

4-H Grab and Go: *Stress: How Thick is Your Skin?*

Concept:

Stress in our lives can negatively affect healthy behaviors.

Age/Grade Level:

Middle school: Grades 6-9

Education Standard:

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

Life Skill:

Healthy Life Choices, Self Responsibility, Stress Management

Success Indicator:

Youth will identify sources of stress in their daily living.

National 4-H Curriculum:

**Health
Rocks!**

4-H ■ HEALTHY LIFE SERIES

PREPARATION

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Space: Large open classroom

Materials:**Activity One**

- 3 or 4 different kinds of fruits or vegetables with varying outer covering hardness. (apple, orange, coconut, squash, melon, etc.)
- Knife (used by instructor only)
- Small hammer
- Napkins/plate to serve fruits and vegetables.

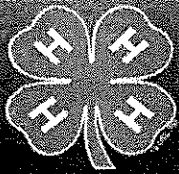
Background Information:

Everyone experiences stress. In everyday living, youth experience stress from tests, assignments, deadlines, relationships, competitive sports, and the list goes on. The amount (or level) of stress in each instance can cause an individual to become more motivated. At other times, when the deadline is not within the next few days or the big game is two weeks away, the stress for that particular activity is not as significant. As the time approaches for that particular activity, the stress can start to build, and if there are additional stressors from home, relationships, or other activities, a buildup of stress can occur.

The question becomes how much stress can youth handle before the stress is no longer motivating, but overwhelming. When stress becomes overwhelming, it can cause youth to turn to tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. When this occurs, youth are not coping with their stress, they are just avoiding it and ultimately adding to it.

Instructions:**Activity One:**

1. Discuss how stress is part of everyday living. Stress can be good or bad. There are days when less stress is experienced and there are other days when the stress seems overwhelming. What do you think is meant by good stress? What would be some examples? What is meant by bad stress and what would be some examples?
2. Show participants the fruits and vegetables. Ask them which of the outer coverings can withstand the most pressure. Why? How do they think the covering relates to stress?
3. Form groups of 3 to 5 youth. Have each group rank the fruits and vegetables from softest to hardest outer covering. Discuss how the differences in coverings might affect each of the fruits and vegetables. What is the purpose of the covering?
4. Have groups share their discussions and rankings.
5. Give each group a fruit or a vegetable. What do they need to have or do to be able to get to the edible part? Does it require a lot of effort or is it pretty easy to do?
6. How does this exercise relate to stress? Explain that some stress is major, while some is not. If you have stronger coping skills, then you can better withstand the pressures of stress.



Stress: How Thick is Your Skin?

PREPARATION

Materials:

Activity Two

- 5 soft rubber balls or tennis balls for every 10 participants

Youth Development Tip:

Although youth may be old enough to use a knife, it might be better for adults to cut the fruits and vegetables to share for a snack.

Open Ended Questions:

- When there was only one ball, how did you feel?
- What feelings did you experience when more balls were added to the pattern?
- Why did this feeling change?
- Do you ever feel like you have too many balls coming at you? Why? How does this make you feel?
- What are some things you could do to avoid a stress buildup to happen?
- How can the buildup of stress affect a youth's ability to resist risky behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs?
- What are some positive coping skills that you use to help you to handle stress better?

7. Share with participants that sometimes our "shell" doesn't feel very strong and we feel we could "crack" easily, like the softer skinned or shelled fruits, vegetables or even nuts. Other times, we may feel we have a harder covering or shell. Several factors contribute to this. We might have stronger coping skills, less stress at that time, more outside support, etc. What are some positive coping skills that might be used to handle stress?

Activity Two:

1. Divide the group into teams of approximately 10-12 participants. Have each group form a large circle. Give someone in the group a ball. They are the leader. The leader begins by tossing the ball across the circle. (Do not toss to the person next to them.) Share that they will need to remember who tossed them the ball and to whom they tossed it. After tossing the ball, participants put their hands behind their backs to indicate they have had the ball. This procedure continues until everyone has their hands behind their back. The final person throws the ball back to the leader. The goal is to establish a pattern for passing the ball.
2. Repeat this process a couple of times to reinforce the pattern.
3. Give the leader two balls. They need to pass the first ball and then the second ball using the same pattern. Have them try doing this a couple of times. How much more stress did that cause?
4. Once they have passed the two balls, then give them three, four, and five balls. Each time they need to follow the same pattern.
5. Discuss **Open Ended Questions**.

Additional Notes/Extension/Glossary

Consensus - general agreement.

Stress - a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. The term "stress" as it is currently used, was coined by Hans Selye in 1936. He defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change."

Learn More

The following website provides additional information:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA3083.html>