

# Stress Management Strategies for Adolescents to Improve Mental Health

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**Abstract:** *Today in the world of excellence, every one experiences some kind of stress in their lives. Even children are not the exception as they experience stress from both home and the school which poses pressure on them to perform better beyond their ability. This pressure causes depression, frustration, anxiety and helplessness like problem in their lives. It is at this stage very necessary to implement stress management strategies like deep breathing, progressive muscular relaxation, positive self talk etc. so that children can learn to manage stress at the very young age.*

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Mental Health, Stress Management Strategies, Deep Breathing, Progressive Muscular Relaxation and Positive Self Talk.

## 1. Introduction

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension that occurs from unfavorable or demanding circumstances of life. It is a body's method of responding to emulation. Stress can be both good and bad, as it is the stress that provides the means to express inner talents; it can also cause exhaustion and illness.

Adolescence is stage of stress and strain, adolescents experiences more stress because of physical appearance, sloppy class mates, failing in exams, disagreement with parents and teachers etc. Adults fail to recognize the volume of stress, young children are revealed to. Studies have shown that "parents perceive children as having lower levels of stress than children perceive themselves as having." (Humphrey, 1998) This is confirmed by a nation-wide survey that concludes "parents underestimate how much children worry" (Witkin, 1999). This stress among young adults causes depression, increased muscle tension, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, frustration, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety etc. which results in poor mental health.

Recent studies have shown that many mental health problems in particular depression and anxiety are the main cause of disease among young people. Since mental health is a way to describe social and emotional well being of once life, it is also the central domain of adolescent's healthy development. In adolescents, good mental health is associated with healthy peer relationship, seeming happy and cheerful all the time, full with motivation and active participation in school activities etc., whereas mentally unhealthy adolescents usually seems sad or worried, aggressive, showing disobedient behaviour, avoiding friends, feeling bad about their physical appearance.

Since adolescence is the period on which the child need to be prepare to handle the challenges of life, so it is the duty of the parents, teachers and the health workers to early detect or recognize adolescent mental health problems and impart them with such knowledge that they understand how to react

to a particular stressor and they manage to control them using necessary coping /stress management strategies.

## 2. Stress Management

Stress management is the skill of adroitness that helps one to look forward, prevent, control and recover from the deterioration brought on by perceived threats and subsist deficiencies. These stress competency skills emphasis not only on deterioration, but on the assessment of threat and evolution of coping resources.

Coping refers to both behavioural and psychological efforts that people employ to master tolerate, reduce or minimize stressful events. Psychologists have developed a number of very effective coping strategies that reduce stress levels, which in turn decreases the occurrence of psychosomatic symptoms. These strategies may be termed as stress management strategies. There are a various stress management strategies that shatter the stress sequence and trigger the relaxation response to deliver the body/mind system back into a healthier equilibrium.

## 3. Stress Management Strategies

To reduce the physical and psychological/mental disorder associated with stress following techniques are very effective for both adolescents and adults. These techniques can be used in any situations when a person experience stress such as during class, while studying, at a party, at work, or when trying to fall asleep.

### Deep Breathing

1. Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your lower abdomen (belly) just below your rib cage and the other hand on your chest.
3. Inhale slowly through your nostril, drawing a deep breath into your lungs.
4. Slowly exhale through pursed lips as if you are blowing out the candle.

5. Do not breathe with the chest.
6. Do this breathing 3 to 10 times per day.

### **Meditation**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Close the eyes.
3. Breathe naturally.
4. Focus the attention on breathe and feel how the body move when you inhale and exhale.
5. Notice the movement of each body part i.e. chest, shoulders, rib cage and belly as you breathe.
6. Make no effort to control the breathe.
7. If the mind wanders, retune the focus back to the breathe
8. Repeat the practice for 2-3 minutes

### **Progressive Muscular Relaxation**

1. Lie down comfortably on your back and stretch out.
  2. Inhale, and tense the first muscle group (hard but not to the point of pain or cramping) for 4 to 10 seconds.
  3. Exhale slowly, and relax the tensed muscle group.
  4. Relax for 10 to 20 seconds before working on the next muscle group. Notice the difference between how the muscles feel when they are tense and how they feel when they are relaxed.
  5. When you are finished with all of the muscle groups, count backward from 5 to 1 to bring your focus back to the present.
- (Muscle group: hands and arms, face, neck, stomach and back, legs and feet).

