

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

Grade Levels: 9–12

Materials: No material needed for this activity.

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 help them self regulate and cope with stress.



Activity Description

- Introduce the activity by sharing these prompts with students:
 - Some young people start using substances (drinking alcohol, using cannabis, vaping, etc.) out of curiosity or for fun but continue because they are using it to cope with stress. This can lead to higher-risk cannabis use and affect our health in a negative way, including negative impacts on our brain development.
 - Stress and substance use have a complicated relationship and can affect the way our brain works. Stress can make people more sensitive to drugs' addictive effects and drugs can make people more reactive to stress.
 - There are lots of other things people do to self regulate and reduce stress in the moment — things that are good for both our health and relationships.
- As a group, brainstorm options for dealing with stress that you would consider good for your health and relationships. Record ideas in a place where everyone can see them, like on chart paper.
- Discuss: Do you use any of these strategies? Which ones work best for you?
- As a class, decide on the top five strategies you'd like to practice together. You might decide using:
 - A sticker voting system where each student gets three stickers and votes on their top choices by adding stickers to the brainstorming sheet next to their selected options.
 - A digital polling tool like Mentimeter.
- Divide into five groups and assign each group one of the top five coping strategies. As a group, students can practice their coping strategy and plan for how to lead the rest of the class in their activity.
- In the following class, have each small group of students lead the rest of the class in a practice exercise (e.g., journaling, yoga, physical activity, mindfulness, breathing exercises, games with friends, art) based on today's discussion and learning.

Want to share your learning with the rest of your school community?

School-wide expansion of learning:

- Create an awareness campaign for the school related to healthy coping and stress reduction.
- Organize a de-stress lunch club.
- Create “coping kits” that students can access.



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 calming are accessible to everyone.

- **Activity Format:** Consider barriers to participation with the selected coping strategies you'll be trying as a class and reduce barriers to participation by adapting the activity or choosing ones that work for everyone in the class. Encourage students from different backgrounds to share their self-regulating strategies with the rest of the students, as appropriate.



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?