

Session 11 Managing Stress, Anger, and Conflict

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, learners will be able to:

- Describe ways to manage stress and anger
- Use “I” statements to express their feelings
- Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate responses to anger
- Successfully deal with situations that cause stress, anger and/or conflict



Time 80 minutes

Background Notes

Managing Stress

Stress occurs on a daily basis and can be healthy. At times stress can be overwhelming and adolescents may have trouble dealing with it. Adolescents are faced with a number of issues and make many major decisions, such as the decision to have sexual intercourse, the kind of career they want, what they want to do in the future or the attempt to develop a unique identity, which contribute to their burden of stress.

Too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being. Overtime, repeated stress can lower self-esteem, decrease academic performance and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. Stress is unique and personal to each of us. What is relaxing to one person may be stressful to another. The key to reducing stress is to find strategies that help you as an individual.

The best way to cope with unhealthy stress is to recognize when your stress levels are building. While we often think of stress as the result of external events, the events themselves are not necessarily stressful. It is the way we react to an event that causes stress. Stress signals fall into four categories: thoughts, feelings, behavior and physical symptoms. When you are under stress you may experience the following feelings, thoughts, behaviours or physical symptoms:

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviours	Physical Symptoms
Anxiety	Self-criticism	Stuttering	Tight muscles
Irritability	Difficulty concentrating or making decisions	Difficulty speaking	Cold or sweaty hands
Fear	Forgetfulness or mental disorganization	Crying	Headaches
Moodiness	Preoccupation with the future	Acting impulsively	Back or neck problems
Embarrassment	Repetitive thoughts	Nervous laughter	Sleep disturbances
	Fear of failure	Yelling at friends and family	Stomach aches
		Grinding teeth	More colds and infections
		Jaw clenching	Fatigue
		Increased smoking, alcohol or drug use	Rapid breathing
		Accident prone	Pounding heart
		Increased or decreased appetite	Shaking hands
			Dry mouth

Tips for Stress Management

There are many ways to manage unhealthy stress. Everyone needs to find ways that work best for them.

1. Take a Deep Breath. Stress often causes us to breathe shallowly and this almost always causes more stress! Try taking a minute to slow down and breathe slowly. Breathe in through your nose and count as you breathe out through your mouth. Inhale enough so your lower abdomen rises and falls.

2. Talk It Out. When you feel stressed, try to express your feelings. Keeping feelings inside can increase stress. Share your feelings. Perhaps a friend, family member, teacher or church leader can help you see your problem in a new way. Talking with someone else can help clear your mind of confusion so that you can focus on problem solving. Even if it is slightly embarrassing, asking for help soon after a problem occurs may avoid serious problems later. Writing down thoughts and feelings can help clarify the situation and give a new perspective.

3. Take a “Minute” Holiday. Create a quiet place in your mind. You cannot always run away, but you can dream. Imagining a quiet place can take you out of a stressful situation. When you have the chance, take a moment to close your eyes and imagine a place where you feel relaxed and comfortable. Notice all the details of your chosen place, including pleasant sounds, smells and temperature.

4. Pay Attention to Physical Comfort. Be as physically comfortable as the situation will allow. Wear comfortable clothing. If it’s too hot, go somewhere where it’s not. If your chair is uncomfortable, move. Do not wait until your discomfort turns into a real problem.

5. Move! Physical activity can help reduce and prevent stress. Being a student involves a lot of sitting, and sitting around can mean letting stress build up in your body. When you feel nervous, angry or upset, release the pressure through exercise or physical activity. Try to find something you enjoy and make regular time for it. Running, walking or dancing can be done anywhere. Working in the garden, cleaning or playing with younger children can relieve stress, relax you and energize you!

6. Take Care of Your Body. Healthy eating and adequate sleep fuels your mind as well as your body. Avoid eating too much caffeine and sugar. Well-nourished bodies are better able to cope with stress.

7. Laugh. Maintain your sense of humor, including the ability to laugh at yourself. Share jokes and funny stories with your friends. Laughter is good for you!

8. Manage Your Time. Plan ahead and make a realistic schedule for yourself and include time for stress reduction as a regular part of your schedule. Trying to take care of everything at once can seem overwhelming and may keep you from accomplishing anything. Instead, make a list of what you have to do, then do one at a time, checking them off as you finish. Do the most important ones first. If a particularly unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with; the rest of your day will be less stressful. Too much studying is actually inefficient and can lead to burnout. Recognize when you are most stressed and allow yourself some reasonable breaks. When things feel especially difficult, take a walk or otherwise change your scenery.

