



HELPING YOUR CHILD MANAGE STRESS IN A COMPLEX WORLD

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McGill



DEVELOPMENT
AND
INTRAPERSONAL
RESILIENCE
RESEARCH TEAM

OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

Background

- Who we are
- Information about stress: signs, prevalence, good vs. bad stress

Application

- How to talk to your children about stress
- What you can do as a parent

Take Home

- When and where to seek professional help
- Resources



A man in a dark suit is slumped over a desk, his head resting on his hand. A large, heavy, textured rock is placed on his back, symbolizing the burden of stress. The scene is dimly lit, with a grey background.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is an internal experience we have when we perceive the demands of the situation are more than we can cope with.

SIGNS OF STRESS

Psychological

Rumination
Muddled thinking
Difficulty
concentrating

Headaches
Muscle tension
Fatigue
Stomach aches

Physical

Emotional

Irritability
Anger
Apprehension
Oversensitivity

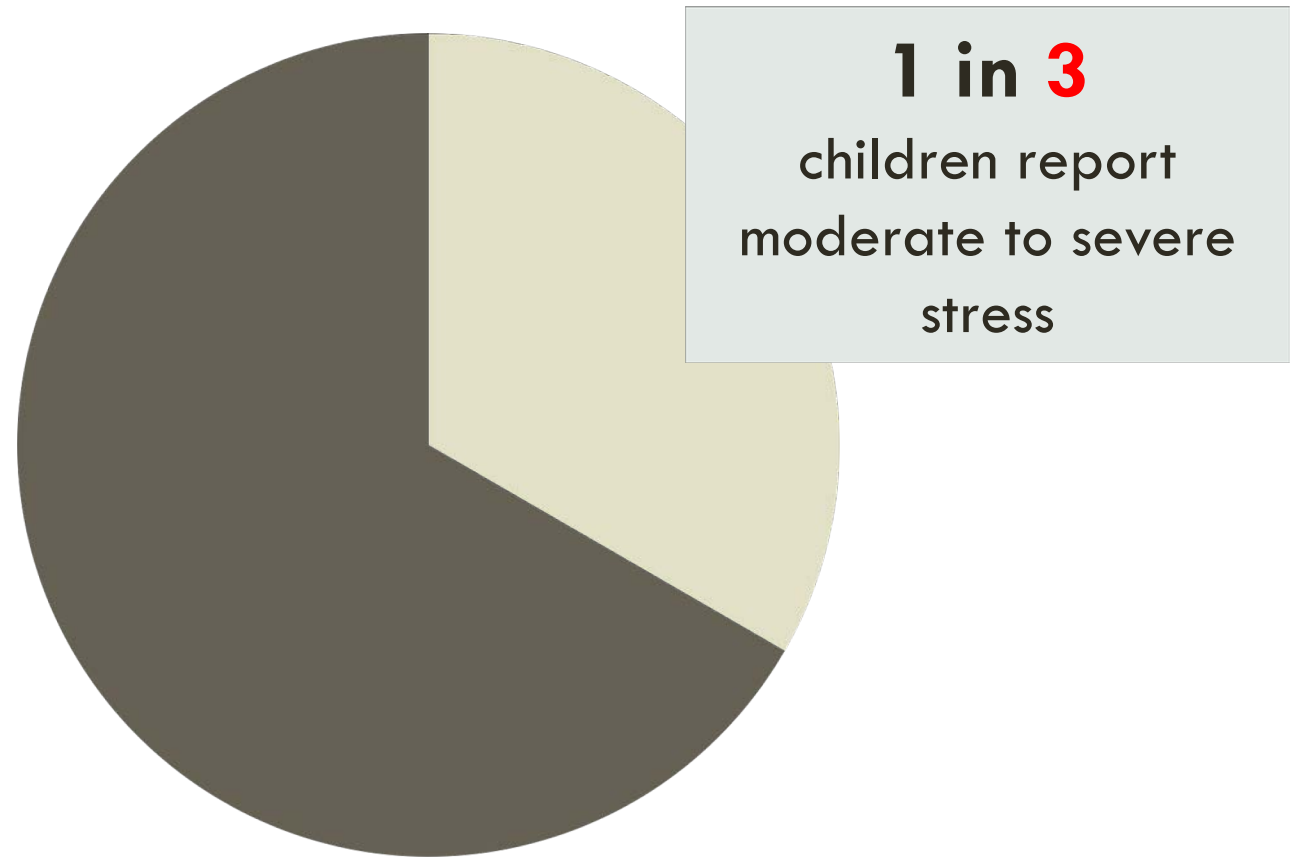
Drug/alcohol
use
Change in
eating habits
Difficulty
sleeping

Behavioral

PREVALENCE OF STRESS

More than **1 in 3** children report moderate to severe stress, with **1 in 4** reporting stress so severe that it impacts their day-to-day functioning.

Stress is increasing: 10%
increase in reported stress
over 2 years.



WHY THE INCREASE IN REPORTED STRESS?

The causes of stress remain the same, but they are heightened due to our current complex world.



IS STRESS ALWAYS BAD?

- ❖ Stress is often thought of as bad, but it can actually be protective and good!
- ❖ The human brain is hard-wired to respond to danger.
- ❖ The “fight or flight” response is what has helped humans protect themselves from danger throughout evolution.
- ❖ Whether real or perceived, our stress response is activated, which has physiological effects.



Fight-or-Flight Response

IMMUNE SYSTEM

- Is repressed

HEART

- Beats faster
- Pumps more blood
- Blood pressure rises
- Blood increases to muscles
- Blood decreases to organs

ENDOCRINE SYSTEM

- Pumps out adrenaline, noradrenaline & cortisol
- Noradrenaline constricts blood vessels
- Releases less growth hormone
- Produces fewer sex hormones

LUNGS

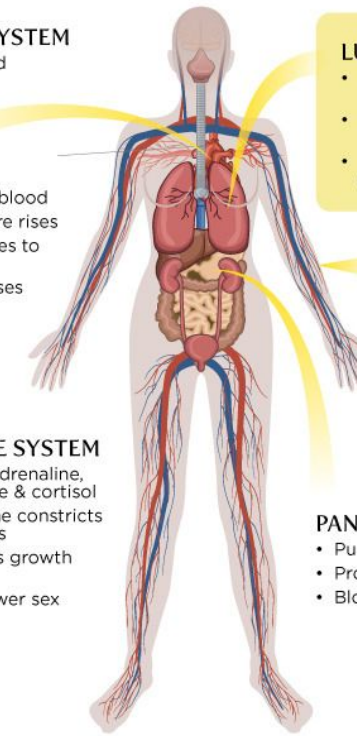
- Breathing becomes faster & shallower
- Consume more oxygen
- Expel more carbon dioxide

