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Foundations for Wellbeing

Year 6, lesson 5: Managing stress



Managing stress

This is the last of five lessons on self-regulation, mental health and emotional wellbeing, for year 6. This lesson focuses on managing stress.

To encourage pupils to use the self-regulation strategies taught in these lessons more automatically, autonomously and effectively, it is important to revisit and reinforce them regularly, as part of a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. The extension activities are designed to support this (for more information, see the [Teacher Handbook](#)). To learn more, please visit our [self-guided online courses](#), which are available to all School Plus members.

The lesson plan is based on a 45-minute lesson. The timings given are the minimum required to deliver the activities, but you may wish to spend longer exploring each activity.

Learning objective and outcomes

To learn about managing stress.

Pupils will be able to:

- explain how the body and brain respond to stress
- evaluate strategies for managing stress
- explain how practising these strategies can help reduce stress and support long-term wellbeing

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Flipchart paper, pens and post-it notes
- Baseline assessments from lesson 1
- Resource 1: *Meena* [one per pupil]
- Resource 2: *Managing stress cards* [one cut-up set per pair]
- Resource 3: *Meena's conversation* [one per pupil]
- Resource 3a: *Helping Meena* [support option, as required]

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. They include guidance on establishing a safe learning environment, supporting pupils with additional vulnerabilities, using assessment and personal reflection effectively, and embedding the learning. They also outline useful subject knowledge on the theory and evidence informing these lessons, self-regulation strategies and relevant neuroscience.

The lesson plans should be used flexibly, and you are encouraged to adapt them to meet the specific needs and abilities of your pupils. It is also important to consider sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific pupils' circumstances. If safeguarding concerns arise during this lesson, these should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, in line with your school policy.

Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 9–11, 2 mins)

Establish or revisit ground rules. Explain that if pupils have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Using slide 10, begin by briefly recapping the learning from last lesson.

Introduce today's learning objective and outcomes. Explain that the lesson will explore how using different strategies to manage stress can help support wellbeing.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 12, 5 mins)

Create two 'graffiti walls' at the front of the room with the following headings: 'Feeling stressed' and 'Feeling relaxed'. On post-it notes, ask pupils to write down any ideas they have about each feeling, considering:

- how it might feel – the emotions someone might have and how it might feel in the body
- how someone might behave when they feel it
- what might cause someone to feel this way
- what they might do to feel it more, or less, often

After two to three minutes, ask pupils to stick their post-its, or write their ideas, on the relevant graffiti wall and review these as a class. Consider how the lesson may need adapting, for example if pupils do not identify factors that can affect how someone feels, such as sleep and diet, spend more time exploring how stress can be managed in the second activity.

Core activities

The body and the brain (Slides 13–17, 10 mins)

Show slide 13 and explain that Meena has been feeling stressed and angry recently. Give pupils

Resource 1: Meena and read through Meena's thoughts as a class. Then, show slide 14 and ask pupils to think back to what they have learnt about the brain and body in previous lessons: what might be happening in Meena's body and brain when she is experiencing stress? If necessary, use the Amazing brain poster (Appendix 2) in the Teacher Handbook, to remind pupils of the parts of the brain and what they do.

Take feedback from volunteers and reveal the answers on slide 15, explaining that when Meena is experiencing a lot of stress on a particularly difficult day, the amygdala is more active and begins 'ringing alarm bells' to signal threat or danger. This activates the 'fight, flight or freeze' response, which increases the heart rate and can make her feel tense (like a coiled spring). While this can be helpful in some situations (for example, escaping danger), in other situations it can be unhelpful and counterproductive, possibly causing Meena to act without thinking, or to become upset.

Next, ask pupils, what might happen in Meena's body and brain if she uses emotion regulation strategies to help manage her stress? Take feedback from volunteers and reveal the answers on slide 17, explaining that when Meena uses emotion regulation strategies to manage stress or tension, they make it easier for the PFC to send calming messages to the amygdala. This helps to reduce the stress response. As Meena does this more often, the connections between the PFC and amygdala become stronger. This makes it easier for the PFC to communicate with the amygdala, to manage stress or tension and feel calmer or more relaxed in the future.

Managing stress (Slides 18-20, 10 mins)

Remind pupils that the stress response is there to keep Meena safe and help her respond quickly when needed (for example, competing in a race or competition). However, if Meena often feels stressed or gets very stressed easily, this can be unhelpful. Luckily, there are different strategies and things Meena can do, to help manage this.

