



PENN·HARRIS·MADISON
SCHOOL CORPORATION

STRESS MANAGEMENT

"In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our heads and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers."

~ Fred Rogers

Stress is something with which we all deal. It can be positive and help us reach new heights, or it can take a toll. Our bodies are incredibly designed to have a complex response to stress situations in order to protect us and keep us safe from danger. Our stress response is our body's natural way to protect us from danger. However, sometimes, stress can be too much and can lead to negative outcomes. When we are stressed, often our energy is depleted. Therefore, if we engage in healthy stress management techniques, we can feel refreshed and can continue with the vitality we are meant to have in life.

That is why we want to make sure we keep healthy stress management techniques at the forefront of our minds.

Understanding yourself and how you are primed to react in certain situations is helpful to managing stress because you can be aware of warning signs and behaviors to help you be sure to implement coping strategies. Additionally, there are several things we can call do to proactively and positively manage stress. Below are some ideas to help manage stress. **The key is finding 1 to 3 strategies that work for you and consistently implement the strategies.**

MIND

ART: Art is a creative activity that can relieve stress no matter your talent level because it helps take your mind off of the things that are causing your stress so you can have a clear head to tackle the next project. To get started, just draw what you feel whether that is real or abstract. You can also start by coloring in the adult coloring books, which can be relaxing for many people.

CELEBRATE POSITIVES: Celebration is important because it helps us focus on positives, our accomplishments! It is a way to take a break from the norm and appreciate the hard work! When we celebrate, our bodies release Dopamine and can provide a sense of pleasure. So, start by celebrating the little things.

EXPRESS GRATITUDE: The simple act of giving thanks actually has many complex psychological benefits. Expressing gratitude increases positive emotions, decreases stress and helps people bounce back from adversity.

IMAGERY: Visualization is easy...you just need to form a mental image to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. Oftentimes, you can close your eyes to eliminate distractions, so be sure you are in a safe situation to use this technique.

MINDFULNESS: According to the Mayo Clinic, Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress. It is a practice that helps you focus on the present moment, being aware of your body sensations, thoughts and feelings.

MINDSET: According to the Indiana Department of Education, Mindset is the ability to demonstrate cognitive flexibility and a willingness to learn which is critical for perseverance, adaptability, self-discovery, resilience and giving/receiving constructive feedback. Having a growth mindset (believing that your abilities, intelligence, personality, and character are continually developing) can help you embrace change and uncertainty, and continually grow with effort. See Carol Dweck.

MOTIVATION: Motivation can be defined as the reasons a person has for acting or behaving in a certain way. Our motivation can help us seek pleasure or avoid danger, and this can be impacted by the environment - a safe & calm environment helps us to manage our motivational response, and also helps us accept responsibilities and take ownership of our work, This all helps us manage stress and seek opportunities for growth. Motivation is high when the task challenges us just enough, but it is not too hard. Activities that are too hard can cause more stress and frustration. We also find motivation and manage stress when we measure our progress (e.g., goals, journal, checklists, etc.) because this helps us see growth.

MUSIC: Music can energize and relax us...It is a great stress reliever because it makes us feel good. Studies show that listening to music also impacts the release of different neurotransmitters that help us feel pleasure.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK: Be positive and give yourself a pep talk to suggest to yourself that you have what it takes and will get through it.

TIME MANAGEMENT: Time management can help you stay on top of projects or activities so you can plan ahead and avoid last minute feelings of stress. For big projects, it helps to break it up and set small goals to help keep you on track. It also helps to utilize calendars or reminders on your smartphone or places like Google or Canvas.

In addition to managing time, it is also important that you schedule time in for stress management and self-care activities. Our lives are often dictated by our calendars, so be sure to make time for proactive strategies or chances are slim that they will happen.

BODY

AUTOGENIC RELAXATION: This is a blend of deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and mental imagery. Simply put, imagine a peaceful setting, while focusing on breathing, and relaxing your different parts of your body.

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY: Life does not always go as planned, so we need to be able to revise plans in the face of setbacks, new information, obstacles or mistakes. This is our ability to adapt to a changing world to adjust how we think about something so we can maintain a positive mindset. We can practice cognitive flexibility by changing our routine, trying new things, being creative, seeking others' perspectives and letting go of anxieties.

DEEP BREATHING: Deep breathing can help with stress management and can have a calming effect. This is because the autonomic nervous system is made up of two systems: (1) the sympathetic nervous system, which is activated when in a state of stress, & (2) the parasympathetic, which helps you rest and relax. You cannot have both systems activated at the same time. You can activate a sense of calm by engaging in deep breathing, which increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes a state of calmness. Additionally, breathing techniques help you feel connected to your body—it brings your awareness away from the worries in your head and quiets your mind. There are several breathing techniques available. A helpful tip is to remember to smell the roses (breath in through your nose) and blow out the candles (push air out of your mouth). Depending on what you are able to do, breathing slowly and deeply from your stomach can signal a state of calm. Additionally, strategies like square or star breathing can help. The great thing about breathing is we all do it and it is a strategy you can do anywhere.

DIET: Eating a healthy, balanced diet can impact the way one feels. During times of stress, we might want to "stress eat" by consuming drinks that are not healthy or eat foods that are high in carbs (e.g., "comfort foods"), which causes a spike in blood sugar and then we "crash." On the other hand, eating a balanced diet can support mood regulation and combat negative feelings of stress. (Keep in mind any food allergies or dietary restrictions.)