SKIN

- Sweating begins

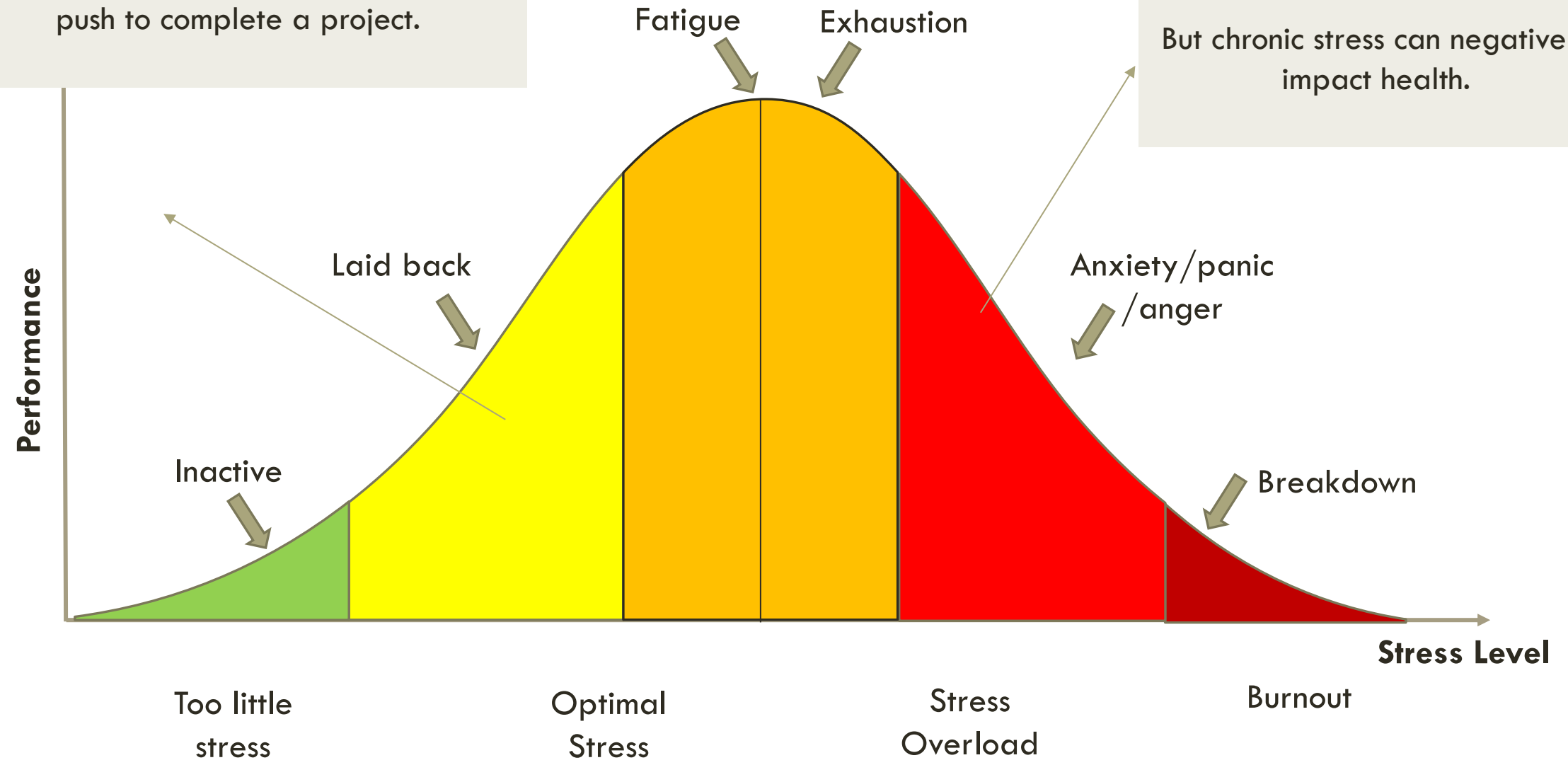
PANCREAS

- Pumps out glucagon
- Produces less insulin
- Blood sugar level rises



Some stress is good, giving us an extra push to complete a project.

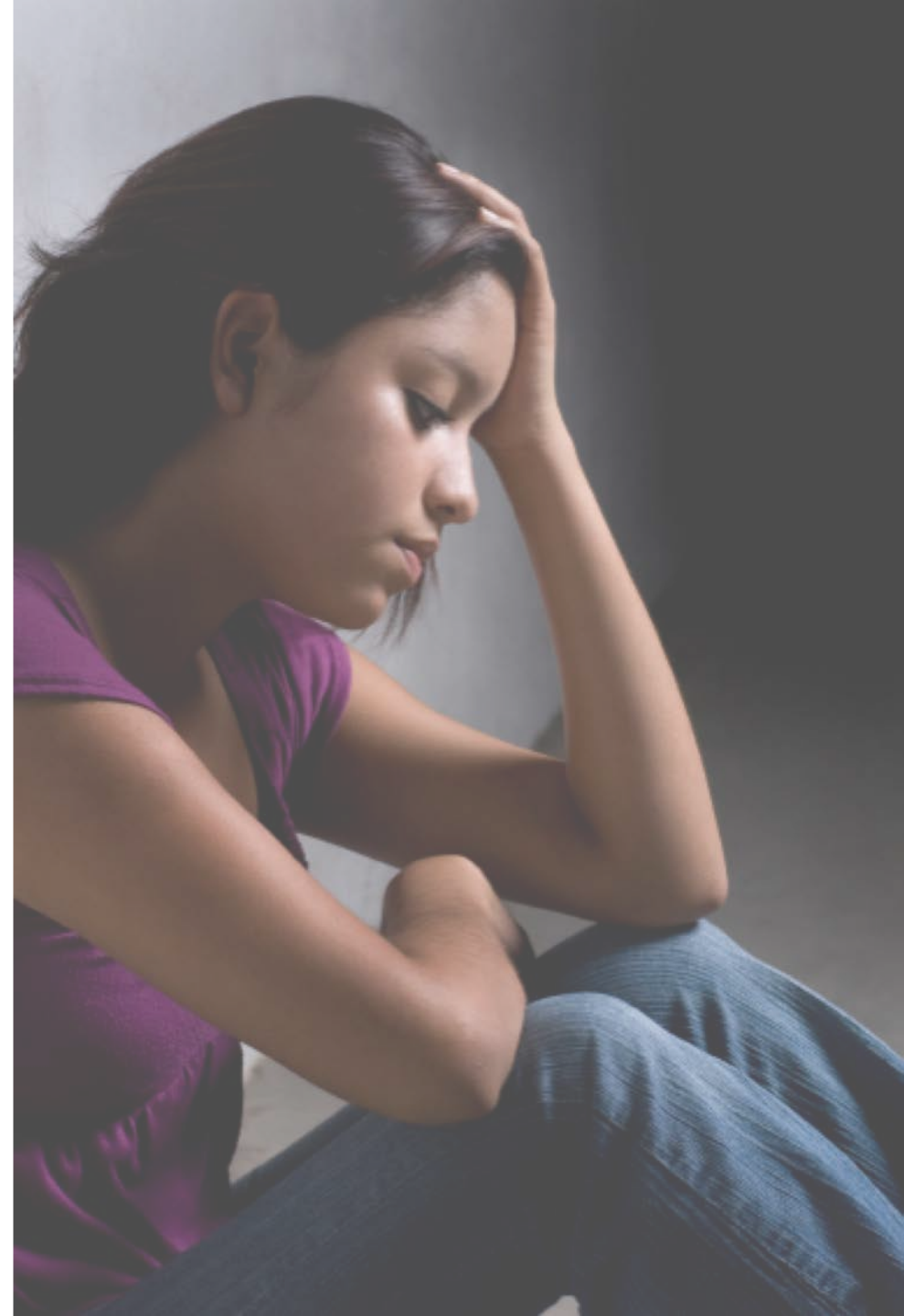
But chronic stress can negatively impact health.



