**Lesson 8: Stress and ME Health**

**Overview:** Students will examine stress and how it impacts ME health. Students will also learn how stress impacts how we think and act. Students will identify how to recognize stress and anxious feelings. Students will identify strategies, tools, and resources to think and act in healthy ways.

National Health Education Standards

**Standard 1:** Students comprehend functional health knowledge to enhance health.

**Standard 7:** Students demonstrate observable health and safety practices.

Healthy Behavior Outcome (HBO):

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| Students will implement stress reduction strategies when needed to enhance their personal health. |

**Lesson Objective** - Students will be able to:

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| **Objective** | **Assessment** |
| 1. Define stress and other terms related to stress.
 | Attachment 8.1 – Stress Management Notes  |
| 1. Describe ways stress can impact how we feel, think and act.
 | Attachment 8.1 – Stress Management Notes  |
| 1. Demonstrate a variety of stress management techniques/strategies.
 | Attachment 8.2 – My Recharge Plan |
| 1. Evaluate different stress reduction techniques/strategies to determine usefulness.
 | Attachment 8.2 – My Recharge Plan |

Introduction:

* Crumbled Paper: Take out a scrap piece of paper or you can have multiple pages. I want you to think about what it looks like, sounds like, or feels like when you hear the word stress or stressed…. Do another round when we think about the things that cause stress (use another color paper if possible).
* Debrief – How do we feel when we hear the word stress? What causes stress? How do you think we can think and act in healthy ways when faced with stress or stressful situations?
* Let’s talk about stress…What is it, causes, how it impacts how we feel, think, and act. In the lesson we’ll learn how to recognize stressors, our stress response, and how we can use our resources to manage stress.

Teaching Steps:

Activity 1: Distribute Attachment 8.1 - Stress and ME

* Student Question - *How would you define stress, eustress, and distress?*
	+ Have students write their answers on Attachment #1 and give them the opportunity to share their answers with the class.
* **Stress:** A term commonly used to describe the response to the demands encountered on a daily basis throughout life. A state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives.
	+ Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way we think and act as we respond to stress makes a big difference to our overall well-being. For example, if someone bumps into me in the hallway, I could keep moving toward my destination or I could choose to get upset and possibly embarrass myself or get in trouble. ([WHO, 2023](https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress#:~:text=Stress%20can%20be%20defined%20as,experiences%20stress%20to%20some%20degree.))
	+ Teacher Notes: Our perceptions of stress and reactions to stress are not the same from person to person. Managing our responses to stress is an important life skill because it impacts all our components of health - physical, mental/emotional, social, intellectual, occupational, spiritual, etc.
* Stress is caused by stressors. Stressors are “things” that produce stress. Stressors can be physical, emotional, environmental.
* Stressors can be positive (eustress) or negative (distress). It is important to note that stress is not always a bad thing; experiences that cause eustress can enhance our motivation; help to find our passions in life; and improve our performance with tasks.
* Eustress is a positive stress response and has the following characteristics:
	+ Motivates, focuses energy.
	+ Is short-term.
	+ Is perceived as within our coping abilities.
	+ Feels exciting.
	+ Improves performance.
	+ Examples of eustress include taking a vacation; going to a school dance; getting a new job; learning something new, etc.
* A formal definition for [distress](https://www.mentalhelp.net/stress/types-of-stressors-eustress-vs-distress/): A feeling of being under pressure. This is negative stress and has the following characteristics:
	+ Causes anxious feelings, nervousness, or concern.
	+ Can be short- or long-term.
	+ Is perceived as outside of our coping abilities.
	+ Feels unpleasant.
	+ Decreases performance.
	+ Can lead to mental and physical problems.
	+ Some examples of distress are:
	+ Death of a loved one; school problems; losing a job; injury or illness; divorce; being hurt by someone; etc.
* Stressors can be acute or chronic. Acute stressors are short in duration and intensity. They usually fade after the situation has passed (examples – traffic jam, a disagreement). Chronic or toxic stress is severe, prolonged or repetitive adversity that can cause those experiencing toxic stress at risk for long-term adverse health effects. (Examples – physical health, behavioral health, occupation, etc.). Examples might include relationships, traumatic stress, location or environmental, and work-related.
* *More about toxic stress.* Toxic stress is when a person is in a prolonged state of distress, it can impact other areas in their life. A key to navigating the stress response is the presence of resources and supports like trusted adults. Remember if we recognize overwhelming feelings (those that last an extended period of time or impact our lives) we should reach out to our resources for support.
	+ Stress response – Our bodies respond to stressors by using our downstairs brain in survival “fight or flight” mode.
	+ When an individual recognizes a situation as being stressful, the adrenal medulla releases the hormone adrenaline, which prepares the body for a fight or flight response. This increases heart, sweating, blood pressure, and breathing rates. The downstairs brain is in the limbic area which controls fight, flight, freeze. The downstairs brain is not so good at making decision – think and act in healthy ways. The hypothalamus, which is a brain structure associated with emotional reactions, such as fear responds to stress by activating the pituitary gland, which in turn secretes adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH) that activates the adrenal glands to release the hormone corticosteroid. Cortisol helps the body to maintain steady supplies of blood sugar.
	+ When the brain is “downstairs” it is challenging to learn, retain information, and process information to think and act in healthy ways.
	+ But our brain is not very good at differentiating the stressor and sometimes triggers the fight, flight or freeze when it isn’t needed.
	+ Fight, flight or free our brain is not in control of thoughts and actions
	+ The “Upstairs Brain” is prefrontal cortex which enables you to think, reason, and maintain flexibility.
	+ Regulation or stress management strategies can be used to move from downstairs brain to upstairs brain. We can also use regulation when we recognize our feelings or a situation that might trigger moving to the downstairs brain.
	+ How to move or stay in your upstairs brain?
		- Recognize your feelings or when you are stressed.
		- Know how your upstairs and downstairs brain functions
		- Use your resources.
		- Regulation strategies
		- Trusted adults and people that care about you
		- A safe supportive environment.
		- Remember that you have the power to think and act in healthy and safe ways.

