

# STRESS

## The Basics

### What is stress?

Stress is an emotional and physical reaction to a physical, psychological, or emotional demand.

We all show stress in different ways.

Some stress is good; it motivates us to turn in our paperwork on time.

Too much stress is not good and can have short-term and long-term effects on our health.

### What are some symptoms of stress?

Increased heart rate and blood pressure, feeling tense, irritable, fatigued, or depressed.

Lack of interest, inability to concentrate, racing thoughts, and too much worry.

Avoidance behaviors: excessive alcohol, cigarette smoking, and drug use.

### What are some causes of stress?

Expectations we place on ourselves.

Expectations of others.

Our physical environment: noise, room size, crowding.

Our internal environment: work pressure, frustration, not enough time.

### What are ways to manage stress?

Practice effective communication: *State feelings in a clear way (for example, "I feel angry when you yell at me.")*.

Establish "me time": *Make time to enjoy hobbies.*

Practice specific stress reduction techniques: *Learn relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation.*

**COMING SOON** MORE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS...



# STRESS

## Thoughts Impact Behavior

**D**id you know that your thoughts can impact your behavior? Stress comes from our perception of a situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful.

The experience of stress is cyclical and includes thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Each component of stress impacts the other. If you can intervene at one of these points, you can stop the cycle of stress.



Sometimes it is easier to start by changing your thoughts, and here is one way to try this:

### Practice "Thought Stopping"

- Step 1:** Notice your thoughts. Are they positive and helpful? Or negative and unhelpful?
- Step 2:** Use a trigger word to stop a negative and unhelpful thought.
- Step 3:** Replace that thought with a more helpful thought.

### This is what it might look like:

- 1. You:** "There is no point in trying"
- 2. You:** STOP!
- 3. You:** "This situation could be easier if I first talked with a friend, colleague, or other source of support."



# STRESS

## Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts

**S**tress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful. Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all have, as well as ways you can challenge these thoughts.

### **All-or-Nothing Thinking:**

You see things in black-and-white categories. If your actions aren't perfect, then they are seen as a failure.

*Challenge:* Instead of thinking in an "either/or" way, try to think in shades of gray. Evaluate the situation on a scale of 0-10. Think again about partial success and reevaluate, on a scale of 0-10.

### **Filtering Out the Positive:**

You focus on one thing that went wrong and filter out the positive events that occurred.

*Challenge:* Try to be as kind to yourself as you would be with a friend. Review the day's events, and focus on all of the positive things that went right. For every negative thing you think of, try to also focus on one positive thing.

### **Overgeneralization:**

You see a single negative situation as never-ending and a "forever" pattern.

*Challenge:* Remind yourself that a single negative event (or even multiple events) doesn't mean it will truly last forever. Think of a specific time when a single negative event did not have a long lasting outcome.



# STRESS

## Take a **B**reath

**B**elly breathing or deep breathing exercises are a proven way to reduce stress. Try this technique standing or seated in a chair:

1. Place your arms and hands at your side, relaxed.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Focus on your belly, the lower part of the stomach. Imagine a small balloon inside.
4. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, imagine the balloon inflating. Hold a few seconds.
5. Slowly exhale through your mouth, imagining the balloon gently deflating. Blow out of your mouth as if you were blowing out a candle.
6. Repeat at least three times.

**TIP:** Place a hand over your belly to feel it go up and down, and make sure you're not breathing with your chest.

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car — anywhere!



# STRESS

## The Ball Is in Your Court

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**S**tress can be related to the amount of control you feel over a situation, event, interaction, thought or feeling. Since we can't change things that are out of our control, it's best to focus on what is in our control.

### Examples of areas outside of your control:

- How people respond to you.
- Other people's feelings.

### Focusing on areas outside of your control results in:

- Feeling hopeless.
- Feeling anxious.
- Feeling STRESSED.

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### Examples of what is in your control:

- Your ability to prioritize work requirements and personal obligations.
- Your reactions to events and other people.
- Your thoughts.
- Your behavior.

### Focusing on areas in your control results in:

- Feeling empowered.
- Feeling relief.



# STRESS

## Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts II

**S**tress comes from our perception of the situation. Technically, the actual situation is not stressful; it is our **PERCEPTION** that makes it stressful. Here are some common unhelpful patterns of thinking that we all have, as well as ways you can challenge these thoughts.

### **Jumping to Conclusions:**

You interpret something negatively even though you don't have all of the facts.

*Challenge:* Ask yourself, "Do I really know this to be true?" If the answer is no, focus on the things that you do know are true and on what information you still need.

**Catastrophizing:** You negatively exaggerate the importance of things.

*Challenge:* Try to take the event for what it is, and do not let your mind go astray.

### **Emotional Reasoning:**

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are. "I feel it, therefore it **MUST** be true."

*Challenge:* Seek out the opinions of trusted friends or family to evaluate whether your thoughts are accurate.

### **"Should" Statements:**

You try to motivate yourself by saying, "I should/shouldn't" do something.

*Challenge:* Think about the advantages and disadvantages of your thoughts, feelings, and/or

behaviors. Are you gaining anything from your thoughts or feelings? Discuss with a friend or family member to determine the accuracy of your thoughts.

**Personalization:** You see yourself as the cause of a negative event for which you were not entirely responsible.

*Challenge:* Carefully evaluate the situation to figure out if you really have any responsibility for the results. Identify outside factors that may be impacting the outcome.



