

Stress and Coping

OBJECTIVES/RATIONALE

Stress is a subjective feeling in response to environmental events that are perceived as frustrating or threatening. Individuals adapt to stressful situations by using coping strategies and defense mechanisms. The student will identify general responses to stress, common events that cause stress, defense mechanisms in response to stress, and types of maladaptive behavior.

TEKS 121.26 1A, 1D, 1H
121.2 3B

TAKS ELA 1, 3, 4, 5
Mathematics 10

KEY POINTS

- I. Emotions
 - A. feelings that involve physical and psychological changes
 - 1. “fight” or “flight” - physical response to emotions related to challenge or threat
 - a. prepares body for aggression (fight)
 - b. prepares body to escape perceived danger (flight)
 - 2. learning to control emotions—a major task
 - a. children learn to repress unacceptable emotions
 - B. Types of Emotions:
 - 1. Anxiety
 - a. Definition: vague unpleasant feeling that produces physical sensations
 - 1) result: tension and increased heart rate
 - 2) often can not identify reason for emotional distress
 - 2. Fear
 - a. result of specific, identifiable cause
 - b. physiologic reactions similar to anxiety
 - 3. Anger
 - a. inborn, instinctive
 - b. emotional reaction to loss
 - 4. Aggression
 - a. combination of frustration, hate, or rage
- II. Perceptions of Control:
 - A. “in control” – perception that one has choices and is able to create a change in psychological state or current life circumstances
 - B. “powerlessness” – perception that one’s actions cannot effect changes in outcome
 - C. “hopelessness” – perception that one’s needs have no potential to be met
 - 1. long-term feelings of powerlessness lead to feelings of physical and mental fatigue which can ultimately lead to depression
 - 2. long-term feelings of hopelessness often lead to depression
 - D. Spiritual Distress
 - 1. Leads one to question:
 - a. the meaning of one’s life
 - b. meaning of suffering and pain
 - c. the value of living
 - 2. short-term spiritual distress is type of personal introspection that promotes personal growth and development

3. prolonged spiritual distress leads to depression

III. Stress and Coping

A. stress – the subjective feeling of tension to perceived events

B. coping – refers to how the mind reacts to stress

C. coping mechanisms vary from person to person

1. event that stresses one person, might not stress other

2. conscious behavior usually based on success of previous coping experiences

IV. Defense Mechanisms – unconscious and operate automatically

A. Types:

1. **compensation** – covering up weaknesses by emphasizing a more desirable trait or by overachievement in a more comfortable area

a. example: high school student too small to play football becomes star tennis player

b. purpose: allows person to overcome weakness and achieve success

2. **denial** – an attempt to ignore unacceptable realities by refusing to acknowledge them

a. example: a mother, though told her daughter has terminal cancer, continues to plan for her daughter's college entrance

b. purpose: temporarily isolates person from full impact of a traumatic situation

3. **displacement** – transferring emotional reactions from one object or person to another object or person

a. example: a boyfriend and girlfriend are arguing, and he gets so angry that he slams his fist into the wall

b. purpose: allows feelings to be expressed through or to less meaningful objects or people

4. **intellectualization** – when an emotional response that would normally accompany a painful (or uncomfortable) incident is avoided by use of academic or intellectual explanations that remove personal feelings from the incident

a. example: pain over best friend's sudden death is reduced by saying, "He wouldn't have wanted to live disabled."

b. purpose: protects person from emotional reality of loss

5. **minimization** – not acknowledging the significance of one's behavior

a. example: a teenager says, "Don't believe everything my kid brother tells you. I wasn't so drunk I couldn't drive."

b. purpose: allows a person to decrease and trivialize responsibility for behavior

6. **projection** – projects shortcomings or feelings on to others

a. example: a disgruntled college freshman when called to meet with her advisor believes that she's called in because advisor doesn't like her

b. purpose: allows person to deny existence of shortcomings

7. **rationalization** – justification of certain behaviors by faulty logic and attribution of socially acceptable motives that did not in fact inspire the behavior

a. example: a student cheats on an exam but blames the teacher for not making the material more understandable

b. purpose: helps person cope with inability to acknowledge inappropriate behavior

8. **reaction formation** – individual acts exactly opposite to the way he/she feels

a. example: teenager has bitterness towards girl who beat her out of cheerleader position, but acts very sweet and friendly when they see each other

b. purpose: form of repression that allows feelings to be acted out in a more acceptable way

