

November 11-20

Power Point covering on Who, What, How we Are.

Objectives

Students will

- review the effects of stress and low self-esteem on the body and mind,
- list some ways of coping with problems and stress, and
- participate in a therapeutic writing activity.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about stress management and coping
- A notebook to use as a journal

Procedures

1. Ask students how many of them feel stressed. Compile a list of the things that they find stressful. Ask what effects stress can have on the body. (Answers may include the following: affects concentration, leaves teens prone to accidents, wears down the immune system, raises blood pressure, affects blood sugar levels, and leads to weight gain.) Ask what ways students have of coping with stress and compile a list of those.
2. Explain that expressing feelings is one of the best ways to alleviate stress and confront problems. But not everyone is comfortable talking to someone else. One way to express feelings in a completely private way is to write about them. It's called therapeutic writing, and it can take numerous forms.
3. Ask students to choose a special notebook or binder that will be their journal. They should feel free to decorate their journals and express themselves.
4. Their assignment is to write in their journals at least three times over the next week. The focus of the assignment isn't to write grammatically correct compositions, but for students to write honestly about their feelings. Their writing can take one of many forms. Here are a few suggestions:
 - Write a letter to someone you wish to talk to but can't.
 - Write a letter to yourself, saying the things you think you need to hear.
 - Write a script between you and anyone else you'd like to talk to, imagining what the person might say to you when you tell them what's on your mind.
 - Write an account of your day, focusing on what's bothering you or causing you stress and explore why it's an issue and what you might try to better cope with it.
 - Write a poem expressing your feelings.
 - Write a story in which one of the characters expresses your feelings.
5. To get students started, lead a brief writing exercise during class. A good way to begin is by using a writing prompt. Give students 15 to 20 minutes to write a response to this opening phrase: When I think about what I have to do today, I

feel... . This can be entry #1 in their journals. They'll add at least three more over the course of the next week, and you can lead additional journal exercises in class.

6. After the week is up, review the students' journaling experience. Did they find it helpful, fun, or useful? Do any of the students think they'll continue writing as a way of coping with problems and stress?
7. Wrap up the journaling exercise by assigning one more entry. Have students look into stress-coping strategies and write about whether they think the strategies might work for them and how. These resources are helpful:
 - o About.com's Teen Stress and Its Management
<http://stress.about.com/cs/teenstress>
 - o BBCi: Stress
http://www6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/parenting/kids/teen_stress.shtml
 - o Fighting Invisible Tigers: A Stress Management Guide for Teens by Earl Hipp (Free Spirit Publishing, 1995)
http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0915793806/qid=1069776478/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/104-3397418-2822340?v=glance&s=books
 - o TeensHealth: Spotlight on Stress
http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html

Extensions

- Some students may be motivated to create and publish a blog (Web log) of their writings. Blogs may contain writings as well as artwork, photographs, and links to favorite sites. Blogs are great for those who wish to express themselves in a public forum. Here are some sites where students can sign up for free Web logs: Journalspace at <http://www.journalspace.com>, Teen Blogs at The Student Center (<http://teenblogs.studentcenter.org>), and Blogger at <http://new.blogger.com>.
- Are students stressed because they are Type A personalities? If they go to http://www.queendom.com/tests/personality/type_a_r_access.html at Queendom.com, they can find out by taking a free 20-minute test. Once they've completed the test, they'll learn what it means to be a Type A or Type B personality. If they lean toward Type A, they may wish to explore some ways to curb some of their tendencies and help alleviate the stress that goes with having a driving personality. Also at Queendom are tests for anxiety, self-esteem, and many other topics. For other ways of assessing personality, students can visit HealthyPlace.com at <http://www.healthyplace.com/site/tests/psychological.asp#personality> and browse the its many personality tests as well as tests for stress, depression, and anxiety.
- For some character-building activities and information, check out this Character Counts Web page: <http://www.charactercounts.org/howto/teaching-tools.htm>. It offers activities, handouts, and information for students of all ages. Goodcharacter.com at <http://www.goodcharacter.com> is another site with many resources to plan extension activities to strengthen character.
- Apply what students have learned about dealing with their own stressors to others, in particular, military peacekeepers. A lesson plan from the New York Times Learning Network, at http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20010621thursday.html?search=learning_lessons, centers on a newspaper article about how emotions affect the peacekeepers. Students are tasked with designing training methods that simulate the types of stressful situations the soldiers are likely to encounter to learn about the emotional stress response.

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **Three points:** Students were highly engaged in class discussions, enthusiastically kept their journals, and were motivated to find ways to better handle stress in their lives.
- **Two points:** Students participated in class discussions, wrote the required journal entries, and found some ways of handling stress.
- **One point:** Students participated minimally in class discussions, wrote short or lackluster journal entries, and seemed uninterested in learning about methods of coping with stress.

Vocabulary

character

Definition: An assessment of a person's values, traits, and abilities

Context: Sean was a boy of good character; he unselfishly gave of himself to help others.

fight or flight

Definition: A bodily response that gets you ready to face a sudden threat

Context: The flight or fight response is useful if you need to jump out of the path of an oncoming car, but it can cause trouble when activated by non-threatening situations such as a big exam.

personality

Definition: The qualities, traits, and behaviors that make someone unique

Context: Personality is shaped by genes and the experiences someone has in life.

self-esteem

Definition: The image one has of him - or herself.

Context: Low self-esteem can cause teens to feel overly stressed.

stress

Definition: A state of tension that causes chemical and emotional responses in the body

Context: Occasional stress is necessary to confront life's challenges, but ongoing stress is harmful to the body.

therapeutic writing

Definition: Writing in any form to express emotion and work through problems or questions

Context: Therapeutic writing can help teens express their feelings and bring relief from problems and stress.