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Managing mental stress

Strands

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

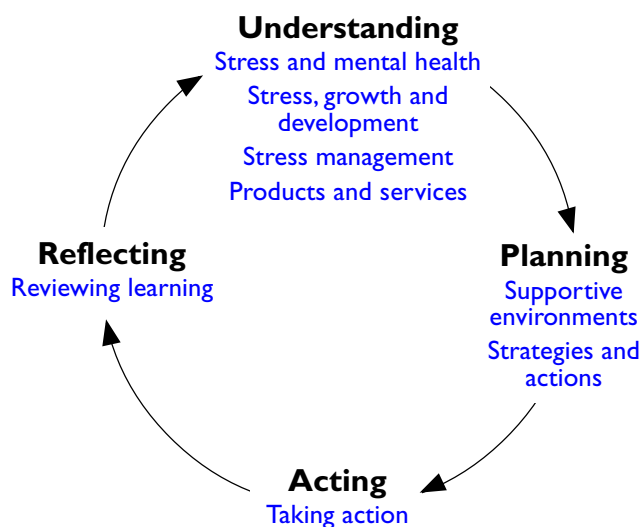
Enhancing Personal Development

Purpose

Students develop a proposal designed to promote the mental health of themselves and other young adults. They investigate the influence of social, cultural and environmental factors on the management of stress. They identify constructive ways of coping with stress and the types of social and physical environments conducive to young people learning to manage stress and growing and developing through such experiences.

Overview of activities

Activities in this module are based on a learner-centred approach with an emphasis on decision making and problem solving. As the following diagram shows, activities are sequenced in **understanding**, **planning**, **acting** and **reflecting** phases.



Core learning outcomes

This module focuses on the following core learning outcomes from the Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus:

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

6.1 Students investigate the social, cultural and environmental factors associated with a health concern of young adults in order to propose strategies that promote the health of themselves and others.

6.4 Students propose a combination of products and services required to accommodate their health needs, now and in the future.

Enhancing Personal Development

6.3 Students evaluate the influence of personal behaviours and social and physical environments on growth and development, and propose actions to enhance their own and others' growth and development.

Core content

This module incorporates the following core content from the syllabus:

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

- factors influencing health — society, culture and environment and individual and group actions and behaviours;
- health-promoting behaviours of individuals and groups related to physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing;
- issues related to the selection of health products, services and information, in particular, health needs of self and others, access and availability, and effective use;

Enhancing Personal Development

- factors influencing growth and development, strategies to enhance growth and development, goal setting and stress management.

Assessment strategy

The following are examples of assessment tasks that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the core learning outcomes identified in this module. Other activities in this module provide opportunities for teachers to gather evidence about students' demonstrations of outcomes for assessment purposes.

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities 6.1

- **Students prepare a submission to relevant community health administrators to stimulate planning towards promoting the mental health needs of young adults. They link their recommendations/proposals to social, cultural and environmental factors that influence the mental health of young adults and to the diverse mental health needs of individuals in the community.**
 - Can the student identify social, cultural and environmental factors associated with stress in young adults?
 - Can the student propose strategies that promote the mental health of young adults?

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities 6.4

- Students propose a combination of products and services that may be required to accommodate their current health needs in relation to the management of stress. They consider possible, probable and preferred futures for themselves and their peers and propose a combination of health products and services that would accommodate health needs related to stress in the future.
 - Can the student identify health products and services that accommodate the mental health needs of young adults?
 - Can the student propose a combination of health products and services to accommodate health needs related to stress now and the future?

Enhancing Personal Development 6.3

- Students prepare an electronic or print product for young adults that promotes practical actions to enhance their growth and development. Information contained in the product should be in response to personal behaviours and social and physical environments that influence their mental health.
 - Can the student identify the influences of personal behaviours and social and physical environments on growth and development in relation to mental health?
 - Can the student propose actions to enhance his/her own and others' growth and development?

Background information

Adolescent mental health

In recent years there has been an increased interest in the area of adolescent mental health which has led to an increased awareness of the mental health concerns and needs of young adults. In the past, this dimension of health was often surrounded by fear, misunderstanding and stigma.