# STRESS

## From Head to Toe

Deep muscle relaxation, or progressive relaxation, is a proven way to reduce stress.

Progressive relaxation helps you help yourself to relax by tightening and releasing different muscle groups in your body. Below is an example, using your feet.

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Flex your toes toward your head.
3. Feel the tension that occurs in your feet, ankles, and lower legs.
4. Pay close attention to the feelings of tightness and tension. Hold for 10 seconds.
5. Now relax your feet, let them return to their normal position.
6. Feel the difference in your feet, ankles, and lower legs; where it was tense, there is now a feeling of relaxation.

**TIP:** You can do your entire body, making your way from your feet all the way up to your head.

You can do this in your classroom, at home, on the bus, in the car — anywhere!



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# Are You Really Listening?



**Sometimes you only hear the content of the conversation.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**Colleague:** "I finally finished all of my paperwork!"

**You:** "Oh good, now you can help clean up the water table."

**Active listening occurs when you also listen for the message or feelings behind the content.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**Colleague:** "I finally finished all of my paperwork!"

**You:** "You must feel relieved, that was a lot of work!"

Active listening facilitates relationships and can transform your work environment into a good or GREAT one.

**Active listening also takes place when you "listen" to or observe the nonverbal cues.**

Not all communication is verbal. The words used are only part of the message. Nonverbal communication includes:

- Pauses or hesitation in speech.
- Tone of voice.
- How fast or slow an individual speaks.
- Facial expressions, body posture, and eye and hand movements.

**Active listening is communication. It communicates to the listener that you are present and that you respect the individual's thoughts and experiences.**





# STRESS

## A Strategy a Day Will Keep the Doctor Away!

**H**ere are some daily strategies to reduce stress. You will be surprised by how effective even the smallest change can be!

### Create a Consistent Routine

- Eat a well-balanced diet with drinks that are low in calories and caffeine. Plan some healthy snacks and lunches.
- Maintain a regular bedtime, and shut off all “screens” two hours prior to sleeping.

### Express Feelings

- Talk with friends and peers; avoid gossip and hurtful conversations.
- Write in a journal.

### Establish “Me Time”

- Create time each day to relax.
- Treat yourself to a simple pleasure.
- Pair enjoyable activities or tasks with less enjoyable activities or tasks.

### Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques

- Focus on what is in your control, and recognize that you can’t change what is out of your control.
- Decrease negative self-talk. FOR EXAMPLE: Instead of thinking, “My paperwork will never get turned in,” say to yourself, “I may not be keeping up now, but my paperwork will get turned in if I can set aside 15 minutes a day to work on it.”



# STRESS

## Imagine!

**V**isual imagery is a proven way to help reduce stress. It helps you to relax by focusing on a place or image that brings you comfort. It also allows you to slow down and breathe.

### It's Easy!

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably.

**Step 2:** Close your eyes and “see” in your mind’s eye a beautiful beach, countryside, or a favorite childhood place or memory.

**Step 3:** Imagine the sounds, textures, smells, tastes, and physical details. Try to see the colors, placement of trees or buildings, who you are with, what you are doing, the sound of voices, the feeling of the sand or sidewalk under your feet, etc.

**Step 4:** Take a minute to rest in your comforting place. Take a few deep breaths and release them slowly. Stay here for as long as you like.

**TIP:** Sometimes it’s helpful to participate in a “guided” visual imagery tour. You can find a guided imagery audio recording on [www.echmc.org](http://www.echmc.org).

# STRESS

## Effective Communication Strategies

### **Make a praise sandwich.**

When you need to give someone feedback on his/her behavior, start with an observation of what he/she is doing well. Describe the changes you would like the person to make as "next steps" rather than as a critique. Finally, end with a compliment about something he/she has done well.

**Praise:** "Nice job speaking right at eye level with Jacey."

**Next steps:** "Next time you might think about using a softer voice."

**Praise:** "I really liked how you gave her a high five at the end."

### **Practice active listening skills:**

Listen to the message, reflect feelings, notice nonverbal communication cues.

### **Repeat back to the listener what you think you have just heard, to make sure you are correct.**

**Speak about yourself rather than the other person.** "I felt sad," versus, "You let me down."

### **Describe the facts rather than placing blame.**

"Drop-off is at 9 a.m.; it is now 11:30," rather than: "You are more than two hours late!"



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## A Strategy a Day Will Keep the Doctor Away!

**H**ere are some daily strategies to reduce stress. You will be surprised by how effective even the smallest change can be!

### Create a Consistent Routine

- Daily exercise: Any physical activity that you find enjoyable.
- Add soothing music to your daily commute.

### Practice Effective Communication

- State feelings in a clear way. FOR EXAMPLE: "I feel angry when you yell at me."
- Offer factual descriptions of what upsets you, rather than labels or judgments.

### Establish "Me Time"

- Create time to maintain hobbies.
- Have a spa night at home.
- Reward yourself for a job well done.

### Practice Specific Stress Reduction Techniques

- Learn relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation.
- Introduce positive statements into your day and in reaction to negative or unhelpful thoughts. FOR EXAMPLE: "I always try my best." Or, instead of, "I need to be perfect, or I fail," say: "I did a great job learning this new curriculum."