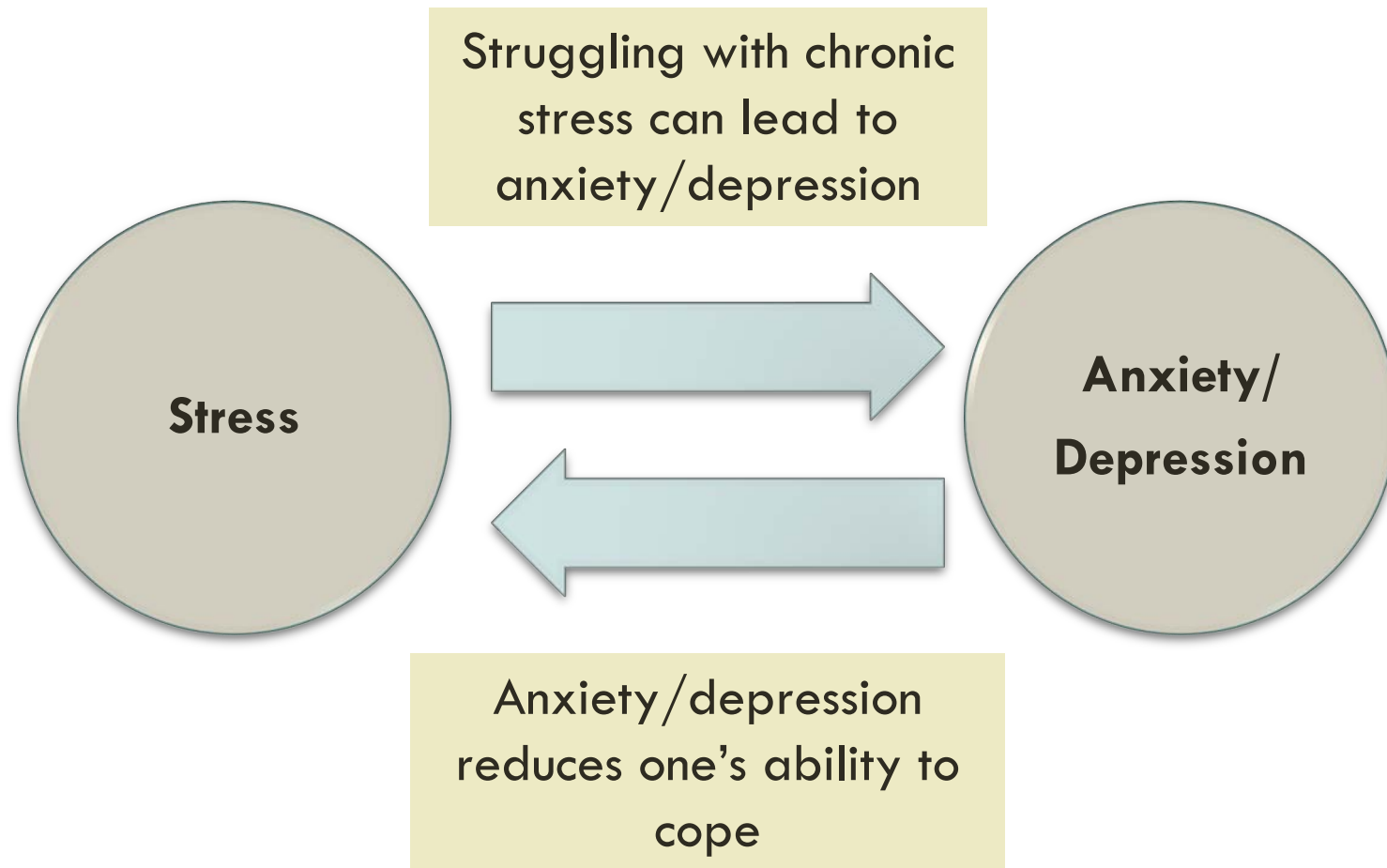
SIGNS OF UNHEALTHY STRESS

- Can't seem to get rid of it.
- Stress comes and goes for no apparent reason.
- Can't seem to relax; feel tense most of the time.
- Feel a general loss of control.
- Feel unable to cope.

Stress becomes problematic when it interferes with day-to-day functioning



STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?



- Program developed by Dr. Heath and Dr. Shapiro.
- Delivered to over 8,000 students in Montreal and shared with school boards across Canada and the U.S.
- 90% of students rated the program as good to excellent.

STUDENT COMMENTS

“I enjoyed this program and thought the quizzes were a great way of interacting with the audience- some of the techniques I will try to use. Thank you!”

“I really like how it was broken down into specific strategies, so we always have techniques we could easily do at home.”

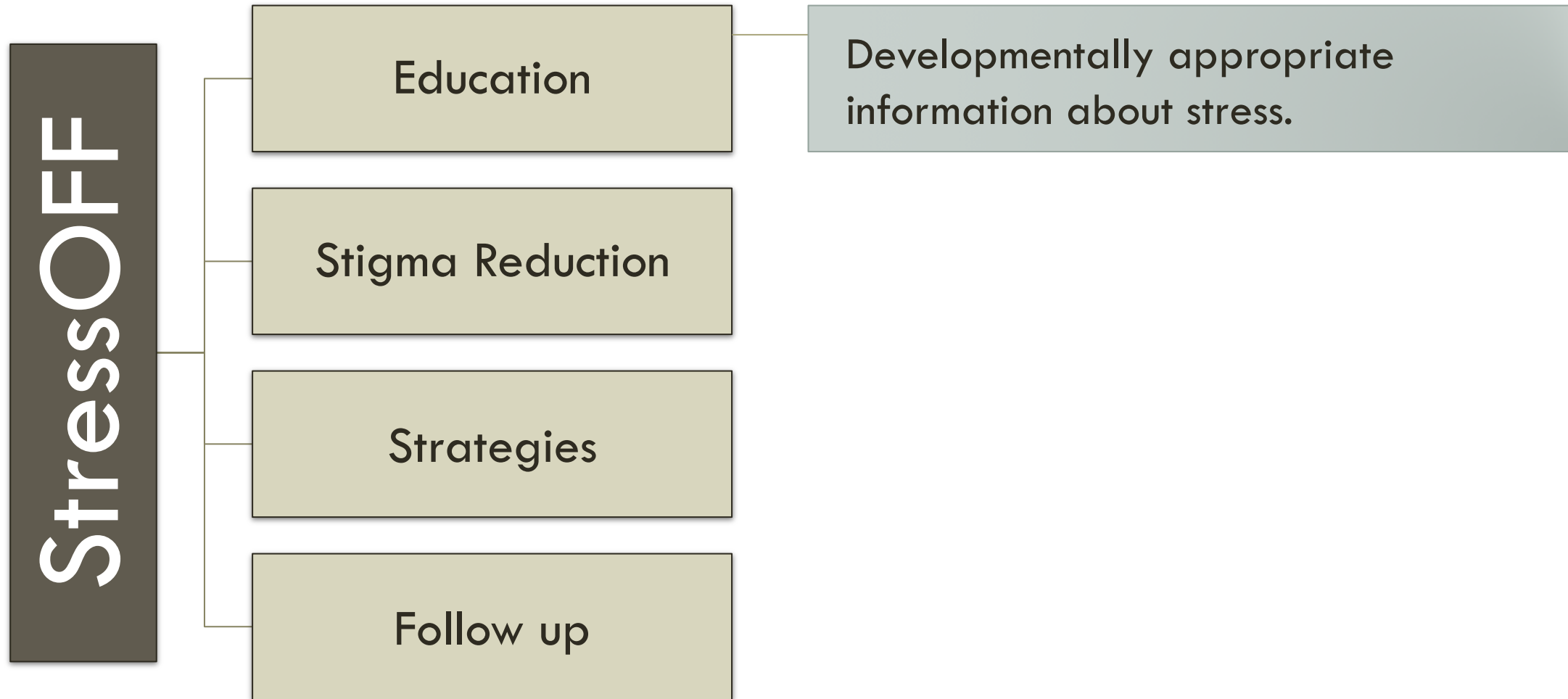
“Great program. I learned about useful techniques to deal with stress and connections between my self-esteem and stress.”

“The program should be taught at every school in Quebec :)”



**HOW YOU CAN USE STRESSOFF WITH
YOUR CHILDREN**

PROGRAM COMPONENTS



EDUCATION: WHAT YOU CAN AS DO AS A PARENT

01

Talk to your child about what stress is and what it feels like.

02

Teach your child to be aware of the signs of stress.

WHAT IS STRESS?



