

The Impact of Stress on the Body

Pembroke's Friday Freebie



**Social-
Emotional
Learning**

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Of Impact of Stress on the Body

Objective: To examine the ways that stress affects our bodies in order to understand external influences on ourselves.

Addison is in Grade 4.

Addison often has disagreements and problems with other children. Once she is upset, she yells and screams. Then she seeks out a teacher. When she comes to you, she is agitated and shaky. She screams and yells about what another student did to her.

Ignore

You listen to Addison's version of the story and to the other student's, then you tell them to play on their own.

React

You sternly tell Addison to calm down.

Respond

When Addison tries to speak to you, you gently raise your hands in the air and indicate that she is not ready to speak yet. You draw her attention to the negative power in her body and indicate that she needs to calm down her body before you can think and problem-solve.

External stress triggers launch the body into a Fight, Flight, or Freeze reaction in defence against danger. This has an automatic physical impact on the body. Symptoms might include increased heart rate, shallow breathing, dizziness, sweaty palms, nausea, or headaches. Children are often not aware that it is stress that is causing their physical symptoms. Once they develop negative physical symptoms, they experience stress from two sources: the initial source and the physical symptoms.

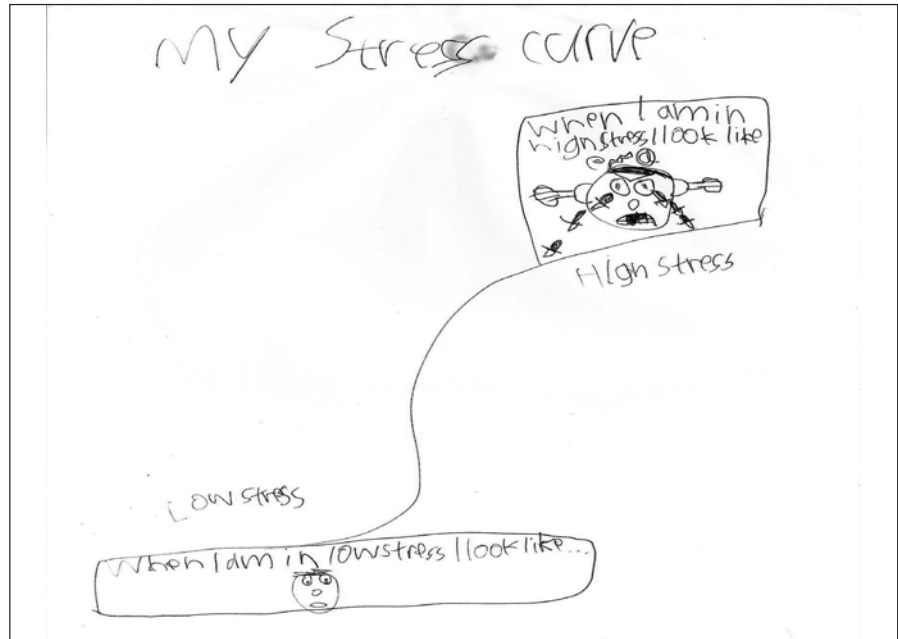
If a child understands that stress is causing the physical symptoms, worrying about underlying medical problems will not cause additional stress, and the child is often more motivated to engage in calming strategies to mitigate the physical symptoms of the stress.

Awareness-Building Activities

Stress Curve

Ask students to self-reflect on the sensations in their bodies before and during challenging moments, considering what they look like and the areas of their bodies that react when they become upset. Work with students to plot their low, medium, and high stress on a Stress Curve; see template on page 48.

