

2. Activity: Potholes

Objective: Stress is a real issue for teens. By helping them to understand their body's responses to stress, we can empower them to cope with stress in a healthy way. The following activity represents the stresses we face as we navigate our daily life.

Instructions: Prepare for this activity by using masking tape to make a large rectangle (approximately six feet by 15 feet) in a large open room (e.g., a classroom with desks pushed to the side, a gym or a wide hallway). Collect the sheets of paper that the students have written their top stressors on, and place them inside the rectangle in a random order.

Discuss the significance of the rectangle and the sheets: the rectangle is like a road we have to navigate in our daily life, and the pieces of paper are "potholes" that represent the stresses we face along the road.

Ask for a volunteer to walk from one side of the rectangle to the other while blindfolded, without touching any of the potholes. Have the volunteer choose another student to be their guide (their supporter) to get them around the potholes. This supporter will be able to offer verbal directions to the blindfolded student.

Meanwhile, split the remainder of the class into two groups. Have them stand on opposite sides of the rectangle. One group will shout out positive, supportive comments (such as, "You can do it!" or "Almost there!") while the other group does the opposite, shouting out negative messages.

3. Recognizing and responding to stress

Debrief the activity by facilitating a discussion about how we respond to stress. You can use the following questions as a guide. Pay attention to themes that emerge from students' responses to stress, including thoughts, feelings and types of behaviour. Record these themes on the board.

- What was it like to be the person blindfolded? What were you thinking? How did it feel?
- What did the blindfolded person notice about their level of stress as they navigated the potholes while their classmates called out mixed messages?
- How did it feel being the guide giving directions and support?
- If you were on the side, were you shouting positive things or negative things? How did you feel about the role you were playing?
- How do you think this activity may relate to your life?
- Is this realistic? Why or why not?
- How can we compare this activity with stress management?
- What makes dealing with stress easier? What makes it harder?
- Are there times in your life when you get mixed messages about managing stress?
- How do people cope with stress?

Review with the class that people often experience stress in a number of ways, including thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Ask them how they experience stress. Answers may include the following:

- having physical complaints (headaches, stomach aches, muscle pains, feeling tired)
- “shutting down” (withdrawing from people and activities)
- feeling angry or irritable, lashing out at others
- crying for no reason, and feeling hopeless
- feeling anxious or nervous
- having trouble sleeping and eating, or sleeping and eating too much
- finding it hard to concentrate

Because stress influences us in so many ways, it is important to have coping skills. Brainstorm with your students different ways people can cope with stress, both healthy and unhealthy. Answers may include the following:

- solving the problem
- going for a run
- talking to someone
- using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- gambling
- overeating or not eating properly
- sleeping

Have students use the “Stress and Me” worksheet to explore their personal responses and coping strategies for stress. (The worksheet, and a sample with some answers already provided, are attached at the end of this lesson.)

4. Closure: Key messages

Stress is a real issue for teens. By helping them to understand their body's responses to stress, we can empower them to cope with stress in healthy ways. By encouraging students to recognize and participate in personal strategies to manage stress, we help to build their resiliency in facing the challenges that come with the physical, emotional and social changes they go through in adolescence.

SAMPLE: Stress and Me

Use this worksheet to explore how you respond to stress, and how you can better cope with it.



How my body reacts

- headaches
- stomach aches
- body feels tight, like a balloon ready to explode
- not sleeping well or wanting to sleep all the time
- loss of appetite, or overeating or eating extra comfort foods
- feeling tired, no energy
- get sick more often than usual
- lots of aches and pains
- heart beats fast
- feel sweaty



How my heart feels

- angry: overreact to the situation, lash out
- frustrated
- depressed, sad
- lonely
- worthless, hopeless, I'm not good enough, I don't matter
- panicky, scared, anxious
- overwhelmed
- cry easily or feel like crying
- like running away

Things that cause stress



How my head reacts

- trouble focusing or concentrating
- negative self-talk
- headaches
- blaming others
- confusion

Healthy choices for coping with stress

- Take deep breaths, begin to calm all the negative thoughts.
- Think positive thoughts, answer negative self-talk with positive answers.
- Talk to someone: parents, friends, teacher, counsellor.
- Set small goals and tasks, ask for help.
- Focus on what you can control and let go of what you can't.
- Exercise: go for walks or runs.
- Take time to laugh: it can make you feel better.
- Take time out for yourself; listen to music, do yoga, read.
- Get involved in the community by volunteering.

