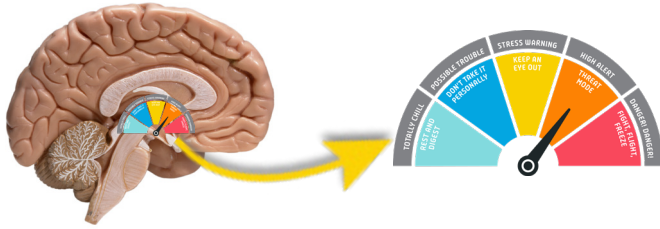


Stress Management Definitions & Discussion Questions



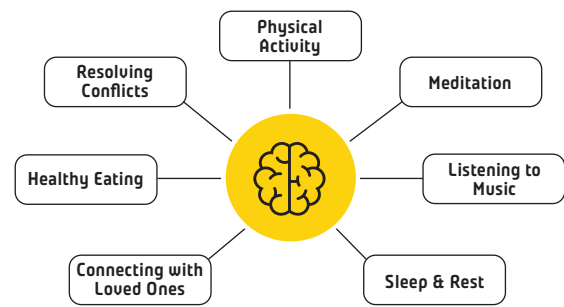
Stress & the Brain

Stress occurs in our body when we care about something. We may feel tension, pressure, discomfort or amped feelings. Stress can help motivate us to do our best, but if it gets too high stress can exhaust us and interfere with performance. What stress level is good for you? What stress level is bad for you?

When our brain senses high stress, it moves blood flow and electrical activity away from the frontal lobes and into the limbic system getting the body ready to fight, flight, or freeze. This explains why we get moody, irritated, sometimes have poor impulse control, or shut down and isolate when we are stressed.

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, causing moodiness, loss of pleasure, and heightened anxiety. This may increase cravings for things that spike dopamine (good and bad). To cope, increase behaviors that provide healthy sources of dopamine.



Critical Thinking Section

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.

Staff & Family:

- 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?