SESSION 4

STAYING CALM
Background

This session focuses on the sense of control. A sense of control comes from the belief that we have the ability to cope with life challenges to obtain successful outcomes where they are possible. A sense of control involves a feeling of being in charge of your own life and the choices that you make. A sense of control is also important in managing stress and stressful situations. In today’s world the term stress is used frequently and in many settings. Young people report experiencing considerable stress as a result of various pressures such as the need to study, get their assignments in on time, train and play as part of a team, or practise for a concert/play. They may have a part-time job, have jobs they must do at home, have to look after younger family members, they may have issues with their friends or they may have experienced a loss or traumatic event.

Not all stress is bad; for example, sometimes the stress of competing in a game or race helps improve performance, or the stress of a party or formal can increase anticipation of enjoyment. However, when the level of stress or anxiety becomes high, then it is counterproductive as a sense of control is decreased, and performance and enjoyment is impaired. Having a realistic sense of control is an important factor in mental health. Young people may report feeling like they have little control as events seem to happen to them and they are required to do many things about which they have no choice. Although we cannot control many of the events that happen to us, we can control how we are going to think about or interpret these events, and, consequently, how we feel about them and how we choose to respond to them. Having a good sense of control means that you know that you have choices in how you react and respond to situations. There are a number of practical ways to minimise stress and enhance a sense of control. These include learning to manage time or organise what has to be done; getting help if school work is getting out of hand; using helpful self-talk; problem solving; and learning to relax. There are many different relaxation strategies that can be used to reduce stress and gain both physical and mental control in difficult situations, and students will be asked to practise some of these in this session.

The video shows the situation in the house becoming quite tense and the contestants are provided with a video that takes them through a deep breathing exercise. Students will be asked to view the same deep breathing segment and practise deep breathing along with the presenter. Students will then work in small groups and practise another relaxation technique with one of the students leading the exercise and then present their technique to the whole class. Students will be reminded that, along with these techniques, the things that you say to yourself are also really important in how you manage stress and how “in control” you feel.
Learning outcomes

In this session students:

- Identify and demonstrate stress-reduction strategies
- Describe effective ways of managing negative emotions
- Use self-talk to gain a sense of control and to help cope with stressful situations

Key messages

- A realistic sense of control is a protective factor for building good mental health.
- A good sense of control means that you know that you have choices in how you interpret situations and consequently how you feel about them and how you respond to those situations.
- Stress is a common experience for most people. Individuals respond to stress both physically and psychologically. Some stress is good as it readies the body for action and can improve performance and enjoyment. However, too much stress can impair performance.
- There are practical strategies that help manage stress – planning, time management, problem solving, relaxation, seeking support, and others.
- Relaxation strategies include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mental imagery, meditation, and creating mandalas.
- Self-talk (the things that we say to ourselves about our self and our world) plays a major role in managing stress and developing a good sense of control.

Skills: emotional regulation, managing stress, relaxation, helpful self-talk

Session outline

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Video – Episode 4 of Strongbbox
4.3 Activity – Staying calm
4.4 Extra activity – Role play
4.5 Out of class activity – Making a mandala

Materials

- Video set at Episode 4
- Clock or watch with second hand
- Photocopy of Resource 4.1
- Photocopy of Resource 4.2
- Photocopy or OHT of Resource 4.4 [optional extra activity]
Session Plan

4.1 Introduction 1 min
1. After students are seated ask them to stand up and sit down, and stand up and sit down again quickly. Ask them to take their pulse (find a spot either at the side of the neck or on the wrist). Time them for 15 seconds then ask them to multiply this number by 4 and write down that number.

4.2 Video – Episode 4 of Strongbbox 14 mins
What’s happening this week? There has been a lot of tension building in the house over the last few weeks! Things come to a head, and Dr Solomon steps in with some helpful stress management suggestions for the contestants.

STOP VIDEO AFTER FADE OUT

4.3 Staying calm 20 - 25 mins
Learning environment 3 groups
Preparation/materials
- Video of deep breathing following Episode 4 of Strongbbox
- Photocopy of Resource 4.1 – Relaxation techniques [1 technique for each group]

NOTE: There are 4 techniques provided, the 4th (meditation) is an optional extra if you have the time or you could substitute it for one of the other techniques.
- Photocopy of Resource 4.2 – The mandala circle [for each student in the mandala technique group]

Procedure
1. Discuss how being part of a group can be stressful, e.g. living in a family or share house, going camping, school camps, or doing a group project where there are expectations about the tasks each member has to do. This can be seen in the Strongbbox house where the contestants are stressed and have been doing deep breathing. Explain that students are going to view the same tape that the contestants watched and practise deep breathing.
2. Play video (it is the segment following the end of Episode 4 of Strongbbox) and ask students to follow the deep breathing procedure outlined on the video. They will be asked to take their pulse by the video presenter at the end of the procedure.
3. **Discuss** with students whether their pulse rate was different after the video to their rate at the start of the class. **Explain** that the pulse rate increases when anxious or under pressure and is an indicator of being stressed. Deep breathing is one way to lower the pulse rate and manage stress.

