

4-H Grab and Go: *Stress in My Life and Coping*

Concept:

Managing and relieving stress can lead to healthy behaviors.

Age/Grade Level:

Middle School: Ages 12-15

Education Standard:

National Health Education Standard 2: Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.

Life Skill:

Healthy Lifestyle Choices, Self-Responsibility, Stress Management

Success Indicator:

Youth will identify their stress and how to manage it.

National 4-H Curriculum:

**Health
Rocks!**

4-H * HEALTHY LIFE SERIES

PREPARATION

Time: 30 – 45 minutes

Space:

Classroom with tables

Materials:

- Pencils/pens
- Paper
- Chalkboard/chalk or Flip-chart/markers
- *Coping with My Stress* worksheet

Background Information:

Stress can cause "wear and tear" on our bodies and take a toll on our well-being. Everyone has stress and it is a normal part of life. Too much stress, or not dealing with stress in a productive way, can negatively affect our bodies.

Youth are going through the process of exploring their identity and trying to better understand where they fit into family, peer groups, community, and the larger society. They are negotiating their increasing independence from their parents, while dealing with the reality that they are still dependent on them for basic support. For all these reasons, youth experience a significant amount of stress.

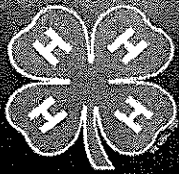
Even when there is no physical stressor, such as running from a mugger, our bodies will react in similar ways if we are stressed about concerns of daily life like exams and relationships. And, while these reactions are normal, and in fact, necessary to deal with emergencies or other stressors we might face, continued stress can affect the body in negative ways. Stress can lead to many stress-related health concerns such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity. Youth who experience a significant amount of stress and are unable to deal with it effectively are more likely to be involved in substance use.

There are many potential stressors during the teen years. Stress can have many effects on the physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being of teens. Three extremely important tasks are:

1. Identifying sources of stress;
2. Finding productive ways to deal with stressors; and,
3. Having teens with skills and resources/assets (e.g. self-esteem, social support) to protect them from risks.

Instructions:

1. Think about what stresses you. Give each participant a pencil/pen and paper. Ask what are their everyday kinds of stresses? (Examples: homework, tests, arguments with mom.)
2. What are chronic, ongoing, or continual stresses? (Examples: constant family arguments, addiction.)
3. What are major life changes? (Examples: parent's divorce, death, serious illness.)
4. Discuss the following questions:



Stress in My Life and Coping

Youth Development Tip:

Youth might need time to think about what causes them stress. Start by having youth share all the things that cause stress in their lives and list on a chalkboard/flipchart.

Open Ended Questions:

- What are some positive strategies for handling stress?
- When are you most susceptible to stress? What people might cause you stress? What events might cause you stress?
- When is stress a good thing for you?
- What different coping methods might you use in dealing with your stress?

- What are some good stressors in your life?
- What are some bad stressors in your life?
- Which might be the hardest to cope with?

5. Give each participant the *Coping with My Stress* worksheet or a blank sheet of paper. Have them select one stress and write it down. They are to then put together a simple plan for handling that stress better (see **Stress Coping Ideas**). When everyone has finished, discuss how hard it was to select the stress they wanted to handle better. Have some share their stress and how they plan to cope better. This would be a good time for others to offer suggestions to help make their plan even stronger.

6. Discuss **Open Ended Questions**.

COPING WITH MY STRESS

Write down something that causes you a lot of stress. Then write down how you handle it now. Think about how you could handle it differently or better to reduce your stress level. Use the stress coping ideas below or think of others you might want to try.

Stress: _____

How do I handle it now: _____

How could I handle it better: _____

Stress Coping Ideas

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Think of it more positively | Manage time well |
| Exercise | Give and receive affection |
| Talk to someone | Change routines that cause stress |
| Develop a support system | Become better organized |
| Get enough rest | Set priorities |
| Listen to music | Limit number of activities |
| Think of new ways to handle it | Do your best |
| Make a plan | Say "no" to additional activities |
| Share my feelings | Have fun |
| Find quiet time for me | Learn to accept disappointments |
| Drink fewer caffeinated beverages | Don't procrastinate |
| Eat a balanced diet | Get rid of anger |

Learn More

The following website provides additional information:

http://www.ces.purdue.edu/Living_on_Less/Pubs/FF-37.html <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA3083.html>