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## Stress in Children and Its Management Techniques



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### ABSTRACT

This paper speaks about the stress which is a major problem for students throughout the modern world. It suggests stress management techniques, which are easy to practice for students, teachers, and parents. The term stress is a highly subjective phenomenon that it defies definition. The term stress was coined by Dr. Hans Selye in the year 1936. He defines it as “the non – specific response of the body to any demand for change”. Stress soon becomes a popular buzzword that completely ignored Selye’s original definition. In a 1951 issue of the British Medical Journal, a Physician pointed out that “Stress in addition to the beginning itself, was also the cause of itself, and the result of itself.” For practical purposes, stress can mean the following: stress is what we experience as we adjust to the continually changing environment, it can affect us physically, emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, and spiritually. It can create positive or negative feelings. Our body's way of preparing to deal with the changing environment. We feel large and small pangs of stress dozens of times every day. A certain level of stress is normal at manageable levels and as long as we cope with it effectively. Stress and pressure are wonder-full blessings if manageable.

## INTRODUCTION

Stress is a reality of everyday life. The term "stress" used first in physics to analyze the problem of how man-made structures must be designed to carry heavy loads and resist deformation. With the transition from physics to the behavioral sciences, the usage of the term "stress" changed<sup>1</sup>. According to Wheeler C. M.<sup>2</sup>, stress is a word of physics, which refers to the amount of force used on an object and it relates in real life to how certain issues that carry force are applied to humans. Examples like financial difficulties, health issues, personal conflicts, and work issues all carry force or pressure on a person's body, mind and spirit.

Some of the pressures originate from the environment but most often, it emanates from within a person's head in the form of worry, anxiousness, regret, discouragement and low confidence and self-esteem. This article uses the term "stress" in the context of mental health. For roughly the last 50 years, the term stress has increasingly been used in the behavioral and health sciences.

The accompanying social "theory" explains observations about stress as an aspect of student life. Undoubtedly, stress has become the number one reported impediment to academic performance. A Publication of New York University<sup>3</sup> stated that 55% of students claimed their biggest stressor to be academic. 6 in 10 college students report having felt so stressed they could not do their studies on one or more occasions. Stress is the process by which a person reacts when faced with external or internal problems and challenges.

"The organism processes numerous systems to coordinate such adaptive responses both at systematic and cellular levels," that means, stress has direct effects on the brain and the whole anatomy of the body: failure to adapt to a stressful condition can result in brain malfunctions, physiological problems and also areas of psychological challenges in the form of depression, anxiety, pain and burnout<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, many of the emotional and physical symptoms that occur commonly in the student population, such as headaches, fatigue, depression, anxiety, upset stomach, vague aches and pains, changes in appetite, bedwetting, nightmares, nail-biting, refusing to go to school, physical aggression, crying often, difficulty in sleeping and the inability to cope, can be attributed to or exacerbated by stress.<sup>4</sup> Surveys conducted by Kansas State University reveal a 58% increase in stress-related mental health issues reported to campus counselors between 1988 and 2001<sup>5</sup>. These increased stress loads

come with some direct consequences. Suicide rates amongst college-aged students are three times higher than they were in 1950, as described by the International Conference on the Theory and Practice of Personality Formation in Modern Society (ICTPPFMS-18).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

It is obvious that students meet different situations that provide stress, such as relationships with new students; personal factors that vary from person to person; e.g. movement from a small hometown or village to a big city; changes in sleeping habits. This means when students have large academic workloads, they often suffer from lack of sleep. They also have new responsibilities and sometimes combine a job with the studies. Also, they may have financial difficulties, if they should pay for their education. There may be health problems and poor eating habits when because of studies, students do not have enough time to do physical activities and to cook for themselves, etc. In terms of academic factors, there are various challenges to outline, for instance, increased academic workload, especially when there are a large number of assignments; lower than the expected grade, which means, when students receive a lower than expected grade and are seriously disappointed. Excessive amount of hours of study which means students spend most of their time studying and they do not have time to relax with their friends and language difficulties,<sup>6</sup>.

While educational language is for some students like their native tongue for other students it is as foreign as a second language. Procrastination means students put off their assignments until the last possible moment and then end up with no time to do the work properly.

### **Examinations**

These are the only means for a student to prove that they deserve a better grade for a course and because of this students tend to overthink and even obsess about the course work and also try to revise everything they have learnt during the whole period of the course. In doing so, some students get overwhelmed and confused about many topics and they do not know what to do next with their studies.