"STRESS"

HOW STRESS SHOWS ITSELF

Mind

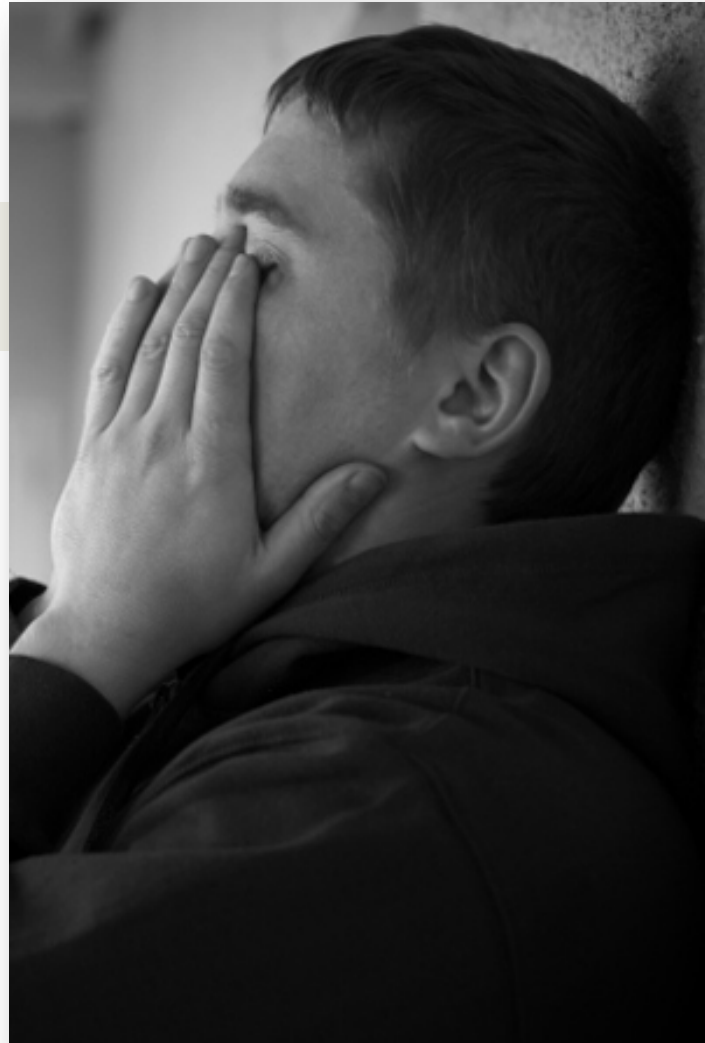
How you think

Constant worrying
Unclear thinking
Difficulty concentrating

Emotion

How you feel

Feeling very annoyed
Feeling angry
Being oversensitive



Body

How you feel in your body

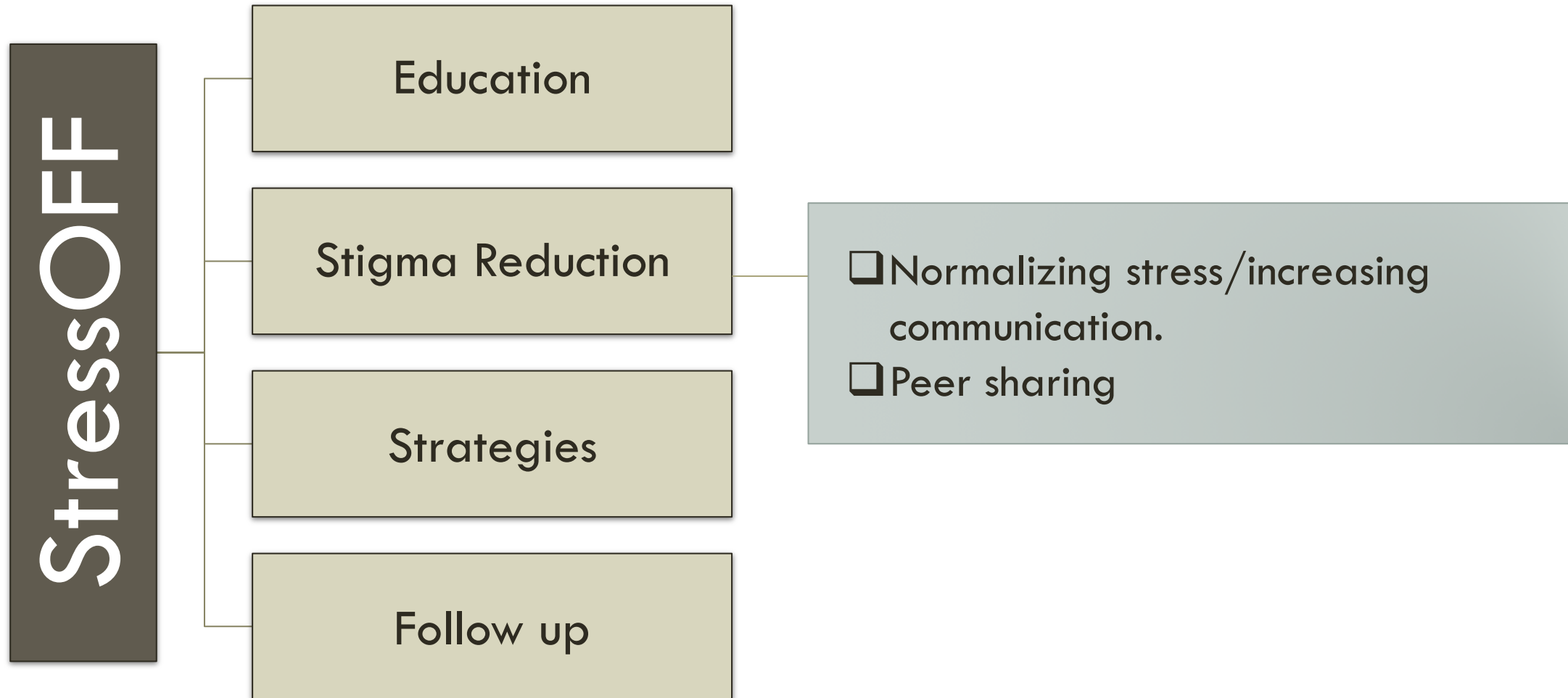
Headaches
Feeling tension in your muscles
Feeling tired
Stomach aches

