

# MANAGING STRESS

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## AGENDA

- Starter
- Stress or Not?
- You Stress Me Out
- Analyze This
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will identify sources and symptoms of stress.

Students will identify ways to manage and reduce stress.

### Materials Needed

- Three copies of the “Stress or Not?” activity sheet (Starter and Part I)
- A dictionary (Part I)
- One copy of the “Stressful Situations” activity sheet or one blank piece of paper that you have folded and unfolded to make 10 or 12 boxes (Part II)

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**Starter (3 minutes)**

Before you begin, give three students who like to perform copies of the “Stress or Not?” activity sheet dialogue to practice quietly.

On the board, write the word “stress.” Draw a circle around it to begin a word web. Explain word webs to students who are not familiar with this kind of organizer. Have students freely associate words that they relate with the word “stress” as you write their responses in the area surrounding the circle.

Discuss students’ ideas and conclude that stress is a big part of our daily lives. Explain that today’s lesson will help them recognize and manage stress.

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**Part I Stress or Not? (10 minutes)**

Purpose: Students define “stress” and the ways in which our perceptions of situations determine whether or not we are stressed.

**1. Students define “stress.”**

Ask a volunteer to look up the word “stress” in the dictionary. List the various definitions on the board. Have students identify the definitions with which they are most familiar. (Students might respond: tension, pressure, mental or physical strain.)

**2. Three students perform a dialogue for the class.**

Explain to the class that they are going to see a brief skit about stress. Remind them to keep the definition of “stress” in mind.

Instruct the three students you chose during the starter to perform the dialogue for the class.

**3. Students recognize that our perceptions of situations determine whether we are stressed.**

When the dialogue is complete, ask students if they thought that the test was stressful. Lead students to understand that the test was stressful for Eddie, but it was not stressful for Dominique. Have students identify the reasons why this was the case. (Student responses may include that Eddie was not prepared for the test, while Dominique was prepared.)

Point out that the students’ attitudes toward the test were different. Guide students to realize that attitude is a major factor in how we perceive the level of stress involved in a situation. Most situations are not stressful in themselves; rather, it is how we perceive them that determines the stress.

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**Part II You Stress Me Out (20 minutes)**

Purpose: Students identify situations that cause stress.

**1. Students brainstorm situations that they find stressful.**

Ask students to list situations that they find stressful. Write their ideas on the board. In addition, ask a volunteer to write the situations on the “Stressful Situations” activity sheet or the sheet of paper you have previously folded to create boxes. Have the volunteer write one situation in each square.

**2. Students identify symptoms of stress.**

Refer students to a situation on the board. Ask them to describe how they feel when that situation occurs. Encourage them to consider their emotional and physical reactions. (Students might respond: tension, rapid breathing, losing sleep, sleeping too much, depression, getting sick, anger, eating too much or not enough.)

Explain that these responses can be symptoms of stress and that learning to recognize these symptoms can help us reduce stress.

**3. Students work in groups and prepare to role-play stressful situations.**

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Ask the student volunteer to tear the activity sheet or folded paper into pieces so that one situation is on each piece. Place the papers in a bag or box. Have each group randomly choose a stressful situation to role-play.

Instruct students to include the following in the role plays:

- Identify and describe the stressful situation by acting it out.
- Show the symptoms of stress.
- Show how and why one character’s perceptions of the situation make it stressful.

Explain to students that they do not need to show a resolution for the situation at this time.

Allow students five minutes to prepare their role plays.

**4. Students perform their role plays.**

Have students perform their role plays for the class.

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**Part III Analyze This (15 minutes)**

Purpose: Students analyze the role plays and suggest techniques for managing or reducing stress.

**1. Students brainstorm some stress-management techniques.**

Explain to students that they are now going to suggest ways to manage or reduce the stress that they saw in the role plays.

Ask students to suggest some common techniques for managing or reducing stress. (Students may respond: being prepared, staying healthy, talking it out, going for a walk, breaking down big tasks into manageable pieces, breathing deeply, visualizing relaxing places, exercising, thinking of the “big picture.”)

**2. Groups analyze the role plays.**

Explain to students that they are now going to suggest appropriate ways to handle the stressful situations they portrayed in their role plays. Assign each group one of the role plays that another group performed.

Allow students eight minutes to discuss the following questions:

- Why was the situation perceived as stressful?
- What stress-management techniques could be useful?

When they are finished, have groups share their analyses with the class.

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### Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to identify techniques for reducing stress that they can apply to their own lives. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Most situations are not stressful in themselves; rather, it is how we perceive them that determines the stress we feel.
- Recognizing the symptoms of stress can help us reduce stress.

### Student Assessment

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1. Define “stress.”
2. List three physical and three emotional signs of stress.
3. List three techniques for managing your stress.
4. Describe a stressful situation in your life. What can you do to make this situation less stressful?

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

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“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.” —Helen Keller

Discuss the role of acceptance and flexibility in reducing stress.

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

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Have students compile a resource guide of stress-management tips. Students might contribute information from teen-interest magazines or reference books for adults. Use a recipe box to separate this information by categories.

Have students write their favorite tips on an index card to keep with them wherever they go.

### Writing in Your Journal

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Have students use the following prompt to begin their journal writing: “Stress! I’ve got plenty. For example....” Have them identify symptoms of stress, develop a personal plan of stress-reducing techniques, and identify where to get help with tough problems.

Discuss sources of stress common to the students in the class.

### Using Technology

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Show a relaxation or stress release video. Discuss the elements of the video and the suggestions it offers.

Have students create their own stress release videos.

## Homework

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Have students take a quiz to find out their “hassle quotient.” (See pages 21–24 of *Urban Ease: Stress-Free Living in the Big City* by Allen Elkin, PhD, or have students make up their own quiz.)

Discuss the quiz results in class. Talk about how people respond differently to stressful events. Students might want to give the quiz to a family member and discuss whether their coping styles are the same or different.

## Additional Resources

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Invite a guest speaker skilled in a particular method of relaxation (e.g., meditation, yoga, tai chi) or a traditional sport to demonstrate and discuss their area of expertise and how it reduces stress.

Have students write about the activity and whether it seems likely that the strategy will work for them.

# STRESS OR NOT?

The following dialogue has three roles:

- Teacher
- Eddie
- Dominique

Practice the dialogue several times before performing it in front of the class.

*For about 30 seconds, the two students sit at desks at the front of the room. Eddie shuffles frantically through papers, trying to cram for a history test. Dominique sits calmly and looks relaxed, perhaps reading a book. The teacher enters the room and walks over to his desk in the corner, talking as he walks.*

**TEACHER:** Okay, class, it's time for your history test. I need you to clear everything off your desks.

**EDDIE:** (still shuffling, to himself) One more time...Okay, who was president during the Great Depression?

**TEACHER:** Eddie, did you hear me? It's time for the test. Please clear everything off your desk. (Teacher begins organizing some papers.)

**DOMINIQUE:** (to Eddie) Hey, what are you so worried about? This thing is going to be a breeze!

**EDDIE:** What do you mean it's going to be a breeze? I need at least a B in this class to be eligible to play this year, and if I don't do well on this test, I'm never going to get it.

**DOMINIQUE:** Well, I need to get a good grade in this class, too. This is an important requirement for the college I want to get into. But you don't see me freaking out over it.

**TEACHER:** (returning attention to students) Class, I can't begin the test until your desks are clear.

**DOMINIQUE:** (to Eddie) C'mon! I want to get started!

*Eddie looks up with an expression of panic.*



# STRESSFUL SITUATIONS
