

# Stress factors

Linked to our main Feature on mental health and well-being, these activities are designed to involve young people in discussions around stress and self-esteem.



The activities are taken and adapted from two books in UK Youth's Mind Matters series: Stress and Self-esteem, both by Marilyn Harvey. visit the UK Youth storefront for more information, sample pages and ordering.

## 1 Stress – what springs to mind?

### Aim

To help the participants to look at the causes of stress in their age group.

### You'll need

Large sheets of paper/flipchart, felt tip/marker, pens, B!u tac, dictionary.  
Time 35-45 mins.

Explain to the group that they will be looking at the word 'stress' and the different situations that might cause young people to feel stressed.

Split into small groups and ask them to discuss the causes of stress they are aware of. Ask them to list them on a large sheet of paper. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for this. Then bring the participants back into a large group.

Write the word 'STRESS' at the top of the large sheet of paper or flipchart and invite small groups, in turn, to share one idea that they have discussed in their small groups. Continue until all the small groups have shared their ideas

### Discussion points

- You may want to broaden the discussion by asking participants to comment on the different causes of stress that have been listed on the large sheet of paper/flipchart.
- Do they think everyone would find the different situations equally stressful?
- Have they ever been in any of the situations and did they find them stressful?
- Emphasise that everyone is different and what may seem perfectly normal for one person may be very stressful to another and vice versa.

## 2 A major hassle?

### Aim

To help the participants to become more aware that stress is an everyday part of our lives and that young people may react differently to similar stressful situations

### You'll need

Sets of three large 'hassle cards' with the words 'Major', 'Minor' and 'Can't agree' on them – one set for each group; copies of small 'situation cards' for each group

**Time** 30-40 minutes

Divide participants into smaller groups of 4/5. Give each group a set of cards. Ask them to put down the three large 'hassle cards' apart from each other, ('minor', 'major' and 'can't agree') and place the smaller 'situation cards' face down.

Each group member in turn picks up a card and decides whether it is a 'minor' or 'major' hassle – or both. They then place cards on the appropriate pile.

When all the cards are out, the whole group can decide if they agree with the way they've been divided out. If they find they can't agree on some of them, these should be placed on the 'can't agree' card.

### Discussion points

- Ask participants why they think young people experience different levels of stress in similar situations. Emphasise that young people should try to respect each other's concerns and not laugh at those who might be very stressed about something that may not worry them.
- Stress need not always be a bad thing. It can help us to survive danger or lead us on to greater achievement. However, when we are under too much stress or are stressed for too long a period it might seriously damage our physical and/or mental health.
- If someone is trying to carry more than they can cope with, over a long period of time, it is almost certain to catch up with them in the end. This might show up in: psychological problems like depression, attempted suicide, road rage, criminal activities, bad temper, aggression, alcohol or drug problems, gambling, eating disorders; immediate physical problems such as tummy upsets, headaches, sleeping problems; or long term problems like back pain or high blood pressure. It is important, therefore, to recognise stress and to develop ways of coping with it.

### Situation cards:

make up cards with these words – and/or develop your own.

- getting dumped
- being in hospital
- parents separating
- starting a new school
- being physically or sexually abused
- not having enough cash
- sitting exams
- not having nice clothes like friends
- being in trouble with the police
- getting engaged
- losing a job
- finding out you are pregnant
- death of a friend or relative
- worrying about the way you look
- bringing up a baby on your own
- starting a new job
- moving home
- not getting on with parents

## 3 What do I do?

### Aim

To get participants thinking about how they can affect other young people's self esteem.

### You'll need

Large sheets of paper/flipchart  
Felt tip/marker pens  
Photocopies of 'examples of actions that can raise or lower self esteem' (see page 39)

**Time** 30-45 mins

Introduce the session by explaining to the group that they will be looking at how they can make other people feel good or bad about themselves.

Split the participants up into groups of 4 and give each group a large sheet of paper and some felt tip/marker pens.

Ask them to write a list of actions that they think might raise or lower someone's self esteem. You might want to give them some of the words from page 39 to get them started.

Allow approximately 15 minutes for this and then bring them back to the larger group. Invite the participants to read out their list of actions and write these on the large sheets of paper/flipchart.

### Discussion points

- High and low self esteem can be strongly affected by how others treat us.
- Have any of the participants felt that other people's actions have affected them by either raising or lowering their self esteem? Do they know of anyone who has been similarly affected?
- Can think of times when they may have affected someone's self esteem through words or actions.

### Actions that can raise or lower self-esteem:

make up cards with these words – and/or develop your own.

- Complimenting your mates or family
- Gossiping about people
- Ignoring others
- Supporting a friend who needs help
- Listening when your mate needs you to
- Name calling of someone who is different
- Ganging up against someone
- Laughing at other people
- Spreading rumours about others
- Making friends with someone who is lonely

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