

# PERSONAL MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

## SKILL 18

### Managing Stress

## Rationale

**Stress** is our body's reaction to people and events and to our own thoughts. Teenagers face as much or more stress than any other age group. Some stress is normal, such as before a date, a big test, or an athletic event. But too much stress can have physical and psychological repercussions that interfere with health and well-being.

## Guidelines

At best, stress can be difficult to deal with. We need to have available a number of techniques so we can choose the most effective way to manage and reduce stress in a given situation. Following the steps below will help make stress more manageable.

- ✓ Recognize that the symptoms you are experiencing are a result of stress.
- ✓ Identify the direct or indirect cause(s) of the stress.
- ✓ If possible, reduce or avoid the causes you have identified.
- ✓ If you cannot avoid the cause(s) of the stress, consider a range of techniques to reduce it, such as looking at the problem in a more positive way or exercising.
- ✓ Choose the best technique and use it.

## Applications Options

### TEACH

#### TEACH ACTIVITY, OPTION 1

## Brainstorm Causes and Techniques

Explain that **stress** is a reaction by our body to people, events, and our own thoughts. Point out that the symptoms of stress can be physical—faster heartbeat and breathing, tight muscles, insomnia, nausea, sweating, dry mouth—or mental or emotional—irritability, overeating, compulsive dieting, oversleeping, depression, fatigue, procrastinating.

Write on the board the guidelines for managing stress. Go over each and ask students to copy them in their Learning Logs. Then have students brainstorm things that might cause stress for teenagers. The list could be quite long—taking academic tests; moving to a new neighborhood, town, state, or province; entering a new school; facing unresolved conflicts, personal or family illness, or divorce; setting unrealistic goals; trying out for something; competing in an athletic event; overworking; experiencing disappointment or failure; trying to meet demands made by other people; facing important decisions; poor eating habits; lacking exercise or sleep.

Ask students to share stress-reducing techniques—effective ways they know to deal with stress. Guide them to include such stress relievers as the following: exercising; eating right; getting enough sleep; taking time to relax with friends; participating in sports and hobbies; managing time better; setting realistic goals; taking a positive attitude toward problems; resolving festering conflicts. If anyone suggests using drugs as a way to deal with stress, guide the class to recognize that drug use does exactly the opposite—it increases stress because it harms the body and makes it more difficult for someone to think clearly and deal with whatever may be causing the stress.

### REINFORCE

#### REINFORCE ACTIVITY, OPTION 1

## Reducing Stress A

Divide the class into groups of two or three. Assign each group one or two of the following situations or create some of your own:

- Your classmate's parents are getting a divorce.
- Your best friend's family is moving hundreds of miles (kilometers) away.

- Your best friend wants to go to college after high school but is worried that his or her family cannot afford it.
- Your best friend is worried about a family member who is using drugs.
- Your cousin is juggling a part-time job and baseball practice every day. If his grades don't improve, he will be thrown off the baseball team.
- Your sister is being teased because of a physical problem.
- A very popular person at school wants your best friend to give him or her the answers during the math test tomorrow.
- Your best friend allowed someone to pressure him or her into shoplifting and is worried that the police are looking for him or her.
- Your brother is so worried about giving an oral report this morning that he has thrown up twice.

Ask each group to think of and share with the class ways to help others reduce the stress resulting from the situations. Emphasize that the groups do not have to solve the problem, just suggest ways to reduce the stress. List on the board the techniques suggested by each group. Then ask the class to suggest additional techniques.

## REINFORCE ACTIVITY, OPTION 2

### Reducing Stress B

Divide the class into groups of two or three. Have each group (1) think of its own stressful situations and suggest effective ways to handle that stress, or (2) describe on an index card a stressful situation, exchange cards with another group, and discuss techniques for reducing the stress associated with the situation on the card. Ask groups to share their ideas with the class. List their responses on the board.

## ENRICH

### ENRICH ACTIVITY, OPTION 1

### Degrees of Stress

Point out that there are different degrees of stress and that each can have a different effect on a person. A little stress, for example, is called *eustress*. It can cause

adrenaline to flow and actually improve the functioning of our bodies and minds. On the other hand, there is *distress*, which results as stress increases or continues. It can interfere with health and well-being and cause our brains to shut down in the middle of a test or our muscles to stiffen during a race. Ask students to name situations when eustress would be helpful—during a test, athletic event, oral report, or a crisis like an automobile accident. Ask when distress would be harmful—during a first date with someone, a driving test, or a disagreement with a family member or close friend.

### ENRICH ACTIVITY, OPTION 2

### Stress Quotation

Read aloud or write on the board this quotation:

*Stress can be fantastic or it can be fatal. (It's all up to you. As well as respecting the dangers of stress, you can learn to harness its benefits.)*

—Peter Hanson, *The Joy of Stress*

Ask:

- How can stress be fantastic?
- How can stress be fatal?
- What are some ways you can harness stress and make it work for you? (Examples: by being aware of its sources, by avoiding or eliminating some sources, by knowing many ways to deal with excess stress)

### ENRICH ACTIVITY, OPTION 3

### Stress Discussion

Discuss the following questions with students:

- What are some sources of stress outside ourselves? Inside ourselves?
- What stress-reduction techniques can you use during your service-learning experience?

Then give these instructions to the class:

Think of something you could learn or practice that might help you deal with stress. Tell someone near you what it is. Then have that person share with you something he or she could learn or practice to help deal with stress.