While stress and stress management are health concerns of young people, stress, itself, is a separate concept. The Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland (1995) reports that stress among young adults can be associated with a wide range of issues — for example, poor self-concept, confusion about personal identity (including sexual orientation) or cultural identity, body image, family issues including conflict, school issues, relationship problems, loss of a friend.

Stress may also be the result of a complex mix of factors — social, cultural or environmental. How a young adult copes will depend on the interaction between those.

Activities in this module raise students' awareness of the range of stressors that can have an impact on their own and their peers' health. Other activities enable them to evaluate the various ways they and other individuals manage stress and to distinguish positive ways from negative ways. It is recommended that teachers use the stressors identified by students as a basis for developing the unit.

The Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland (1995) recommends that young adults should be encouraged to develop closer relationships with mental health services, youth specific services and community organisations. Such actions, they suggest, would encourage young adults to access mental health programs. The Support materials and references in this module provide information to guide students to mental health services they can access in their local area. Other activities enable students to evaluate this service provision and to propose the type of services or improvements needed to best promote their own and their peers' mental health.

Because it is important that students do not develop the attitude that stress is all bad, it is recommended that teachers provide activities that enable students to realise that stress can also provide the opportunity for individuals to grow and develop.

Positive stress, *eustress*, is the type of stress we feel when we engage in activities or enter situations that are fun, exciting or challenging. Negative stress, *distress*, wears us out and the rate of change experienced in modern society makes it almost impossible to avoid.

Terminology

Activities in this module involve use of the following language in the context of Health and Physical Education:

coping	mental health promotion	stress management
crisis	mental health service	stressor
depression	mental health workers	suicide prevention
distress	mental stress	youth services
eustress	mood state	youth workers
health services	referral	
mental health concern	stress	

School authority policies

Teachers need to be aware of and observe school authority policies that may be relevant to this module, particularly policies relating to sensitive issues.

Social justice principles

This module provides opportunities for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of supportive environments and diversity. It includes activities that encourage students to:

- understand and accept that stress is a part of everyone’s life and that individuals react to stress in unique ways;
- understand that everyone has a right to access appropriate support without fear of stigma;
- understand the stigma experienced and feared by individuals wanting to seek support to address their mental health concerns, and to be proactive in dispelling this;
- be responsive to the mental–emotional support needs of others in times of mental stress and show care, concern and respect.

Students with disabilities may require some activities to be modified to optimise both their participation and their ability to demonstrate the outcomes. Teachers should consult with parents/carers and specialist support staff to determine whether modification is necessary.

Support materials and references

Clarke, D., Kunjasch, L. & Lans, T. 1995, *Lifestyle 2000: Book 1*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Inspire Foundation, *Reachout*. Available URL: <http://www.reachout.asn.au/> (accessed December 2000).

Rheinberger, C., Davis, R. & Hewitt, P. 1994, *Lifewise: Book 2*, Thomas Nelson, South Melbourne, Vic.

Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland 1995, *Mind Your Head: Working with Young People and Mental Health Issues*, kit, Brisbane.

Sunderland, G. & Pickup, M. 1993, *In Great Shape 2*, Rigby Heinemann, Port Melbourne, Vic.

Youth Suicide Prevention Project, *Make a Noise*. Available URL: <http://makeanoise.ysp.org.au/> (accessed December 2000).

Activities

Understanding

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Exploring aspects of stress and the extent to which stress affects oneself and others

- ▶ Students consider the various ways different people react when asked to give a speech, and participate in a ‘Think, Pair, Share’ activity to consider how stresses can be either *eustress* or *distress*.

Focus questions could include:

- What physical reactions can individuals experience when confronted with a stressful situation — for example, being asked to give a speech? Why?
- What thoughts might go through individuals’ minds in such a situation?
- Why do individuals respond differently to challenges?
- Why do some tasks bring about a physical and mental–emotional response in individuals?

Teaching considerations

Clarify to students that stressors — those events that cause stress — can bring about eustress or distress. A stressor might be eustress, that is, a positive experience for one individual, but distress, or a negative experience, for another. For example, although an exam, assignment or gymnastic competition might help some individuals produce a best performance followed by a feeling of success, for others, these challenges might stimulate panic, poor performance and a sense of personal failure. In other words, for some individuals the response to a stressor may be positive; for others it may be negative and harmful.

Advise students that it is normal to feel distressed in certain situations.



