



## The Ups and Downs of Stress

Ask people, young and old alike, why they drink alcohol or use other drugs and you're likely to get responses that include (though not limited to) coping with stress.

Thinking about stress, according to BC's [Adolescent Health Survey](#) (2013) most youth across BC (83%) reported feeling at least some stress in the past month. Females were more likely than males to experience extreme stress that prevented them from functioning properly (13% vs. 5%). Of those who reported using alcohol or other drugs, 16% of males and 25% of females cited stress as a reason for using.

All of us experience stress and, while it's not always a bad thing (e.g., starting a new school year, preparing for a trip or a performance), it is important to learn how to manage stress in a healthy way. Drinking alcohol or using other drugs may provide us with temporary relief from stress. But using substances too often as a coping strategy may lead to significant harm.

While everyone copes with stress differently, regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health and it's also an important part of a stress-busting lifestyle. It can change your mood – so if you are feeling sluggish, some activity can make you feel more energized and alert. But at the same time, it can also help calm agitated, angry or anxious feelings. It can reduce levels of the stress hormones that cause the physical feeling of being stressed (like feeling tense or hyper-aroused) and also results in the release of feel-good brain chemicals.

### Instructional strategies

1. Show the short video *Managing Stress* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE)) and then facilitate a short discussion with the class using questions like those below. And then introduce and practice a variety of exercises students can use on their own to manage and reduce stress.
  - a. What are some common reasons people get stressed out?
  - b. Do you think life is more stressful these days than in the past? Why or why not?
  - c. How do you cope with or manage stress? How do people in other cultures manage stress?
  - d. How could we reduce stress in the first place?
2. Provide students with a copy of the [Ups and Downs of Stress handout](#) and have them read through it quickly. Facilitate a short discussion with the class using questions like those below, and then introduce and practice a variety of exercises students can use on their own to manage and reduce stress.
  - a. If stress can be both good and bad, how do we know the difference?

### Why “why?” matters

The reasons we use a drug are important since they influence our pattern of use and risk of harmful consequences. For example, if it is out of curiosity or another fleeting motive, only occasional or experimental use may follow. If the motive is strong and enduring (e.g., relieving chronic stress or other mental health challenges), then more long-lasting and intense substance use may follow. Motives for intense short-term use (e.g., to fit in, have fun or alleviate temporary stress) may result in risky behaviour with high potential for serious harm.

- b. Physical activity is a proven stress-buster. Can it also contribute to stress? If so, how? How can we use physical activity to find our sweet spot?
  - c. What other ways are there to manage stress?
  - d. What advice can we provide to the stressed student in the image?
3. Show the TED talk by health psychologist, Kelly McGonigal, in which she presents stress as a positive ([www.ted.com/talks/kelly\\_mcgonigal\\_how\\_to\\_make\\_stress\\_your\\_friend/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend/transcript?language=en)). Invite students to comment on the video and explore what it might mean for them. The following questions might help.
  - a. What are some situations when stress can be helpful? How might it help?
  - b. McGonigal talks about “making you better at stress.” How might that look for you?
4. Invite students to explore further information provided by the Adolescent Health Survey. Note, that in addition to the provincial report there are 16 regional reports that will provide a closer look at youth in your part of BC. Students might consider things they can do to promote physical activity within their school. The McCreary Centre Society offers Youth Action Grants of up to \$500.00 that might just provide the impetus for some pretty cool activities! Read more at [www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs\\_youth\\_resources](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs_youth_resources)

## Resources

**Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre:** BC’s information source for children, youth and families dealing with mental health and substance use issues. The website includes information and resources on stress, including an interactive Healthy Thinking Activity and an interactive Problem Solving resource, as well as mindfulness audio and video resources. [keltymentalhealth.ca/healthy-living/stress](http://keltymentalhealth.ca/healthy-living/stress)

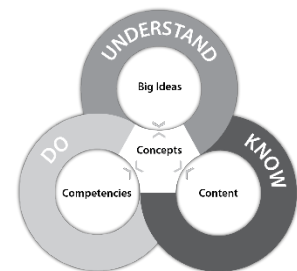
**Mindcheck.ca:** Website designed to help youth and young adults in British Columbia check out how they’re feeling and quickly connect to mental health resources and support. Website includes information on stress, a stress check quiz, mindfulness related resources and other tips for managing stress & self-care resources. [mindcheck.ca/mood-and-stress/stress](http://mindcheck.ca/mood-and-stress/stress)

**The Psychology Foundation of Canada:** has a range of programs and resources, also available in French, including *Stress Lessons: From Stressed Out to Chilled Out* (a resource for grades 7-9 teachers) and resources for parents of teens. [www.psychologyfoundation.org](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org)

## Drug literacy

### Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control drugs by examining human thinking through time, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other



### Competencies

- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf>



## Links to Curriculum

### First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)

### Physical and Health Education 8

#### Big ideas

- Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being
- Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives
- Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community

#### Competencies

- Describe how students' participation in physical activities at school, at home, and in the community can influence their health and fitness
- Identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy-living goals
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others

### Physical and Health Education 9

#### Big ideas

- Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being
- Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives
- Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community

#### Competencies

- Describe how students' participation in physical activities at school, at home, and in the community can influence their health and fitness
- Propose healthy choices that support lifelong health and well-being
- Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community