Activity 2: I am feeling…stressed!

* Ask Students - How do you know when you are feeling stressed? How does your body communicate this to you? (This could be physical, emotional, or behavioral)
	+ Possible student answers: my face gets hot; I shake; I get quiet; my heart races; I get a headache; my muscles tense up; I become short tempered; etc.
* If you notice, your peers did not only mention effects on the body, but also emotional and behavioral effects. Here are additional effects for each of these categories:

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| **Physiological** | * Headache, muscle tension, chest pain, high blood pressure, fatigue (tiredness), stomach upset, sleep problems, changes in the menstrual cycle, indigestion, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, rashes, sweating, lowered immune function, etc.
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| **Emotional** | * Anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation or focus, feeling overwhelmed, irritability, anger, sadness, depression, worry, etc.
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| **Behavioral** | * Overeating or undereating, angry outbursts, substance use - including tobacco/vape products, social withdrawal, exercising less often, etc.
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* To be think and act in healthy ways it is helpful to recognize our feelings. Let’s practice recognizing how we are feeling and then consider how we can think and act in healthy ways.
	+ Complete scenarios (Attachment 8.1) to recognize feelings and identify stressors. Discuss the scenarios, then target our stress response.
* Teacher Notes:
	+ We will practice identifying our feelings associated with stress and what might be the cause. We will use the sentence I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
* *Answers to Attachment 8.1*
	+ You have 4 tests on the same day.
		- Think and Act in healthy ways - Study a little bit each day leading up to the test day; ask your teacher for additional help to guide your studying.
		- Negative solution or outcomes - Poor performance that results in a failing grade, feeling irritable.
	+ You are feeling the pressure from your friends to participate in a dangerous TikTok challenge.
		- Think and Act in healthy ways - Tell your friends that this is not safe for any of them to participate in this challenge and if the situation becomes more stressful, leave the environment.
		- Negative solution or outcomes - Getting hurt; hospitalization; loss of life
	+ You lost your earbuds.
		- Positive solution to deal with this stressor - Retrace your steps; look in the lost and found; talk to the custodial department and see if they saw them.
		- Negative solution or outcomes - Never finding the earbuds; putting blame on others and hurting relationships; becoming angry and making an unhealthy choice.
* Teacher Notes - Thinking through how we would feel, think, and act in response to stressors can help prepare for our actions in the future. When we manage our emotions and actions, we strengthen our relationships, academic and athletic performance, reputation, and overall well-being.

Activity 3: My Recharge Plan

* Teacher Notes. Now that we can recognize stress and stressors, develop a plan that will help recognize our feelings and organize a set of tools and strategies.

