of stress but will not cure the cause.