Not-so-healthy choices for coping with stress

- Get angry at people and bully them.
- Verbally or physically abuse someone else.
- Use alcohol, tobacco, other drugs or gambling to escape the pressure.
- Sleep all the time.
- Overdo activities to avoid dealing with the stress.
- Spend more money than you can afford on shopping.
- Spend hours watching TV or playing video games.

Healthy consequences

- resiliency: the skills and emotional strength to bounce back
- sense of hope
- more energy
- feeling in control
- better balance in major life areas like school, emotions, health, family issues, and relationships

Not-so-healthy consequences

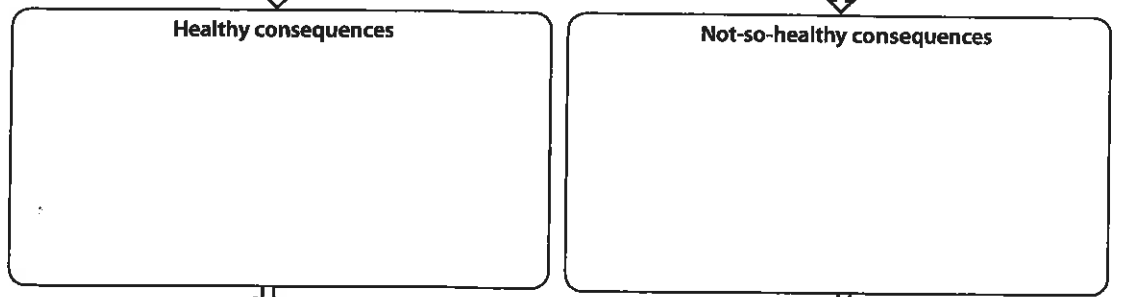
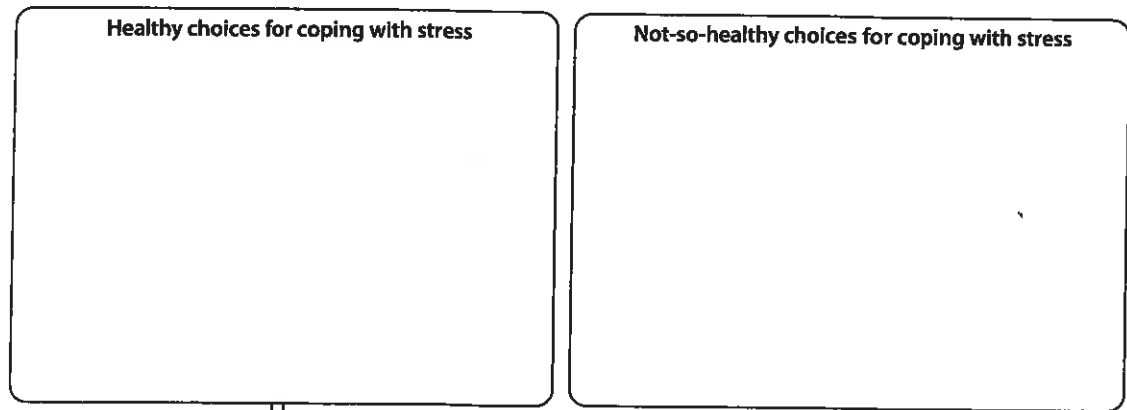
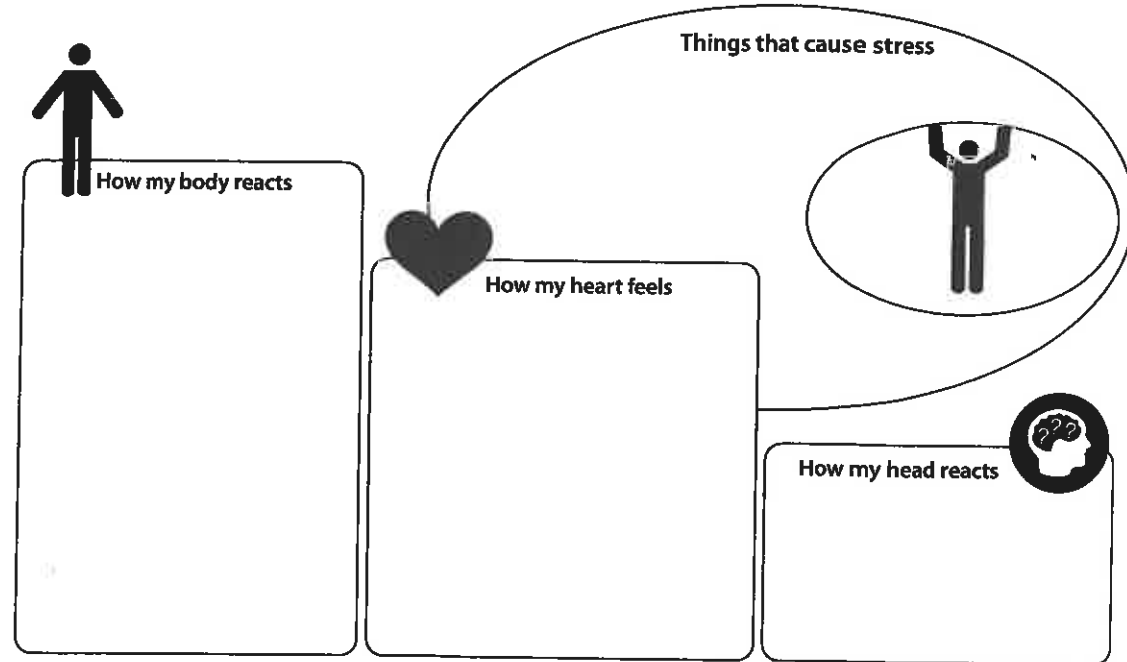
- health problems
- depression
- suicidal thoughts
- feeling hopeless, worthless
- feeling guilty
- difficulties in major life areas like school, emotions, health, family issues, and relationships

