### Making Friends With Your Stress Response

#### Division Two - Grades 4 - 6

This topic has two activities:

**Activity I**
- Stress Explained

**Activity II**
- Taking Charge of Your Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Knowledge</th>
<th>Procedural Knowledge</th>
<th>Handle with Care</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Most daily stress is normal and adaptive&lt;br&gt;• We need some stress to perform well&lt;br&gt;• Stress can be managed</td>
<td>• To be able to explain the stress response and why it is useful&lt;br&gt;• To identify age-appropriate personal stressors&lt;br&gt;• To describe how stress feels in their body&lt;br&gt;• To change unhelpful thoughts about stress to helpful thoughts&lt;br&gt;• To select a range of strategies for managing the stress response&lt;br&gt;• To name trusted adults that they can go to in times of stress</td>
<td>• This topic explores stressful situations and some students may react emotionally to this discussion</td>
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### Materials and Printables
- Slide presentation
- Stress Explained – Elementary Edition video
- Andi Mack Video
- Stress Explained – Elementary Edition – Activity Sheet
- Unhelpful/Helpful Thinking Sample Sheet and Scenarios
- Taking Charge of Your Stress Response Activity

### Extension activities
- School Mental Health Assist offers a variety of everyday activities to support coping and stress management in the classroom
Stress is the body’s reaction (thinking, feeling and behavioral responses) to any change in our environment that requires an adjustment or a response. Stress does not only alert us to life-threatening danger (fight or flight response) but also to life challenges and opportunities (excite and delight response). We all need some stress to perform well but the right amount of stress varies from people to people.

When faced with a stressor (challenge, opportunity, threat, etc.) our brain and body initiates the stress response. If we avoid the stressor, the next time we encounter similar stressors, the stress response will become more intense, resulting in maladaptive outcomes. Students can learn to better manage their stress response, not by avoiding or reducing their stress, but by building skills and coping strategies that help them use the normal stress response for growth and development.
Activity I – Stress Explained

Purpose
develop students understanding of the Stress Response and how it is helpful
draw students attention to their personal stressors and how it is expressed in their body

Conceptual Connection
✓ most daily stress is normal and adaptive
✓ we need stress to perform well

Stress Explained: Elementary Edition
• Ask students to share their current understanding of stress
• Explain to students that there are different types of stress – Positive, Tolerable, Toxic and provide examples for each one
• Remind students that our brains job is to keep us safe and help us learn and grow
• Watch the Mental Health Literacy Video – Stress Explained: Elementary Edition
• Ask the students
  • “What did you learn from this video about the stress response?”
  • “Has your thinking about stress changed? If so, how?”
• Watch YouTube video – Andi Mack https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5gXJgHcfp0
• Distribute a copy of the Stress Explained: Elementary Edition Activity
• Brainstorm with the students (jam board)
  • What stresses did Andi have?
  • What activates your stress response?
• Direct students to record a personal stressor on their activity sheet
• Invite students to share examples of how stress can show up in their body (jam board)
• Give students a minute to write down on their activity sheet how stress shows up in their body
Activity II – Taking Charge of Your Stress Response

Purpose
assist students in developing a range of strategies for responding to their stress response
• thinking strategies
• coping strategies
• help-seeking strategies

Conceptual Connection
✓ Stress can be managed

Taking Charge of Your Stress Response
• Review with students the concept of unhealthy vs. healthy thinking and how this can affect your stress response
• Provide students with examples of how to change an unhealthy thought to a healthy thought.
• Show students the situations provided and ask them to choose one and change an unhealthy thought to a healthy thought on their Stress Explained activity sheet
• Tell students to choose one scenario and create an unhelpful and helpful thought on their Stress Explained Activity Sheet
• Introduce the notion that there are many different coping strategies we can use to take charge of our stress response and that these can be grouped into different categories (Coping Strategies Handout)

Explain the three effective calming strategies that can help relax our brain are:
• Mindful Breathing
  • Starfish Breathing
  • Box Breathing
• Muscle Relaxation
• Guided Imagery

Try each strategy with the class.
Mindful Breathing

**Starfish Breathing**

In this practice, use the sensations of breathing and touch to settle your mind and body. Show how to do it and have your child copy you.

- Choose a hand to be your starfish. Extend this hand, palm out, with fingers spread like a starfish.
- Use the pointer finger from your other hand to trace the starfish as you breathe. Start at your thumb, and as you breathe in, trace up your thumb to the top. Do this carefully, so your movement matches your inhale.
- Now, with your out breath, trace down the inside of your thumb. Again, move slowly paying attention to keeping the breath and movement together.
- Continue breathing up and down each finger, matching your movement with your breath. As you breathe and trace, notice the sensations of movement in your body – your chest and belly moving in and out and your finger moving up and down.
- When you come to the base of your wrist below your little finger, rest for a moment. Check in with yourself. Notice how you are feeling without overthinking or judging.
- Try this again with your other hand.

**Box Breathing**

Breathe in for 4

Hold for 4

Breathe out for 4

Hold for 4

start here
Muscle Relaxation

Take the students through a progressive muscle relaxation, starting with the feet. Ask students to sit quietly and comfortably in their own chair, putting their heads down on their desks and closing their eyes for a minute or two. Play the CD quietly in the background.