9. Know Your Limits. When in a stressful situation, ask yourself: is this my problem? If it isn’t, leave it alone. If it is, can you resolve it now? Once the problem is settled, leave it alone. Do not agonize over the decision, and try to accept situations you cannot change. There are many circumstances in life beyond your control. If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at the moment, learn to accept what is, for now, until such time when you can change things.

10. Must You Always Be Right? Do you get upset when things don’t go your way? Consider cooperation or compromise rather than confrontation. It may reduce the strain and help everyone feel more comfortable.

11. Have a Good Cry. It is normal for people of all ages to cry. A good cry during stressful times can be a healthy way to bring relief to your stress, and may prevent a headache or other physical consequences of stress. However, crying daily can be a sign of depression.

12. Look for the Good Things Around You. It is easy to see only the negative when you are stressed. Your thoughts can become like a pair of very dark glasses, allowing little light or joy into your life. Decide to notice five good things around you. These can be positive or enjoyable moments or interactions. These may seem like small events but as these good things add up they can often provide a big lift to energy and spirits and help you begin to see things in a new, more balanced way.

Affects of Anger and Conflict

Unresolved anger or conflict can cause people to feel indifference, resentment or rage. It can lead to physical or verbal violence, withdrawal, depression, mean gossip or even addiction or other self-destructive behaviour. When anger and conflict are unresolved, relationships can be damaged and youth can suffer social consequences such as rejection, teasing or humiliation. It is important to be able to manage anger and conflict effectively.

Managing Anger

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems. Anger is an emotion that ranges from mild irritation to intense rage. Like other emotions, it causes physical changes. When you get angry, your heart rate, blood pressure and energy hormone levels go up. Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person or event or your anger could be caused by worrying about personal problems. Memories of traumatic events can also cause you to feel angry.

Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats and inspires powerful, often aggressive, feelings and behaviours, which allow us to defend ourselves when attacked. A certain amount of anger is necessary for survival. We cannot, however, physically attack every person or object that irritates or annoys us; laws, social norms and common sense place limits on how far our anger can take us.

People use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with their angry feelings. The three main approaches are expressing, suppressing and calming.

- 1) Expressing your angry feelings in an assertive-not aggressive-manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.
- 2) Anger can be held in by not thinking about it or focusing on something positive. The purpose is to convert your anger into more constructive behaviour. If anger is not allowed out it can cause physical and emotional harm. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure or depression. Or people can become hostile and critical which can negatively affect their relationships with others.
- 3) You can calm down inside by controlling your behaviour and your internal responses. Try to take steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself down and let the anger go away.

The goal of anger management is to reduce both your emotional feelings and the physical responses that anger causes. You cannot get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that make you angry, nor can you change them, but you can learn to control your reactions.

Psychologists now say that it is dangerous to express all of your angry feelings because it can actually make you angrier and does not help resolve the situation. It is best to find out what makes you angry, and then develop ways to keep those things from making you angry.

Sometimes, our anger and frustration are caused by very real, unavoidable problems in our lives. Not all anger is wrong, and often it is a healthy, natural response to difficult times. Not all problems have a solution. In these situations, try not to focus on finding the solution, but on how you handle the problem.

Make a plan, and check your progress along the way. Try your best, but do not punish yourself if an answer does not come right away. If you can approach the problem with your best intentions and efforts and make a serious attempt to face it, you will be less likely to lose patience and become angry, even if the problem does not get solved right away.

Anger Management Tips

Ask yourself if this will matter in ten years. You may see things from a calmer perspective.

Acknowledge that it is frustrating, and it's understandable that you would be upset about it. At the same time it is not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix anything. .

Think about whether you have ever done the same thing to someone else, even if by accident. Did you get angry at yourself? Ask yourself if the person did it on purpose. In many cases, you will see that they were just careless or in a rush, and really did not mean you any harm.

Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything and will not make you feel better (and may actually make you feel worse).

Try counting to ten before saying anything. This may not address the anger directly, but it can minimize the damage you will do while angry. Or try counting to ten with a deep slow breathe in between each number. Deep breathing helps people relax.

Imagine a relaxing experience. Close your eyes, and travel there in your mind.

Non-strenuous physical activities, like walking, can relax your muscles and help you feel calmer.

Give yourself time and space alone. Physically move away from situations that make you angry.

Resolving Conflict

Conflict is natural and happens in almost every relationship. Since conflict is unavoidable we must learn to manage it. Conflict is a sign of a need for change and an opportunity for growth, new understanding and improved communication. Conflict can not be resolved unless it is addressed with the person or people involved. We face conflicts with people who think and act differently than we do or in ways that are different from our values and beliefs. Young people face conflicts with friends, siblings, parents, teachers and other adults. It is normal for people to disagree, but it is important to resolve these disagreements in a constructive and healthy way.