Behavior

How you behave

Drug/alcohol use
Eating more/less
Difficulty sleeping

PROGRAM COMPONENTS



STIGMA REDUCTION: WHAT YOU CAN AS DO AS A PARENT

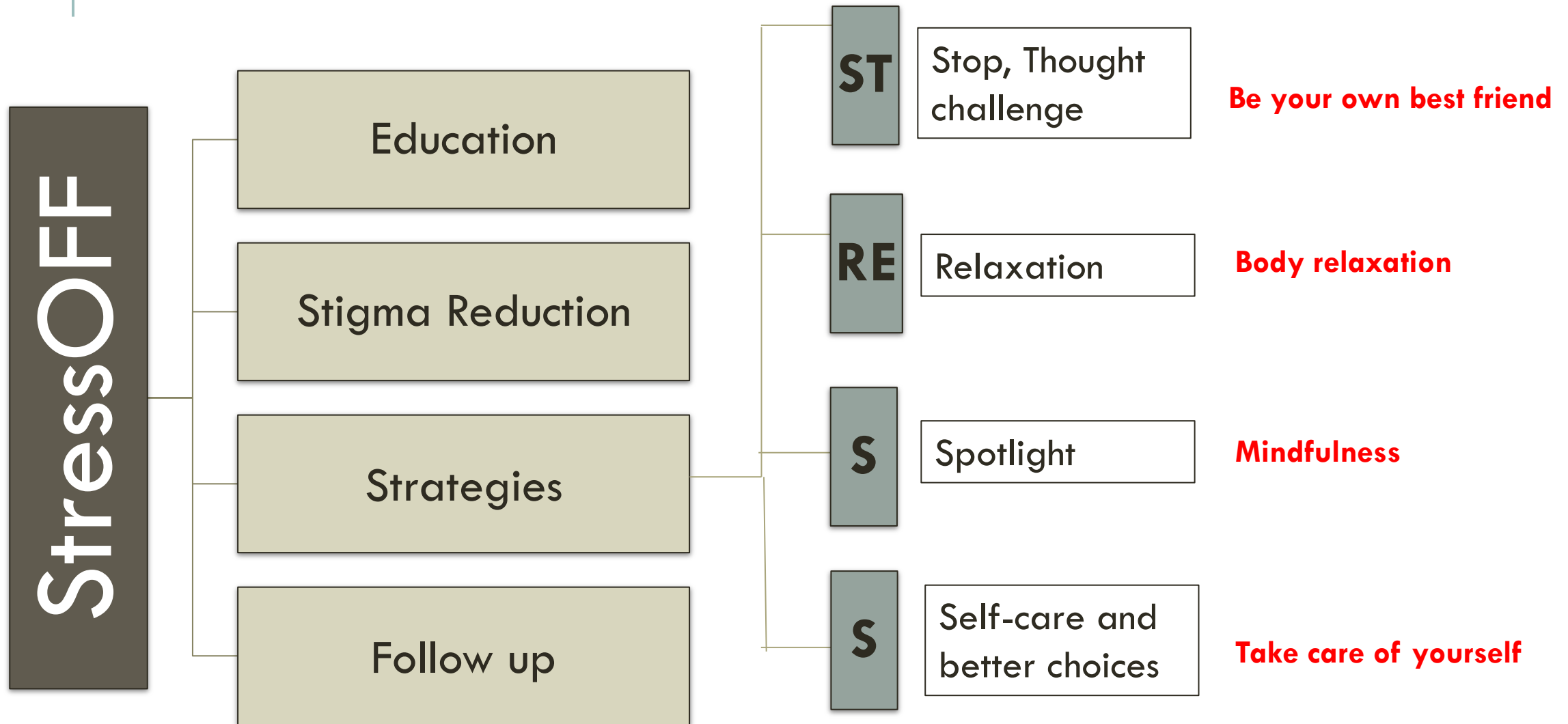
01

Talk about stress; normalize the experience of stress.

02

Listen to your child: validate, comment on what they are feeling.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS



STRATEGIES: WHAT YOU CAN AS DO AS A PARENT

01

Teach your child a buffet of strategies

Different contexts/different people

02

Use the strategies to manage your own stress – stress is contagious!



STOP

THOUGHT CHALLENGE

RELAXATION

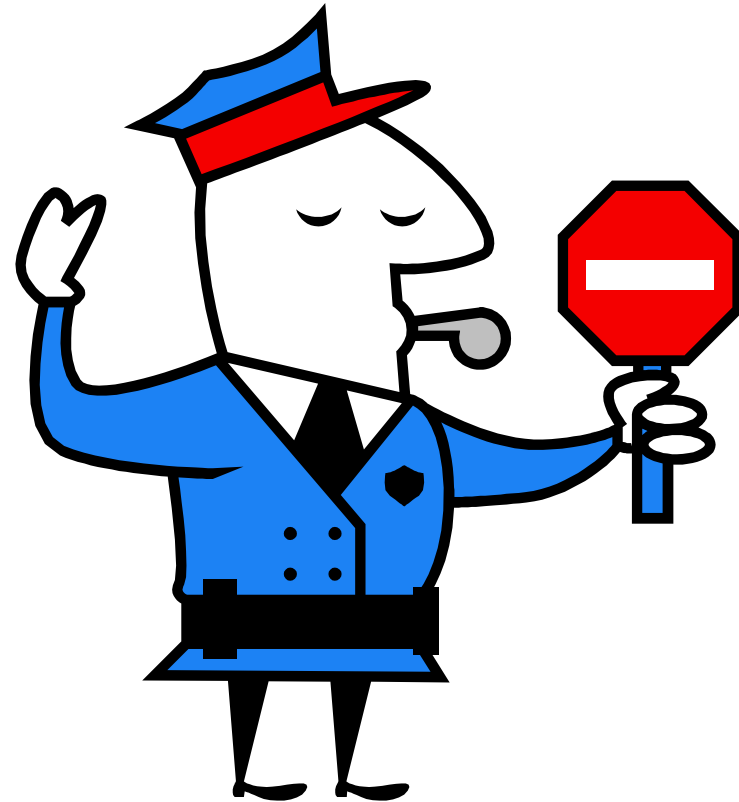
SPOTLIGHT

SELF-CARE &
BETTER CHOICES



STOP, THOUGHT CHALLENGE

- Sometimes your child may have negative thoughts and worries.
- Have your child visualize a **stop sign**, which indicates to take a **deep breath** and **challenge** the worrying thought as if they were their own best friend.



*Negative
Thought*

LET'S TRY IT...

RELAXATION

- Sometimes your child may not have time to challenge their thoughts (ex. in a test) or your child is feeling so much stress in their body they are not able to properly examine their thoughts.
- In this case, your child can use muscle relaxation, a strategy used to decrease physical stress by tensing and then relaxing each muscle group in their body starting with their fists.

