



## REALITY AVENUE: "Life as a Teenager: How Stressful is it REALLY?"

Follow-Up Discussion Prompters, Classroom Activities & Assignments

### Follow-Up Discussion Prompters

*Questions can be utilized as a resource for an interactive teacher driven activity or as a prompter for written assignments. Classroom ground rules for the discussion should be set, if not already, for example: confidentiality (no names – "I know someone who..."), respect (all ideas accepted), what is said in the class stays in the class, we all get a chance to talk, keep an open mind, etc.*

1. How do you define stress?
2. What are some examples of stress in your life and the lives of those around you?
3. Stress originates from both "good" things happening in your life as well as "bad". Detail both sources of stress in *your* life and why they can be so stressful.
4. How do you create your own stress?
5. What stress creators in your life are out of your control? How is your reaction to them affecting your level of stress? Is one way of reacting working better than another?
6. How does stress look on you? Give some examples of how stress shows itself physically, psychologically (mentally) and in relationships in your life.
7. When *friends, family, and strangers* see you under stress, how do they react? Do they react in different ways? Explain your answer.
8. How does the way others react to your stress affect you and your level of stress?
9. Do your *parents* relate to the life stresses you experience? What are some examples of the ways your parents respond to your stress? Does their response help or hurt you?
10. What could your parents do to help you during times of stress? Do you need different ways of helping depending on the source of the stress?
11. What can you *learn* about *yourself* through stress?
12. What are some of the benefits of stress?
13. Can you ever eliminate stress and/or *should* it be eliminated from your life?
14. What are some *negative* personal strategies you use in coping with or managing the stress in your life? Why are these strategies ineffective?
15. What are some *positive* strategies you use to cope with stress? Why are these strategies effective?

## Classroom Activities & Assignments

(for middle and high school students)

<b>Sunshine State Benchmarks For Middle School</b>	LAA1.3, LAA23, LAB1.3, LAB23, LAC1.3, LAC23, LAC3.3 SSA23, SSA3.3, FLA1.3, FLA23, FLB1.3, FLC1.3, DAB1.3 <b>THA1.3, THA23, THE1.3, VAE1.3</b> <b>HEA1.3, HEA23, HEB1.3, HEB23, HEB33, HEC1.3, HEC23</b>
<b>Sunshine State Benchmarks For High School</b>	LAA1.4, LAA24, LAB1.4, LAB24, LAC1.4, LAC2.4, LAC3.4, LAD1.4, LAD2.4, LAE2.4, SSB2.4, FLA1.4, <b>FLA2.4, FLA3.4, FLB1.4, FLC1.4,</b> <b>THB1.4, THC1.4, THE1.4, VAA1.4, VAB1.4, VAE1.4</b> <b>HEA1.4, HEA2.4, HEB1.4, HEB2.4, HEB3.4, HEC1.4, HEC2.4</b>

### Exercise #1 - "Will This Matter a Year from Now?"

Ask Yourself this Question, "Will This Matter a Year from Now?" Imagine that whatever circumstances you are dealing with isn't happening right now, but a year from now. Then simply ask yourself, "Is this situation really as important as I'm making it out to be?" Once in a great while it may be, but a vast majority of time it simply isn't. While this simple game won't solve all of your problems, it can give you an enormous amount of perspective on any one problem.

Do you use up a lot of energy feeling angry and overwhelmed about things that won't matter a year from now? To help prioritize your stressors and find out, try the following:

Make a list of the troubles you're facing today, and imagine where they'll be a year from now:

	<b>My Worries Today</b>	<b>How will they matter next year?</b>
<b>At School</b>		
<b>At Home</b>		
<b>With Relationships</b>		
<b>About My Future</b>		

Adapted from: Don't Sweat the Small Stuff Workbook, Richard Carlson, Ph.D.

### Exercise #2 - MANAGE YOUR STRESS

**Objective:** To practice 3 methods of managing and lowering stress levels as well as to determine which methods are the most effective for each individual student.

**Explain** to the class that each of the following 3 methods of managing stress has been proven effective and that like any other behavior, to get good at it, we must practice it often. Have the students attempt each method, preferably at a time when they are feeling stressed.

**Before** beginning the exercise, have each student rate his/her level of stress from 1 to 10 (1 being completely relaxed and ten being TOTALLY stressed out!).

**After** the exercise have him/her rate the level of stress from 1 to 10 again. Have him/her **note** the ratings and self determine which method is most effective.

Then have each **detail** what other methods her/she uses to manage stress along with the plusses and minuses of each coping mechanism (i.e. – portable, can be done anywhere, costs money, makes you gain weight, etc.). This exercise can be turned in as a ranked and detailed tabled list or as an essay.

### **1) DEEP BREATHING**

Relax shoulders & arms.

Slowly circle head right, then left. Repeat several times.

Close eyes.

Take a slow, deep breath. Repeat concentrating on breathing.