### **Missing lectures**

It is a common desire of students to miss lectures and when this happens they start to wonder how they will make up for the lessons they have missed so they will be on the same level as their fellow students.

When students live in conditions which are sub-standard and it is difficult for them to afford some basic amenities, they can easily become depressed and obviously, this affects all aspects of their lives, especially their studies. Mental health problems as is well known, stressful events can be very common in both private and professional life and above all, in universities! Studies suggest that many students and lecturers experience significant mental health issues.

Stress is a major problem in higher education. Stress-related disorders can impair cognitive functions and thereby lead to poor achievements with exams<sup>7-8</sup>. Mental health difficulties contribute to problems with achievement and relationships at colleges<sup>9</sup>. In severe cases, they prevent students from regularly attending class, but more often students simply struggle with these problems on a daily basis, leading to further negative social and academic function<sup>10</sup>. The word stress conjures up thoughts of depression, negativity and anxiety and other potentially life-threatening issues even including suicide.

### **Problem solving methods**

There are two central vehicles that can be adopted for broad knowledge sharing about coping with stress during the educational processes: dedicated online courses and face-to-face communication. This consists of yoga courses and music among other things to relieve stress.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Stress management techniques:**

The ability to manage stress is really an important issue when it comes to the topic of stress. Due to this, the Canadian Clinic Community Health Centre has laid down some stress relieving techniques which can help a lot, especially for students<sup>3</sup>.

### Some techniques and methods that can help reducing stress:

Relaxation means to treat and relax all stress centers in the body and gradually check mechanisms that may lead to stress, thereby reaching complete relaxation both inside and outside the body.

Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, volume 198. 50

In this process, all the muscles, internal organs and joints of the body, as well as the emotions and the mind should become relaxed. In the beginning, relaxation should be a conscious effort, though in the end all parts of the body including the mind, should be naturally relaxed. Stress is a factor that may cause disease of the body and the mind. When stress appears in any part of the body, the natural function of that part of the body may be impaired and a state of disorder may gradually develop. When this disorderly state reaches a certain level, disease will be the result. Therefore removing stress can mean eradicating the source of some illnesses<sup>11</sup>.

A technique that can help with the management of stress is **meditation**.

**Meditation** cultivates mindfulness and it can be particularly effective at reducing stress, anxiety, depression and other negative emotions. Mindfulness is the quality of being fully engaged in the present moment, without overthinking or analyzing the experience. Rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, mindfulness meditation switches the focus on what is happening right now.

It takes an effort to maintain your concentration and to bring it back to the present moment when your mind wanders or you start to drift off. However, with regular practice, mindfulness strengthens the areas of the brain associated with joy and relaxation. Mindfulness provides a potentially powerful antidote to the common causes of daily stress such as time pressure, distraction, agitation and interpersonal conflicts<sup>3</sup>. Another method, which is easy to practice, is deep breathing:

Breathing exercises can help to reduce this stress. The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much air as possible into your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel. This kind of breathing is called “diaphragmatic breathing”. It means to breathe from the depths of your abdomen, rather than from your chest<sup>3</sup>.

### **Benefits:**

Deep breathing has been successfully used to decrease the fatigue associated with haemopoietic stem cell transplantation patients<sup>16</sup>, to reduce the anxiety and asthma signs/symptoms of children with asthma<sup>16</sup>, in the management of acute stressful task<sup>16</sup> showing that the slow-breathing technique can have a significant effect on the improvement of the hemodynamic changes following the acute stressful tasks.

The power breath supercharges the body mind. It saturates your entire system with prana (Prana is the Indian word for the energy of the breath). It develops mental clarity, purifies the blood, and builds strong, powerful lungs<sup>12</sup>.

### **Student Stress Busters<sup>17</sup>:**

Learning how to recognize signs of stress and practicing ways to address these symptoms are important steps on the path to good mental health. Here are some activities from our mental health experts that parents and educators can teach children and teens to get them started.

- **Draw your feelings**

Children respond well to visual manifestations of stress. Ask them to draw their feelings of stress on a piece of paper. They can use crayons, markers, colored pencils or even paint. Then ask them to crumple up the paper or tear it into pieces. As they get up to throw the paper away, explain to them that they are also throwing away the negative feelings and stressors.

