

# Dealing with stress: Teachers' notes

Most students experience stress at some time. Its source may be study related or may derive from outside sources and impact on their studies. Either way it is an issue that needs to be addressed.

**Recognising and dealing with stress.** This activity helps students to become aware of, and take responsibility for, their feelings. By breaking the cycle of negative reactions to stress (panic) using a CALM approach students will become aware of the importance of a problem solving approach to dealing with stress. As an extension activity students could discuss how stress is a necessary part of life in that it can lead to personal growth and ensure that necessary life-coping skills are learned. By providing an opportunity to discuss and compare their different stress related experiences and responses students will see that each individual needs to find the optimum level that is right for them. Students may wish to consider their reactions to situations that have too few demands (boredom, lack of motivation) and too many demands (anxiety, panic, fatigue, confusion, 'burn out') as well as 'ideal' demands (challenging, motivating, rewarding). They could draw a 'stress curve' using all the collected 'reactions' before deciding where 'peak performance' would come. By considering their reactions to study related situations e.g. 'I am motivated when a deadline is near', 'I panic when I don't plan', students can see how a great deal of study related stress and 'burnout' (physical, emotional and mental exhaustion occurring as a result of long term involvement in study habits that are not effective) can be avoided.

**Stress and time management** reminds students that poor time management is the most common cause of stress. As a follow-up ask students to add four more 'time-wasters' to this list for discussion: constant interruptions, indecision, failure to prioritise, personal disorganisation, flitting from task to task, plunging in without planning. Remind them that they have only 168 hours in each week and ask them to think about strategies that might improve their use of time. (This is called 'reframing' and involves finding another framework that fits the situation more effectively.)

**Exams and stress** is concerned with alleviating exam stress. A very useful extension activity concerns assertiveness training in relation to self-management in exam situations. Assertive statements distinguish fact from opinion and are brief and concise positive 'inner dialogues', for example 'I will....', 'I can', 'I am going to'. Ask students to write down three things that stress them in the exams, either from previous experiences or from anticipation. Examples might be 'I never finish on time', 'I worry because everyone seems to write more than I do', 'I seem to write a lot but never answer the question'. These sorts of comments represent 'faulty inner dialogues'. Next ask students to change their three comments to 'positive inner dialogues'. For example, 'I will practise and plan so that I finish the exam in good time'. Finally, discuss how they can make their 'positive inner dialogue' come true.

# RECOGNISING AND DEALING WITH STRESS

Can't cope with the stresses of studying?

Yes you can ....

By having some strategies for de-stressing you can become much more positive in your approach to studying.

What do you find stressful in your studies?

Perhaps it's the thought of an examination? Or the pressure of getting assignments in on time? Maybe it's the thought of giving a presentation?

Think of all the aspects of your studies that shout 'STRESS' to you.

Now put a ring around one source of study-related stress that you *regularly* experience, for example, *managing time*.

OK, let's take a minute here to look at some of your reactions to that stress. That is, how did you *know* you were stressed?

Ring round your particular reactions to stress.

Drink more tea or coffee?	Not want to get out of bed?
Become emotional?	Find it difficult to sleep?
Come out in spots?	Feel shaky inside?
Have a headache?	Feel breathless?
Feel depressed?	Can't concentrate?

Add some more if you can.

Study related stress is created by making demands on yourself. You feel these demands are difficult to off-load as someone else's problem. This means they make you feel alone and isolated and that it's all your fault and has to be dealt with by you and you alone. This is not so – there are ways to share these problems.

However, a great deal will depend upon whether you are a CALM or a CHAOS person.

The CALM approach to stress is to:

Confront the problem positively.

Approach it as something that can and has to be dealt with.

Look for the steps that need to be taken in order to deal with it.

Manage it by planning de-stress strategies.

However, the CHAOS approach is the one we often resort to. It is the CHAOS approach that leads to those stress-related reactions we saw earlier. This approach tends to:

Compromise by dealing with part of the problem but not all of it then

Hedge the problem by putting it to one side and therefore avoid commitment until we

Abandon it altogether which leads us to

Opt out of studying in general and eventually

Sink in the knowledge that we have allowed the source of the stress to become our master instead of our slave.

Let's look again at the CALM approach.

Write here, next to C, a source of stress that you have encountered in your studies - you may wish to select one from the list you made earlier.

C \_\_\_\_\_

Now, by doing that you have already Confronted the fact that there is a problem - and remember - problems can usually be solved.

Next, let's look at how you can Approach the problem – write three things here that would make the problem less stressful. (For example, you might think about '*being given more time*', '*getting more organised*' or '*going over a piece of work on a one to one basis.*')

A

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

L

Look again at the approaches above and write them again here, this time in order of priority.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Finally, write here how you will:

Manage these stages – how can they be achieved? Perhaps you will '*negotiate extra time with a tutor*' or '*photocopy some missed notes*'.

I will :

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Great, you are now well on the way to becoming de-stressed.

By finding the source of stress you are recognising that there is a problem and problems *can* be solved.