### **2) 6-SECOND PAUSE**

Smile (to relax facial muscles).

Inhale. Imagine air flowing in through the feet and hands.

Exhale. Let jaw, tongue and shoulders go loose, "feel" warm air flow down from the chest and out through the feet.

Tell yourself that your body is calm.

### **3) MEDITATION**

Sit or lie comfortably.

Close eyes, let muscles relax.

Concentrate on breathing.

Select a word and say it silently each time you exhale. Think only of the word.

Open your eyes after 10-20 minutes.

Sit quietly for a few more minutes.

## **Exercise #3 - GET OFF MY BACK!**

Participants symbolically shrug off their troubles in this loud and lively self-assertive exercise.

**OBJECTIVE:** To raise participants' awareness of the stresses and strains that weigh them down.

### **PROCESS:**

**1)** The teacher directs participants to slump in their chairs, as if they were carrying a heavy weight on their shoulders/back.

**2)** Reflection - Once everyone has assumed the "bowed down" posture, the teacher invites the students to personalize their posture.

Think of all the burdens you're carrying around these days - all the worries and concerns, the stresses and strains, the trials, and tribulations.

*Give several examples and suggest that most people are carrying around a lot of extra burdens that aren't even their own. Examples: personal issues, what to wear tomorrow, homework, projects, work, boyfriend/girlfriend worries, parents...*

Mentally visualize and name each of the burdens and imagine them as part of the weight on your back. Is it anger, guilt, resentments, embarrassments, fears...? Now remove

each burden and put all of those burdens in your baggage cart. Can you visualize putting your “stuff” in a paper bag, overnight bag, trunk, etc...?

**3)** At the count of three, the students leap out of their chairs, with arms outstretched, shouting in unison, **“GET OFF MY BACK!”**

**4)** Have the students do this several times, until the group energy level rises and the individual tension levels diminish.

### **Exercise #4 – Mental Math, A + B = C**

**Objective:** To increase each student’s awareness of his/her thoughts concerning a stressor and how his/her thoughts will help to determine the resultant emotional reaction and whether his/her stress level will increase or decrease.

**Concept:** A (Action) + B (Thought about the Action) = C (Emotion)

**Activity:** Divide the class into 5 groups. Each group will have the same Action, but a different Thought following the Action and in turn, a different Emotion response. Have each group review their team’s roles and then act out their scenario for the class. Then, have each group take another Action and create 5 Thoughts and 5 Emotions for it. Have each group act out *one* Action with Thought/Emotion sequence of their choosing or have each group act out a *different* Action/Thought/Emotion sequence.

**Discussion:** After the exercise, have the class discuss and relate experiences where they noticed that they THOUGHT and in term FELT differently than another person regarding an Action or stressful life event. Does this *thought=emotions* apply to all life circumstances? Is there any action in the world where EVERYONE would react/feel the exactly the same way?

**Assignment:** Utilize life history events or current events (newspaper, etc) to write an essay detailing either someone they admire in terms of how they handled stress/adversity (Martin Luther, Mahout Magandhi, Nelson Mandela) or someone they do not admire (John McEnroe, Barry Bonds, Marion Barry) in terms of how they handled stress. What were the A + B = C of this person’s life circumstances and stressors? How did they handle it that made you choose this person and how might other people have thought and felt differently about his same stressful circumstance?

<b>A (1 Action)</b>	<b>+ B (5 Thoughts)</b>	<b>= C (5 Emotions)</b>
You were rear ended in a car accident	I have no insurance! Thank God the kids weren’t in the car! Yes, I hated this car, time for a new one! What an idiot, how stupid can that guy who hit me be?! Oh well, no biggie, at least it wasn’t totaled.	Panic Relief Excitement Anger Calm acceptance
Being diagnosed with cancer		
Getting tripped and made fun of in the Cafeteria		
Having your girlfriend/boyfriend break up with you		
Having a disagreement and being punished by your parent		

## **Exercise #5 - DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION**

Deep muscle relaxation is a technique used for creating tension and then relaxation in a particular muscle group. Read the following to your students twice, using a calm voice, possibly with lights lowered and eyes closed.

Raise your eyebrows and wrinkle your forehead. Try to touch your hairline with your eyebrows. Hold for five seconds...and relax.

Make a frown. Hold for five seconds....and relax.

Close your eyes as tightly as you can. Draw the corners of your mouth back with your lips closed. Hold for five and relax.

Open your eyes and mouth as wide as you can. Hold for five seconds...and relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your face.

Stretch your arms out in front of you. Close your fist tightly. Hold for five seconds...and relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.

Stretch your arms out to the side. Pretend you are pushing against an invisible wall with your hands. Hold for five seconds...and relax.

Bend your elbows and make a muscle in your upper arm. Hold for five seconds... and relax. Feel the tension leave your arms.

Lift your shoulders. Try to make your shoulders touch your ears.

Hold for five... and relax.