EXERCISE: Exercise is planned and structured body movements done to improve or maintain physical fitness. We also need physical activity or movement, which works your muscles and requires energy. This can include leisure activities or household chores. Exercise helps you feel less stress because it releases endorphins, which can make you feel good and can enhance your sense of well-being. It also takes your mind off of your worries, helps you gain confidence to meet challenges and feel better about how you look and feel. Exercise can also be a social activity that helps you connect with others, even if you connect virtually.

LAUGHTER: No joke! Laughing can release endorphins, which help you feel good. It also impacts your blood pressure and pulse to help with some physical symptoms of stress. Laughing also helps you feel connected to others.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION: This is an evidence-based technique to help you relax and calls for you to focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing muscle groups in a progressive manner.

SLEEP HYGIENE: Good sleep hygiene includes a variety of different practices that help a person to have normal, quality sleep and daytime alertness. There are several practices that impact one's sleep hygiene, such as going to bed and waking at the same time each day, avoiding stimulants 4-6 hours before bed, establishing and maintaining a bedtime routine, avoiding screens before bed, using one's bed for sleep (not work), etc.

SHINE! HONE YOUR SKILLS: Think of what you are good at or enjoy doing, and schedule time to engage in these activities to sharpen your skills and soar with your strengths.

SOUL

PRAYER, MEDITATION, & SPIRITUALITY: The general idea of spirituality can help you feel connected, have meaning, increase your personal value system to lead a healthier life, and be better able to cope with stress.

RELATIONSHIPS: When we are in a safe, healthy relationship, it increases feelings of connection and belonging. It also gives us someone with whom to share life and share in our burdens when stress starts to take a toll.

Having relationships not only keeps us connected, but it also keeps us accountable to others by making sure we are staying motivated, engaging in stress management techniques, and caring for ourselves. People closest to us can usually tell when we are not acting like ourselves, so it is helpful to have a trusted friend who has your best interests at heart and can be honest with you in a kind way to let you know if you seem "stressed,"

PETS: The companionship of a pet can positively lower stress and increase feelings of socialization and connection.

LIFE IS TOUGH, BUT SO ARE YOU.

Life can be tough, but we can become resilient and bounce back. Engaging in self-care and stress management techniques can help us bounce back. At times, we need to seek additional help. You are important enough to ensure your needs are met. We can find more help by looking within ourselves or looking outside of ourselves. We can look in ourselves by engaging in one of the stress management strategies, or look outside of ourselves to connect with others.

- **If you are in need of resources for food, shelter or clothing, please call 211 for free resources in our area.**
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At times, we may not be sure if we are showing signs of stress...If you are unsure, pay attention to a few warning signs, such as trouble sleeping, changes in eating patterns, body aches, tearful, feeling nervous, not acting like yourself, people asking if you are okay, feeling unsafe or afraid, or feelings of sadness. Be sure to consider other plausible explanations without avoiding potential concerns. Below are some possible signs of stress for students of different ages:

- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
- **Elementary school children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

If you or someone you care about feels overwhelmed, seek help.

- Students and families can talk to our counselors for resources in the area
 - Certain P-H-M employee groups have access to our **Employee Assistance Program through New Avenues. ([NewAvenuesOnline.com](https://www.newavenuesonline.com) or 800-731-6501)**
 - **Call 911** for emergencies
 - **Suicide Prevention Lifeline**-The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones
Call 1-800-273-TALK
 - **Safe School Helpline**-is a 24/7 communication service that empowers school administrators to make proactive decisions as well as creating reporting responsibilities for students, parents and community members to share in the maintenance of a safe learning environment-Call 1-800-4-1-VOICE x359
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At times, we may need to explore the possibility of counseling interventions (at our families expense). Counseling is a great tool that can provide a needed intervention via talk therapy. There are many methods counselors, therapists and psychologists use to move a person through the counseling process and reach counseling goals. A lot of times people think counseling is "advice" but it is really intended to help people achieve their goals, become the best versions of themselves, and gain greater insights into a situation. The counseling sessions are designed to help a person identify potential concerns and solutions that can cause stress or emotional turmoil and then work toward solutions. In many cases, counseling will continue until the issue that you came to counseling for is resolved or at least manageable. There are different types of counseling, such as individual (1-1 session to receive support to help a person deal with the presenting concern), couples (is for a couple to receive support and assistance to solve a problem or heal), family counseling (is often used when there is a stressful life event that impacts one or all areas of family closeness, communication or structure) and group counseling is used when people come together to work on similar topics, like anger management, divorce, substance abuse recovery, etc. Depending on the type of counseling, there are different theoretical frameworks counselors use to move through the counseling process to help a person resolve the presenting concerns and become the best version of themselves. A lot of times people are resistant to counseling because of mental health stigma or they feel uncomfortable; however, there is nothing wrong with working with a person who is highly trained to help lead a person through a situation or difficult circumstance. Sometimes, we just need to bounce something off of someone to process through. Counseling is a very effective strategy that is helpful for all kinds of concerns, especially stress.

RESOURCES

- <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/how-to-increase-dopamine#section8>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11958969>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044464>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495>
- <https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/ultimate-diet-guide-stress-management/>
- <https://rightsrain.uwmedicine.org/mind/stress/why-deep-breathing-makes-you-feel-so-calm>
- <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/how-to-increase-dopamine#section7>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21217764>

- <https://intheLoop.mayoclinic.org/2015/01/15/you-should-be-getting-very-very-sleepy/>