

COPING SKILLS



STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Students will learn techniques for managing stress and conflict.
- Students will identify various sources that influence an individual's mental, emotional, and social health behaviors.
- Students will demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health.
- Students will demonstrate nonviolent strategies to manage or resolve conflicts.
- Students will engage in focused conversations about grade-appropriate topics and texts, build on the ideas of others, pose specific questions, respond to clarify thinking, and express new thoughts.

Objectives

Students will be able to understand what stress is and identify its effects in their lives.

Students will be able to identify techniques and strategies in order to cope with stress-inducing situations.

Materials Needed

- Board or chart paper and markers (“We Do”)
- Paper, about three sheets for each student (“We Do”)
- Coloring supplies for each student (“We Do” and “You Do”)

Starter (5 minutes)

Ask students to raise their hand if they have ever had a bad day, or a day when they felt like things just kept getting worse and worse and nothing went right. Then ask students if they have ever heard of stress or can explain in their own words what stress means. After taking a few student responses, explain that stress is when a person feels worried about things in their life or is uncomfortable with a situation. Tell students that stress and worry are emotions that can have both physical and mental effects on a person. A physical effect is when a person's body feels sick or bad, and a mental effect is when a person feels sad or upset in their mind.

Teacher Presented Knowledge/I Do (10 minutes)

Ask students to stand up and to follow your instructions carefully. Instruct students to breathe slowly in through their noses and out through their mouths. Demonstrate this technique dramatically to students so they can see how you take time with each breath and are intentional in how you breathe. Do this five times as a class. Tell students they did great and that you want to do one more activity with them standing next to their seat. Tell students to make their bodies very rigid and tight, as if their whole body is one big, straight board. Demonstrate. After the class holds this position for a few moments, instruct students to make their bodies very loose, like wet noodles. Demonstrate by loosening your body and wiggling all around, letting your arms jiggle. Tell students to make their bodies tight again, and loosen and jiggle. Do this a few times. After this is complete, ask students to return to their seats.

Ask students how they feel after this breathing and body movement activity. One or two students should suggest that they feel relaxed, but if they do not, prompt the class toward this response. Explain to the class that those two body activities are examples of ways to cope with our emotions, calm down, and relax.

Guided Student Practice/We Do (15 minutes)

Say to students, "It is important to manage and handle the stress in your life. In order to do this, we must examine the things that cause stress to see if there are healthy ways to handle them. We are going to create a list of skills and strategies that can help all of us cope with the things that cause stress in our lives."

Ask for volunteers to give an example of something that worries them or might cause stress in their lives. As students give examples of stressors, write them on the board or on chart paper. Next to the list of stressors the students suggested, create a new list on the board of stress relievers and coping skills. Ask students to help think of ideas. If students have trouble, suggest the following:

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1. Play outside or exercise
2. Stretch
3. Read a book
4. Doodle/draw/start an art project
5. Talk to someone about how you feel
6. Practice slow-breathing techniques (like the one you led in “I Do”)
7. Practice body-relaxing techniques (like the one you led in “I Do”)
8. Play music and dance
9. Think about things that make you happy
10. Spend time with a pet
11. Take a nap
12. Take a bath or shower
13. Count backward from 10 slowly
14. Journal or write down your feelings
15. Close your eyes and visualize a safe, calm place

Explain that sometimes people may need to use more than one strategy to help them, or sometimes a strategy that works for one person will not work for another. Also, explain that a person might still feel stress even after using the strategy, but it might not be as strong as it was before. Stress how important it is that people learn strategies that help when dealing with these emotions.

Guide the students through creating a “Coping with Emotions” book. Pass out three pieces of paper to each student and have them fold the pages into a book. Tell the students that they will pick an emotion for each page in the book and write the name of the emotion at the top of the page. Underneath the emotion, the students will write the strategies they use to cope with this emotion. Walk the students through the activity by having them all do the same emotion for the first page. Have the students write “anger” at the top of the first page in their book and then, as a class, discuss strategies they could use to help them cope with this emotion. Direct students to write down the strategies they discussed. (*They do not need to be exactly the same.*) Stress the importance of using communication as a strategy to help them cope with the emotion of anger.

Student Independent Practice/You Do (20 minutes)

Have the students complete a few more pages in the book independently or in small groups. Encourage the students to pick emotions they feel that they experience often and for which they may need better strategies to help them cope. Walk around the room and monitor the students as they are working. Let students use their coloring supplies to create art and designs in their books.

Closure (5 minutes)

After the students have been given enough time to complete their books, allow students to share an emotion they experience and the strategies they identified to help cope with this emotion. After a few students have shared, recap the lesson by stressing the importance of communicating how one is feeling.

Student Assessment

1. How can you cope with stress and worry in a healthy way?
2. What coping strategies can you use?
3. Do you think that using a coping strategy is going to completely stop you from feeling that emotion?
4. Should we make fun of someone for sharing their emotions with us? Do you think it takes courage to talk about our emotions?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Art Extension

For this extension, you will need two paper plates and a fastener for each student. Tell students that, in order to remember some of the ideas on how to cope with stress or worry, they will create a wheel of coping skills. Guide the students through the following steps to make the wheel of coping skills:

- Take the first paper plate and cut out a small triangle/slice toward the middle in order to be able to see the plate that will be fastened underneath it.
- Insert a paper fastener into the first plate with the triangle cut out and then into the second plate so the top plate can spin over the bottom plate.
- Spin the top plate, and each time a new section of the bottom plate is exposed, write one of your favorite coping skills from the list that was created on the board into each section of the bottom plate. *(The students will write 10 of their favorite coping skills from the class-generated list on the bottom paper plate.)*
- Once all the coping skills have been written down on the bottom plate, decorate!
- Ask students to write their names on the bottom of their wheel so they know it is theirs, and tell them they can take it home with them or keep it in school in order to help them remember how to cope with stress and worry.

Drama Extension

Role-play different situations or scenarios involving controllable and uncontrollable worries. Be sure to remind students to utilize the coping skills they learned during the lesson.

ELA Extension

Create a synonym chart for the saying “calm down.” What specific things can be done to help you “calm down”?

Literature Extension

Read the book *Is a Worry Worrying You?*, by Ferida Wolff and Harriet May Savitz, to the class. Then, ask students the following questions: What were some of the worries that bothered the main character? What did the main character do to get rid of the worries? Can you relate to the main character's worries? What are some things or situations that worry you or add stress to your life?

Literature Extension

Read *Thunder Cake*, by Patricia Polacco, and ask students to think about how Thunder Cake brings the main character comfort during the storm. To spark student thinking, you can ask the following questions during and/or after the reading:

- What is the main character scared of, and how do you know she is scared?
- Can you relate?
- What does her grandmother tell her to do each time she sees lightning?
- How does her grandmother's suggestion help?
- What things does the main character have to do in order to gather the ingredients?
- Why do you think the main character is willing to gather all the ingredients, even with the storm approaching?
- Why does her grandmother say she is brave?
- How did making Thunder Cake help lessen the main character's fear of the storm?

Discuss how all people go through stressful, sad, and scary situations. However, it is important for one to focus on what brings them happiness as a way to cope with difficult situations.

PE Extension

Play a guided relaxation audio clip (*found online*) and lead your students through the exercise.