Background

This session complements the previous sessions which focused on building up positive emotions through planning pleasant events and using helpful thinking. It will also reinforce what students have already learnt about the link between their thoughts and feelings.

It is important to acknowledge that students will be faced with challenges in their lives. This session aims to help students understand the impact these challenges have on their body, thoughts, and emotions. The session also aims to help students identify body clues, or early warning signs of stress, and to increase students’ awareness of helpful coping strategies for dealing with problems they may already be experiencing or are likely to experience in the future. Being prepared to deal with challenges and stressful events is likely to act as a protective factor against depression in the face of these events and challenges.

Learning outcomes

Students will recommend and demonstrate skills that promote a positive self-concept and resilience.

In this session, students will:

- identify body clues/early warning signs of stress;
- describe the impact of stress and negative emotions on their body, thoughts and emotions;
- identify common sources or causes of stress or negative emotions; and
- generate a range of coping strategies for dealing with stress, and select their preferred personal strategies.
session outline

• Review
• Activity 1. Reactions to stress or life challenges
• Activity 2. Causes of stress
• Optional(extension activity
• Activity 3. ‘Can do’ coping
• Reflection
• Home tasks

Preparation/resources

No additional resources required.
session plan

Emotional regulation — coping with challenges and negative emotions

Review [3–5 mins]

1. Review previous session — thoughts-feelings connection. Remind students, ‘We can change the way we feel by changing the way we think’.
2. Review home task — Did students complete the ‘My activities, feelings and thoughts record’? Did students notice any connection between their thoughts and moods?
3. Link to current session.

Points to make

- The last session looked at how it is possible to change the way you feel by changing the way you think about things.
- Today we will look at what to do when we are affected by negative emotions, particularly what to do when feeling stressed or overwhelmed.
**Activity 1. Reactions to stress or life challenges**  
[10–15 mins]

**Process**

1. Firstly, create a situation that you think will present a realistic challenge for most of the students. For example, tell the students that as a way of livening up the session, you will randomly pick four or five students to go to the front of the class and sing a few lines of their favourite song. Tell the students that they will be given one minute to choose which song they would like to sing.

2. Observe students’ reactions for about one minute, then explain to the class that they don’t actually have to sing a song; this was just an experiment to find out people’s responses to a real life challenge.

3. Whole class discussion — ask students for examples of how they felt while waiting. List these on the board in the categories of feelings, body cues and self-talk — as shown in the grid, Resources 7.1. Have students list the responses in the table on page 80 of the Student Workbook.

4. Discuss responses. Some sample questions:
   - How would you define stress?
   - How might you know if someone was under too much stress?
   - Why might it be important to identify your body clues to stress?

**Points to make**

- **Stress is a response to a challenge or threat.**
- **Stress has a thoughts component, a feelings component and a physical (body clues) component.**
- **A little bit of stress can be good for us — e.g. before an exam, it can help us study.**
- **Too much stress can interfere with our daily lives and have a negative effect on our health.**

**Purpose**

*Students will be able to describe responses to stress (physical, emotional and thoughts) and recognise these as early warning signs of stress.*

**Hint**

Teachers will also need to note and normalise different reactions that occur as well. Some people will not be anxious — they may have wanted to sing. Just as people have different emotions in the same situation, people will experience stress in different situations.

**Stress is normal — everyone experiences stress.**

It is helpful to identify how you react to stress, because then you will know the early warning signs and can take steps to manage stress.
## Activity 2. Causes of stress  [10–15 mins]

### Purpose

Students will be able to identify a range of situations that cause stress for people their age.

### Process

1. In groups, have students brainstorm the common causes of stress for young people.
2. Refer students to page 81 of the Student Workbook. Have the students record responses, grouping them under the relevant headings such as family, peer, school, and community/society.
3. As a class, discuss responses.

### Points to make

- Causes of stress can be grouped under different headings such as family, peer, school and community/society.
- Causes of stress can also be grouped according to whether they are in our control or not.
- However, even if a situation is beyond our control, changing the way we think about it can help.

### Optional/extension activity

1. From the list of stressors, have students discuss and group those they believe they have control over and those which they do not.
2. Debate which is more stressful — those situations which are within our control or those which are not.
3. Link to the next activity on stress coping strategies.
**Activity 3. ‘Can do’ coping** [15 mins]

**Process**

1. Refer students to page 82 of the Student Workbook.

2. In pairs, ask students to swap examples of things they like to do to calm themselves down when they feel stressed or overwhelmed.

3. As a class, brainstorm and create a list of coping strategies for dealing with stress.

**Points to make**

- As mentioned before, there are things that can cause us stress that we have no control over.

- Although we can’t change some of the things that stress us, there are things we can do to help calm ourselves when we’re feeling overwhelmed and to keep our stress at manageable levels.

4. Have students read over the ‘can do’ coping strategies on pages 83 to 86 of the Student Workbook and compare these with the list of strategies the class generated. Have students add any new ‘can do’ coping items identified by the class in the blank spaces provided.

5. As a class, discuss the range of coping strategies.

**Points to make**

- There is a huge variety of coping strategies.

- There is no one right way of coping.

**Purpose**

*Students will identify their current coping strategies and learn about other positive options for coping.*
### Reflection

Refer students to page 87 of the Student Workbook. Ask students to complete the following tasks:

- Look back over the list of ‘can do’ coping strategies and think about times when you have felt really stressed or challenged.
- Has anything helped when you’ve felt this way?
- Pick your top five personal ‘can do’ coping strategies and record them in the space provided.

### Home tasks

Refer students to page 88 of the Student Workbook. This week’s home tasks are:

1. Think of two situations that are challenging or cause you some stress and that occur regularly (e.g. Maths homework, fight with sister).
2. Over the next week plan to use one of your top five ‘can do’ coping strategies each time one of these situations arises. Keep some notes about how the strategy works.
**activity 1**  
Reactions to stress or life challenges

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEELINGS</td>
<td>BODY CUES</td>
<td>SELF-TALK</td>
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