

## **STRESS and how we can MANAGE it**

Stress can be described as any demand placed on your brain or physical body, by whatever means, that makes you feel frustrated or nervous. This can be a feeling of fear, worry, or unease.

A little stress can be a good thing, it can be the motivational push that you need to get things done; like how you may feel before a game/match, or before an exam you have prepared/revised for. This is called tolerable stress.

Learning how to relieve and manage stress takes time and practice. There are techniques that will be effective in the short term. But other strategies will take consistent effort if you want to see results long-term.

Coping with mock/real exams, or other related issues can however turn this tolerable stress into toxic stress because we don't know how to manage what we think in an effective way.

There is an estimated 20-50% annual increase of students seeking help for study-related mental health issues, so we're under more pressure than ever to help our students manage this.

**For this reason, we have identified 15 possible ways to reduce stress factors in our school.**

### **1. Organisation**

Reducing the last-minute rush to meet deadlines, is another highly effective way to lower your stress levels. Organising your workload can be extremely empowering and it may even help you view situations that you once viewed as stressful as exciting instead.

### **2. Task specific Focus**

Reducing your need to multitask can significantly reduce stress levels, by allowing you time to focus on one thing and get that right before moving onto something else. Trying to address many tasks at the same time can leave you disoriented and unable to focus on any specific task effectively.

### **3. Set boundaries**

Not all stressors are within your control, but some are. Putting too much on your plate may increase your stress load and limit the amount of time you can spend on self-care. It's important to create healthy boundaries in your life by declining to take on more than you can handle. Saying "no" is one way to control your stressors. Setting these boundaries can be challenging, but the results are worth it.

### **4. Procrastination**

Stay on top of your priorities and avoid procrastinating because tomorrow may never come until it's too late to do something about it.

If you find yourself procrastinating regularly, it may be helpful to get in the habit of making a to-do list organised by priority. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list.

### **5. Ask for help**

Do not hesitate to seek help when you feel that your stress levels are growing out of control, especially if they are impacting your quality of life.

### **6. Avoid isolation**

Isolation can compound feelings of stress and loneliness. You can combat loneliness by staying socially connected with supportive friends, family members, colleagues and support staff at school who you can speak to about your concerns.

### **7. Communication**

Managing your stress levels includes communicating with teachers, parents, and friends about how you genuinely feel, so you can get help in a respectful and constructive way.

**8. Minimise phone use and screen time**

Spending too much time in front of screens in general is associated with lower psychological well-being and increased stress levels in both adults and children. Excessive screen time can negatively affect sleep, which can also lead to increased stress levels.

**9. Sleep**

Poor sleep can exacerbate stress, so it is important to prioritise sleep into a consistent daily pattern. You can do this by going to bed at a reasonable time, minimising your exposure to phones and TV's at least an hour before bed, keeping your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet and reserving your room for sleeping instead of using it for other activities.

**10. Social Support**

Having a social support system in place from friends and family is important for your overall mental health. something as simple as this can help you get through those stressful so you cope better.

**11. Breathing**

Breathing exercises help by regulating the parasympathetic nervous system which promotes calmness and full-body relaxation, allowing the person to detach from the stresses induced by thoughts experienced.

When you find yourself in a stressful situation, turn your attention toward your breathing patterns and try breathing in, for a count of four, holding for a count of four, and out for a count of eight.

**12. Take a walk**

Getting away from the area stressing you, so you can clear your mind and disconnect for a while, is an excellent way to manage stress. Ideally find a green space for a few minutes to calm down and divert your attention away from where the stress is. Walking can be very effective here.

**13. Exercise**

Maintaining your physical well-being by staying active keeps your body and mind in peak condition, this physical activity gives your body a boost of endorphins that helps regulate stress.

**14. Eat Well**

The food you eat can affect how effectively you brain, and body operates. Minimise your intake of highly processed foods and beverages and eat more whole foods such as vegetables, fruits, beans, fish, nuts, and seeds can help ensure that your body is properly nourished. This can affect the way the brain works and contribute to the brains ability to function better under stress.

**15. Pets and Animals**

Having a pet, or using the animals at our disposal in the school, can definitely help reduce stress and improve your overall mood. By you holding, touching, or cuddling animals/pets, your body releases oxytocin which is a hormone that's linked to a positive mood