

## Stress: dogs, cannabis, exercise or ...

Various studies have shown that having a pet can increase self-esteem, physical fitness, and social connectedness while decreasing loneliness and stress.

This lesson uses this fact as a jumping off point to engage students in thinking about ways we might use to manage stress, the different impacts these strategies might have and how to make choices in using these tools to maximize our own well-being.

As a facilitator of dialogue, you are not an observer but a participant in the conversation. So you should feel free to add in thoughts that may not be voiced by the students (but do so in a way that is conversational rather than authoritative). We encourage you to mention (if students do not) cannabis, alcohol or tobacco as means people use to deal with stress but not to draw undue focus to these. They are part of the human toolbox and simply need to be critically examined along with other tools. At the end of the day, we want students to recognize that some tools (like exercise and breathing) are more universal, both in terms of number of people for whom they are effective and the range of situations in which they help. But no tool is a magic bullet, and all tools must be used wisely.



### Instructional strategies

1. Have students watch this [video](#) from Harvard University (about the impact of dogs on stress and exercise) and then explore how people deal with stress.
  - a. Write on the board, “Dealing with stress ...” and “dogs” and have students brainstorm other ways to deal with stress – capture some of these on the board (if no one mentions exercise or cannabis, you should slip these into the conversation during the brainstorm).
  - b. Then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following. Throughout the discussion, as appropriate, draw attention to the issues of dogs, cannabis and exercise to have students reflect on the question relative to some of those issues in particular.
    - What is it about some of these things that helps them reduce stress? (While many answers are possible be sure someone mentions the ability of some of these things to make changes in our bodies, e.g., heartrate, blood pressure, etc.).
    - Do all ways of reducing stress work for all people? Why, or why not?
    - If something helps you reduce stress today, will it necessarily work tomorrow? Explain.
    - If a little of something is good, is more better? – with dogs? what about other things?



- Following the dialogue, have students mentally rate their own stress levels on a scale from 1 to 10. Then lead them through a short vigorous exercise regime ending with a cool-down involving deep breathing. Then have students reflect on their current stress levels. End with a short discussion about why this short exercise may have had different impacts on different people and why it is important to do mental check-ups on what is going on in our own bodies and on the choices we are making in response to these bodily situations.

## Drug literacy

### Big ideas

- ✓ 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

- ✓ Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- ✓ Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- ✓ Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks, benefits and harms related to drugs

## Links to curriculum

### Physical and Health Education 7

#### Big ideas

- ✓ Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being
- ✓ Learning about similarities and differences in individuals and groups influences community health

#### Competencies

##### *Physical literacy*

- ✓ Develop, refine, and apply fundamental movement skills in a variety of physical activities and environments
- ✓ Develop and apply a variety of movement concepts and strategies in different physical activities

##### *Healthy and active living*

- ✓ Describe how students' participation in physical activities at school, at home, and in the community can influence their health and fitness
- ✓ Identify factors that influence healthy choices and explain their potential health effects
- ✓ Identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy-living goals
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used

##### *Mental well-being*

- ✓ 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 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

### Competencies

#### **Physical literacy**

- ✓ Develop, refine, and apply fundamental movement skills in a variety of physical activities and environments
- ✓ Develop and apply a variety of movement concepts and strategies in different physical activities

#### **Healthy and active living**

- ✓ Describe how students' participation in physical activities at school, at home, and in the community can influence their health and fitness
- ✓ Assess factors that influence healthy choices and their potential health effects
- ✓ Identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy-living goals
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used

#### **Mental well-being**

- ✓ 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 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

### Competencies

#### **Physical literacy**

- ✓ Develop, refine, and apply fundamental movement skills in a variety of physical activities and environments
- ✓ Develop and apply a variety of movement concepts and strategies in different physical activities

#### **Healthy and active living**

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy-living goals
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used

#### **Mental well-being**

- ✓ Analyze strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others
- ✓ Assess and evaluate strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others

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