

Managing stress

Stress affects everyone differently for different reasons. It is important to understand our own and each other's stress to be able to manage it and support our friends and family.

Use a specially created animated video to explore and understand how stress affects you and your body. The below activities can help you to develop your understanding of your own stress and other people's and understand how to help manage stress.

Learning objectives

You will:

- learn about stress and its affects
- think about how you experience stress
- explore ways to manage when you are stressed
- reflect what we can do to manage stress in the future

Primary activities (ages 7-11)

Starter activity: What is stress?

Start by thinking about what the word stress means to you. What do you think a stressed person looks like? Move your body to show what 'stress' looks like. How do stressed people move and act? Close your eyes and get into the character of a 'stressed person'. After doing this for a minute or so, close your eyes and become yourself again. Take 5 slow, deep breaths. Now think about the activity.

- > why did you choose these movements? What feelings and thoughts did you want to show?
- > how does stress change someone's body and actions?
- > is this how you show your stress?

You can write down your ideas or discuss them with others.

'Stress' can mean lots of things to different people and affects everyone differently. Things like change, pressure and challenges can cause us to feel 'stressed'. Some people might show stress in their body, some might just feel it inside. Understanding how stress affects you can help you to manage your stress better.

For parents or educators who want more information about what stress is and how to manage it [visit the Mind charity website](#).

Coping activity: Relaxing your body

You can feel stress in your body, on the inside and outside. It can feel too much to manage, and too much stress too often can damage our body. To relax your mind and body when you feel stressed you can do this activity:

- > count to three in your head as you take a breath in through your nose. Count to three in your head as you breathe out through your mouth.
- > now count again and screw up your face and make your body as small as you can. Relax your body again.
- > now count again and stretch your face and body out as big as you can. Relax your body again.

- > you can repeat this activity a few times until you feel better. Finish by taking 3 second breaths in and out again.

How does this make you feel more relaxed? Can you use this activity to feel better when you are feeling stressed?

Reflective activity: Think about coping

Lots of different things can help us to feel better when we feel stressed. Think about what might make you feel better.

Draw a heart in the middle of a piece of paper and write or draw all the things that make you happy, cheers you up, or makes you feel relaxed.

Some examples are:

- > hugging a cuddly toy or your parents
- > dancing or moving around
- > singing or listening to music
- > talking to friends
- > looking at the clouds or relaxing

Can you do these things when you feel stressed? How would this help you feel better?

Video activity: Stress patterns

Now it is time to think more about your experiences of stress. First, remember to take care of yourself. If you start to feel uncomfortable, stop the activity and do the relaxing exercise above.

Imagine you are looking at your stress as a doctor or scientist, try to imagine it is someone else's body and feelings. You are looking at it so you can understand it better.

[Watch the video and do the stress patterns activity](#) in the video. After drawing your own stress pattern look at it carefully.

- > what are your signs of stress? What feeling can you watch out for so you know you are stressed? What action can tell others "help, I am stressed". Can you tell your friends and family about this so that they know?
- > how can you manage your stress – one activity that makes you feel calmer. Can you do this whenever you feel stressed?
- > how can you prepare yourself – we can't always avoid doing things that make us stressed, but can you tell people and get ready to do your calming activity ready for when you have to do something you know makes you feels stressed?

Does understanding your stress pattern help you to prepare for and manage stress better? What will you do in future to help yourself?

Extension activity: Helping others with stress

Now think about how you can help your friends and family with their stress. If they do the video activity too, look at their 'stress pattern' and learn about their stress. What can you do to help notice and understand their stress?

- > what action might mean they are stressed?
- > what thing might cause them to feel stressed?
- > what thing might help them to feel better?

Remember that everyone shows and feels stress differently for different reasons. Understanding others is a really big part of helping them and knowing how to help.

With a friend or family member, create a “Help, I’m stressed” card – you can show it to them when you feel stressed or post it somewhere where you can all see it all the time. Draw a picture of what you look like and act like when you are stressed and some activities or actions that help you feel better.

Remember to look out for their signs of stress and help others too.

Secondary activities (ages 12-18)

Starter activity: What is stress?

Start by thinking about what the word stress means to you. Think about what you assume a stressed person looks and behaves like. Perform a movement or dance that shows ‘stress’ to you. If you don’t want to act it out, you can direct the movements of someone else or draw a diagram of a stressed person. Be careful not to feel it too realistically. If you start to feel stressed, calm yourself down with some deep breaths or whatever coping technique works for you.

