Making Friends With Your Stress Response  
Division One - Grades K - 3

This topic has two activities:  
Activity I: Stress Explained  
Activity II: Coping with the Stress Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Knowledge</th>
<th>Procedural Knowledge</th>
<th>Handle with Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Most daily stress is normal and adaptive</td>
<td>• To be able to explain the stress response and why it is useful</td>
<td>• This topic explores stressful situations, and some students may react emotionally to this discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We need some stress to perform well</td>
<td>• To identify age-appropriate personal stressors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stress can be managed</td>
<td>• To describe how stress feels in their body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To change unhelpful thoughts about stress to helpful thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To select a range of strategies for managing the stress response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To name trusted adults that they can go to in times of stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials and Printables

• Stress Explained – Elementary Edition video
• Stress Explained-Elementary Edition Activity Sheet
• Stressful Situations-Sponge Bob Rock Bottom Video
• Unhelpful and Helpful Thinking Sample Sheets and Scenarios
• Coping Clouds Activity Sheet

Extension activities

• School Mental Health Assist offers a variety of everyday activities to support coping and stress management in the classroom  
Teacher Knowledge

**The Stress Response**

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 brain’s 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 Sponge Square Pants YouTube with a focus on identifying stressors- video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6AVpuOd5qE
• Distribute copy of the Stress Explained: Elementary Edition Activity
• Brainstorm with the students (jam board)
  • What stressors did Sponge Bob and Patrick have?
  • What activates your stress response?
• Direct students to record a personal stressor on their activity sheet
• Invite students to share example 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 – Coping with the Stress Response

Purpose
assist students in developing three key strategies for managing their stress response
  • thinking strategies
  • coping strategies
  • help-seeking strategies

Conceptual Connection
✓ Stress can be managed

Taking Charge of Your Stress Response
• Introduce the notion that there are many different we can cope when our stress response is triggered
• 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.

• Explain to students that another way to manage our stress response is to “calm” our brains. We can do this by breathing deeply, tensing and relaxing our muscles and picturing calming scenes in our minds
Demonstrate and Practice the following

Deep 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

Progressive Muscle Relaxation- Melting Moments

Melting Moments

Close your eyes. Scrunch up all your muscles so you are as hard as a block of ice. Hold tight. Now slowly let go. Scrunch up again. Now let go. This time imagine your block of ice melting into the floor. Your muscles are getting softer as you melt. Let your fingers melt. Let your feet melt. Let your back melt. Now wiggle your fingers to wake them up. Wiggle your toes to wake them up. Open your eyes. Sit up slowly.

Guided Imagery – Floating Cloud

Ask the students what they think floating cloud might be about. Then arrange for them to lie down again and listen to the story (Use the script below or devise your own.)

FLOATING CLOUD

Close your eyes. Picture a fluffy white cloud. It is as gentle and soft as feathers. Imagine you are lying on this soft and gentle cloud. It makes your arms relax and feel floaty. It makes your legs relax and feel light and floaty. It makes your back feel soft. When you are all soft and settled, the cloud is going to slowly lift you up and take you for a ride. It is going to take you to a really nice place, to your favourite place. Can you imagine now what you can see in this special place. Is there something nice there? Is there something fun to do? Is there something peaceful there? In a moment your cloud will be bringing you back to the classroom. Imagine that it is gently setting you down now. Wiggle your fingers to show you are back. Wiggle your toes to show you are back. Open your eyes, and slowly sit up.
Ask students;
• “How did these calming exercises make you feel?”
• “Would you use any of them again and if so, why?”

Brainstorm with students other activities they might already be using to cope with their stress response when it is activated (jam board).

Record three favorite Coping Strategies on the Coping Clouds activity sheet. This can be stapled to the back of the Stress Response Explained: Elementary Edition Activity Sheet.

**SOME EXAMPLE COPING STRATEGIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Go and play</th>
<th>Watch TV</th>
<th>Fill your lungs like a big balloon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>Play a computer game</td>
<td>Listen to some gentle music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw a picture</td>
<td>Hug your teddy</td>
<td>Listen to some lively music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to yourself</td>
<td>Jump on the trampoline</td>
<td>Sit quietly on your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat a pet</td>
<td>Sing a song</td>
<td>Make a joke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with friends</td>
<td>Ride a bike</td>
<td>Run around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count sheep jumping over a fence in a big green field</td>
<td>Talk with mum or dad</td>
<td>Eat something nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell yourself, <em>it’s okay my fear will go away</em></td>
<td>Imagine you’re on a sunny beach</td>
<td>Write about it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Bring students attention to the final strategy for dealing with the stress response
  • “Sometimes we can try our thinking and coping strategies but still feel the many big emotions related to the stress response - Scared, Frustrated, Worried
  • When this happens don’t forget that it is okay to talk to a trusted adult. Chances are they can support you in feeling better and more in control
• Encourage students to name on their Stress Response Explained: Elementary Edition activity sheet – one or two trusted adults in their life
• Summarize the key concepts
  • UNDERSTAND: Most stress is normal and helps you learn, grow and stay safe
    The brain and the body activate the stress response when they need you to be aware of a challenge, opportunity or threat
  • COPE: We can manage our stress response through our thinking and behavior
  • CONNECT: It is important to connect with a trusted adult when you are experiencing stress that feel too big too handle on your own.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unhelpful Thinking</th>
<th>Helpful Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

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