- ▶ Students complete a questionnaire to assess whether mental stress is a health concern for themselves and their peers (Resource Sheet, ‘Mental health concerns of young adults’). They report on the stressors in their lives, the stress-related symptoms they have experienced and the ways they cope with stress, including any products and services they may use.

Teaching considerations

It is important to be sensitive when completing disclosure activities. Ensure students are able to complete the questionnaires anonymously and in private.

Advise students of the steps that will be used to maintain confidentiality and ensure that those steps are followed.

Instead of a questionnaire, students could keep a diary for a week and record stressful situations that arise — in their family, in their commitment to tasks and in their general social interactions with others.

- ▶ In small groups, students discuss their ideas about stress. They then list the most significant stressors, the symptoms caused by stress and the ways they manage stress, including any products and services they use.

Focus questions could include:

- What range of stressors are there among people in our group?
- What symptoms do people in our group experience and associate with stress?
- What ways do people in our group cope with stress?

Teaching considerations

Because students know one another’s handwriting it would be inappropriate for them to collate the above information from the questionnaires.

To highlight how individuals vary in their responses to stress, students could write physical and mental–emotional responses on slips of paper and add them to a chart.

- ▶ Students compare what they have learnt about stress from their group with published information about stress, particularly stressors and young people and stress management. They critically discuss similarities and differences between what they have learnt from their group and what they have read about.

Teaching consideration

Student groups could be assigned different tasks. For example, one group might research information about stressors among young people and compare this with information gathered from their group. Another group might research information about stress-related symptoms and compare this to the list students prepared.

STRESS, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Exploring the relationship between stress and growth and development

- ▶ Students evaluate the different actions and behaviours that they and their peers use to cope with stress. They distinguish constructive ways of coping from destructive ways and assess the benefits of managing their stress in a positive manner.

Focus questions could include:

- What dimensions of your growth and development are likely to be affected if you cope with your stress by using violence or aggression, discussion, drugs, food, exercise, music or relaxation?
- Is any one method of managing stress constructive, or destructive, for everyone?

Teaching considerations

Students refer to the list of stressors compiled earlier.

Ensure students consider the impact of different ways of coping on the mental–emotional, physical and social dimensions of growth and development.

Assist students to understand that stress can be productive, an opportunity to grow and develop, if managed in a positive manner for both the individual and others.

**STRESS
MANAGEMENT****Understanding factors that influence stress and stress management**

► Students investigate the personal, social, cultural and environmental factors that influence how young adults manage stress.

Focus questions could include:

- How are the ways you manage stress related to personal, social, cultural or environmental factors or a mix of these factors?

Personal

- How are your ways of managing stress related to your:
 - coping skills;
 - thinking patterns;
 - interpersonal skills;
 - time management;
 - age and maturity?

Social

- How are your ways of managing stress related to stereotypes?
- With which stereotype do you associate managing stress?
- How does this stereotype inhibit or facilitate the ways you or others manage stress?
- How are your ways of managing stress related to:
 - family factors — practices, expectations, values or beliefs;
 - school factors — practices, expectations, values and beliefs;
 - religious beliefs and practices;
 - the availability, accessibility and affordability of health services;
 - rules, laws or policies?

Cultural

- How are your ways of managing stress related to cultural expectations, values and beliefs?

Environmental

- How are your ways of managing stress influenced by aspects of your personal environment or your social environment?

Teaching considerations

Guide students to understand that stress is the result of a complex interaction of personal, social, cultural and environmental factors.

Highlight to students that people are usually less stressed if they make use of a management plan or strategy to help them cope.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**Exploring health products and services that promote mental health**

► Students investigate and evaluate the range of available health services in their school and community that can assist them to manage the stress in their lives. They visit or interview people from these services about access, availability and costs. Prior to the visit or interview, students formulate a list of questions to enable them to gather information and make judgments about the adequacy and relevance of these services.

Focus questions could include:*Access*

- What services are available?
- Are the services easily accessible?
- Would some groups in society have difficulty in accessing these services?
- Is the access 'low key' (private) — for example, by way of an outreach service?
- Is the access 'high key' (public) — for example, a building in a public place and labelled 'Mental health service'?
- What impact can 'low key access' versus 'high key access' have on a young person's intent to use the service? Why?

