UK 101 & UK 201 STRESS MANAGEMENT LESSON PLAN

Learning Objectives
- Students will be able to recognize symptoms of stress.
- Students will be able to begin identifying their sources of stress.
- Students will be able to distinguish between healthful and unhealthful options for dealing with stress and identify campus resources.

Introduction
Ask all of your students to do 15 jumping jacks if physically capable. If not, come up with another brief activity that can be distracting such as saying the alphabet backwards. Immediately afterward, ask students if they know what the day’s topic is.

Say to students: *All of us experience stress, and a certain level of stress is actually good for us. It can serve as a motivator. However it is also common—especially for college students—to feel overwhelmed by stress.*

- Almost 53% of college students report more than average or tremendous stress within the last 12 months.
- Almost 29% of students reported that stress had a negative impact on their individual academic performance within the past 12 months.

(Source: *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Fall 2011. 2012.)*

*It’s important to remember that we all experience stress differently. What might stress me out may not bother you. How college students cope with increased stress may mean the difference between successful completion of college or failure to adapt.*

Defining Stress in Our Lives

Exercise
- Give each student a large notecard (or ask them to pull out a 9½x11 piece of paper). Ask students to write on the piece of paper/notecard the greatest source of stress they are currently experiencing.
- Ask students to look at one another’s “stress.” Go around room and read notecards. Then ask students the following italicized questions and write answers on board. Use bulleted lists to supplement the student answers.

*What are some other things in your life that can make you stressed?*
- Academics
- Relationships
• Finances
• Pressure to make good grades
• Not enough time
• Juggling work and school

**What are some signs that you are stressed?**
- Feel anxious, depressed, or irritable
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Too much sleep or can’t sleep
- Increased heart rate
- Rate of breathing becomes more frequent and shallow
- Not eating or eating too much
- More susceptible to colds or other illness
- Stomach ache or other digestive issues
- Mouth feels dry
- Hands cold or sweaty
- Muscles may tense up, particularly in shoulders, neck, and forehead
- Trouble concentrating

**Methods of Dealing with Stress**
Write two headings on board: **Healthful** and **Unhealthful**.
When you ask the following question and receive student responses, ask the student if their responses belong under the healthful or unhealthful column. Then write answer on board under appropriate column.

*How do you typically handle stress in your life?* (Use bulleted list to supplement student answers.)
- Sleep
- Eat/Food
- Spend time alone
- Exercise
- Blow up at people
- Get moody
- Drink/Alcohol
- Smoke
- Shop
- Yoga
- Prayer or meditation
- Call a friend
Can any of the healthful ways we handle stress become unhealthful? (Yes! For example, eating a snack is fine, but binge eating is not good.) Discuss the importance of moderation when dealing with stressful issues. Otherwise, those responses can in turn create additional stress upon their lives.

A UK study showed that “exercise, sleep, alcohol, and food are common coping strategies, regardless of gender or academic status.”

(Source: **Poster Session: Stress and Coping Behaviors among Undergraduate and Graduate Students, Brandy Reeves, Joanne Brown, Melinda Ickes, and Tyler Smith, University of Kentucky, 2013.)

Campus Resources

What are some on-campus resources that you can use to address stress?

- Counseling Center
- University Health Service
- Resident Advisor / Hall Director
- Friends or organizational members
- Faculty and staff that you trust
- Family
- UK 101 Instructor and Peer Instructor!

The Counseling Center and University Health Service contact information is included in your syllabus (in the resource attachment).

Prevention

What are some actions you can take to help prevent—or at least reduce—stress in your life?

- Time management skills—make a realistic to do list and stick to it to prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- Limit extracurricular activities that add stress into your life.
- Limit partying.
- Limit negative people in your life.
- Practice positive self-talk.
  - Instead of thinking or saying, “I am so overwhelmed and tired; I can’t do this,” say “I can do this. I will do at least 3 productive things today (and name 3 things).
  - Instead of thinking or saying, “I’m going to flunk this exam,” say or think, “I’m going to pass my exam because I have control over my learning. I will go to The Study for tutoring; I will review my notes every day; and I will attend the review session.”
• Exercise regularly.
• Reduce caffeine in your diet. Large quantities can cause nervousness, headaches, irritability, and insomnia.
• Eat healthful foods.
• Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can cause anxiety, depression, and academic struggles.
  o Avoid long daytime naps.
  o Try reading before you go to bed
  o Get exercise during the day.
  o Stick to a regular schedule for going to bed and getting up.
• Ask for help. If a particular class stresses you out, visit your professor to get help or go to The Study for tutoring.
• Talk to someone at the Counseling Center.
• Talk things out with someone you trust.
• Take slow, deeper than normal breaths.
• Stretch.
• Develop your spiritual self: pray or meditate.

Optional Activity
• Distribute note cards to your class and ask students to write “Stress Action Plan” at the top of card.
• Read the following questions to your students and ask them to write their answers on the note card.
  o What is the biggest source of stress in your life right now?
  o What (if anything) can you do to eliminate this stress in a positive manner from your life?
  o What healthy activity can you do to deal with this stress?
  o What are some campus resources you are willing to use to deal with this stress?
• Challenge students to place this note card in a visible place that they see every day in their room. (If the stressor is a person, encourage the students to place the note card where this person won’t see it.)

Optional Progressive Relaxation Activity
(Use only if you have about 10 minutes to devote to exercise.)
This is a technique that can be used for a variety of reasons. It can be used as a way to briefly relax or meditate if feeling stressed.
Instructions

- Play relaxing, spa-type music or nature sounds. You can find these on YouTube if you have a Smart Classroom.
- Turn out the lights to allow only for a dimly lit room.
- Calmly read aloud the instructions from the script.
- For an example of progressive relaxation, go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYsuvRNZfxE. You may also be able to use this video as a stand-alone if you have a Smart Classroom or very good speakers on a laptop computer.
- Once the activity is over, allow students to stay where they are until they feel comfortable to move. Once they do, allow them to leave class as quietly as possible without disturbing their classmates.

Progressive Relaxation Script

Read these instructions slowly and leave a short pause after each one.

- Close your eyes.
- Feel your feet. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and sink into the floor. Start with your toes and progress to your ankles.
- Feel your knees. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your upper legs and thighs. Feel their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your abdomen and chest. Sense your breathing. Consciously will them to relax. Deepen your breathing slightly and feel your abdomen and chest sink.
- Feel your buttocks. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your hands. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your upper arms. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your shoulders. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink.
- Feel your neck. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink.
- Feel your head and skull. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink.
- Feel your mouth and jaw. Consciously relax them. Pay particular attention to your jaw muscles and unclench them if you need to. Feel your mouth and jaw relax and sink.
- Feel your eyes. Sense if there is tension in your eyes. Sense if you are forcibly closing your eyelids. Consciously relax your eyelids and feel the tension slide off the eyes.
- Feel your face and cheeks. Consciously relax them and feel the tension slide off.
- Mentally scan your body. If you find any place that is still tense, then consciously relax that place and let it sink.

Source: http://www.umm.edu/sleep/relax_tech.htm#ixzz2MyXXrsV5
Optional Activity
Ask students to pull out a piece of paper and pen/pencil. Then provide them with the following directions: *Write a letter to the person or thing that is frustrating you the most. Include what action you plan to take to reduce this stress. When finished, rip up the letter and throw it away to demonstrate that you are taking control of the stress.*