

ACTIVITY: EXPLORING SELF-REGULATING AND COPING STRATEGIES (PRIMARY)

Grade Levels: 6–8

Activity Overview:

This activity aims to increase knowledge of healthy coping strategies. Students are introduced to and have an opportunity to practice various activities and strategies that can be used to self regulate and cope with stress.

Materials:

- A variety of items that could be used as self-regulating or coping strategies placed around the room (e.g., art materials, games or sports, stress balls, notebook or journal, yoga mat)
- Optional: [Coping Item Cards](#) (if doing the activity in the gym or outdoors, you can use printed item cards instead of real objects)



Activity Description



- Set up the objects or [Coping Item Cards](#) ahead of time around the space.

- Introduce the activity by having a discussion with students about stress and coping. Prompts include:
 - We all have big feelings and get overwhelmed sometimes. A little bit of stress can be good — it helps to motivate us and prepare us for action. But sometimes stress can be overwhelming. What are some things in your life that cause you to feel stressed or overwhelmed?
 - There are lots of things people do to self regulate and reduce stress — some are good for our health and relationships, and some could be bad for our health and relationships. What are some positive coping and self-regulating strategies you've seen siblings, family or other adults use?
 - Some people use cannabis, tobacco, alcohol, or other substances to self regulate and deal with stress. But there are risks to using substances to deal with emotions, like using too much and becoming dependent on them, making our mental health worse.
 - Today we're going to explore different positive ways to self regulate and cope with stress.
- Invite students to ask themselves: "What is one thing I can do to self regulate when I feel overwhelmed or stressed?"
- Next, invite students to do an "in-class scavenger hunt." Have them take five minutes to explore the room and look for something to represent an activity or strategy that could help them self regulate in a healthy way.
- Once everyone has found their item, give each student time for a quick "show and tell." Invite them to share the object with the class and explain one strategy for self regulating or coping with stress.
- As a group, vote on one or two of the self-regulating and coping strategies discussed that you want to try together as a class. You might plan a future class to practice the strategies or decide which ones you want to try as a class in the moment when you're feeling stressed out.

Want a deeper exploration of stress?

Try:

- [Understanding my Stress](#)
- [Breathing in to Stress Detox](#)



Inclusion Considerations

- **Content:**

- Acknowledge that different cultures use different ways to cope with stress and self regulate, for instance through prayer, dance, music and land-based activities.
- Acknowledge that individuals with neurodivergence may have different coping and self-regulating mechanisms too.
- Acknowledge that everyone is different — what some people find calming and relaxing (like spending time with others or doing something creative) others might experience as stressful. Not all physical practices for self regulating are accessible to everyone.
- **Activity Format:** Place objects for the scavenger hunt at varying levels (e.g., high on a shelf, low on the ground) to accommodate different students' physicality and ensure there are items easy to access for those who may have barriers to mobility.



Reflection Questions

1. What are some reasons these types of activities or strategies help to reduce stress? (E.g., helps our bodies and minds self regulate, distracts us or helps us focus on other things, brings fun and social connection into our lives.)
2. What are some steps you can take to find the right coping or self-regulating strategy for you? (E.g., pausing to reflect on what your body or mind needs, exploring different options when you're not stressed so you're well-equipped with tools when you are.)
3. What can you do when you feel like you're not able to cope with stress in a healthy way?