Availability

- Are flexible appointment systems in place?
- Is there a waiting list? Are there any follow-up procedures in place?

Affordability

- Are there costs involved? How affordable are these?
- Is a Medicare card required?

Appropriateness to the health and other needs of young people

- Does the service have a youth focus?
- Are the staff trained to work with young people?
- Do these services have formal or informal procedures?
- Is permission of parents or carers required?
- Are services confidential?
- Do the services cater to the needs of all students:
 - from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
 - Indigenous students;
 - gay, lesbian or bisexual students;
 - students in rural and remote areas;
 - students with more severe mental health problems — for example, psychosis;
 - students with disabilities?

Teaching considerations

The information gathered here will help in the development of a submission or proposal later in the module.

Young people are well aware of the social stigma attached to mental health issues.

- Many young people avoid making use of mental health services because:
 - they are concerned others will find out and are afraid to be ‘labelled’ or treated differently;
 - they believe that no-one can help them because they are mentally unbalanced;
 - they do not know that services are available.

This is an opportune time to assist students to be critical of the stereotypical attitudes to mental health.

- Because one of the reasons individuals avoid seeking professional help is fear of being thought of as schizophrenic or psychotic, it is important to explain what these terms really mean:
 - **Psychosis** is loss of touch with reality, experiencing delusions or false beliefs (for example, the police are looking for you), hallucinations.
 - **Schizophrenia** is an illness involving psychotic symptoms and deterioration in personal functioning.
-

► Students investigate and evaluate health products available in their community that may help them to cope with stress in their lives.

Focus questions could include:

- What health products are available to help people to manage stress?
 - Are these health products tailored to meet the needs of all young adults, including those from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Indigenous students, young adults with intellectual impairment or vision or hearing impairment?
 - How easy is it for you and all other young people to access these products?
 - How easy is it for you and all other young people to afford these products?
-

Teaching consideration

Ensure students consider questions in relation to all social groups and not just in their own context.

Planning

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Planning for physical and social environments that promote mental health

▶ Students discuss and define the nature of physical and social environments that would be conducive to encouraging young people to talk about or disclose their stress-related concerns, thereby promoting their growth and development. In their discussions, students consider actions that contribute to supportive environments.

Focus questions could include:

- Would you feel more comfortable talking about your stress-related concerns in a private setting or public setting? Why?
- What kind of seating arrangement, noise levels or music would help you to discuss your concerns? Why?
- What verbal and non-verbal skills would need to be demonstrated by a ‘carer’ to help a stressed person to feel comfortable?

Teaching consideration

Display group descriptions of supportive physical and social environments for students to consider.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Developing personal and group strategies and actions to manage stress

▶ Students identify and evaluate a range of stress-management strategies. They try some of the strategies, such as muscle relaxation or time management plans, and discuss the effectiveness of these.

▶ Students propose personal strategies to promote the mental health and growth and development of themselves and their peers. They explain the behaviours and actions needed to implement such strategies and how these promote mental health and growth and development.

Focus questions could include:

- What strategies could you implement to promote your mental health and growth and development?
- What actions or behaviours would you need to modify?
- What strategies could you implement to promote the mental health of your peers?
- How would these strategies promote mental health and growth and development?
- What individual actions can you take to promote the mental health of your peers?
- Which strategies require collective action?

▶ Students propose community actions to promote their mental health and growth and development and that of their peers. They explain how such actions can promote the health and growth and development of themselves and their peers.

Focus questions could include:

- What services or changes to services are needed to promote the mental health and growth and development of you and your peers?
- What key persons should be informed of these needs?
- Why should those key persons be informed?
- What recommendations need to be made to these persons? Why?
- What would be the health outcomes for you and your peers if this proposal were supported?
- How should your recommendations be made?
- In what format should these recommendations be presented?
- What or who else might be needed to support this proposal?

Acting

TAKING ACTION

Trialling and presenting strategies designed to promote students' mental health

- ▶ Students contract to apply one or two of the strategies they proposed in the Planning phase to promote the mental health and growth and development of themselves and their peers. They monitor the effects of these strategies over a period of time and assess whether they need further refinement or whether they will be potentially effective in promoting the mental health of themselves and their peers.

Teaching consideration

Suggest students maintain a journal about their use of particular strategies. They record the event that triggered each strategy, how well they feel they used the strategy and any outcomes.