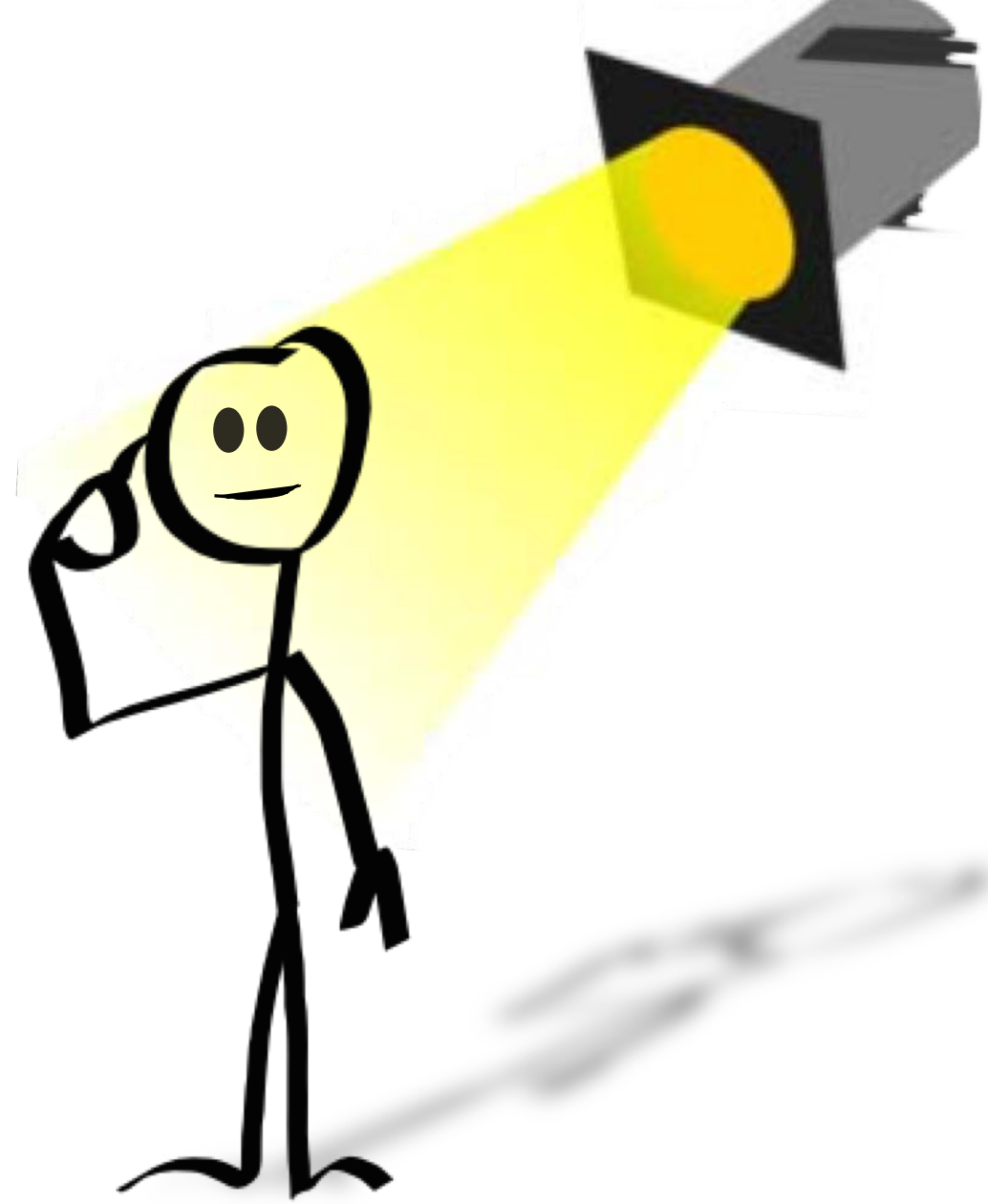


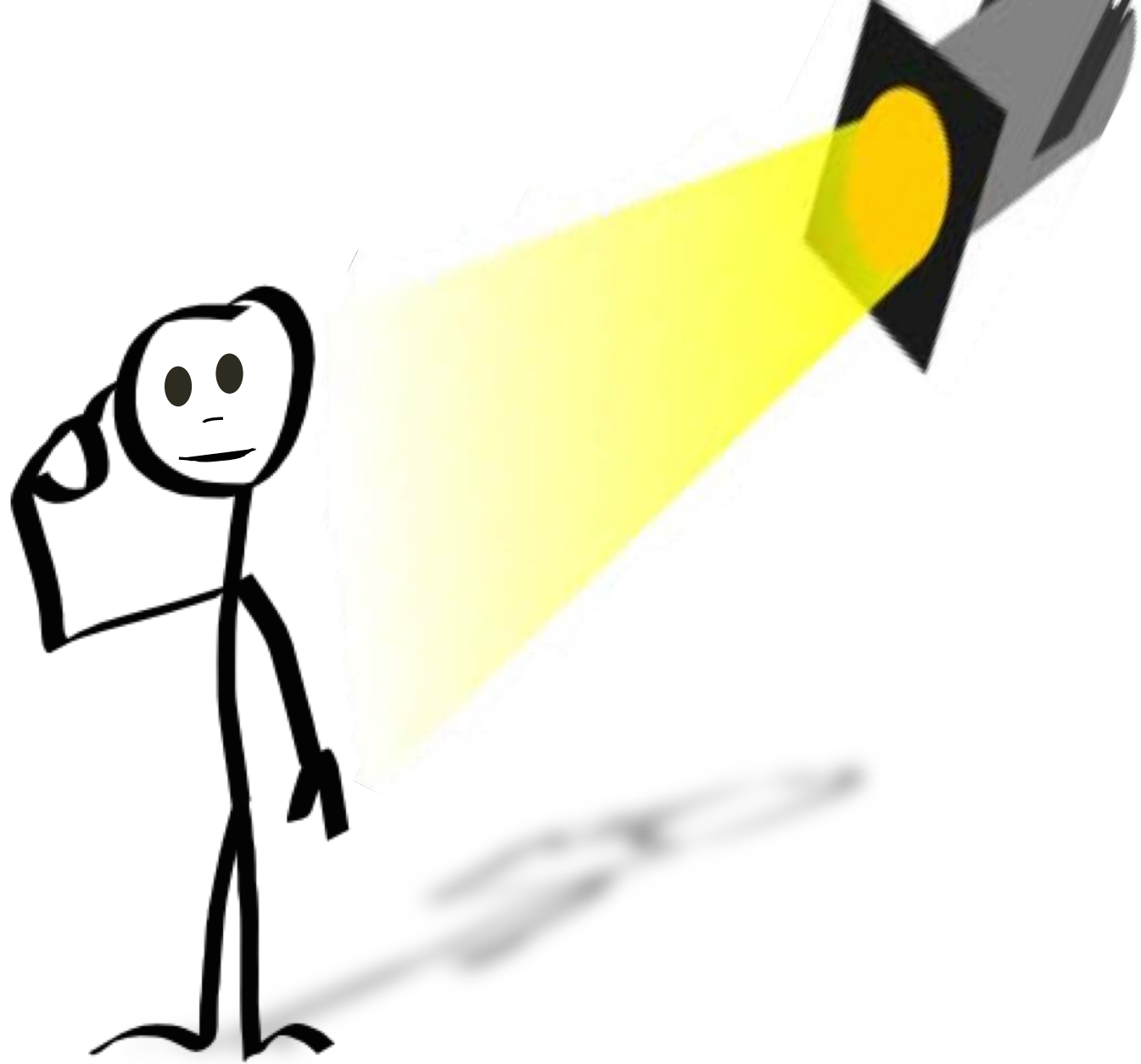
LET'S TRY IT...

SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight (mindfulness) is a strategy that your child can use in a stressful situation in which:

- They don't have time to challenge the negative thought (ex. during a test).
- The negative thought can't be challenged because it's true (ex. I wasn't invited to the party).
- They are feeling very overwhelmed by the thought, worry, or feeling.





LET'S TRY IT...

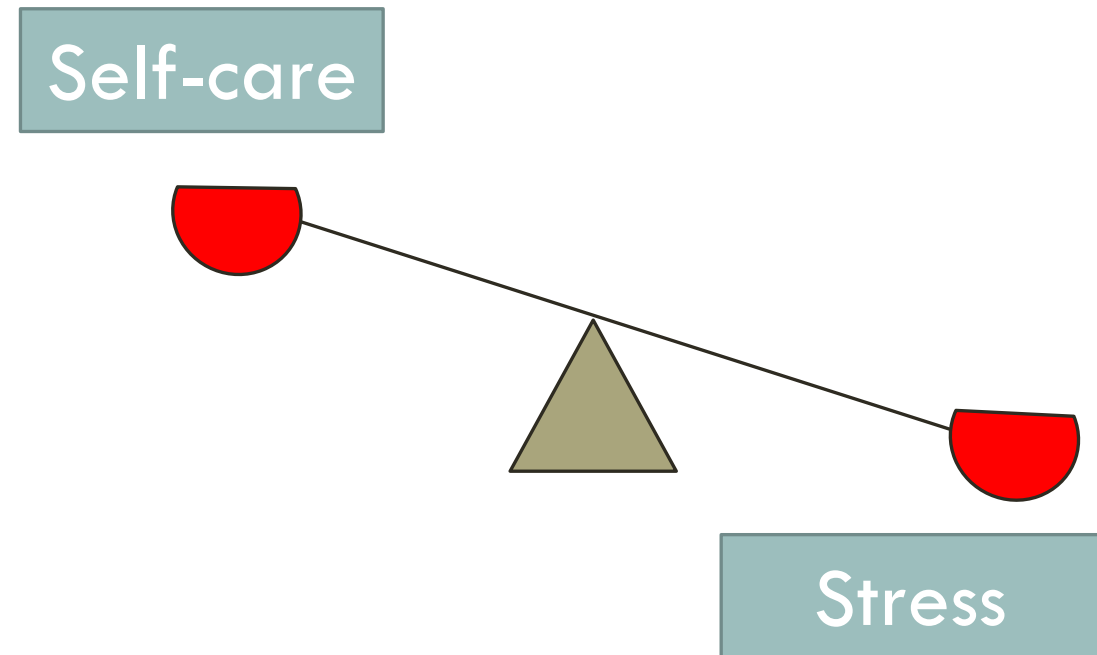
SELF-CARE AND BETTER CHOICES

Sometimes your child may make unhealthy choices at the most stressful of times to manage their stress (ex. eating too much junk food.)

Self-care means doing the opposite during high stress – taking care of ourselves by making healthier choices.

Encourage structure that improves lifestyle:

- Sleep, regular healthy eating, aerobic exercise 3X week



PROGRAM COMPONENTS

StressOFF

Education

Stigma Reduction

Strategies

Follow up

Pamphlets with links to online resources



FOLLOW UP: WHAT YOU CAN AS DO AS A PARENT

01

Try not to use stress, thinking it will increase your child's motivation.

Ex: If you do badly on this project you won't get into X high school and then what?

