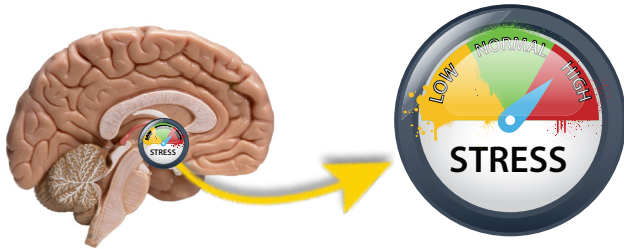


Coping with Stress Discussion Handout

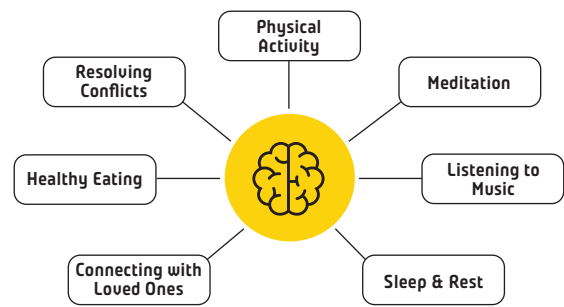


Missing Information Stresses Us Out!

Our brain does not like missing information. A tiny organ called the Amygdala serves as a temperature gauge for the part of our brain in charge of survival. During change or transition, when we do not know what things are going to be like, our Amygdala interprets this missing information as danger and sets off a threat signal. This results in a high state of fear or anxiety that may not end until we find the missing information. The stress of not knowing what will happen or how things will turn out can cause anxiety, anger, acting-out behavior, cravings for comfort food, or attempts to escape the discomfort.

Stress causes an increase in cortisol,

a hormone that reduces the calm, happy feelings that come from dopamine, the brain chemical that signals when we do good things for survival. Chronic stress causes cortisol levels to stay up and dopamine levels to stay down, potentially causing anhedonia, a loss of pleasure from things that used to be enjoyable. This may increase feelings of depression, anxiety and cravings for things that spike dopamine (good and bad). To cope, increase behaviors that provide healthy sources of dopamine.



Discussion Questions & Facts:

Students:

- How do you know you are stressed? What are your symptoms?
- How do you cope with stress?
- What are the top five things in your life causing stress?
- Do you avoid stress or actively deal with it? What is your pattern?
- What comfort food do you crave when you are stressed?
- What would you do if your stress led to depression?
- How do you know if you or a friend is suffering from chronic anxiety?
- How do your parents and teachers handle stress?
- Who do you think handles it well? Doesn't handle it well? Why?

ACTIVE COPING: Facing problems and finding solutions, even when it is difficult and doesn't feel good. Positive active coping examples: listening to music, exercising, talking about feelings, meditating, praying, seeing a counselor, or setting goals.

VS.

AVOIDANT COPING: Attempting to change negative or overwhelming feelings by avoiding them. Positive avoidant coping examples: taking a nap, taking some alone time, watching TV for awhile, escaping into a video game for a bit, or taking a time out from an argument.

WHAT IS YOUR PATTERN?

A combination of positive active and avoidant coping mechanisms can help relieve stress and increase calm and happy feelings.

Family & Staff:

- What types of stress do you see your children or students experience? Are they different from yours? How?
- What coping skills do your children or students use?
- What coping skills can you teach young people to help reduce stress?
- Do you speak openly with your family about depression and anxiety? Why or why not?
- How do you model coping with stress?
- Are you an active copier or an avoidant copier? Why?
- Do you seek negative or positive things to relieve stress? What?
- Does each person in your family have different coping styles? How does that affect your family?