

DEALING WITH STRESS

STANDARDS

- Standard 2: Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.
- Standard 3: Students will understand safety and survival skills.

MATERIALS

- ◆ A gift or shoe box that has a bottom lined with paper and the word “HOPE” written in letters large enough for the class to be able see when shown the inside of the box from the front of the room
- ◆ 2-3 slips of paper per student
- ◆ Pens or pencils

ACTIVITY

Read the following paragraph to your class:

Stress management is mostly a learned skill. All of us are born with a natural “alarm system” in our brains that was originally designed to prepare us to deal with real physical threats and dangers. This alarm system is natural/biologic and helpful; it is intended to keep us safe. During our normal everyday living, most of us do not experience truly physical threatening events, and over time we have evolved and learned to apply our alarm system to a variety of psychological threats. Stress can be characterized as a “false alarm”—an erroneous activation of the “danger alarm” system of the brain. The biological purpose of this system is to help prepare us for dealing with real, physical danger. When the danger alarm is turned on, it produces a physiological response called the “fight or flight” reaction, which helps us to fight the danger or flee it. When you are in real, immediate physical danger, it is appropriate to feel afraid. Getting your body charged up with adrenaline may well help to keep you alive. However, most of the time when we feel stressed, there is no immediate danger, so it is a false alarm. The fire alarm is sounding, but there is no fire!

Distribute the slips of paper to your students and ask them to write one personal stressor on each slip of paper and put the slips into the “Stress Box.”

After everyone has put in their slips, open the box and read one of the stressors identified by your students. Ask the students to share their feelings and reactions about the stressor. Encourage them to the impact such experiences have in people’s lives.

When you and the class have discussed all of the slips of paper, remove the lid and show them that at the bottom of the box lies HOPE. Emphasize the significance of hope and positive attitude in managing stress.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

You may want to ask some of these follow-up questions. How do you cope with your stress? What is the difference between internal and external stress? What sorts of effects does stress have on your body? What sorts of events in your life are not stressful at all? Are there any kinds of stressors that are actually healthy or help you in some positive way? What sorts of strategies do you use to help someone who is stressed out?

ESTIMATED TIME

30 minutes