9. **regression** – resorting to an earlier stage of life that is generally less demanding and responsible
 - a. example: a adult throws a temper tantrum when he can't have his own way
 - b. purpose: allows person to return to point in development when nurturing and dependency were acceptable
 10. **repression** – an unconscious mechanism by which threatening thoughts, feelings, and desires are kept from becoming conscious
 - a. example: child who was verbally abused by her alcoholic mother cannot remember certain events during her childhood
 - b. purpose: protects person from traumatic experience until he/she has resources to cope
- V. Effective coping mechanisms
 - A. a slight to moderate level of worry that engage adaptive activity to relieve mental distress
 - VI. Ineffective coping
 - A. leads to excessive use of defense mechanisms
 - VII. Types of Behavior:
 - A. maladaptive behavior
 1. result of ineffective coping
 - B. psychotic behavior
 1. most severe manifestation of ineffective coping
 2. caused by psychosis
 - a. state caused by lack of contact with reality
 - b. mind unconsciously uses many defense mechanisms to deny, destroy, and avoid reality when it can't consciously cope and solve problems

ACTIVITIES

- I. Using the *Social Readjustment Rating Scale*, identify and list traumatic and stressful events for teenagers. (See Guideline Activity for Teen Social Readjustment Rating Scale.)
- II. Write three short introspective essays about a time in your life when you ¹ felt in control, a time when you ² felt powerless, and a time that you ³ felt hopeless. Essays should not be shared with class in order to promote introspective authenticity. Teachers, reiterate to the students that there are no right or wrong answers to this activity. Grading should be on thoroughness and grammar.
- III. Practice relaxation techniques.
- IV. Complete Partly Cloudy or Partly Sunny Activity.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Quiz for Defense Mechanism Recognition

Key for quiz

Guideline of Teen Social Readjustment Rating Scale

Sample Stressors

Guideline for Relaxation Techniques

www.rxforwellness.com/learningchannel/stress_wellness_0.shtml - Social Readjustment Rating Scale

http://www.ufomind.com/area51/desert_rat/1995/dr32/#freud - adjunct listing of defense mechanisms

<http://www.queendom.com/tests/lc.html> - on-line test to determine “locus of control” (fun activity)

Mental Health & Mental Illness, Sixth Edition, Patricia D. Barry, ISBN 0-397-55473-7 (chapters12-15)

ASSESSMENT

Rubric for Introspective Essay

Quiz - Defense Mechanisms

ACCOMMODATIONS

For reinforcement, the student will create chart of each defense mechanism with an example of each.

For enrichment, the student will review video clip from talk show and identify maladaptive defense mechanisms. (Good choice of talk show videos are the Tuesday *Oprah* shows with Dr. Phil McGraw. The October 17th, 2000 show is excellent for this activity. To order, go to <http://www.oprah.com>.)

REFLECTIONS

Quiz—Defense Mechanisms

Student _____

Date _____

Period _____

MATCHING: Place the appropriate answer to left of number.

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| _____ 1. resorting to earlier stage of life | A. minimization |
| _____ 2. ignoring unacceptable realities | B. regression |
| _____ 3. act opposite to how you feel | C. projection |
| _____ 4. trivializing significance of one's behavior | D. denial |
| _____ 5. use of academic-type explanation to separate personal feelings from painful event | E. compensation |
| _____ 6. unconscious mechanism that keeps threatening thoughts, feelings, and desires from consciousness | F. repression |
| _____ 7. placing inadequate or hostile feelings onto others | G. displacement |
| _____ 8. justifying certain behavior by attributing action to socially acceptable behavior | H. reaction-formation |
| _____ 9. transferring emotional responses to another object or person | I. rationalization |
| _____ 10. covering up a weakness by overachievement in a more comfortable area | J. intellectualization |

Key: Quiz
Stress and Coping

1. **B**

2. **D**

3. **H**

4. **A**

5. **J**

6. **F**

7. **C**

8. **I**

9. **G**

10. **E**

Activity Guideline

Social Readjustment Rating Scale for Teens

OBJECTIVE:

This is an exercise in introspection, which should help students identify traumatic events that can and often do alter the behavior of teenagers.

GOAL:

To promote awareness of specific stressors which have the capacity to lead to teen depression and other maladaptive behaviors.

1. Have the students go over the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, which you can get on-line at address listed under MATERIALS NEEDED.
2. Ask the students if they can identify with this scale.
3. Point out that children and teens are usually affected by different stressors than those that effect adults.
4. Have the students brainstorm and come up with stressors that are common to teens.
5. Write stressors on the board.
6. Divide the students into groups of four or five. Depending on the number of students in your class, make one to two of the groups all girls, one to two of the groups all boys, and one to two of the groups a mixture of boys and girls.
7. Have the groups rank the stressors that are listed on the board. The most traumatic stressor should be first on the list; the least traumatic should be last on the list. Place a time constraint of 15 minutes on this segment of the activity.
8. Upon completion, have the groups compare their *Teen Social Readjustment Rating Scales*.
9. Ask the students to try and determine if there are noticeable ranking differences between the female, male, and mixed gender groups.
10. Point out that stressors that are ranked higher for girls might not be ranked nearly as high for boys (and vice/versa).
11. Point out the similarities and differences of the gender groups.

Example of teen stressors on following page.