Respond; don't react. If you keep your emotions under control you have a better chance of hearing what the other person is trying to say.

Listen carefully without interrupting. Ask questions and wait for and listen to answers. Even if you "know" what the other person is going to say, resist the temptation to interrupt.

Acknowledge the other person's thoughts and feelings. You do not have to agree with the other person to acknowledge his or her feelings and why he or she may feel that way.

Give respect to get respect. Separate the people from the problem. Treat people the way you would like to be treated if you were in the same situation.

Communicate clearly and respectfully so your viewpoint can be understood. If you do not, you may not persuade anyone that your ideas are worth listening to.

Identify points of agreement and points of disagreement. Agree wherever you can. Your underlying interests may be more alike than you imagine.

Be open to change. Open your mind before you open your mouth. Remember the rule: one mouth and two ears and use in that ratio.

Look forward, not backward. Stay in the present and plan for the future, do not think about the past. Move to resolving the situation and away from justifying your position.

Stay focused on the topic at hand. If there are a number of issues, talk about them one at a time.

Work together. This requires that each person stop placing blame and take ownership of the problem. Make a commitment to work together and listen to each other to solve the conflict.

Aim for mutual satisfaction, not victory. Conflicts don't have to end with a winner and a loser. Try to find a solution that is acceptable to both parties.

Be creative. Finding a resolution to the problem that satisfies everyone requires creativity and hard work. Be careful not to give in simply to avoid conflict or maintain harmony. Agreements reached too early usually do not last.

Be specific. Write things down and clarify unclear words that may be understood differently.

Expressing Feelings

An "I" statement is a useful way to share your opinion or perspective without placing blame on someone else. For example, instead of saying, "You made me feel angry" you can say, "I feel angry." Using an "I" statement is a constructive way to convey your message without making any demands. "I" statements should be clear, concise and free of judgment.

Steps to Resolve Conflict or Deal with Anger

Express your opinion calmly.

Allow others to express their opinions.

Listen while others speak and try to understand their views

Work with others to find a solution to the problem.

Use "I" statements.

Ask a respected adult to help if you are unable to reach agreement.

Leave the situation if you are unable to control your anger.

Instructions

Managing Stress (30 minutes)

1. Ask learners to explain what they understand by the word 'stress.' Once they have agreed on a definition, ask them to share times when they felt under stress.
2. Divide learners into groups of four or five and ask them to discuss techniques that can be used to help manage stress.
3. After 10 minutes, ask learners to return to the large group and have a representative from each group share the stress management techniques they listed. After each group has presented, mention any techniques that learners did not list.

Dealing with Anger (20 minutes)

1. Ask learners to brainstorm inappropriate expressions of anger (yelling, hitting, humiliating someone, name-calling, damaging property, throwing things or refusing to help someone in need).
2. Then, ask them to brainstorm appropriate expressions of anger (calmly expressing an opinion, leaving the situation or counting to ten before reacting).
3. Ask learners to name ways to manage anger. Review the anger management tips above.

Resolving Conflict (30 minutes)

1. Ask participants what is meant by "conflict." Write down their responses on the board. Make sure that participants discuss that conflict occurs when two sides have opposing views, perspectives or opinions about a particular issue or set of issues.
2. Ask participants to name issues that might cause conflict among adolescents. What about between adolescents and adults? Is conflict always bad?
3. Ask participants to suggest "I" statements that can help adolescents cope with or avoid a conflict. Some answers include:

"That upsets me and I would like to talk with you about it."

"It hurts my feelings when..."

"It makes me upset when..."

"I think we should talk about this situation. Tell me how you feel about..."

5. Divide participants into groups of four or five. Ask them to create a role-play that shows how to manage anger or stress or resolve a conflict. Assign the groups one of the following scenarios or ask each group to develop their own:

Daniel is upset because his mother told him he was not allowed to go to a football game with his friends on Saturday afternoon, even though he had already made plans with his friends. What should Daniel say to his mother? (anger management and conflict resolution)

Alice has a big exam at school on Friday. On Thursday afternoon, she realizes that she is not well prepared for the exam and is worried that she will not pass. What should Alice do? (stress management)

Robert notices that his friend Joseph is playing with the same ball that was stolen from him last week. Joseph tells him that another friend let him play with the ball. How should Robert talk to Joseph? (anger management and conflict resolution)

Margaret stopped seeing her boyfriend George. Now he is telling other boys at school that they had sex, even though it is not true. What should Margaret say to George? (anger management and conflict resolution).