

8.2

## SUPPORTING OUR MENTAL HEALTH – MANAGING STRESS

This module acknowledges and normalizes the everyday experiences of stress we all face and helps students anticipate and prepare to manage stress by building healthy coping strategies and incorporating them into their daily routines. It also highlights the importance of seeking support when stress is linked to experiences of marginalization. It's important to acknowledge that stress may be different for each of us, and our unique experience is valid.

**NOTE:** Remind students that the focus is on learning facts and reliable information rather than sharing personal stories. If there is a situation a student would like to speak about, invite them to see you after class. You can also share ideas about additional resources at the end of each module.

It is important to provide students with a **supportive transition** following mental health learning. A list of easy-to-use activities and suggested prompts to encourage students to seek help are included at the end of each module so students can transition to the rest of their day in a positive way.

### CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

**D2.4:** demonstrate an understanding of how incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies into daily routines can help maintain mental health and resilience in times of stress

Refer to the [Health and Physical Education curriculum document](#) for a variety of considerations to support planning and delivery of this learning for every student (e.g., students with special education needs and English Language Learners).

### LEARNING GOALS

We are learning:

- That we all experience stress at times, and some stress can be helpful.
- Strategies we can use to prepare for and help manage stress.
- How to incorporate healthy habits and strategies into daily routines.

## SUCCESS CRITERIA

Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: "How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?"

For example:

- I know healthy strategies that can help manage stress.
- I know ways to make strategies part of my everyday life.
- I know how to get help if my stress is more than I can manage on my own

## MATERIALS

- Explore Mental Health: A Notebook for Grade 8 Health and Physical Education
- A computer and projector/digital display
- Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree signs
- Sticky notes/small squares of paper (or a digital equivalent)

## Minds on

Understanding Stress ~ 10 min

- **PURPOSE:** To help acknowledge and normalize the experience of stress; to demonstrate that we all experience stress at times and some stress can be **positive** and even **helpful** —like when we deal with a situation and handling it makes us feel we are capable, learning, and growing. A certain amount of stress also helps motivate us to develop positive ways of coping and to solve problems. It can help us to perform our best and shows something is important to us.

**NOTE:** The minds on activity is designed to be done in person and provides an opportunity for students to move in the learning space. It can also be done individually by having students record their answers (on paper or digitally) and then share back with small groups or the whole class. It can be adapted for virtual learning using a variety of tools (e.g., a shared slide where students can place a coloured dot on an agree/disagree arrow).

Instructions adapted from Facing History's 'Barometer' activity.

**TEACHER PROMPT** "Stress is the pressure, tension, physical discomfort, and sometimes worry that comes from many different situations, like when we have a big test coming up, we are trying out for a team, or we are excluded from our peers or made fun of for something that's important to us. Sometimes even things we are looking forward to can cause stress, such as graduation, a big party, or class trip, because they require us to adapt, grow, and try new things".

## INSTRUCTION 1

### Create a 'continuum'

Identify a space in the room where students can gather in a line or a U-shape. Place "Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" signs at opposite ends of the continuum.

#### TIP

It may be helpful to re-visit class norms/agreements before this activity to remind students about including others' ideas and respecting differences of opinions.

## INSTRUCTION 2

### Think time

Share one of the statements about stress using the slide deck provided. Give students a moment to reflect on whether they agree or disagree with that particular statement.

#### TIP

Some students may wish to use their student notebook to think and reflect on the statements.

## INSTRUCTION 3

### What do you think?

Ask students to move to the spot along the line that represents their opinion, telling them that if they choose either extreme, they strongly agree or disagree. They may choose to move anywhere between the two extremes, depending on how much they do or do not agree with the statement. Remind students that stress is different for each of us, so encourage students not to compare their response to that of their friends and classmates. Each of our experiences is valid.

## INSTRUCTION 4

### Explain

Invite students to explain their position on the continuum.

## INSTRUCTION 5

### Debrief

Use the notes on the slides to debrief each statement.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Before you move into strategies, invite students to consider their personal experience of stress. It feels different for each of us, so this is an opportunity to think about how it shows up for them as a unique individual. Knowing what it looks like can help us choose strategies that will help and cue us to use them (knowing that making strategies part of our daily routine can also help us be ready when challenges appear).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you know you are stressed? How does it show up in your...

- Body (e.g., stomach aches)?
- Actions (e.g., spending more time alone than usual)?
- Emotions (e.g., feeling worried or nervous)?
- Thoughts (e.g., expecting not to do well)?

## BRIGHT IDEAS

Knowing students is so important. Remember that some students may experience more stress than others. For example, educators should be aware of the daily stressors some students face due to the impact of marginalization.

Educators should also be aware that some sources of stress may be modifiable (e.g., too many commitments/feeling overscheduled, feeling unprepared for a test) while others may be more difficult to control (e.g., chronic medical condition, impact of poverty). This is when it may be particularly important for others to step in and offer support.

## Action

Building skills through routines, relaxation, reframing, and relationships ~ 25 min

**PURPOSE:** We can't get rid of stressors or challenges altogether, but we can learn strategies to help manage them and keep stress in a zone that works for us. Note that for some sources of stress (e.g. bullying, marginalization), it's important to seek support from trusted, caring adults and not up to individual students to adjust or adapt to the situation.