In pairs, give pupils **Resource 2: Managing stress cards** and ask them to organise them into two groups:

- everyday behaviours that can help to reduce the chance of Meena feeling tense or stressed and support her wellbeing
- strategies that Meena could use if she starts to feel tense or stressed

Take feedback, drawing out key learning:

- *Everyday behaviours: keeping hydrated, getting enough sleep, savouring positive experiences, having a balanced diet, managing negativity bias (if necessary, remind pupils that this refers to people often remembering situations and events that led to negative emotions better than those that led to positive emotions).*
- *Strategies: noticing and naming emotions, using progressive muscle relaxation, 'See, hear, move' technique, reappraisal, 'Watching thoughts' strategies (e.g. imagining thoughts as leaves on a river, written on balloons that float away, or as pop-up adverts we can choose to close), focusing on a calming memory or image, doing sensory focus activities.*

Explain that if Meena can notice and name her emotions when feeling stressed or tense, she can use the strategies to help feel calmer or move her attention to a thought or activity that will help her feel less tense. This can help Meena manage her response in different situations. Everyday behaviours like getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, and savouring positive experiences, can also help to improve Meena's general wellbeing, by making her feel more at ease and able to take on challenges – making her less likely to feel tense or stressed as quickly.

Finally, ask pupils to privately reflect on the strategies and behaviours and choose two from each category that they think they might find most helpful, or would like to try in future. As this is a personal reflection activity, pupils should not be asked to share their answers with the class.



Challenge: Ask pupils to suggest another strategy Meena could use if she starts to feel stressed or tense, and other everyday behaviours that could support her wellbeing.

Pupils might suggest: strategies such as 4-6 breathing (breath in for a count of 4 and out for 6), or speaking to a trusted adult, and everyday behaviours such as, spending time with friends and family, spending time outside or in nature, doing hobbies.

Asking for help (Slides 21-24, 12 mins)

Highlight that sometimes, even when someone uses these strategies, they might still feel stressed or tense and need some additional support. Show slide 21 and ask pupils who Meena could ask for help if she continues to feel like she's 'going to explode' sometimes.

Take feedback and share the examples on slide 22.

Next, explain that Meena has decided to talk to her friend Fin about how she has been feeling. Show pupils the opening to their conversation on slide 23 and ask them to script the rest using **Resource 3: Meena's conversation**, making sure they include:

- things that might be making Meena feel more stressed and what she might want to change in her daily life
- strategies Fin might suggest, to help her feel calmer when she is feeling angry or tense and why practising these is important
- everyday behaviours Fin might suggest she includes to help improve her general wellbeing
- who else Fin could suggest she asks for help

If time allows, ask pupils to read out or perform their script. They should peer assess each other's conversations, using the list of criteria on slide 24 as a guide, ticking off each point that has been included. Circulate to support feedback. Prompt them to come out of role afterwards – for example, by 'shaking off' the character.



Support: Give pupils **Resource 3: Helping Meena**, to help structure their answers.

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Endpoint assessment (Slide 25, 5 mins)

Remind pupils of the learning outcomes and ask them to revisit question 5 ('What might they do to help prepare themselves for the move to secondary school?') of their baseline activity from lesson 1. Ask them to make any changes to their original answers or add in any new learning from this lesson, in a different colour pen. Pupils should consider:

- daily activities that can help someone feel more relaxed and upbeat
- strategies to use when someone is feeling tense or angry
- signs to look out for that may suggest someone is feeling stressed
- why practising strategies and improving everyday activities can support wellbeing

This will help to evidence student progress and highlight any gaps that may need addressing in future lessons on this or related topics.

Check the question box and respond to any remaining questions.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 26, 1 mins)

Remind pupils that if they are feeling very stressed or tense, or finding stress difficult to manage, it's important they speak to a trusted adult at home or at school. Pupils can also contact Childline www.childline.org.uk/kids.

Closing the lesson (Slide 27)

Finally, using slide 27, reinforce the key learning by summing up for the class what they have achieved in today's lesson.

Activities to extend and embed the learning

Getting ready for secondary school (Slide 28)

Ask pupils to create a guide for pupils starting secondary school on how to manage stress.

Pupils could include:

- signs that could mean someone is feeling stressed
- strategies to help manage stress and support wellbeing
- tips on having a healthier routine to support wellbeing
- where to ask for help
- a list of things someone could look forward to

Practising (Slide 29)

Ask pupils to practise some of the strategies from activity two and reflect on any changes in their emotions and how helpful they are. If they are using diaries, journals or logs, they could use these to record how using these strategies affects them.