



# LEARN HOW TO STRESS LESS

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## About the Activity

Stress is a part of life, no matter your gender or your age – including teens. While it's normal to experience stress, it can be particularly tough on teens, who have busy schedules and face constant peer pressure. According to [4-H research](#), 45% of teens have dealt with excessive stress, and 64% fear that the stress of living through COVID-19 will have long-term implications for their mental health.

This activity will help you identify the sources and the impact of stress on your life and who you can count on to help you through it.

## Supplies

**These simple materials will get you started.**

- 2 paper plates
- Markers (black, green, yellow, red)
- Printout of the Less Stress Plan worksheet
- Pen or pencil

## Grades: 7-12

**Topic:** Healthy Living,  
Social Emotional Learning,  
Stress

**Time:** 30-45 minutes



## Activity Steps

This activity will help you to identify different areas of stress in your life, and it will also help you learn some coping mechanisms to deal with that stress in a healthy, productive way.

### Divide Your Plates Like a Pizza

Grab your soft item and find a place to relax. Turn Stress can be defined as any physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension caused by a situation or event. Stress does not discriminate. It can impact anyone — including yourself — during any time of day. The clocks we are about to make will help showcase this. Let's begin!

- Using the black marker, divide each paper plate into 12 equal sections, similar to a clock. Each section should look like a slice of pie or pizza — yum!
- Write AM in the middle of one plate and PM in the middle of the other plate.

### Write Out Your Routine

Think about your schedule on a typical weekday. Label what you are doing on each section of your clocks. For example, you might put "SLEEP" in each section from 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

When you are finished, you will see your whole schedule for a day on your clocks. There should be no blank sections on either plate.

### Color Code

Now think about each activity on your clock and your level of stress during each time. Color each section using the green, yellow, and red markers to correspond with how stressed the activity makes you feel.

- Green:** no stress
- Yellow:** can be stressful sometimes
- Red:** very stressful

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some types of stress can have a positive effect — in moderation, at least. For example, if you are stressed about an upcoming test, that may motivate you to study more. Studying more increases your likelihood of doing well on the test. The stress leads to an improved outcome. But we don't want to feel this way about school all the time — more about that later. Stress that promotes good outcomes like this is known as positive stress.

Stress can also help us to stay safe. When we hear the fire alarm go off, our body reacts with stress and tells us we need to leave the building to protect ourselves.





## Activity Steps

(continued...)

### Identify Your Chronic Stressors

Now that you've identified which parts of your day are the most stressful by color coding them, use the Less Stress Plan printout to help you learn more about those stressors.

- 1 Pick the top three stressful parts of your day to use on the worksheet.
- 2 Use the worksheet to ask yourself the following questions:
  - Why do these parts of your day cause you stress?
  - What can you do before these activities or times to prevent stress?
  - What can you do during these activities or parts of your day to reduce the stress?
  - What can someone else do for you to help during these stressful times?
- 3 Now identify who can you ask for help if this stressor becomes too overwhelming. Is there a parent, guardian, coach, or teacher that you can turn to for support?

### Why is this exercise important?

Working through the Less Stress Plan can help identify areas of chronic stress, which is what we experience when we are stressed for prolonged periods of time. This type of stress negatively impacts our ability to do our daily activities, have healthy relationships, and thrive. According to **4-H research**, teens often cope with stress in unhealthy ways, including pretending to feel better to not worry anyone (67%), dealing with their feelings on their own (65%), and trying to ignore their feelings or spending more time on their own (45%).

Chronic stress also negatively impacts our overall health, such as increased risk for heart problems, obesity, and mental health disorders. Additionally, chronic stress can lead to physical symptoms, such as:

- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Dizziness
- High blood pressure
- Low energy
- Digestive problems

As you can see, identifying areas of chronic stress early on can help to promote both mental and physical well-being.

### Confide in Your Helper

Having an adult you trust and can count on can help reduce your risk of chronic stress. After you've completed the Less Stress Plan worksheet, share it with the people you listed as helpers. Having a conversation about your daily stressors before you become overwhelmed is important so that your trusted adults and friends know how to help you.

### DID YOU KNOW?

If you are experiencing chronic stress, you are not alone. According to the American Psychological Association, the stress levels of American teenagers are higher than those of their adult counterparts. In one APA survey, 27% of teens reported having extreme stress during the school year; 59% of teens in the survey reported that managing time to balance all activities was a significant stressor.



# Test Your Knowledge

See how much you know about managing stress.

## QUESTION 1

Stress that motivates you to improve or stay safe is called:

- a. Negative stress
- b. Chronic stress
- c. Positive stress
- d. Not really stress

## QUESTION 2

Which is true about chronic stress?

- a. Chronic stress means you experience stress for a short period of time.
- b. Chronic stress positively impacts your health.
- c. Chronic stress puts you at increased risk for other health problems.
- d. Chronic stress helps you have healthy relationships.

## QUESTION 3

True or false? Stress is only a mental health problem; it cannot affect your physical health.

- a. True
- b. False

## QUESTION 4

Which is a protective factor against stress?

- a. Unbalanced diet
- b. Having at least one trusted adult to confide in
- c. Living with a parent who has a mental illness
- d. Using tobacco products

## QUESTION 5

Who has higher stress levels according to the American Psychological Association?

- a. Adults
- b. Teens
- c. Preteens
- d. Toddlers

## QUESTION 6

Which of the following is an example of an unhealthy way to deal with stress?

- a. Pretending to feel better to not worry anyone
- b. Dealing with your feelings on your own
- c. Trying to ignore your feelings or spending more time on your own
- d. All of the above

## Reflection Questions

Questions to deepen wonder and understanding

- How much red do you have on your clock? Are there activities that you can eliminate to reduce your stress levels?
- How is stress currently impacting your daily life and your relationships?
- How can you build protective factors against stress? How can sharing with your trusted adults and friends help?



# Investigate & Explore

Take your new knowledge to the next level.

Stress is a part of life, and as you've learned, it isn't always a negative thing. The next time you are stressed, take a moment to pause, breathe, and reflect.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I stressed?
- How can I make the situation easier in the future?

Starting a stress journal can be a helpful tool for alleviating stress in your life. Each time that you feel overwhelmed or stress, take note of:

- Where you are
- Who is with you
- What activity is happening
- How you feel (physically and mentally)
- How long you feel stressed after the activity is over

This practice can help you recognize patterns and identify what causes you stress. That is the first step in figuring out how to prevent or work through those stressful situations. If you don't have one, you can make your own journal.

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