### **Guided imagery**

1. Sit or lie down comfortably and close your eyes.
2. Breathe deeply for few seconds to relax.
3. Picture a calm and peaceful scene. This could be a beach, a mountain setting or a meadow.
4. Imagine your scene, for example a beautiful beach and try to add some detail, i.e. the sun is dazzling pleasantly, the gentle wind flowing from the ocean is smooth and thermal.
5. Imagine moving barefoot in the tender sand, sense your feet go down in the sand with each step. Move toward the water's edge and let the water flow over your feet.
6. When you are intense into your imagination, wait for a minute in all the peace and harmony around you. Feel how it appears, how it sounds, how it odour. Breathe in deeply the cozy ocean air, stay as long as you like.
7. Think of a simple word or sound that you can use in the future to help you return to this place. Then, when you are ready, slowly take yourself out of the scene and back to the present.
8. Count to 3, and open your eyes. Notice how you feel right now.

### **Peer Sharing**

1. Group the students in the pair (i.e. number the students 1, 2; 1, 2....).
2. Query student no. 1 to talk (about how they perceive today and why? Or about any concern or worries they are experiencing) while student #2 simply listens.

3. After 1 to 3 minutes students have to switch roles. Now, student no. 2 talks (regarding alike question, e.g. how they are perceive today and why?) while student #1 listens for another 1-3 minutes.
4. After the sharing of pairs are done, group students in groups of three; we can number the students like 1,2, 3, 1, 2, 3 ...).
5. Student No. 1 talks while students no. 2 and no. 3 listen (e.g. ask Student 1 to talk about current issue).
6. After every 1 to 3 minutes shift until all students in the category get chance to talk.
7. Query the students whether they detect any perception of relief, calmness, focus or less stressed as an outcome of the above task.

### **Positive Self Talk**

1. Encourage students to speak in a affirmative way. Tell them to convey what they want to have overtaken, versus what they don't want – e.g. "walk" versus "don't run."
2. Motivate students to remember and say fine points about themselves.
3. As a teacher Post affirmative words, sayings and objectives in the classroom.
4. Use affirmative conversation to re frame gloomy experiences. Query the students.
5. Assist students set objectives – affirmative words that state how they want to realize, believe, act.

## **4. Implementation of Stress Management Strategies on Adolescents**

Since stress management strategies produces both physiological and psychological changes among adolescents and adults, these also help them to cope with the stress easily. They help to increase energy and focus, fight illness and relieve aches and pains (Christensen and Fatchett, 2002). Although these strategies can be implemented on all the adolescents yet teachers or psychological workers should

- Identify individuals who are more vulnerable to stress.
- Provide an increased access to the social support in the form of emotional support, advice, assistance and guidance.
- Involve parents, peers and other caring adults.
- Encourage involvement in extra –curricular activities such as music, drama, art and craft etc.
- Consult clinical resources for additional guidance.

## **5. Conclusion**

As adolescence is the stage when young people have to face everyday challenges related to school, home, in the friend circle (peer group) and in the community, so they easily get depressed, irritated and aggressive which lead them to poor coping skills such as use of tobacco, alcohol and/ or addiction of drug. It is therefore very necessary for teachers to teach the students to manage their stress at the very initial stage as it is known that the earlier the adolescents learn to deal with his stress the better will be their psychological and physical health as an adult.

The above mentioned stress management strategies help adolescents to cope their stress and manage their mental health without hurting themselves.

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