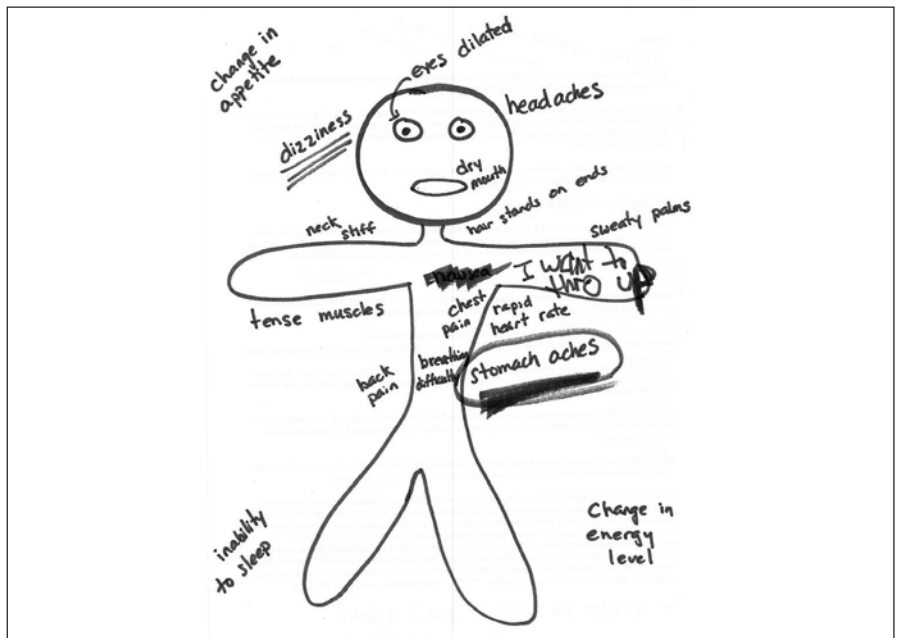
SAMPLE STRESS CURVE



Drawing My Body Under Stress

Some students struggle to know what their body looks like and what physical sensations they experience in states of low, medium, and high stress. Explore this with them by asking them to self-reflect on the sensations in their bodies before, during, and after disagreements or challenging moments, and to draw the sensations on a body outline. Examine what they look like and the areas of their bodies that react when they become upset.

SAMPLE BODY UNDER STRESS



Listing Activity

Work with students to list the physical symptoms they feel when under stress.

SAMPLE LIST OF PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heart racing • body moves everywhere • palms sweating • nausea • dizziness • headache • twitches • tics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indigestion • change in appetite • chest pains • dry mouth • tense muscles • stiff neck • breathing problems • weight loss or gain |
|--|---|

The Positive Response Process

Give Feedback

Before starting an activity, ask students to notice the physical sensations their bodies experience during the activity. For example, before language arts, ask students to think about how their head, mouth, shoulders, and stomach feel; if their bodies are sluggish or moving all over the place. Encourage students to track what their bodies look like when they are ready to learn and engaged, as well as when they are not able to listen and are disengaged from the class.

Feedback Activity

Discuss with students the distinction between energy levels and stress levels. Their energy level could be positive or negative, and does not necessarily correspond with whether they are experiencing stress. This activity is an exploration of how their bodies feel and what level of energy they have. Provide students with the My Energy Level chart (page 49) to record the energy level their bodies are at and to draw what their bodies looked like during the school day.

Note that this student indicates a high energy level for recess, but her drawing reveals that this energy manifests as negative behavior; she runs and bumps into other children.

SAMPLE ENERGY LEVEL CHART

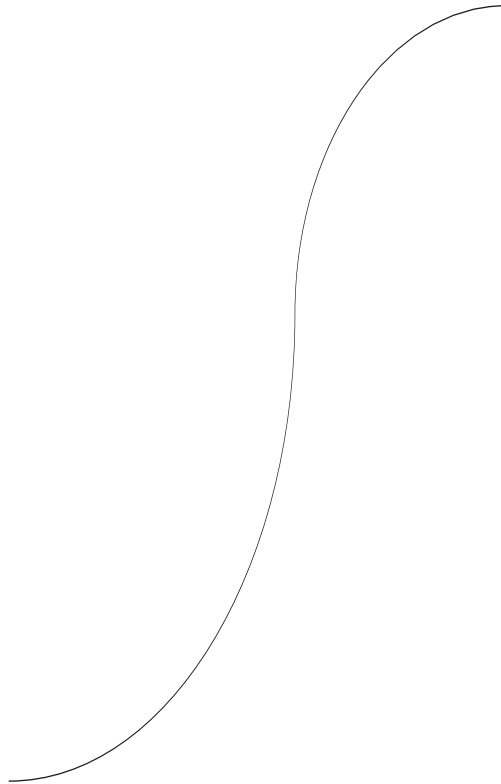
I can track my body's energy level
Name Mid

Subject	Body's Energy Level	Draw how your body looks.
Guided Reading	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Recess	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Gym	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Lunch	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Math	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Recess	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Science	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	
Home time	HIGH	
	MEDIUM	
	LOW	

My Stress Curve

High Stress

(Draw a picture of yourself in high stress.)



Low Stress

(Draw a picture of yourself in low stress.)

My Energy Level

I can track my body's energy level.

Name: _____

Subject	Circle Your Body's Energy Level	Draw How Your Body Looks
Guided Reading	HIGH Medium Low	
Recess	HIGH Medium Low	
Gym	HIGH Medium Low	
Lunch	HIGH Medium Low	
Math	HIGH Medium Low	
Recess	HIGH Medium Low	
Science	HIGH Medium Low	
Home time	HIGH Medium Low	