Think about how stress can be seen and felt in the body.

- > why did you choose these movements? What feelings and thoughts did you want to show?
- > how does stress change someone’s body and actions?
- > is this how you show your stress?

You can write down your ideas or discuss them with others.

‘Stress’ can mean lots of things to different people and affects everyone differently. Things like change, pressure and challenges can cause us to feel ‘stressed’. A situation may be stressful for us, but a situation could also be made stressful because of other factors. For example, going to school might not be stressful every day, but if you had a row with a friend or have an exam that day, it will feel much more stressful than normal.

Some people might show stress in their body, some might just feel it inside. Feeling stress for a long time can damage your body and mind. Understanding how stress affects you can help you to manage your stress better.

If you want more information about what stress is and how to manage it [visit the Mind charity website](#).

Coping activity: Relaxing your body

You can feel stress in your body, on the inside and outside. It can feel too much to manage, and too much stress too often can damage our body. To relax your mind and body when you feel stressed you can do this activity:

- > lie on the floor someone safe and empty. Play some relaxing music if you like.
- > take a slow breath in through your nose for three seconds. Feel the air fill your chest space.
- > breathe out slowly through your mouth for three seconds. Fill the air around you with the breath.
- > now close your eyes and think about your body. Start at your toes: tense your muscles in your feet so they feel screwed up and tight. Hold it for three seconds and then let go from three. Remember to keep breathing steadily.

- > move up and do the same to your leg muscles. Then your bum and hips. Then your stomach and back. Then your shoulders. Then your arms and hands. Then your face. Screw up your face to make it small, including your mouth and forehead.
- > after you have done this to all your muscles let yourself fall limp. Take some slow breaths for three seconds again. Lie there quietly for as long as you like. When you are ready sit up slowly and go back to the world.

How does this activity make you feel – your body, emotions and thoughts? Would this help you when you were stressed?

Reflective activity: Think about coping

Lots of different things can help us to feel better when we feel stressed. Think about what might make you feel better.

Draw a heart in the middle of a piece of paper and write or draw all the things that make you happy or makes you feel relaxed. Or you can write a song or poem about things that make you feel happy and relaxed.

Some examples are:

- > hugging someone or a pillow
- > dancing or exercising
- > singing or listening to music
- > talking to friends

Can you do these things when you feel stressed? How would this help you feel better?

Remember that some things might make you feel less stressed temporarily but can have serious negative impacts later, like over-eating or self-harm. Your safety is vital. Ask yourself: Will this harm my body, mind or emotions in another way? What are the possible risks of each activity and how can I avoid them?

Explore this with others if you want to discuss the topic more. Talking about how you feel is important. If you need to speak to someone urgently talk to a responsible adult or you can call the [Mind helplines](#).

Video activity: Stress patterns

Now it is time to think more about your experiences of stress. First, remember to take care of yourself. If you start to feel uncomfortable, stop the activity and do the relaxing exercise above.

Imagine you are looking at your stress as an outside investigator, try to imagine it is someone else's body and feelings. You are looking at it so you can understand it better.

[Watch the video and do the stress patterns activity in the video.](#) After drawing your own stress pattern look at it carefully.

- > what pattern do you notice - Is it always the same things that make you stressed, does it change your body, feelings and thoughts in the same way each time? Do the same things help you to feel better?
- > what are your signs of stress - What feeling can you watch out for so you know you are stressed? Can you tell your friends and family about this so that they know?
- > how can you manage your stress – one activity that makes you feel calmer. Can you do this whenever you feel stressed?

- > how can you prepare yourself – we can't always avoid doing things that make us stressed, but can you tell people and get ready to do your calming activity when you have to do something you know makes you feel stressed?

Does understanding your stress pattern help you to prepare for and manage stress better?
What will you do in future to help yourself?

Reflective activity: Helping others with stress

Now think about how you can help your friends and family with their stress. If they do the video activity too, look at their 'stress pattern' and learn about their stress. What can you do to help notice and understand their stress?

- > what action might mean they are stressed?
- > what thing might cause them to feel stressed?
- > what thing might help them to feel better?

Remember that everyone shows and feels stress differently for different reasons. Understanding others is a really big part of helping them and knowing how to help.

Discuss your stress patterns with a close friend or family member. Write down the key information someone would need to know about you to identify and help manage your stress.

Read someone else's and think about how you can help them. Remember to look out for their signs of stress and help others too.