- **Deep breathing exercises**

Breathing exercises are good practice for learning how the body responds when we breathe correctly. Ask children to take a deep breath through the nose and then slowly, slowly, slowly

breathe out as though they are blowing bubbles, dandelions or candles on a birthday cake. Remind them to pay attention to how their stomach and chest move in and out.

- **Protective bubble**

This activity models how to feel safe even when feeling stressed. Instruct children to image they are in a big bubble that surrounds them completely. Inside the bubble are all the people and things that make them feel safe like family members, friends, pets and stuffed animals. Let them sit for a few minutes as you prompt them to listen to how their bodies feel in a safe space that they can go to in their minds when they are feeling stressed.

**Important note for teachers and parents:**

Teaching should be more focused on strengths rather than weaknesses. Negative criticism can have devastating effect on young, vulnerable minds. Further special techniques for “regenerative” management of stress are beside yoga, meditation, and breathing.

**How teachers can help to overcome students stress:**

- **Limit homework overload**

Teachers can work together as a team to avoid piling on too much homework on the same nights or scheduling tests on the same day.

- **Keep kids moving**

No matter how old students are they can benefit from moving around the room, working at "stations," taking stretching breaks, etc.

- **Play music**

Studies show music helps people relax and focus. Classical music is great for the classroom and can serve as a model for students when they study at home.

- **Schedule time to organize**

In the lower grades, desks can get messy quickly but in older grades, lockers can get out of control too. Taking time out to throw away old papers and sharpen pencils can help students feel more in control.

- **Listen**

Talking about issues bothering students doesn't have to take up a lot of instructional time. Even five minutes going over concerns, writing them on the board, and addressing them later can help students put them aside.

**How Parents can help to overcome students stress:**

**Parent Tips for Reducing Stress**

When children suffer from stress, it affects the entire family. Because parents are used to being able to fix problems, not knowing how to intervene can be frustrating and even add to stress in the home. Fortunately, parents can take action by instituting the following tips to reduce symptoms of toxic stress.

- **Don't over schedule**

Psychologists say teens need time to decompress and develop naturally through non-goal related activities. Lessons, sports teams and other activities may be helpful when it's time to apply to college but should be scheduled around what works best for each child in moderation.

- **Ensure the right amount of sleep**

In addition to improving physical and emotional health, sleep reduces student inattention, and aids student learning and memory skills. When kids don't get enough sleep, they are at a greater risk of depression, suicidal thoughts and self-harm. So how much sleep is enough? The American Academy of Pediatrics advises children ages 6-12 get a minimum of 9-12 hours of sleep per night, with 8-10 hours recommended for teens.

Parents can help by encouraging children and teens to shut off screens at least an hour before bedtime and by limiting access to screens within their child's bedroom.

- **Serve a healthy diet**

Children develop a taste for healthy food when they are exposed to it early on. Family meals should include a variety of fruits and vegetables and foods made from whole grains and



protein. Parents should also limit processed foods and those containing sugar which may be linked to sleep problems and depression.

- **Model self-care**

Getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods and exercising are all important for good mental health. The best way to teach children these self-care strategies is for parents to follow them too!

## **CONCLUSION**

It would be useful for future studies to consider the extent to which stress management techniques have contributed to the academic performance of students. Given that children and young people spend a substantial part of each day within the educational setting, these communities become a natural and important venue for mental health service delivery<sup>13</sup>. It is obvious, that many parents are busy with everyday life and household chores and do not have enough time to spend with their children.

Unfortunately, it is obvious, that more and more young people are spending their free time on surfing the internet, which impacts their mental health. While it is a helpful tool for education, work, social interaction and entertainment, overuse can take a toll on your health, says Saju Mathew,<sup>14</sup> a primary care physician at Piedmont healthcare.

Excessive smartphone, computer and tablet use can disrupt your sleep, which affects your emotions as well as your physical well-being. Stress may cause you to have trouble staying asleep, not necessarily falling asleep. “It’s more common to be waking up at 3 or 4 a. m., not knowing what woke you up,” says Walter James,<sup>15</sup> a sleep medicine physician at Piedmont Atlanta Hospital.

“There could be intrusive thoughts about stress.” Also, busy schedules crammed with studies and extracurricular activities can take a toll on students ‘physical and mental health, especially if they are not eating or sleeping properly. If untreated, these stressors can compound over time, leading to even greater levels of Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, volume 198 52.

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