4. **Explain** that there are some other common relaxation techniques that are effective in managing stress and that students will practise these in groups. **Hand out** scripts for the 3 relaxation techniques (Resource 4.1 - one technique per group). **Ask** groups to choose a leader who will follow the instructions on the sheet to peer teach the strategy to the group. Explain that they will have 5 minutes (or longer if time permits) to practise their technique.

**Alternative Procedure 1.**

Group students into 2’s or 3’s and hand out copies of the 3 techniques to each group. Ask students to work through one technique with one student acting as peer teacher. If time permits, the other students can take turns to peer teach the remaining techniques. Allow some time for discussion in small groups.

**Alternative Procedure 2.**

You may lead the class in one or more of the techniques.

**Alternative Procedure 3.**

You might like to use local resources, for example, other teachers in the school, the guidance officer/student welfare counsellor/health workers, student mentors, or local community members with expertise in relaxation techniques, to come in and lead the class.

5. At the end of the allocated time, **ask** students to discuss the technique in their group and whether it worked for them, why they did or did not like it, would they use the technique, etc.?

6. **Ask** each group to explain to the whole class about their technique (its purpose, mode of delivery, and effectiveness). If you have time, ask a representative from each group to lead the whole class in doing the technique.

7. **Discuss** as a whole class which techniques students liked best and why.

8. **Brainstorm** some of the ways the students cope with stressful situations, and things they do and techniques they use to relieve tension. Also consider activities that students might engage in to avoid becoming stressed! Record on the board. For example:
relaxation, deep breathing, good nutrition, regular sleep, physical activity (like riding a bike or running), listening to music, meditation, reading, watching TV, yoga, talking to friends, going out, time management, seeking advice from someone.

9. Discuss with students the purpose and application of different relaxation strategies:
   - Relaxation strategies may assist us to gain a sense of control and to calm down if we are going into stressful situations.
   - Regular relaxation practice may be used to prevent adverse reactions to stress.
   - People may choose different stress reduction strategies (e.g. physical activities, imagery).
   - Why different strategies may not work for all people.
   - Why it is important to look at the things we say to ourselves when we confront difficult situations (e.g. exams, public speaking, sporting game, asking a friend for something). Refer students to page 25 in their books for some tips on how to counter negative self-talk.
   - What is the impact of saying negative things to ourselves or thinking that we will not be able to do a good job?

10. Refer students to page 26 of their book (Resource 4.3) for information on what stress is, the body’s response to stress, physiological and psychological problems associated with stress, how to avoid stress, and the benefits of relaxation.
4.4 Extra activity – Don’t drop your bundle

25 mins

Learning environment
Small groups or pairs for planning and practise, and space for the whole class

Preparation/materials
- Photocopy or OHT of Resource 4.4 – Description of characters [cut out 1 for each character if photocopied]

Procedure

NOTE:
- Much of the learning from role play comes from the discussion afterwards, so the whole class should be watching one role play at a time. However it is important for small groups to have the opportunity to plan and practise their own story, and to only use volunteer groups for presentation to the class.
- As this strategy requires a lot of action and physical expression, you may want to carry out a few warm up activities, e.g. miming in pairs, miming watching a movie (horror, comedy).

1. **Present** the scenario where the central characters come together to deal with a problem, e.g. your boss in your new job yells at you when a customer bumps into you and you drop some plates on the floor.

2. **Give** each central character a description of the scenario and who they are (Resource 4.4). Allow students time to think about the scene, their character and their possible responses.

3. **Group** students together to spontaneously act out what happens. Let all groups act out the situation amongst themselves simultaneously. This reduces the pressure of acting in front of others, and allows the participation of all members of the class at the same time.

4. **Bring** the students back to the whole class and discuss their responses. **Ask** both boss and waiter what they were thinking and how they felt when they were under stress, e.g. nervous, frightened, or angry. Were there any physical changes? What were their thoughts? What was the outcome of the exchange? Were the responses helpful or unhelpful? **Discuss** differences between groups and their alternative interactions and responses.

5. **Ask** for volunteers to act out their stories.

6. **Ask** students to suggest some strategies the boss and waiter could use to help them to cope with the stress and resolve the situation.
4.5 Out of class activity – Making a mandala

1. **Refer** students to page 29 of their books.

2. **Instructions:**

   You might like to take a short break from doing your homework tonight to create a mandala. It will only take 10 minutes and might reduce stress. Taking a break will allow you to have more focus when you return to your work. Read the instructions for drawing a mandala on page 21 and use the mandala circle provided on page 23 or use your own paper to draw on. If you prefer, you could practise another relaxation technique that you have learned in today’s class. Refer to pages 16 - 25 of student book for relaxation techniques.

   You might like to take your pulse before and after you do this technique and note how you feel after completing this activity.