02

Model good stress management!

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT: TAKE HOME

Education

Recognize what stress is and how it shows itself

Stigma Reduction

Normalize and validate the experience of stress

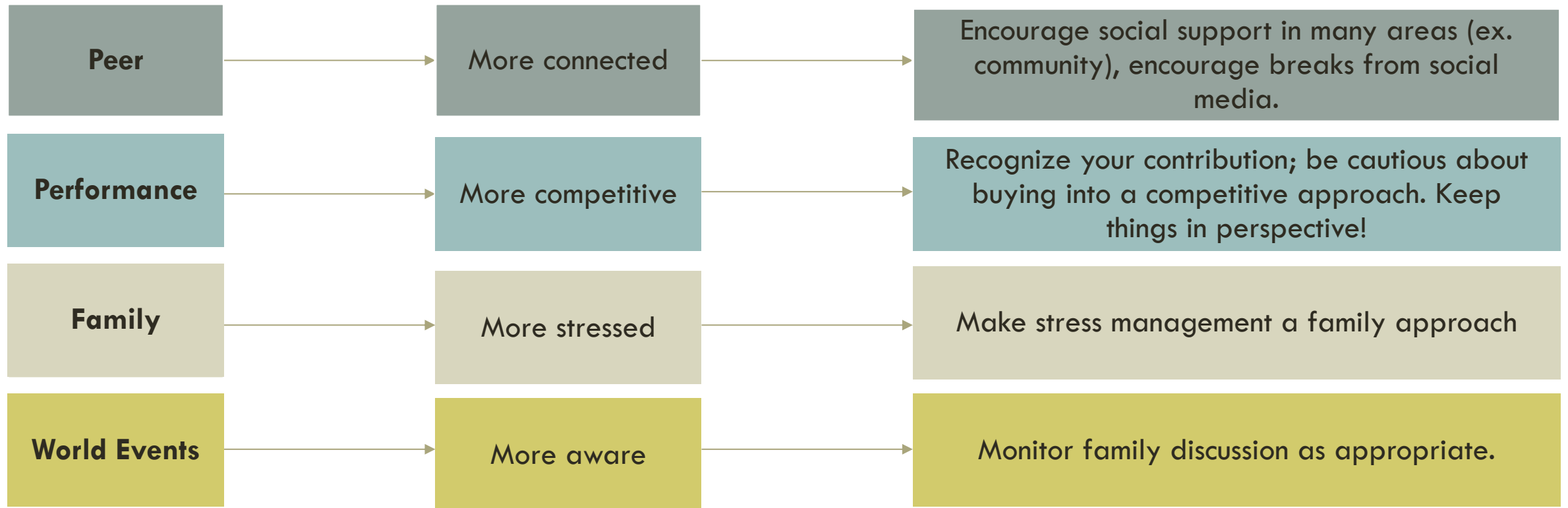
Strategies

Use and suggest stress management strategies (**ST**, **RE**, **S**, **S+**)

Follow up

Model good stress management

PARENTING IN A COMPLEX WORLD




WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR YOUR CHILD?

Is your child's day-to-day functioning significantly impacted?



Is your child using unhealthy coping behaviors/avoidance to manage his or her stress?



Is your child's stress severe, pervasive and lasts?

WHERE TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP



CONCLUSION

- As a parent, you are critical to your child's stress management.
- Practical strategies can empower your child!



THANK YOU!

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QUESTIONS |



RESOURCES



FIND A PSYCHOLOGIST/THERAPIST IN YOUR AREA

Psychology Today

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>



Ordre de Psychologues du Québec

<https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/>



Note: You can also filter your selection based on the professional's area of expertise or type of therapy they provide.

WEBSITES



<http://kidshealth.org/>

Kids Health is a site for parents, kids and educators, with information about health, behavior, and development, including tips on how to help your child cope with stress.



<http://parenttoolkit.com/>

Parent Toolkit is a site specifically geared towards parents that provides information about children's health and development, including tips on how parents can help children manage stress.



<http://worrywisekids.org/>

Worry Wise Kids is a site that aims to improve the quality of life for anxious children by providing information for parents, educators, and mental health professionals.



<http://scholastic.com/parents>

The *Scholastic* website is not only for books. The website also provides a multitude of articles, blogposts, and guides for parents, children and educators about many topics related to school and stress.

FREE SMART PHONE APPLICATIONS



The Parent Toolkit is a one-stop shop to support your child's success from pre-K to 12th grade. It has helpful tips to work learning and a healthy lifestyle into your busy schedule. Produced by NBC News and sponsored by Pearson.



Smiling Mind is modern meditation, a unique web and app-based program developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to people's lives. The app provides developmentally appropriate mindfulness/stress management activities that can be selected for children, teenagers, or adults.

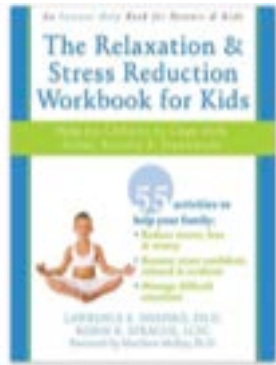


Pacifica gives you psychologist-designed tools based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness meditation, relaxation, and mood/health tracking.



Happify brings you effective tools and programs to take control of your emotional wellbeing. Their techniques are developed by leading scientists and experts who've been studying evidence-based interventions in the fields of positive psychology, mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy for decades.

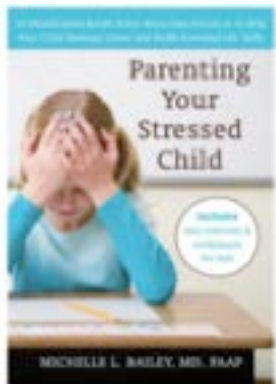
BOOKS



The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids: Help for Children to Cope with Stress, Anxiety, and Transitions (2009) - **\$24** on [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

By Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD and Robin K. Sprague, LCPC

The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids is intended to be used jointly by parents and their children to cope with specific stressful time periods (divorce, loss of a loved one, a family move, and so on), and to help families develop a more healthful lifestyle.



Parenting Your Stressed Child: 10 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Practices to Help Your Child Manage Stress and Build Essential Life Skills (2011) - **\$22** on [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

By Michelle L. Bailey, MD, FAAP

In *Parenting Your Stressed Child*, you'll learn a variety of simple and effective mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) skills that you can teach your child to help him or her stay resilient and calm in the face of stress. This guide includes breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation practices, and visualization and loving-kindness meditations you and your child can do together to handle the ups and downs of everyday life. By modeling these skills and incorporating them into your own life, you can help your child learn the art of resilience, a skill that will stay with your child for a lifetime.

BOOKS



The Coping Skills for Kids Workbook (2016) - **\$34** on [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

By Janine Halloran, MA, LMHC

The Coping Skills for Kids Workbook is designed to help kids learn and practice coping skills to deal with anxiety, stress and anger.

The workbook includes: Over 75 coping skills for kids to try, more than 20 printable worksheet, coping skills for kids, YouTube Video, and a resource collection of other helpful books and websites for families.