LESS stress

MORE stress

Worksheet: Stress and Me

Use this worksheet to explore how you respond to stress, and how you can better cope with it.



LESS stress

MORE stress

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

1. Introduction: Definition of stress (10 minutes)
2. Activity: Potholes (15 minutes)
3. Recognizing and responding to stress (15 minutes)
4. Closure: Key messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Large open space
Roll of masking tape
Sheets of 8½ x 11 inch paper
Bandanas or scarves for blindfolds
Worksheet: Stress and Me

LINKS TO OTHER SUBJECTS

Teaching about substance use and gambling can and should cross all subjects. Here are a few suggestions for use in other subjects.

- **Science:** Explore the health implications of stress on our cells and systems.
- **Physical Education:** Concentrate on exploring physical activities for personal stress management.
- **Leadership:** Host a stress awareness week, and provide information about causes of stress, our body's responses and ways to cope.
- **Career and Technology Studies:** Use a computer application to create a brochure based on information learned.

Grade 8 Lesson

Stress Management

This lesson is one in a series of Grade 8 lessons. If you aren't able to teach all the lessons, try pairing this lesson with the "Weighing Risks to Make Decisions," "Healthy Relationships" or "Who I Am" lessons.

SUMMARY

Objective: Help students understand their body's responses to stress, and how to cope with stress in a healthy way.

Process: Students will participate in an activity in which they navigate a maze filled with potential stressors. This activity will help students explore their thoughts, feelings and behaviour in response to stress.

HEALTH AND LIFE SKILLS OUTCOMES

W-8.4 Develop personal strategies to deal with pressures to have a certain look/lifestyle; e.g., accept individual look.

W-8.11 Identify and develop personal resiliency skills; e.g., planning skills, social competence.

R-8.3 Evaluate the relationship between risk management and stress management; e.g., managing risks effectively reduces stress, managing stress can reduce impulsive behaviours.

L-8.3 Identify components of ethical decision making, and apply these concepts to personal decision making.

OTHER OBJECTIVES

- recognize and participate in personal strategies to manage stress, change and emotions
- identify stress management skills
- recognize and participate in leisure and recreational opportunities
- identify positive friendships, role models and personal support systems

1. Introduction: Definition of stress

Ask students for a definition of stress. Stress is the body's response to any demand or pressure. It is a natural response. Stress can have healthy or unhealthy effects on our lives. For example, when we know we have a big test coming up, it can give us the motivation to study. But if we become too stressed about the test, it can prevent us from focusing.

Divide the class into groups of three to four. Ask each group to take three minutes and brainstorm as many things as possible that cause stress in our lives. Time the activity and call stop at the end of the three minutes. Ask each group to pick the top two stressors and write each on a separate 8½ x 11 inch piece of paper. Have students share the stressors that their groups have chosen. Try to ensure that each group has chosen different stressors. Their responses may include the following:

- pressure from friends
- academic stress
- fighting with people we love
- high expectations