

Feeling Frazzled? Stress and What to Do About It (65 minutes)

Section

Your Life

Investigative Questions

How can stress be both bad and good? What are common causes of stress for students? What are some things students can do to mitigate their stress? What is long-term stress? What are the dangers of long-term stress?

Description of Content

In this activity, students discuss what's bad and good about stress and some of the biggest stressors for kids their age. They go to the *BAM!* Web site and take the Stress-O-Meter test to help them gauge their own level of stress and learn about new ways to relieve their personal stress. In a class discussion, students learn more about the differences between short- and long-term stress. They keep a stress diary, and evaluate whether their methods for reducing stress were successful.

Relevant Standards

This activity fulfills [science and health education standards](#).

Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the good and bad characteristics of stress
- Differentiate between short- and long-term stress
- Explore and make a plan to use new ways to relieve stress
- Describe their own sources of stress and evaluate whether the stress-relief methods they used were successful

Ideas and Behaviors Common Among Students

This activity offers information from the literature on [ways your students may already perceive stress and act on stressors in their lives](#).

Materials

- Access to the *BAM!* site on a computer at school or at home
- Student Reproducible 1: *My Stress Diary*
- Student Reproducible 2: *Feelin' Frazzled? 10 Tips to Keep You Cool, Calm, and Collected*

Safety

Observe normal classroom safety procedures for this module.

Teacher Background

The most common definition of stress, from Richard S. Lazarus, is that stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that “demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.”

Research to develop the *BAM! Body and Mind*[™] Web site showed that kids and teens are very concerned about stress in their lives and interested in learning how to manage it. Parents are interested in helping their kids manage stress as well.

Stress is the body’s way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness. At one time or another, everyone experiences stress.

But according to the National Institutes of Health and many other sources, too much stress over a long period can be bad. When people are unable to stop their stress response from running overtime, their body does not have a chance to rest, restore, and recuperate. This can add up and, suddenly, the signs of overload hit—turning short-term stressors into long-term stress, which can affect both physical and mental health.

Many of the things that cause stress in students—for example, a desire to “fit in” or peer and family relationships—are things they may not want to discuss in your classroom. However, you may want to discuss school-related stress (tests, grades, and homework), as studies show that school is a major cause of stress among middle school students.

This activity will teach students strategies for dealing with any type of stress that they can apply throughout their lives.

Procedure

Engagement (15 minutes)

1. Put students in pairs. Have the paired groups brainstorm for a few minutes and jot down answers to this question:

How can stress be both bad and good?

2. What do they see as the biggest stressors for kids their age? (List some on the board.)
3. What have been big stressors for them? Can they remember how they felt at the time? What were they thinking? What was their body doing?

If students do not respond readily, you could ask the following questions:

- How do you feel when you have a million things to do at school and home?

- How do you feel when you hear a suspicious sound, especially if you are at home alone?
- How do you feel before you are in a performance or a game?
- How do you feel if you are snubbed by classmates or people you thought were friends?

Exploration (individual student time 10 minutes)

1. Send students to the *BAM!* Web site and have them:
 - Go to the *Got Butterflies?* activity at www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_gotbutterflies.html to read the sections entitled “What is Short-Term Stress?” and “What is Long-Term Stress?” If your students do not have access to the Internet, print out the page and give it to students for homework.
 - Take the *Stress-O-Meter Quiz* at www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_stressometer.html. This quiz is to help them gauge their level of stress. There is no record of their answers. It’s a private way for them to look at what might be causing stress. Students could do this as a computer lab assignment, in the classroom, or for homework.

Explanation (10 minutes)

1. Discuss with students how stress can be both good and bad. Stress can push us to accomplish things. Without stress would they study hard for a test or practice a lot for a big game? Probably not. Stress helps people get things done.

But too much stress over a long period can be bad. When people are unable to stop their stress response from running overtime, their body does not have a chance to rest, restore, and recuperate. This can add up and, suddenly, the signs of overload hit—turning short-term stressors into long-term stress. When this happens, there may be even more physical signs of stress—things like a headache, eating too much (or not at all), tossing and turning all night, or just feeling down or angry all the time. All of these are signs of long-term stress, and they start when a person cannot deal with smaller stressful situations.

Tell students that long-term stress can affect their health and how they feel about themselves, so it’s important to learn to deal with stress as it comes. No one is completely free of stress, and different people respond to stress in many different ways. The most important thing about long-term stress is learning how to spot it. They can do that by listening to their body signals and by learning healthy ways to handle stress.

2. Ask students: What are unhealthy ways both kids and adults sometimes use to deal with stress? (Here they may mention smoking, drinking, withdrawing from friends and family, over sleeping, or getting angry.)