When all is calm and silent, students can stay with heads down or sit up.

You will be tensing different muscles as much as you can, then relaxing them. Hold each muscle tension for the count of 10. Relax and enjoy the sensation of release from tension. Keep breathing slowly and deeply.

Now, tighten the muscles in your toes and feet, focus your attention on the sensation coming from the muscles, breathe slowly and deeply. Hold for 10 seconds, then relax.

(Move up through the body, asking students to tighten each group of muscles, holding for 10, then relaxing: legs, stomach, back, neck, face.)

Now tense every muscle in your body, hold for 10 seconds, then relax. Feel a wave of calmness as you stop tensing.
Guided Imagery

Take the students through a guided imagery exercise. Play the music quietly and ask students to sit comfortably, either with their heads down on their desks or to sit up with their eyes closed. They will need to stay silent as you read the script aloud, while they imagine their own individual scene.

All activity and sound will take place inside their heads; all activity is imagined, internal. Use the following script or one of your choosing.

Choose a setting that is calming and restful for you. It may be at the beach, in a rainforest, on a boat, under a tree, on a soft couch, or anywhere else that you choose. Try hard to imagine that you are really there and concentrate hard on your senses – what you can see, hear, smell, touch or taste in this place.

Sit comfortably and breathe in slowly and gently through your nose. Close your eyes. As you breathe out, imagine your scene and look around you. What can you see? Listen carefully. What can you hear in your scene?

Now imagine you can touch some of the things in your scene – it might be the ground, sand, some water. Note the feeling of the textures on your skin. You feel quiet and calm and relaxed. All the time you are doing this you are feeling completely relaxed and safe and peaceful. Check if you can taste anything from your scene – is there a tang of the ocean or the taste of cool fresh water?

As you relax in your special place your body feels heavy and relaxed and all the tension leaves your body. Your breathing is slow and rhythmic. Your entire body feels comfortable and calm. Say to yourself I feel calm and relaxed. My face feels smoother, heavier, more relaxed. I feel safe and at peace.

Take a moment to enjoy the feeling of relaxation and the peace of this scene. Look around your scene again to get a really clear image of this, your special place. When you are feeling stressed or upset remember that you have the power to imagine a place or a feeling of relaxation, as you have done now. When you are ready, open your eyes, feeling alert and awake but keeping the feeling of relaxation and calm that you have created.
• Invite students to write down their favourite calming strategies on the Coping Strategies activity sheet
• Brainstorm examples for the other categories on the Coping Styles activity sheet (jam board)
• Ask students to record one preferred coping strategy under each of the remaining categories. This activity can be stapled to the Stress Explained activity sheet
• Bring students attention to the final strategy for responding to the stress response – Ask for help from a trusted adult
• Encourage students to name on their Stress Explained activity sheet one or two trusted adults

• Summarize the Key Concepts
  • UNDERSTAND: Most stress is normal and helps us learn, grow and stay safe
  • The brain and body activates the stress response when we need to be aware of a challenge, opportunity, or threat
  • COPE: We can effectively manage our stress response through our thinking and behavior
  • CONNECT: It is important to connect with a trusted adult when you experience stress that feels too big to handle on your own.
# COPING STYLES & STRATEGIES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COPING STYLE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SELF-CALMING ACTIVITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>EX: DRAWING</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes things that calm you down, like drawing, meditation,</td>
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<td>praying, being in a quiet space, listening to soothing music, taking a shower,</td>
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<td>snuggling in bed, walking the dog, stroking the car, cuddling a teddy.</td>
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<td><strong>ENERGETIC ACTIVITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>EX: EXERCISE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes things like exercise, sport, dance, bike-riding,</td>
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<td>active play which can help lift your mood.</td>
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<td><strong>SOCIAL ACTIVITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>EX: CONNECTING WITH FRIENDS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Include things like talking things over, help-</td>
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<td>seeking or connecting or spending time with others.</td>
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<td><strong>SHIFTING ATTENTION</strong></td>
<td><strong>EX: READING</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes things that take your mind to a different place like</td>
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<td>reading, watching TV, playing games, doing a favorite hobby.</td>
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<td><strong>GETTING ORGANIZED</strong></td>
<td><strong>EX: MAKING LISTS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Includes activities that help you plan, get organized,</td>
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<td>like making lists, tidying up, making a plan, organizing an activity, making a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>game plan.</td>
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STRESS SCENARIOS

Choose one of these scenarios and record on your “Stress Explained” handout how you could change an unhelpful thought to a helpful thought.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>You answer a question in class and everyone laughs at your response.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>You did not do as well on your test as you hoped.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>You missed scoring a goal and your soccer team lost the game.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>You hear your best friend being invited over to someone else’s house.</td>
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### THINKING ABOUT STRESS

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<tr>
<th>Unhelpful Thinking</th>
<th>Helpful Thinking</th>
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<tr>
<td>I will never meet new friends at school.</td>
<td>I might feel lonely, but soon I will get to know people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t solve this problem.</td>
<td>I have been studying, I am not going to give up this time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>They are right, I am a loser.</td>
<td>It hurts when people say mean things, but that meanness is usually more about them than me. I don’t have to believe what they say.</td>
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