- ▶ Students prepare a submission to relevant community health administrators to stimulate planning towards promoting the mental health of young adults. They link their recommendations/proposals to social, cultural and environmental factors that influence the mental health of young adults and to the diverse mental health needs of individuals in the community.

Teaching considerations

Provide examples of submissions for students to use as models.

Encourage students to use the information gathered during the module to compose their submission.

- ▶ Students propose a combination of products and services that may be required to accommodate their current health needs in relation to managing stress. They consider possible, probable and preferred futures for themselves and their peers and propose a combination of products and services that would accommodate health needs related to stress in the future.
- ▶ Students prepare an electronic or print product for young adults that promotes practical actions to enhance their growth and development. Information contained in the product should be in response to personal behaviours and social and physical environments that influence their health.

Teaching considerations

Electronic products include videotapes or audiotapes, Powerpoint presentations, web pages and CD-ROMs.

Print products include posters, pamphlets, cartoons, comic strips, editorials for newspapers and magazine articles.

Reflecting

REVIEWING LEARNING

Reflecting on mental health and coping with stressors

► Students reflect on what they have learnt about stress and ways that they can manage their own stress to promote their mental health, now and in the future. They also reflect on the actions that they can take to promote the mental health of their peers, both now and in the future.

Focus questions could include:

- What have you learnt about the impact of stress on health? Mental health? Physical health?
- What did you learn about the diverse ways of managing stress?
- What did you learn about health-promoting or positive ways of coping, and health-damaging or negative ways of coping?
- Has your attitude to those people with mental health problems changed? How?
- What skills and strategies have you acquired to manage stress in your life?
- Do you feel that you could offer support to a peer who was experiencing stress? What other skills would you need?

Teaching consideration

This activity may best be conducted through students writing in personal journals or through an oral question-and-answer session. Students experiencing stress may feel more comfortable participating in the written mode.

Mental health concerns of young adults



Part A: Self-assessment

Complete the table below by identifying the stressors in your life that can affect your mental health.

For each stressor reflect on and indicate how much distress it causes you.

- If it irritates you but does not cause much distress then mark it as a 'Minor stressor'.
- If the item causes you worry or anxiety then classify it as a 'Distressor'.
- If the item causes you mental exhaustion, mental pain or trauma, challenges your ability to cope and adapt and is unable to be resolved quickly then it is likely to be a 'Major stressor'.

	Minor stressor	Distressor	Major stressor
Commuting to school			
Waiting to be served			
Boredom			
Extreme heat or cold			
Loud noise (from stereo, tools, industry)			
Lack of space, overcrowding			
Lack of privacy			
Physical disaster (flood, fire, cyclone)			
Change of residence			
Grief after death of friend, relative			
Family conflict			
Major family argument			
Peer conflict			
Bullying			
Imagined threats			
Bad dreams			
Hallucinations			
Concerns about physical appearance			
Self-concept			
Sexual identity/orientation			
Crime			
Infection			
Illness — own			

(continued)

Mental health concerns of young adults (continued)



Resource Sheet

	Minor stressor	Distressor	Major stressor
Illness — family member, close friend			
Career choices			
Heavy study load			
Difficult schoolwork			
Deadlines			
Assignments			
Examinations			
Minor accident			
Serious accident			
Detentions			
Expulsion from school			
Law infringement			
Forthcoming operation			
Finances – family			
Finances – own			
Public speaking/performing			
Holidays			
Family gatherings			
Too many things to do			

MANAGING MENTAL STRESS • LOWER SECONDARY

(continued)

Mental health concerns of young adults (continued)



Part B: Peer assessment

What do you consider to be your peers' most common minor stressors, distressors and major stressors? Record these in the table below.

Minor stressors	Distressors	Major stressors

This sourcebook module should be read in conjunction with the following Queensland School Curriculum Council materials:

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Sourcebook: Guidelines

Health and Physical Education Initial In-service Materials

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Any inquiries should be addressed to:
Queensland School Curriculum Council
PO Box 317
Brisbane Albert Street, Q 4002
Australia

Telephone: (07) 3237 0794
Facsimile: (07) 3237 1285
Website: <http://www.qscc.qld.edu.au>
Email: inquiries@qscc.qld.edu.au

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