Elaboration and Evaluation (10 minutes this class, 20 minutes in a follow-up class a week later)

1. Now it is time for students to develop their own ways to handle the stress in their lives. Hand out Student Reproducible 1: *My Stress Diary* and Student Reproducible 2: *Feelin' Frazzled?*.
2. First, they will keep a stress diary for a week. Go over the four columns on Student Reproducible 1. When students feel stress, they are to record the date and time, what caused the stress, how they felt, what they did about it, and what happened. ("Before my history test, I felt nervous. I took a deep breath and looked at my notes. I felt calmer." or "I was stressed about going to school with my new braces. I got a good night's sleep. Some people made fun of me, but it didn't bother me.")
3. Using Student Reproducible 2, ask students to formulate a question about stress that they would like to answer ("Will taking deep breaths help me stop feeling butterflies in my stomach?" or "Will taking a break help me stop feeling angry?").
4. Also ask students to identify one or more stress reduction techniques they plan to try this week. Students should jot these down in their stress diary. Students can also find this information on the *BAM!* Web site at www.bam.gov/sub_yourlife/yourlife_feelingfrazzled.html.
5. In a week, ask students to take out their stress diaries. Discuss with the class what they have learned, but remind students not to share anything too personal or use people's real names. When are they likely to feel stress? Did they use any stress relief methods that worked? That didn't work? Did they find the answer to their question?
6. Have students create a bulletin board that shows their own successful "stress busters. For example, "Josh: Deep breaths."

Performance Descriptors

On each of the criteria below, rate students from 3 to 0, with 3 being the highest possible score and 0 being the lowest.

Scoring Rubric: Feeling Frazzled? Stress and What to Do About It				
Performance Descriptor	Rating			
Student can define both the good and the bad characteristics of stress.	3	2	1	0
Student can differentiate between long- and short-term stress.	3	2	1	0
Student formulated a question about stress that he or she wanted to answer.	3	2	1	0
Student kept a stress diary, accurately recording his or her own responses to stressful situations during a period of several days.	3	2	1	0
Student helped develop the class bulletin board showing various techniques to reduce stress.	3	2	1	0

Extension

1. Have students come up with some quick, one-minute or less “stress busters” they can do together before a big test.
2. Advanced students might want to develop an experiment to measure whether specific stress reduction techniques work for them (or for other people). Have them design an experimental method and then carry it through.

Web Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov

The CDC Web site includes data on stress in various professions, including statistics on stress suffered by first responders. The site includes a number of fact sheets on stress written for a general audience: “Stress Management for the Health of It” (www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001201-d001300/d001245/d001245.html), “Stress Management: Taking Charge” (www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001201-d001300/d001246/d001246.html), and “From Family Stress to Family Strengths” (www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001201-d001300/d001249/d001249.html) are some examples of the fact sheets.

CDC *BAM! Body and Mind*TM: www.cdc.gov/bam or www.bam.gov

BAM! Body and Mind is brought to you by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). *BAM!* was created to answer kids' questions on health issues and recommend ways to make their bodies and minds healthier, stronger, and safer. *BAM!* also serves as an aid to teachers, providing them with interactive activities to support their health and science curriculums that are educational and fun.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: www.aacap.org
Helping Teenagers with Stress: www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/66.htm

A fact sheet, written for a general audience, on things families can do to help teens reduce the level of stress in their lives.

KidsHealth: www.kidshealth.org
Stress: www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html

Basic information on stress, including information about the endocrine system. Written for a teenage audience.

Text Correlations

Glencoe, *Teen Health Course 1*, Chapter 1, Mental and Emotional Health: Managing Stress

Glencoe, *Teen Health Course 2*, Chapter 7, Mental and Emotional Health: Managing Stress

Glencoe, *Teen Health Course 3*, Chapter 15, Your Body Systems: Your Endocrine System

Relevant Standards

Benchmarks for Science Literacy

Chapter 6, Benchmark F, Grades 6-8: Mental Health

By the end of the 8th grade, students should know that

- Individuals differ greatly in their ability to cope with stressful situations. Both external and internal conditions (chemistry, personal history, values) influence how people behave.
- Often people react to mental distress by denying that they have any problem. Sometimes they don't know why they feel the way they do, but with help they can sometimes uncover the reasons.

Chapter 7, Benchmark D Grades 6-8: Social Trade-offs

Students at this level are very preoccupied by personal and social relationships. Their greatest concerns are usually peer approval and popularity, sexual development and feelings, personal appearance, and the struggle to separate from family and become an individual. They can consider personal and social consequences of individual choices in health (sexual activity, immunization), education (how different course choices limit future options), and popularity (how affiliation with one group might exclude a person from others). Students should assess tradeoffs that occur in the lives of their friends (or

their own) and that offer only unwanted choices (such as sexual abstinence and venereal disease).

By the end of the 8th grade, students should know that

- There are tradeoffs that each person must consider in making choices-about personal popularity, health, family relations, and education, for example-that often have life-long consequences.
- Tradeoffs are not always between desirable possibilities. Sometimes social and personal tradeoffs require accepting an unwanted outcome to avoid some other unwanted one.

