

Recognizing and Managing Stress

A. Opening Question

1. Think about the last time you were really stressed. What caused it, and how did you respond?

B. Discussion Questions for Recognizing and Managing Stress

Directions: Answer the questions. Share your responses with a partner. Share your responses with the class.

Recognizing Stress

1. What are the first signs you notice when you begin feeling stressed?

2. When you're stressed, how does your mood usually change? Do you become quiet, irritable, anxious, or something else?

Managing Stress

3. When you begin to feel stressed, what's the first thing you usually do to try and manage the stress?

4. What strategies do you use to handle stress?

C. Activity: Box Breathing and Laughing

1. [Box Breathing Relaxation](#) video
2. Time to Laugh

D. Reflection and Discussion Question

1. What is one stress management strategy that you haven't used before that you will try in the future? Why?

E. Extension Activities/Resources

[Managing Stress in High School](#) (Harvard Blog)

[Stress Relievers: Tips to Tame Stress](#) (Mayo Clinic)

[25 Quick Ways to Reduce Stress](#) (University of Colorado Law School)

[Five top ways for college students to manage stress](#) (Casper College)

Stress Indicators & Management Techniques

1: Stress Indicators

Stress can show up in different ways — in the body, in emotions, and in how we think. Becoming aware of these signs is the first step to managing stress in a healthy way.

Physical Indicators

- Headaches or migraines
- Stomachaches, nausea, or digestive problems
- Tightness in neck, shoulders, or back
- Muscle tension or aches
- Increased heart rate or pounding heartbeat
- Shortness of breath or rapid breathing
- Sweating (especially palms)
- Shaking or trembling
- Fatigue or low energy
- Trouble falling or staying asleep (insomnia)
- Changes in appetite (eating more or less than usual)
- Frequent colds or lowered immunity
- Clenched jaw or teeth grinding

Emotional Indicators

- Irritability or short temper
- Feeling overwhelmed or 'on edge'
- Sudden mood swings
- Increased feelings of anxiety or worry
- Sadness, hopelessness, or depression
- Feeling easily frustrated

- Restlessness or inability to relax
- Feeling isolated or disconnected from others
- Emotional numbness or feeling 'shut down'

Mental/Cognitive Indicators

- Trouble concentrating or staying focused
- Memory problems or forgetfulness
- Racing thoughts or constant overthinking
- Negative self-talk or self-doubt
- Indecisiveness or trouble making choices
- Feeling mentally 'foggy' or scattered
- Worrying excessively about the future
- Reliving past mistakes or stressful events
- Difficulty seeing positive outcomes

2: Stress Management Techniques

There are many healthy ways to manage stress. Some methods work quickly in the moment, while others are long-term habits that increase your resilience to stress.

Breathing & Relaxation

- Deep Breathing (4-7-8 Method) – Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7, exhale for 8
- Box Breathing – Inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, then release
- Guided Imagery – Imagine a calm, peaceful place while breathing slowly

Mindfulness & Meditation

- Mindful Pause – Focus on your senses for 1–2 minutes
- Body Scan Meditation – Notice and release tension in each part of your body
- Gratitude Practice – Write down 3 things you're thankful for each day
- Journaling – Reflect on thoughts and feelings without judgment

Physical Activity

- Take a Walk – Even 5–10 minutes can help reset your mind
- Stretching or Yoga – Loosens tension and calms breathing
- Sports or Recreation – Basketball, soccer, swimming, dance, etc.
- Movement Breaks – Stand, stretch, or move between study sessions

Social & Emotional Support

- Talk to a Trusted Adult – Teacher, counselor, family member, or coach
- Spend Time with Friends – Laugh, talk, and do activities together
- Join a Club or Group – Build a supportive community
- Ask for Help – Let someone know when you're feeling overwhelmed

Healthy Lifestyle Habits

- Get Enough Sleep – Aim for 8–10 hours each night
- Eat Balanced Meals – Include fruits, vegetables, proteins, and water
- Limit Caffeine & Sugar – They can worsen anxiety and stress
- Stay Hydrated – It helps regulate mood and energy

Time Management & Organization

- Break Big Tasks into Smaller Steps – Helps make tasks seem more manageable

- Use a Planner or Calendar – Keep track of deadlines and commitments
- Prioritize – Concentrate on the most important tasks first
- Set Realistic Goals – Avoid trying to do too much at once

Creative & Fun Outlets

- Listen to Music – Choose calming or uplifting songs
- Draw, Paint, or Do Crafts – Express yourself creatively
- Read for Enjoyment – Take a break from academic reading
- Spend Time Outdoors – Nature can help reduce stress levels