

Understanding and Responding Effectively to Student Stress

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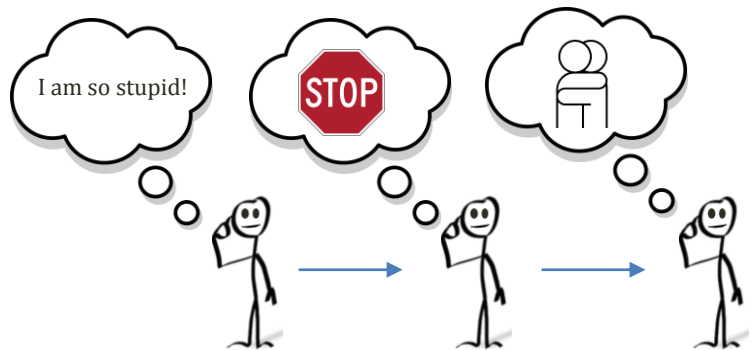
Stress Profile

Psychological/Emotional	Physical	Behavioral
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating <input type="checkbox"/> Racing thoughts <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent worry <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty falling asleep due to racing thoughts <input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty making decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Blowing things out of proportion <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to let go of unsettling thoughts or feelings <p style="text-align: right;">Score: ____</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Headache <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach pain and/or digestive problems <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling tired <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension <input type="checkbox"/> Jaw clenching or teeth grinding <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty falling asleep due to tenseness <input type="checkbox"/> Skin conditions (ex. rash or hives) <input type="checkbox"/> Neck or back pain <input type="checkbox"/> Change in appetite (increased or decreased) <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid heartbeat or tightness in chest <p style="text-align: right;">Score: ____</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Nail biting <input type="checkbox"/> Constant pacing <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent foot tapping or constant fidgeting <input type="checkbox"/> Angry outbursts <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent crying spells <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding situation that cause stress <input type="checkbox"/> Overeating or not eating enough <input type="checkbox"/> Fast or abrupt speech <input type="checkbox"/> Increased clumsiness <input type="checkbox"/> Poor choices to manage stress (ex. Not eating properly, substance use, self-injury) <p style="text-align: right;">Score: ____</p>

Stress Management Strategies

STOP, THOUGHT CHALLENGE

When a student is being self-critical, have the student visualize a stop sign, which indicates to stop and take a deep breath and challenge the negative critical thought as if they were their own best friend.



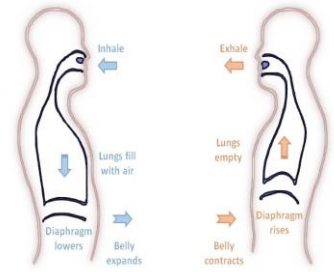
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

This strategy involves the tensing and relaxing of each muscle group in the body to trigger the calming response. Although this example involves the tensing and relaxing of face muscles, students can also practice this strategy in a discreet way, anytime, anywhere by using muscle groups that are below the neck. For example, have students make a fist with their hand, feel the tension, and then relax, then tense up their forearm muscles, notice the tension, and then relax, and so on moving from one muscle group to the next.



BREATHING: Belly Breathing

Have students place their right hand over their heart, and their left hand on their lower abdomen below the navel. Instruct them to notice where their breath is, i.e., is their belly hand rising when they breathe in or is it their chest hand rising. Instruct students to try to make their belly hand go up as they inhale while keeping their heart hand mostly still. Have them breathe in through the nose for 4 slow counts, and breathe out through the mouth for 6 slow counts.



BREATHING: Calming Breath

Have students engage in belly breathing as described above. As they get better at this you can instruct them to breathe into the belly hand, then fill it up to the top with some chest or heart breathing, and then breathe out slowly. Note that to get the calming effect of this technique, it's essential that students practice this to a certain pace. Therefore, have students breathe in through the nose for 4 slow counts, pause for 2 slow counts, and breathe out through the mouth for 6 slow counts. Gifts for timing the pace of breathing can be found at www.mindful.org



MINDFULNESS

Students should be encouraged to have their own mindfulness practice and engage in the practices below to enhance emotion regulation and decrease their stress response. **Audio files which can be used to facilitate some of the practices below will be provided as a separate resource.**

Mindful moments

Coming to your senses

Mindfulness Practice

Body Scan

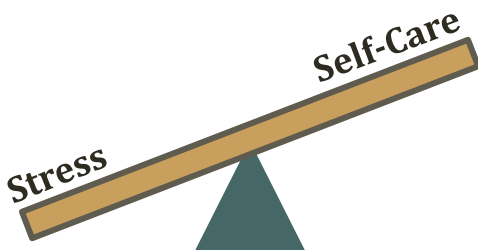
Sitting meditation

Yoga Nidra

Walking meditation/Mindful movement

Breath awareness

SELF-CARE



Inform students that they can lower their stress response by regularly making healthy choices regarding sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Students should; eat regular, healthy meals, follow healthy sleep guidelines, and engage in aerobic exercise at least 3 times per week, **especially** during periods of high stress.

Classroom Applications

Try a short mindfulness practice (5min), e.g., body scan, sitting meditation, **at the start of the day.**

Use a stimulus (e.g., flickering lights, tapping pen against mug) to draw students' attention and remind them to have mindful moment **during transitions.**

At the end of the day, try another brief mindfulness practice or even just a mindful moment!

Throughout the day, every hour have a “mindful moment” (30 seconds to 1 minute): come to your senses (e.g, listen to sounds in the room without effort, labeling, or judging...just noticing)

To settle a class, you can use mindful movement or progressive muscle relaxation or breath awareness

Make sure to build into your classroom regular times for mindfulness practice as well as brief mindful moments to benefit you and your students.

Best practice guidelines for use of strategies

Preparation for exams

- Self-care training and Yoga Nidra
- Regular mindfulness practice
- Stop, Thought Challenge

Right before an exam or difficult assignment

- Calming breath or mindfulness practice (e.g., body scan)
- Progressive muscle relaxation

After an exam or difficult assignment

- Mindful movement

When a student is self-critical

- Stop, thought challenge

Student distress

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Calming breath

Further resources on stress-management strategies as well as audio files to facilitate mindful moments and practices with your students can be found on the accompanying Multimedia Resource Index.