

# WHAT IS STRESS?

1. Stress is the reaction to a difficult challenge, a tough situation, or a threat (real or imagined). In other words, it's pressure from outside that can make you feel tense inside.
2. While you can't control the events around you, you can control how you respond to them. This is what determines how much stress you experience.
3. Stress can show up in the form of anxiety, irritation, annoyance, anger, fear, blame, and reactions of many kinds.
4. You can also create stress by what you tell yourself. This is called negative "self-talk". You might hear yourself saying something like "I'm no good," "I'll never pass this test," or "Everyone else is smarter than me."

Things that cause stress include:

- Feeling like you never have enough time to get things done
- Speaking in public
- Changes in life (job change, death of a loved one, end of a relationship)
- Trying out for a team or role
- Taking tests
- Getting into college
- Dating
- Fighting with parents
- Being pressured into doing things that you don't really want to do
- Illness or injury
- Worrying about not having enough money to fulfill needs

What's so bad about stress?

- Stress can affect your ability to think, make good decisions, and have fun.
- Stress can cause you pain, such as stiff muscles, headaches, and stomachaches.
- Stress can damage your relationships, since you might get grouchy, say things that you later regret, and don't react well to those around you.

Keep in mind...

- No one makes you feel stressed out. It's the way **you think** about what happens that determines whether you're stressed or not.
- Stress is a natural part of life.
  - Stress can be an opportunity to change for the better. Embrace the challenge and look for chances to grow!

# HOW DO YOU REACT TO STRESS?

Everyone experiences stress at times. In order to be able to get rid of stress, you have to be able to recognize it.

- When you feel stress, what does it feel like?
- Where in your body do you feel it?
- If your stress had a color, what would it be?

When you're stressed, how does your body react? Which of these do you experience?

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating            | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor appetite         | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor listening         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Trembling             | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pounding heart      | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sleeping   | <input type="checkbox"/> Negative self talk     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach in knots    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of concentration | <input type="checkbox"/> Oversensitivity        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach       | <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear thinking      | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stiff neck          | <input type="checkbox"/> Careless remarks      | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling out of control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches           | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor memory           |   |

When you are stressed, how do you respond? Be honest with yourself!

## 1. Flip out or blame others

- Get angry
- Get upset
- Get anxious
- Feel sorry for yourself
- Complain
- Blame others
- Get frustrated
- Pick fights
- Throw or hit things
- Break things
- Hurt people



*When you respond in unhealthy ways, it tends to add more stress to your body and often makes the situation worse!*

## 2. Hide from the problem/Escape

- Sleep a lot
- Watch TV
- Play video/computer games
- 'Lose yourself' in music
- Keep to yourself
- Eat junk food
- 'Forget about it'
- Avoid the situation
- Avoid a person
- Give up and stop trying



*When you try to escape or hide from stress, it doesn't really go away. It becomes buried inside but is easily triggered if something or someone reminds you of the situation. Then you blow up!*

## 3. Cope in healthy ways

- Talk to a friend
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Listen to relaxing music
- Work out
- Take a walk
- Spend time with pets
- Do favorite things



*When you cope in healthy ways, it relaxes you so that you can really deal with the source of your stress. A new attitude and a new perspective are often necessary for fixing the stressful situation!*

## REDUCING STRESS...

*Remember, we often cannot change what causes our stress.*

*We can only change how we react to it.*

- ☉ Start by learning to control your reactions to the little things that aren't worth getting upset over.
- ☉ When a problem comes up, take charge. Figure out what you can do and give it a try. If it doesn't work, try something else! If that doesn't work, then look again at whether or not this is truly something you can change. If you cannot change it, accept it as a fact and move on.
- ☉ Breathe deeply. Try to breathe like you are blowing bubbles: long, steady breaths.
- ☉ Repeat calming statements to yourself. Some examples include:
  - I can handle this.
  - This too shall pass.
  - I deserve better than this.
  - I'm doing the best that I can in this situation.
  - Look how far I've come...and I'm still moving!
  - There are no failures, only different degrees of success.
  - One step at a time.
  - I am only responsible for me. Others are responsible for their feelings and their reactions.
  - I can bear just about anything for a short while.
  - In the long run, who will remember or even care about this?
  - I will get through this.
- ☉ Pretend you are a snowman. You have a head, a body, two arms sticking out and you stand on sturdy legs. The sun is shining and you can feel its warmth. You realize that you are melting. First your head melts, then one arm melts, then the other. Gradually, little by little, your body begins to melt. Now only your feet are left and they, too, are melting. Soon you are just a puddle lying comfortably on the ground.
- ☉ Relax. Close your eyes and imagine yourself somewhere peaceful. Some scenes that are often considered relaxing include:
  - Lying on a beach – feel the warmth of the sun and a soft breeze; hear the ocean waves and the sound of distant seagulls; smell the salty ocean air
  - Sitting in a park under a large shade tree – feel the cool breeze; hear the leaves rustle in the trees and the birds chirp in the distance; smell the fragrant flowers
- ☉ Exercise. Play sports, lift weights or take a walk (or run) and let your mind think things over.
- ☉ Plan your time well, so that you'll have enough time to get things done AND relax.
- ☉ Prioritize your activities. Focus on the “must-do's” first!
- ☉ Be Realistic. Don't expect more of yourself (or others!) than can reasonably be achieved. No one is perfect!
- ☉ Learn to love yourself. Get to know your strengths, your needs, your beliefs, your values. Respect yourself and expect others to do the same.
- ☉ Laugh! Keep a box filled with things that make you happy (pictures, kind notes, a favorite childhood toy, a list of all of the things that you love) – and open it when you need a boost!
- ☉ Surround yourself with supportive people. Friends, family, teachers, pastors, others who have been through similar experiences – even pets! – are all great resources. Spend time with those who listen fully and give only gentle advice. Avoid people who “push your buttons” or sap your energy.
- ☉ Smile. Others will smile back and you will feel better immediately!