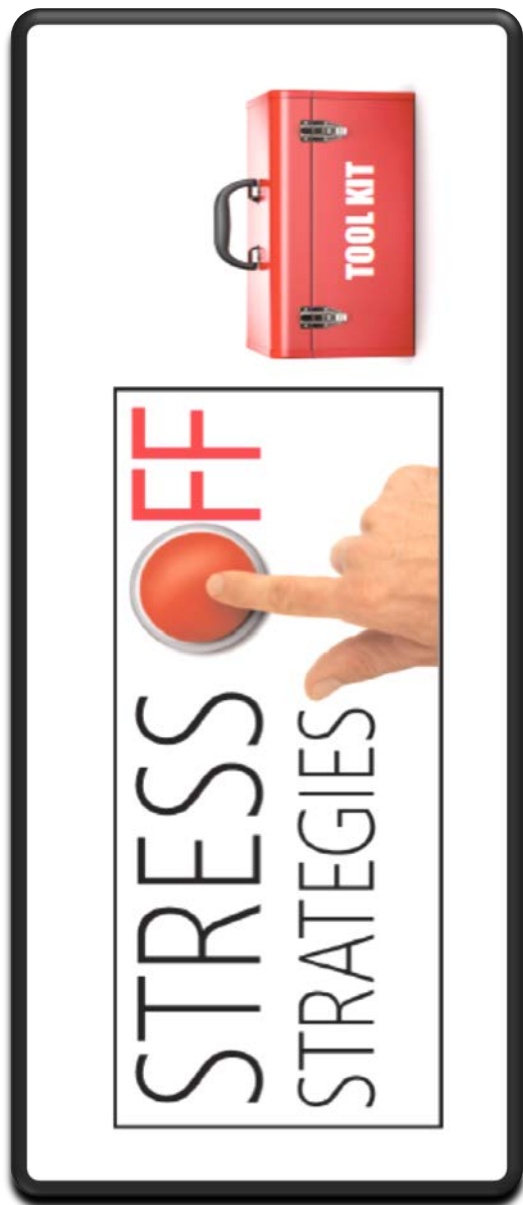
Kids can read this book on their own, or they can work through it with a family member or another trusted adult.



The Parent's Toolkit: Simple & Effective Ways to Help Your Child Be Their Best (2012) - **\$14** on [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

By Naomi Richards

In *The Parents' Toolkit* Richards shares the key life tools she uses and teaches so that you can help your child successfully navigate childhood challenges and grow up into a happy, confident and resilient young adult. Her coaching tools include teaching your child positive self-talk, simple problem-solving techniques to encourage your child to arrive at the right solution to an issue, and specific advice for you as a parent to hone your own listening and coaching skills.



What is stress?

Stress is psychological and/or physical strain, or tension, as a result of circumstances, events, or experiences that are viewed as challenging or difficult.

Who is stressed?

A survey by the **American Psychological Association (2014)** reports that **27%** of adolescents report high levels of stress.

How does stress show

PSYCHOLOGICALLY	PHYSICALLY	BEHAVIORALLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative thoughts - Difficulty concentrating - Always thinking the worst is going to happen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Muscle pain - Stomach upset or pain - Tiredness - Headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoiding things - Anger problems - Making poor choices (ex. Risk taking) -Overeating

The Stress**OFF** Strategies TOOL KIT can help you manage stress.

Stop,
Thought challenge
RElaxation
Spotlight
Self-care &
better choices



Stop, Thought challenge

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

Are your thoughts really true? Or are they just 'thoughts'? **Let's give it a try...**

Situation: You didn't do well on your math test.

Automatic thought: "I'm not good at anything".

(Negative) → STOP.

Take a breath.

Thought Challenge:

Is this really true?

I did well on my history test...

More helpful thought:

"Okay, so I didn't do as well as I would have liked to on this test, but I did do well on my history test!"

(Positive) → GO



RElaxation

PHYSICAL STRESS

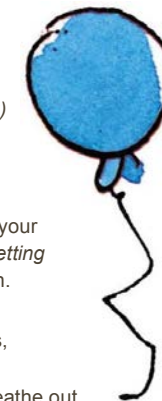
Turn off your physical stress (stress that affects your body) with these brief exercises:

MUSCLE RELAXATION

- ❖ Tense and relax each muscle group in the body starting with the fists, arms, shoulders, legs, etc.
- ❖ Muscles should be tensed for a count of 5 and then relaxed for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Pay careful attention to the feeling of tension and relaxation in your muscles.
- ❖ End the exercise with a deep breath in (breathe in for a count of 4), and then breathe out (breathe out for a count of 7).

DEEP BREATHING "BALLOON" TECHNIQUE

1. Imagine that your abdomen/ stomach is a balloon.
2. Inhale for a count of 4, paying close attention to the feeling of your abdomen/ stomach inflating (*getting larger, growing*) like a balloon.
3. Exhale for a count of 6, paying close attention to the feeling of your abdomen/ stomach deflating (*getting smaller, shrinking*) like a balloon.
4. For the last two or three breaths, breathe in for count of 6, then pause for 2 counts and then breathe out forcefully the very last breath in your body.
5. Finally, let the breath move on its own back into your body, like a wave.



GUIDED IMAGERY

- ❖ Position yourself comfortably and close your eyes.
- ❖ Breathe in deeply and breathe out, letting all of the stress flow out of your body.
- ❖ Once you start to feel more relaxed, imagine that you are in the most relaxing environment (ex. lying on a beach or sitting by a fire in a cozy room)
- ❖ As you envision the relaxing scene, involve your senses by allowing yourself to imagine what it looks like, if there are any special scents around you, what it feels like, and what/ who is around you.
- ❖ When you are ready to return to reality, count backwards from 10.
- ❖ Take a deep breath in and exhale.

Spotlight

Spotlight (sometimes called Mindfulness) is a strategy that has been used in US military training in Iraq to train soldiers to be mentally fit in order to better manage stress while doing a very stressful job. Train yourself to be mentally fit with a few of these exercises.

“SPOTLIGHT” EXERCISE

Sit on a chair comfortably with your hands positioned on your lap. Allow 5 seconds (or count three ‘elephants’ in your head) between pauses.

Can you feel your feet on the ground?..... Can you feel the pressure of the floor beneath your feet? Feel the seat under your thighs..... Feel the support of the chair on your back..... Feel your arms resting on your lap.....

Now, become aware of the sense of hearing. Can you hear sounds from outside this room? ... Can you hear sounds that are close to you in this room?.....

Finally, become aware of the feeling of your breath moving into your body through your chest and stomach... and out your mouth. Again..... Feel your breath go in again and then out..... Like a wave..... In and then out.....

THREE SENSES EXERCISE

Bring your attention to the feeling of your breath moving in and out of your body. Now, bring your attention to your physical environment and take a mental note of the following:

- ❖ Three things I can *hear* (e.g., clock ticking, humming of the ventilation, car/ truck going by).
- ❖ Three things I can *see* (e.g., people walking by, the view).
- ❖ Three things I can *feel* (e.g., my backside against the chair, the floor beneath my feet, my hands resting at my side).



Self-care & better choices

BEHAVIORAL STRESS

Sometimes we make poor choices and do unhealthy things to manage stress, like staying up all night playing video games, or eating a lot of junk food.

Self-care means choosing to take care of ourselves by getting enough sleep, making sure we eat well and getting some exercise... Sounds straightforward, but research shows that *if you do better self-care when your stress goes up, the stress will go down.*

Making better choices is an important part of dealing with stress. Instead of choosing unhealthy ways of dealing with stress, you can choose to use some of the strategies you learned in this program. You can also talk to a friend, or do something creative like painting, drawing, playing music or writing. Part of better choices is also choosing to get support and asking for help when you need it.

Helpful Resources

- ❖ **MoodGYM:** <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au>
MoodGYM is a free, fun, interactive program consisting of a number of different modules, which explore issues such as why you feel the way you do and changing the way you think.
- ❖ **Mind Your Mind:** <http://www.mindyourmind.ca>
Mind Your Mind is an award-winning site for youth by youth. It is a place where you can get info, resources and the tools to help you manage stress, crisis and mental health problems.
- ❖ **TeensHealth:** http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/
TeensHealth is a safe, private, place for teens who need honest, accurate information and advice about health, emotions, and life.
- ❖ **Kids Help Phone for immediate help**



For more information about the StressOFF Strategies Program please contact Amy Shapiro amy.shapiro@mail.mcgill.ca or Nancy Heath nancy.heath@mcgill.ca



Direct Links:

❖ MoodGYM:

<https://moodgym.com.au/>

❖ Mind Your Mind:

<https://mindyourmind.ca/>

❖ TeensHealth:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/your-mind/>

❖ Kids Help Phone:

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>