

New world

New skills

Teacher Notes: Understanding Stress

PwC Primary School Toolkit



Teacher Notes

Overview and Purpose

This lesson is designed to raise pupil awareness of stress and teaches pupils how to recognise signs of stress in both themselves and others.

A key message here is that stress is a normal human emotion and pupils will also learn some of the main ways in which people manage stress in order to feel better.

The lesson offers some advice on how to help others when they are feeling stressed.

It is important that pupils are aware that stress is a normal emotion and that it can be managed. This session allows pupils to learn about this subject and some of the practical things we can do to support ourselves and others.

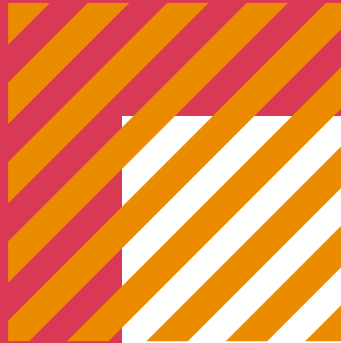
Objectives

By the end of the session, students will be able to:

- Understand what stress means
- Understand how stress affects us emotionally and physically
- Identify practical things they can do to help manage stress
- Identify people they trust to talk to when they are feeling stressed.

Key Vocabulary

Stress - stress is a state of worry we feel in difficult or uncomfortable situations. It is a natural response that helps us to overcome challenges we face.



Curriculum Link

Pupils should know:

- that there is a normal range of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) and scale of emotions that all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situations.
- where and how to seek support (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including whom in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online)

Preparation / Materials Needed

- ☐ Chart Paper
- ☐ Marker pens
- ☐ A whiteboard/blackboard/smartboard
- ☐ Download the session PowerPoint
- ☐ Post-It Notes for pupils

Lesson structure

Getting started (10 mins)

Introduction to session and objectives

Stress (15 mins)

- Stress and me
- What is stress?
- Stress and others

Managing Stress (15 mins)

- Why do we feel stressed?
- How can we manage stress to feel better?

Wrap up and Reflection (10 mins)

- Reflection on the lesson
- Time for questions

Teacher Notes

Getting Started

Share **slide 1** and introduce this session as being focussed on understanding stress and how we can help manage it. Encourage the children to be supportive and respectful of each other and what is shared during the session. (1 minute)

Slide 2 covers the objectives for the session. (1 minute)

Stress

Move to **slide 3** (2 minutes). Stress is caused when things get too much. We all feel pressure about different things, for example, a test or a race. A small amount can be a good thing and can motivate as to meet our goals. But too much stress isn't good, especially when it feels out of control, impacts our mood, our wellbeing or our relationships with people around us.

Move to **slide 4**. We're now going to take a look into how you deal with stress. (15 minutes)

Have you ever been late for a lesson? Or maybe a train or bus? Or what about when you are in a hurry, but the people in front of you are walking really slowly?

Activity - How did you feel in these situations?

- Spend **2-3 minutes** asking pupils how they've felt during these and other similar situations.
- Write the words they are using out on the board/flip chart, giving a tally mark for each word if used more than once.

Refer to the words that have been used in those few minutes so pupils can build their terminology around stress.

Explain to pupils if you felt uncomfortable, maybe slightly panicked, this is what we would call feeling stressed. A similar term you may have heard is feeling anxious.

Move to **slide 5 "What is stress?"** (3 minutes)

Allow pupils a few moments to think about what's on the slide then go through the following.

Did you know stress can go up and down and causes our bodies to make special chemicals, or hormones, to react to that stress? Feeling stressed is a very normal and human emotion, everyone feels stressed sometimes about different things.

When we are too stressed through, we can react in different ways. Inwardly we might feel butterflies, our heartbeats might feel very fast and we might even feel a bit sick. We might show signs we are stressed to others by screaming, shouting, crying, being very quiet or hiding away.

Move to **slide 6 "Stress and others"** (15 minutes)

It's important that we can recognise when the people around us are feeling stressed too. This way we can maybe help them.

Ask the pupils to think about the question on the screen.

Activity - Think about how you recognise when your friends and family are feeling stressed.

- In pairs, discuss the signs of stress you can notice in those around you.
- Ask each pair to share back one sign of how they know others are feeling stressed.

The students might suggest various stressful situations such as: an upcoming exam, hard piece of homework, moving house or school, worrying about grades or problems with friends. Different signs of stress include: irritability, difficulty sleeping, headaches, loss of appetite, loss of motivation and finding it difficult to complete everyday tasks.

Someone might feel stressed before a big football game, their heart may start to feel like it is racing, they might have sweaty hands, fast breathing or feel like they have butterflies in their stomach.

Teacher Notes

Managing Stress

Move to **slide 7** (1 minute). Now that we've talked about what stress feels and looks like in ourselves and others, we're going to look at how we manage it.

Move to **slide 8 "Why do we feel stressed?"** (5 minutes)

Now that we've talked about how we recognise how stress feels and looks like in ourselves and others, we're going to look at how we manage it.

Read through the examples on the slide.

Let's think back to those previous examples. If someone was running late to a lesson, why do you think they might feel stressed? Maybe they are afraid of getting in trouble for being late, or perhaps it's their favourite lesson and they will be disappointed if they miss out on it.

A lot of people can feel stressed when they are speaking in front of a large group of people. Is it because they are afraid of making a mistake and being laughed at?

The common theme here is that stress can occur when we fear something or we imagine something bad is going to happen in our minds.

Activity - ask for a show of hands if pupils believe they can manage this kind of stress somehow.

Move to **slide 9 "How can we manage stress to feel better?"** (10 minutes)

Learning to deal with stress is a really important skill which takes practice but will always be worth it.

With practice you can start recognising the signs of stress sooner. Think back to the last time you felt stressed.

- What was happening when you felt stressed?
- What did you think/feel/do just before you felt stressed?

One of the best ways we can feel less stressed is to talk about how we feel with someone we trust. Remember before when we said stress is inside our minds and bodies and you can't really see it or hold it? A lot of people find that once you talk about feeling stressed and take it from outside of your mind, it doesn't seem so big and scary anymore.

There are lots of things we can do to make ourselves feel better and reduce stress such as exercising, getting fresh air, playing with a fidget toy or reading.

Activity - one really useful way to relieve stress quickly before it can build up is through breathing exercises.

- Ask pupils to pretend they are a snake and hiss, inhaling deeply through the nose and blowing out through the mouth with a soft and low hissing sound. Repeat three times.

Wrap up and reflection

Move to **slide 10** (8 minutes). Thank the pupils for participating in this session and you appreciate them being open and mature in discussing this really important topic.

To wrap up the session, we would like you all to take **two minutes** to think about the questions on the screen.

Activity - ask pupils to answer the questions on screen using no more than three words per answer on a piece of paper.

After the two minutes is up, ask for up to three volunteers to share their responses if they are comfortable. Advise pupils to retain the answers to these questions should they ever feel stressed.

You may choose to ask students to document their key takeaways from the session as part of their learning.

Signpost pupils to any support available in school.

Disclaimer: This content is for general information purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional advisors. Information available here is not to be relied upon as professional advice or for the rendering of professional services.

Certain links in this Site connect to other Web Sites maintained by third parties over whom PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP has no control. PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP makes no representations as to the accuracy or any other aspect of information contained in other Web Sites. © 2025 PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. All rights reserved. 'PwC' refers to the UK member firm, and may sometimes refer to the PwC network. Each member firm is a separate legal entity. Please see www.pwc.com/structure for further details.