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7. The Upside and Downside of Stress

Module 1 – Physical Safety, Mental Health and Wellness (Secondary)

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Learning Goal

To understand and identify that stress can have positive and negative influence on our daily lives, and strategies that help mitigate the stress response.

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Before we begin, think about...

Think about times in the school day where you may feel "stressed out".

Do you feel stressed out before a test or quiz?

An important sports game or swim meet?

Getting on a bus?

A big performance?

Catching COVID-19 or any other illness?

Social media apps and social media usage?

Experiencing bullying?

Oral presentations or sharing ideas in class?

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Before we begin, think about…

Now think about how that stress "feels" like.

Does your heart race?

Do you start sweating a lot?

Maybe you freeze?

These physical feelings refer to the "stress response" or the "fight/flight/freeze response", which is a biological and psychological response we experience on encountering what our body perceives as a threat (a quiz or test, for example).

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Minds On – The Upside & Downside of Stress?

Using a 3-heading list or a 3-column chart:

- List times in school when you experience "stress responses".

- Beside each example indicate whether it affected you in a positive (+) or negative (-) way.

- Briefly describe how you physically experienced stress in each moment.

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TASK: 3 Case Studies

It may feel like stress is unavoidable!

However, it is important to understand that our bodies are not designed to be in "stress mode" all the time. There are positive and negative effects of stress! It is useful to learn how to challenge the ways we think about stress.

Read the following 3 Case Studies and answer the questions for each Case Study using the previous slides or your notes to help you.

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TASK: Case Study #1 - Roger

Roger is a grade 12 student that has experienced acute anxiety for several years which he has managed well since beginning high school. When he becomes particularly worried or stressed, he experiences anxiety attacks and his blood pressure rises. Since being in high school, a range of support measures were put in place, such as being able to pre-visit classrooms and new spaces. This year, Roger decided to pursue a co-op placement. However, he was particularly worried about how he would manage this new and demanding experience, as well as keep his grades up for college and scholarships.

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- **What are Roger's stressors?**

- **What did Roger experience as a stress response?**

- **What coping strategies could potentially be utilized by Roger?**

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TASK: *Case Study #2 - Naomi*

Naomi is a grade 10 student who enjoys her physical education and nutrition classes. When Naomi was younger, she witnessed a lot of violence in the country she grew up in. Whenever she hears yelling, loud noises, or glass breaking, her heart begins to race, she feels dizzy, and afterwards, begins to feel sad and confused. Sometimes, Naomi has difficulty sleeping, which impacts her concentration in school.

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- **What are Naomi's stressors?**
- **What did Naomi experience as a stress response?**
- **What coping strategies could potentially be utilized by Naomi?**

Alex is in grade 9. They use a lot of social media apps like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. Alex likes to follow many "influencers" who wear expensive clothes, live in large homes, and have stylized photoshoots. Alex spends 1-2 hours before bed on their phone scrolling through these apps. They often feel jealous after looking at influencers' photos and frustrated to have not dedicated enough time to their homework and other activities.
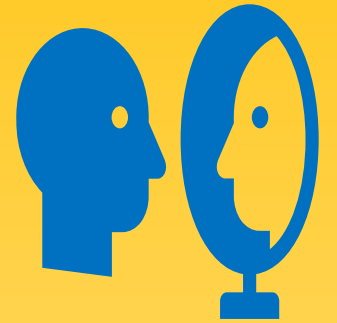
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TASK: Case Study #3 - Alex

- What are Alex's stressors?
- What did Alex experience as a stress response?
- What coping strategies could potentially be utilized by Alex?

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Take Away: Self-Reflection

- **What are my stressors?**

- **What do I experience as a stress response?**

- **What positive coping strategies could I potentially use?**

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