**Note:**

- This module has connections to **module 7.1** offered as part of strand D of the grade 7 **Health and Physical Education curriculum** (Action 1 – Promoting Positive Mental Health).
- While students may be familiar with the idea of using strategies, the idea of making them part of daily life may be new. The discussion provides a great opportunity to help students understand the value of regular practice and ways to include it every day, such as tracking personal progress in a journal, checking in with a friend, setting reminders on a phone or other device, or practicing at the same time each day.

**TEACHER PROMPT** "We can't always choose whether we experience stress, but we can choose how we get ready for it. And instead of reacting to it, we can be intentional about how we respond when it appears.

Think about stress like **trying to keep** a big **inflated** beach ball underwater. Think about how **the ball** might keep popping back up and throwing you off balance. Sometimes it's best to just accept that the stress is there, to just hold the beach ball, instead of fighting it. Stress is a part of life and getting through it can help you to grow and learn. And there are also stress management strategies that can help let the pressure out of the ball bit by bit. When we use stress management strategies, stress gets easier to manage just like the beachball. We're going to learn some skills that can help: routines, relaxation, and reframing."

**Reference:** **Exploring Your Mind's beachball metaphor for emotional regulation.**

### INSTRUCTION 1

A video has been provided to assist in this learning. View the video with students and engage in the discussion questions provided. The video has been prepared with pauses built in for this discussion. The discussion questions and space to take notes are provided in the **student notebook**.

Access the **video transcript**.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

### CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity has connections to an expectation in Strand A of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

#### Stress Management and Coping:

**A1.2** apply skills that help them to recognize sources of stress and to cope with challenges, including help-seeking behaviours, as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to support the development of personal resilience.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Invite students to revisit ways they might know if a stress management strategy is supporting them:

- How do you feel after you use the strategy?
- Does it support your values, goals, and the plans you have for your life, or get in the way of them?
- Are there other strategies that might better support you?

### TIP

Not all strategies are created equal. But rather than categorizing strategies as helpful or unhelpful for students, provide students with tools to think critically and be intentional about their own choices.

**TEACHER PROMPT** "While some stress can be helpful, stress that we don't get a break from, including stress that is related to experiences of marginalization, can impact our mental and physical health. When that happens, it's important to use the strategy of seeking support. It's also a great idea to reach out for help if we find ourselves using strategies that are negatively impacting our health or safety. Seeking support from a caring adult can help us build other ways to manage stress into our lives".

### BRIGHT IDEAS

If students are transitioning to secondary school at the end of the school year, this is a great opportunity to talk about how what they have learned might support them. Transitions (even transitions we are looking forward to) can be stressful, and the strategies students identified can be great tools to help them as they move through this important milestone.

## TRY IT!

Your mental health matters too! As you move through the video with students, consider your own mental health strategies. Are they all working for you? Are they a good investment of your time and energy? Might anything else better support you? It's a great time to take inventory of your personal stress management toolbox!

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

There are many different stress management strategies that can help impact our mood and help us feel well, and **music** can be one of them! Invite students to share a song that positively impacts their mental health. Listen to some examples together that are appropriate (e.g., clean lyrics), and talk about how students respond. Again, what works may be different for each of us. Consider incorporating this strategy as an option for when your students need a supportive transition.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity has natural connections to expectations within the **Grade 8 Arts curriculum (Strand C: Music)**. For example:

**C2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing:** apply the critical analysis process to communicate their feelings, ideas, and understandings in response to a variety of music and musical experiences.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Space for responses is provided in the notebook.

- How does the song you chose support you?
- Does it inspire you, offer encouragement, boost your energy level, remind you of someone you care about or a meaningful experience, or something else?

## Consolidation

Sharing Strategies and Learnings ~ 5 min

**PURPOSE:** To give students the opportunity to reflect on the learning and share their ideas.

**NOTE:** This student reflection is intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through post it notes or other virtual tools). Students may also capture their reflections in their notebook.

- What did you find interesting or helpful about what you learned?
- Did anything surprise you? Is there anything you are still wondering about?
- Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?
- What is one new healthy strategy you could make part of your daily life?

### KEY LEARNINGS

- We **all** feel stress at times.
- Some stress is a **good thing!** It can help us in many ways.
- Managing stress is a skill we can **practice** and **get better** at. There are strategies that can help.
- Different strategies may work at different times, so it's important to have a few **options available** and to **practice** them **regularly**.
- When we don't get a break from stress—like stress that is related to experiences of marginalization, bullying, or poverty—it can **impact** our mental and physical health. When that starts to happen, it's time to **seek more support**.

### SUPPORTIVE TRANSITION

A supportive transition from mental health learning is recommended. Please see a list of easy-to-use transition activities, as well as suggested prompts to support students in seeking help within the [Supportive Transitions Tip Sheet](#). This is an important part of the learning and should be repeated each time the module is paused or completed.

### PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

You can use this brief [parent/guardian communication](#) to share and continue the learning following student participation in this module.