MANAGING STRESS

Stress is a normal and necessary part of life. Stress can help to motivate us and get us moving and help us to focus. If the stress levels rise too high in our body, this then becomes distress and we start to feel negative effects from these high stress levels – both physical and non-physical symptoms.

To deal with stress take the following actions:

1. FACE YOUR FEARS
   Write down all the things that are troubling you or bothering you. Rank them from the thing that is bugging you the most to the thing that is bothering you the least - both for school and personal.

2. SPLIT YOUR LIST IN TWO
   Look at your list. Some of the things you can change and do something about, others you can't. See if you can make any changes to reduce your stress and begin to accept and deal with those things you cannot change. Look at the list and divide everything you have written down into 2 columns: Things you might be able to do something about (in which case write down specific actions you can take) and things you can't change but have to accept and deal with.

3. TAKE ACTION
   If there are actions you can take to help reduce the stressful situation, make a decision to take them! Take the actions needed to start alleviating any of the stress you can have control over.

4. TRY THESE MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES
   Strong mental health helps us to become more resilient. If we are resilient we are able to cope with the challenges that life throws at us so that when something tries to knock us off the path we want to be on, we simply pick ourselves up, brush the dust off and look around for another way to make things happen or to cope with what is happening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>What does this technique involve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relax yourself</td>
<td>Give yourself permission to relax and take the time to do things you enjoy and that relax you. Schedule time on a regular basis for these activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take mini-breaks</td>
<td>Take a few moments out of your day on a regular basis to close your eyes, breathe deeply and slowly with a smile on your face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do something active</td>
<td>Exercise can help get rid of stress so make time to do active things like playing sport or going for a walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with people whose company you enjoy</td>
<td>Spending time with other people makes you feel happier! Give a friend a call or see people you like on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive self-talk</td>
<td>Talk positively to yourself and watch out for negative thoughts – immediately replace them with positive ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and family</td>
<td>Rather than take out your frustrations on the people closest to you, talk to them and tell them what you are feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get organised</td>
<td>Develop a daily schedule of activities that is realistic and achievable. Make a daily to-do list. Identify your priorities and what is most important to you and stick to your list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write down your thoughts</td>
<td>Use a journal, write a letter to yourself or to someone else (and you don’t even have to post it). You could also send an email or write a list of what is bothering you – getting your thoughts down on paper helps!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mountains vs molehills

Imagine a ruler marked 1 to 100 and think of all the things that are not good in the world. Where at the moment is the thing that is making you feel bad on this scale compared to the worst things that could ever happen? This reminds us that reality is not as bad as it seems.

Try aromatherapy

Some substances in nature make you feel calm and serene. Pine, lemon, lavender: go to a shop that sells essential oils and see which you find soothing. Chlorophyll also helps people to reduce stress and feel more energetic so get some indoor plants in your room.

Laugh out loud

Look for opportunities in your day to laugh and to smile. Be around people who are happy and positive rather than misery-guts. Do things that make you laugh like watching a comedy.

Cry

Although laughing is a more positive way of dealing with stress, sometimes letting yourself have a good cry and getting it all out of your system can be a great stress reliever.

Deal with anger

Express your anger in a healthy way: talk to someone about how you are feeling, write in a journal, express yourself through art, punch a pillow, find somewhere where no-one is around and scream out loud, do some vigorous exercise, write a letter (don’t post it).

Breathe deeply

Imagine there is a balloon in your stomach. As you inhale you fill it up, when you exhale you deflate the balloon. Your chest and shoulders should not be a part of the process - they should be relaxed. Ensure you breathe slowly and smoothly.

Celebrate yourself

Feel good about yourself and your achievements! Reward yourself for the things you do and look for your positive qualities and strengths - give yourself encouragement. Take pride in yourself and your skills and abilities. Accept yourself for who you are and what you are and set realistic expectations for yourself.

Cross the word ‘failure’ out of the dictionary

Stop thinking of things in terms of success and failure. When things don’t go the way you want, instead think of what you can learn from the experience and what steps you will take next to move towards your goal.

Look for beauty

Slow down and take in the beauty of the world around you. It is amazing what you will see if you start looking for things you can enjoy.

Be grateful

Think about the things you have in your life that you are grateful for. Each day remind yourself of these things and be thankful.

Meditation and relaxation exercises

Try different forms of meditation and relaxation until you find ones that suit you – but be patient, it takes practice to be able to switch off your brain and relax.

Use visualisations

Create positive mental movies in your mind of how you would like things to be and imagine these as vividly and regularly as possible.

Seek help

Don’t always try to deal with everything yourself. Communicating your thoughts to others can make you feel so much better. Visit www.reachout.com.au, and for Australian students call Kids Helpline 1800 551 800 or Lifeline/Youthline 131114.

So what steps can you take to manage stress in your life?