Teachers, in the event your students need some verbal prompts, here's an example list of stressors my high school psychology class developed.

unreasonable curfew
argument with best friend
parental separation/ divorce
death of sibling
lack of money
preparing for prom
driving status
exams
changing schools
sibling becomes sick or disabled
injury or illness
too tall/too short
assigned detention hall
“wrong” cloths
asking someone out
argument with parent
embarrassment in front of peers
breakup with girl/boy friend
moving to a different neighborhood
involved in auto accident
too big/too small
disagreement with teacher
not making “team” (football, cheerleader, etc)
getting in college of choice

teen pregnancy
poor grade(s)
sexual relationship
parent loses job
death of parent
acne
bad hair-cut
lose job
traffic violation
having date for important event
best friend moves out of town
need to find job
overwhelmed with homework
applying for college
waiting for someone to ask you out
oral report
elected to leadership position
college entrance exams (ACT/SAT)
death of friend
new “love” relationship
suspension from school
peers “talking” about you
parental pressure & expectations
holidays / vacations

***Note: Stressors do not have to be “bad” in order to traumatize individuals. *Any* life-changing event is seen as a stressor and has the capacity to change behavior.

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

Rubric: Introspective Essay

Criteria		Comments	Score
Thoroughness	60%		
Spelling	20%		
Grammar	20%		

Total _____

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

Rubric: Introspective Essay

Criteria		Comments	Score
Thoroughness	60%		
Spelling	20%		
Grammar	20%		

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques can be a useful way to help yourself feel better when you are depressed, stressed out, or angry.

**I use these relaxation techniques as a group activity for the entire class. Generally, I dim the lights, play soft relaxing music, and slowly talk them through the steps. After the initial giggling dies down, they really get into this activity!*

Mental Imagery Relaxation

- As you focus on your mental image more and more, you direct your attention away from anxiety provoking situations.
- Close your eyes.
- Breathe deeply and slowly.
- Think of a place where you feel entirely safe and comfortable. Your place should be real, such as a childhood tree fort or a waterfall you once visited. It could be imagined, like a lush deserted island or in a castle high above the clouds.
- What does that place look like? What sorts of things are in your special place?
- What does that place sound like?
- Breathe deeply.
- Does your place have a particular smell? Imagine that smell.
- What does your place feel like? What is the temperature? Is it sunny or dark?
- Humid or dry?
- Your special place will always be somewhere you can go whenever you are scared or sad. You can also go there to simply relax.

Physical Relaxation

By learning to relax your body, you can concentrate on feeling good and deal with unpleasant emotions and experiences.

Sit or lay comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Breathe slowly and deeply

Concentrate on feeling the air move in and out of your body

Concentrate on your toes. Relax them. Feel all the tension leave your toes, one by one.

Feel yourself breathe slowly and deeply.

Relax your feet. Let all the tension in your feet disappear.

Now the tension in your calves disappear.

You are breathing deeply.

A soothing feeling rises through your legs, through your knees to your thighs.

Your legs are completely relaxed and free of tension.

Breathe deeply. Feel the air glide through you.

Now your pelvis is relaxing. The muscles grow free of tension.

The soothing feeling moves through your buttocks. Feel your buttocks relax.

The muscles in your belly relax now.

Feel yourself breathing deeply as the tension in the lower half of your body disappears.
Now the tension in your back begins to disappear starting from the bottom and working upwards.
The soothing feeling wraps around your chest and neck and extends down your arms.
All tension leaves your arms and hands. You feel very relaxed now.
All the while you are breathing deeply.
All the muscles in your neck relax.
Then the soothing feeling moves through your face.
All of your facial muscles relax as you breathe deeply and feel the tension disappear from your body.
You are now completely relaxed. Your body and mind feel free and without tension.
All of the bad feelings are gone.

PARTLY CLOUDY, PARTLY SUNNY

Background: How we feel about things often affects how we react. At different times, we might react differently to the same situation.

Obtain a straight-sided glass container and determine the middle of it. Add water to the container to the halfway level. Look at the container and describe it.

Did you say the container was half-full or half-empty?

When it is a day with some sunshine and some clouds, how do you describe it? Do you say it is partly cloudy or partly sunny?

Read the following statements one at a time. Write your reaction as to what you think is happening in each situation. Don't try to carefully analyze the situation. Just react and write what you feel.

1. You arrive home and your mother tells you that your teacher called.
2. In school, a long-haired boy with tattoos, body piercings and long hair passes a small bag to another boy.
3. At a party, your friends, standing together in a group, suddenly stop talking when you come into the room.
4. At the mall, you see your young married female teacher hug and kiss a man who is not her husband.
5. You receive a note from the teacher that the principal wants to see you now.
6. You approach your home and find a police car parked in front.

Check your response. How many of your reactions were negative? How many were positive? What do you think days are for you, partly sunny or partly cloudy?