*Task 1: Recognize my Feelings*

* Make a list of feelings that occur when you are stressed or in stressful situations.
* Students can also use provide a reason for the feeling using “I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

*Task 2 – My Recharge Plan: Recognize and Use Resources*

* Identify resources and recharge – strategies, tools and people who can help you manage when you’re feeling stressed, need to recharge, or just want to think and act in healthy ways.
	+ Quick charge – These strategies are tools you can use to calm down or charge your battery enough to keep going. Stress management tools like deep breathing, moving or stretching, distracting, or positive thinking can be helpful to keep you in your upstairs brain to think and act in healthy ways.
	+ Plug-it in – These activities take about 15-30 minutes and can be used to charge up your battery. Examples could be going for a walk, reading a book, etc.
	+ Full charge – These are everyday or activities that take extended time or resources. These are healthy behaviors like exercise, healthy eating, and social activities.

Closure

* What is stress and how can you manage stress?
* So why is it important to recognize stressors and reach out to resources?
* So, what can you do to think and act in healthy ways when encountering a stressor?
* **Materials & Resources:** *Additional materials outside of the Behavioral HELP Mental Emotional Health (MEH) Curriculum that provide information and support for the lesson:*
	+ [*https://www.mentalhelp.net/stress/types-of-stressors-eustress-vs-distress/*](https://www.mentalhelp.net/stress/types-of-stressors-eustress-vs-distress/)
	+ [*https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/AAA-Grounding-for-Anxiety.pdf*](https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/AAA-Grounding-for-Anxiety.pdf)
	+ [*https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress#:~:text=Stress%20can%20be%20defined%20as,experiences%20stress%20to%20some%20degree*](https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress#:~:text=Stress%20can%20be%20defined%20as,experiences%20stress%20to%20some%20degree)*.*
	+ [*https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331901/9789240003910-eng.pdf*](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331901/9789240003910-eng.pdf)
	+ [*https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987*](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987)
	+ [*https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-and-social-media-use/art-20474437#:~:text=However%2C%20social%20media%20use%20can,much%20social%20media%20teens%20use*](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-and-social-media-use/art-20474437#:~:text=However%2C%20social%20media%20use%20can,much%20social%20media%20teens%20use)*.*
	+ [*https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/features/students-sleep.htm#:~:text=Importance%20of%20Sleep&text=The%20American%20Academy%20of%20Sleep,10%20hours%20per%2024%20hours*](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/features/students-sleep.htm#:~:text=Importance%20of%20Sleep&text=The%20American%20Academy%20of%20Sleep,10%20hours%20per%2024%20hours)*.*
	+ [*https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-management*](https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-management)
	+ [*https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/yoga-stress.html#:~:text=Yoga%20can%20help%20reduce%20stress,%2C%20and%20you%20shouldn't*](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/yoga-stress.html#:~:text=Yoga%20can%20help%20reduce%20stress,%2C%20and%20you%20shouldn't)*!*

Attachment 8.1: Stress and ME

Define, or provide an example for, *stress*, *eustress*, and *distress*.

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| --- | --- |
| Stress |  |
| Eustress |  |
| Distress  |  |

How can stress impact your health? Provide at least one example in each category

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Physical |  |
| Emotional |  |
| Behavioral  |  |

Describe at least three signs you recognize when you are feeling stressed.

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| --- |
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List at least three short- or long-term consequences from not managing our stress response.

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For each of the stressful situations below, write how you would feel and the reason you are feeling this way. Then you will think about how you could think and act in healthy and unhealthy ways.

You have 4 tests on the same day.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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|  |

Think and Act: Give an example for both a positive and negative way to think and act.

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| --- | --- |
| Positive (Safe & Healthy) | Negative (Unhealthy or unsafe) |
|  |  |

You are feeling the pressure from your friends to participate in a dangerous TikTok challenge.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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|  |

Think and Act: Give an example for both a positive and negative way to think and act.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Positive (Safe & Healthy) | Negative (Unhealthy or unsafe) |
|  |  |

You lost your earbuds.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

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|  |

Think and Act: Give an example for both a positive and negative way to think and act.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Positive (Safe & Healthy) | Negative (Unhealthy or unsafe) |
|  |  |

Attachment 8.2: My Recharge Plan

*Part I.* I feel: In the table below list the feelings you recognize when you are stressed or encounter a stressor.

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| --- |
| I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because …… |
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*Task 2: My Recharge Plan*

Directions – Complete the Recharge Plan with your self-care strategies.

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| **Quick charge** - Limited time and resources available. |  | *Strategies and activities* |
| **Plug-it-in** - Time frame of less than 30 minutes and some resources available |  | *Strategies and activities* |
| **Optimal Battery health** Activities to keep my mind and body healthy |  | *Strategies and activities* |

Place a checkmark to the strategies you currently use.

Place a star (\*) next to the strategies you want to try this week.