



United States  
Department of  
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National Aeronautics  
and Space  
Administration

**EXPEDITIONARY**  
**SKILLS** **FOR LIFE**

A FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP FOR **STEM** EDUCATION

## LESSON PLAN: ACTIVITY 2.1

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### LESSON DETAILS

#### AGE/GRADE LEVEL

Middle School

#### LEARNER OUTCOMES

Youth will understand how to effectively use stress management tools and techniques.

#### SUCCESS INDICATORS

Youth will identify unhealthy and healthy ways to cope with a stressful situation.

#### LIFE SKILLS

Personal accountability, interpersonal effectiveness, critical thinking, self-awareness, personal credibility, flexibility

#### NATIONAL STANDARDS

21st Century Skills / Life and Career Skills / FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY / adapt to change, be flexible

21st Century Skills / Life and Career Skills / SOCIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS / interact effectively with others, work effectively in diverse teams

21st Century Skills / Learning and Innovations Skills / CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING / reason effectively, use systems thinking, make judgements and decisions, and solve problems

21st Century Skills / Learning and Innovations Skills / COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION / communicate clearly, collaborate with others

#### PREP TIME

15 minutes

#### ACTIVITY TIME

2 hours (all activities combined)

#### MATERIALS LIST

1. White board
2. Markers
3. Handout on Coping with It
4. Paper
5. Pencils
6. Single piece of rope. The rope should be at least 1-2 feet long per youth. If more than 10 youth in the group, consider multiple ropes.

#### SUGGESTED SPACE

Any

#### SUGGESTED GROUP SIZE

Any

#### REFERENCES

Love to Know: Stress Management Lesson Plans

[http://stress.lovetoknow.com/  
Stress\\_Management\\_Lesson\\_  
Plans#IEhHKXLjOAYJzH3j.97](http://stress.lovetoknow.com/Stress_Management_Lesson_Plans#IEhHKXLjOAYJzH3j.97)

Confronting Teen Stress: Meeting the Challenge in Baltimore City-A Guide for Parents, Teachers & Youth Service Providers

[http://www.jhsph.edu/research/  
centers-and-institutes/center-for-  
adolescent-health/\\_includes/\\_pre-  
redesign/Teen\\_Stress\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-adolescent-health/_includes/_pre-redesign/Teen_Stress_Guide.pdf)

Edutopia: Handbook: Stress-Reduction Activities for Students, Glenview Elementary School in Oakland, CA  
[https://www.edutopia.org/sites/  
default/files/resources/stw-glen-  
view-stress-reduction-activities.pdf](https://www.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/resources/stw-glenview-stress-reduction-activities.pdf)

### INTRODUCTION

**S**tress is a natural part of every young person's life. Stress is any change, internal or external, positive or negative, to which a young person must adapt; simply, "stress is anything that causes physical and/or mental wear and tear on the body and mind" (Joyce V. Fetro, *Personal & Social Skills*, 2000).

Youth stress is usually related to everyday experiences, worries and challenges at school, home, in the community and within their peer group. For example, young people may experience stress resulting from bullying, name calling, social isolation, not getting what they want, body image, academic difficulties, or unsafe neighborhoods.

While each youth will respond to and resolve stress differently, the impact of ongoing and/or unresolved stress can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, poor concentration, aggression, physical illness, fatigue, sleep disturbance and poor coping skills such as tobacco, drug and/or alcohol use.

Stress is not all bad. Stress helps you to deal with life's challenges, to give your best performance, and to meet a tough situation with focus. The body's stress response is important and necessary. However, when too much stress builds up, you may encounter many physical and emotional health problems. If you don't deal with stress, the health problems can stay with you and worsen over the course of your life.

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EXPEDITIONARY SKILLS FOR LIFE

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Therefore, young people, like adults, can benefit from learning and practicing stress management skills. Youths who develop stress reduction skills learn how to feel and cope better without hurting themselves or others. Identifying and acknowledging the causes of stress and expressing feelings about them are usually the most effective tools youths have to reduce stress, in addition to learning practical stress reduction skills.

### ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

#### ACTIVITY 1: NAME THAT STRESS (30 MINUTES)

Not everyone experiences stress the same way - and it can manifest itself through a variety of signs. Let's talk about some of the ways that you can tell that you might be experiencing stress, as well as what to look for to see if stress may be guiding the actions of another person.