National Health Education Standards

Standard 1

Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.

- Explain the relationship between positive health behaviors and the prevention of injury, illness, disease, and premature death.
- Describe the interrelationship of mental, emotional, social, and physical health during adolescence.
- Explain how health is influenced by the interaction of body systems.
- Describe how family and peers influence the health of adolescents.
- Analyze how environment and personal health are interrelated.
- Describe ways to reduce risks related to adolescent health problems.

Standard 3

Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks.

- Explain the importance of assuming responsibility for personal health behaviors.
- Analyze a personal health assessment to determine health strengths and risks.
- Distinguish between safe and risky or harmful behaviors in relationships.
- Demonstrate strategies to improve or maintain personal and family health.
- Demonstrate ways to avoid and reduce threatening situations.
- Demonstrate strategies to manage stress.

Standard 5

Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health.

- Demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills to enhance health.
- Describe how the behavior of family and peers affects interpersonal communication.

- Demonstrate healthy ways to express needs, wants and feelings.
- Demonstrate ways to communicate care, consideration, and respect of self and others.
- Demonstrate communication skills to build and maintain healthy relationships.
- Demonstrate refusal and negotiation skills to enhance health.
- Analyze the possible causes of conflict among youth in schools and communities.
- Demonstrate strategies to manage conflict in healthy ways.

Standard 6

Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting and decision-making skills to enhance health.

- Demonstrate the ability to apply a decision- making process to health issues and problems individually and collaboratively.
- Apply strategies and skills needed to attain personal health goals.

Standard 7

Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

- Analyze various communication methods to accurately express health information and ideas.
- Express information and opinions about health issues.
- Identify barriers to effective communication of information, ideas, feelings, and opinions about health issues.
- Demonstrate the ability to influence and support others in making positive health choices.

Ideas and Behaviors Common Among Students

What Stress Is

- When asked what stress means to them, middle school students responded that stress was characterized as “being under a lot of pressure,” “feeling angry or annoyed,” “too much on your mind and you can’t take it anymore,” and “pressure and more stomach problems” (D’Autuono, 1998).
- In general, children have identified the majority of the stressful events in their lives as stemming from school-related problems (i.e., tests, grades, assignments.) Other stressful areas in their lives were associated with peer relationship problems as well as home and family problems (Henderson & Kelbey, 1992).
- Middle school girls appear more likely to rate traumatic events as more stressful than boys, while those from socially disadvantaged areas rate everyday events as more stressful than children from more affluent backgrounds (Muldoon, 2003).

Effects of Stress

- When describing stressful situations, 4th to 6th grade students were most likely to say that they felt headache and stomachache as their main physiological symptoms. Boys were also likely to say they felt their “heart beating fast,” while girls said that they felt “sweaty” (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 2002).
- Middle school students also reported that stress made them feel “sad and lonely,” “uncomfortable and nervous everywhere I go,” “like it’s never going to end,” and “tense” (D’Autuono, 1998).
- When middle school students were asked specifically about school-related stress, this type of stress was associated with lack of concentration, trouble remembering, and frustration (Mailandt, 1998).
- When describing their reactions to general stressful situations, boys were most likely to say that they felt mad, worried, or nervous, while girls would cry or feel sad, as well as feel mad and worried (Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 2002).

How Stress Can Be Mitigated

- Children who perceive a sense of control over their stressful situation are more successful at coping than those with less of a sense of control where they blame their situation on outside sources such as fate or luck (Chandler, 1985).
- Many children use similar coping strategies for different types of stressors in their lives, rather than different strategies for variety of stressful events (Donaldson, et al., 2000).
- Older children use coping strategies for stressful events in their lives more than younger children do (Donaldson, et al., 2000).
- When middle school students were asked what they do during stressful situations, they reported that they “go to [their] room and pound the pillow,” “go to sleep,” “worry a lot,” “watch television,” “yell or scream,” “cry,” and “cuddle the pet” (D’Autuono, 1998; Sharrer & Ryan-Wenger, 1995).
- Additionally, many children believe that coping strategies are moderately helpful in relieving stress (Donaldson, et al., 2000).

References

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Student Reproducible 1:

My Stress Diary

Will _____ help me to stop feeling _____?
[stress reducer] [stress response]

This question is important to me because:

This week I plan to reduce stress by using this technique:

My Stress Diary				
Date and Time	What Caused Me Stress	How I Felt	What I Did About It	What Happened
	When did you feel stress? What was happening?		What actions did you take to try to relieve your stress at the time?	

Date and Time	What Caused Me Stress When did you feel stress? What was happening?	How I Felt	What I Did About It What actions did you take to try to relieve your stress at the time?	What Happened

Other techniques I'd like to try in the future to beat stress:
