

# "Fraying at the Edges": Stress Management 101

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**Overview:** Through this workshop, younger students will explore the topic of stress. Students will reflect upon the triggers of their own stress, learn ways to avoid stress, and tools to cope with unavoidable stress as college students and volunteers.

**Category:** Balance/Boundaries

**Level:** Explore

**Learning Goals:**

- To understand the triggers of personal stress
- To learn ways to avoid stress in daily life
- To gain tools for coping with stressful periods of college life

**Materials:**

- Ball of yarn
- Construction paper
- Markers
- Newsprint or dry erase board
- Balloons
- "What is Stress?" handout
- "Coping Strategies" handout

**How to Prepare:**

- Room should be large enough for students to have room to sit on floor and/or lay down
- Table should be present so that students can do written/drawing exercises
- Prepare by reflecting on the stress that you experienced as a college student and what coping strategies you have now that you wish you had in those years

**How to Do/ Brief Outline:**

The outline has the following parts:

- |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Yarn Toss              | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2. Stress Identity Circle | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 3. Group Discussion       | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 4. Meditation Activity    | suggested time 25 minutes |
| 5. Finals Balloons        | suggested time 5 minutes  |

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## **Part 1) Yarn Toss**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

1. Gather students into a circle, with everyone standing
2. Give one student a ball of yarn
3. Instruct the students that they are to wrap a small amount of yarn around their wrist, state something that causes them stress, then pass the ball of yarn to someone across the circle from them (each response should be different than something previously stated)
4. This yarn toss should continue until everyone in the circle has stated aloud at least two things that cause them stress
5. Transition into next activity by stating something to the following effect, “while some might look at what our circle has created as a beautiful web that connects us, for the purposes of this exercise, we can see that stress can create a tangled web of emotion that each of us helped to create. Can you imagine our group now going out with all of this individual stress tying us all together and trying to do a community service project? You can see that when we are stressed, we can also stress others and put a strain on the important work we have to do.”
6. You may ask the following question as students take the yarn off of their wrists, “Did you want to state a stress factor that someone else already said? If so, what was it? Are there common areas of stress that we all encounter in college?”

## **Part 2) Stress Identity Circle**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

1. Have students sit at tables and work individually
2. Give each student a piece of construction paper and markers
3. Instruct the students to draw a circle on their paper (with room around it)
4. Inside the circle, students should write things that stress them that they are responsible for (stress they create)
5. Outside of the circle, students should write things that stress them that others are responsible for (stress that is placed on them)
6. After all of the students are done drawing, break into pairs and have students share their stress factors.
  - a. What stress factors are similar?
  - b. What stress factors are individual?
  - c. Looking overall at what is in the circle and what is outside of it, how much stress does each individual student control and how much is placed on them from outside sources?

## **Part 3) Group Discussion**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

1. Gather group together in a circle
2. On a dry erase board or newspaper, have students brainstorm
  - a. "How do you know when you are stressed?"
    - i. "How does your body tell you that you are stressed?"
    - ii. "What is your attitude like when you are stressed?"
  - b. "What are ways that you cope with stress?"
    - i. "Who do you talk to when you are stressed?"
    - ii. "What types of activities do you do to de-stress?"

## **Part 4) Meditation Activity**

Suggested time: 25 minutes

1. Transition from discussion to activity with something like the following: "We have a good amount of ways that we as individuals deal with stress. We've talked about what stress does to our bodies as well. Next, we will all participate in a simple exercise that you can do at home on your own to help you relax – both your mind that is running a million thoughts a minute, and your body whose muscles unfortunately pay the price for our stress."
2. Have students sit on the floor *at least* an arm-length apart from each other, sitting in "Indian position". If students prefer to lay on the floor, that is acceptable as well, but no one should be sitting in a chair
3. Tell students to sit as comfortably as possible, allowing them to remove their shoes if desired
4. Verbal instructions for meditation (NOTE: Read SLOWLY for the students to relax):
  - a. Please close your eyes
  - b. Be sure that your back is straight, and that your whole body is in a straight line
  - c. Place your hands comfortably in your lap, on your thighs, or on your knees
  - d. Begin to give permission to yourself to let go of all of the thoughts of your daily activities and concerns. There is nothing for you to worry about, all of your worries are gone for the time being
  - e. Feel your body and the space that your body occupies
  - f. Pay attention to your breathing. Breathe quietly through your nose. Breathe deeply, slowly, and evenly, but do not strain yourself. Breathe in deeply, breathe out slowly.
  - g. Relax your body. Send warmth to each body part. Let all the muscles soften. Begin at the top of your head and move down to your face - relax your eyes, eyelids, mouth, teeth, tongue, lips, jaws, throat, and neck. Let the muscles of your shoulders soften by stretching them and letting them go, then send warmth down your arms to your fingers. Move down and relax your chest muscles, heart, and lungs. Then relax the abdominal

muscles and the organs in that area. Stretch and relax your entire back and spine. Then send warmth to your pelvic area, to your rear, and down your legs to your toes

- h. Concentrate on the warmth and relaxation that you are bringing to your body. Feel your body relax. Imagine your favorite quiet place. Imagine the silence, far away from your worries and concerns. It is only you and your breath. Breathing in deeply and out slowly. Feel that breath coming in your nose, through each part of your body, and out through your mouth
  - i. I will now give you a few minutes of silence to concentrate on your breathing and relaxation
5. After about 5 minutes of silence, instruct the students to slowly stretch each muscle in their body, beginning at the head and ending at the toes. Students may open their eyes and slowly begin to retake their seats

## **Part 5) Finals Balloons**

Suggested time: 5 minutes

1. One particular time during the academic year that is stressful for college students is final exam time
2. Give each student approximately 6 small balloons
3. Standing in front of the group, demonstrate this effective activity for breaking up the stress of finals time
  - a. Blow up a small balloon
  - b. Using a sharpie marker, write the name of a class on the balloon (i.e., Life Choices Final Exam)
  - c. Tape the balloon to the wall
  - d. Pop the balloon using a push pin
4. Explain to the students that they should blow up a balloon at finals time for each final exam and/or class project that they have due at the end of the semester and then pop that balloon when they are done with that task. The joy of stabbing the balloon as well as the noise help to deflate the stress associated with that week.

### **Credits:**

1. "What is Stress?" Counseling Center at Northern Michigan University.  
<http://www.nmu.edu/counselingcenter/>