What are some of the physical signs of stress? Record responses on a white board or other space visible to everyone. Possible responses may include:

- Racing heart
- Shaking hands
- Shaky legs
- Clenching fists
- Reddening of the skin
- Headaches
- Tenseness
- Muscle spasms

What are some of the emotional signs of stress? Record responses on a white board or other space visible to everyone. Possible responses may include:

- General feelings of anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Inability to focus
- Avoidance behaviors

- Inability to make decisions
- Fight or flight response
- Acting out

What are some of the health-related conditions that can be brought on by stress? Record responses on a white board or other space visible to everyone. Possible responses may include:

- Inability to sleep
- Excessive sleep
- Binge eating
- Loss of appetite
- Irrational behaviors
- Bouts with depression
- Mood disorders

Ask the teens to describe the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods. How do they know what is healthy? Explain that the ways we cope with stress in our lives also can be healthy or unhealthy.

UNHEALTHY coping strategies may harm you or others and in the long term they don't reduce the stress. Getting into a fight is an example of an unhealthy coping strategy.

HEALTHY coping strategies focus on the positive and what you can change or control in your life. Writing in a journal or playing a sport are examples of healthy coping strategies.

What are some of the healthy coping strategies you can use to reduce stress? Record responses on a white board or other space visible to everyone. Possible responses may include:

- Listening to music
- Playing with a pet

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EXPEDITIONARY SKILLS FOR LIFE

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- Laughing or crying
- Writing, painting, or doing other creative activities
- Exercising or getting outdoors to enjoy nature
- Discussing situations with a parent or close friend
- Practicing deep breathing, meditation, or muscle relaxation

Ask each youth to write down one thing in their life that causes them to feel stressed and two strategies they will take to cope with that stress. Challenge them to implement these strategies and share with someone how well the strategies worked.

### ACTIVITY 2: ALL TIED UP (30 MINUTES)

Directions:

1. Take the piece of rope and tie a knot about every 1 to 2 feet. There should be one knot per youth. Lay the rope out and have each youth stand by a knot.
2. Have each youth grab the rope with one hand, holding onto a side of a knot.
3. The youth have to use their free hand to untangle the knot. Youth have to work together to figure out how to untie the knots without letting go of the rope.

Discuss:

1. Did this activity create any physical or emotional stress? Why or why not?
2. If stress was created, how did you cope with it?
3. What role did communication play in this activity?
4. Was any part of the communication stressful? Explain.
5. What did you learn about coping with stress from this activity.

### DEBRIEF ACTIVITY: WORD CIRCLE (10 MINUTES)

1. Participants should sit in a circle.
2. The facilitator should start with the person to their left

and ask each participant to say “one word” that comes to mind when they think about the activity.

3. Once everyone has had a chance to respond, you should bring the process to an end by summarizing themes that might have appeared during the debriefing.

### APPLIED CHALLENGE

Directions:

1. In your team, plan a short skit with a role for each person using the assigned situation.
2. Pick an unhealthy way that the teen in your skit will cope with the stressful situation.
3. After practicing, present the skit to the entire group.
4. After you present, the large group will comment on the unhealthy coping strategy.
5. Choose one volunteer from the large group to take the place of the stressed teen and act out a healthy coping strategy. The volunteer should tell you the plan.
6. For a second time, your team should act out the entire skit with the volunteer, this time with the stressed teen coping in a healthy way.

Example Scenarios:

- A. Bobby is 17 years old. He is having some problems with his girlfriend. He feels that she is always checking up on him and says that she doesn't trust him. He is feeling a lot of stress from this situation. He can't seem to concentrate or getting anything done at school.
- B. Sherry is 14 years old. She can't stand walking home from school every day. She gets harassed and called names by men in her neighborhood. She is so anxious and stressed by the problem that she hasn't been able to get enough sleep.

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**ACTIVITY 2.1: LEARNER ASSESSMENT**

These questions are about things you learned during this activity. Please check the circle that best describes you.

**Q1** I know how to identify when I am feeling stressed.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
- Somewhat like me
- A lot like me

**Q2** I know how to cope with my stress in a healthy manner.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
- Somewhat like me
- A lot like me

**Q3** I ask for help when I need it.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
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