



## The Ups and Downs of Stress

Ask people, young and old alike, why they drink alcohol or use other drugs and you're likely to get responses that include (though not limited to) coping with stress.

Thinking about stress, according to BC's [Adolescent Health Survey](#) (2013) most youth across BC (83%) reported feeling at least some stress in the past month. Females were more likely than males to experience extreme stress that prevented them from functioning properly (13% vs. 5%). Of those who reported using alcohol or other drugs, 16% of males and 25% of females cited stress as a reason for using.

All of us experience stress and, while it's not always a bad thing (e.g., starting a new school year, preparing for a trip or a performance), it is important to learn how to manage stress in a healthy way. Drinking alcohol or using other drugs may provide us with temporary relief from stress. But using substances too often as a coping strategy may lead to significant harm.

While everyone copes with stress differently, regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health and it's also an important part of a stress-busting lifestyle. It can change your mood – so if you are feeling sluggish, some activity can make you feel more energized and alert. But at the same time, it can also help calm agitated, angry or anxious feelings. It can reduce levels of the stress hormones that cause the physical feeling of being stressed (like feeling tense or hyper-aroused) and also results in the release of feel-good brain chemicals.

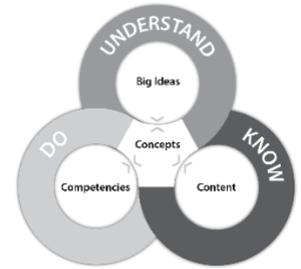
### Why “why?” matters

The reasons we use a drug are important since they influence our pattern of use and risk of harmful consequences. For example, if it is out of curiosity or another fleeting motive, only occasional or experimental use may follow. If the motive is strong and enduring (e.g., relieving chronic stress or other mental health challenges), then more long-lasting and intense substance use may follow. Motives for intense short-term use (e.g., to fit in, have fun or alleviate temporary stress) may result in risky behaviour with high potential for serious harm.

## Links to Curriculum

### Core competencies addressed

- Communication
  - Connect and engage with others (to share and develop ideas)
  - Acquire, interpret, and present information (includes inquiries)
  - Collaborate to plan, carry out, and review constructions and activities
  - Explain/recount and reflect on experiences and accomplishments
- Creative thinking
  - Novelty and value
  - Generating ideas
  - Developing ideas
- Critical thinking
  - Analyze and critique
  - Question and investigate
  - Develop and design
- Personal awareness and responsibility
  - Self-determination
  - Self-regulation
  - Well-being
- Social responsibility
  - Contributing to community and caring for the environment
  - Building relationships



### First Peoples' Principles of Learning addressed

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

### Big ideas addressed

- Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional, and mental well-being.
- Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives.
- Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community.

### Drug literacy related big ideas addressed

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives



Competencies and content explored

<b>Physical and Health Education 9</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe how students' participation in physical activities at school, at home, and in the community can influence their health and fitness</li><li>• Propose healthy choices that support lifelong health and well-being</li><li>• Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community</li></ul>

<b>Drug Literacy</b> (For a complete look at the drug related competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC at University of Victoria, see: <a href="https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf">https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf</a> )	
Students learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs</li><li>• Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs</li><li>• Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs</li></ul>	By exploring content such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the role of individual experience, ideas and agency as they impact attitudes and behaviours related to drug use</li><li>• media awareness and critical thinking</li><li>• the emotional and social appeal of drug use</li><li>• self-examination and the exploration of ideas without immediately passing judgement</li><li>• ways to assess personal risk and distinguish between beneficial and harmful use</li><li>• decision-making skills that incorporate rational processing and emotional regulation</li><li>• support and leadership skills within peer group, family and community</li></ul>



### Instructional strategies

1. Show the short video *Managing Stress* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE)) and then facilitate a short discussion with the class using questions like those below. And then introduce and practice a variety of exercises students can use on their own to manage and reduce stress.
  - a. What are some common reasons people get stressed out?
  - b. Do you think life is more stressful these days than in the past? Why or why not?
  - c. How do you cope with or manage stress? How do people in other cultures manage stress?
  - d. How could we reduce stress in the first place?
2. Provide students with a copy of the [Ups and Downs of Stress handout](#) and have them read through it quickly. Facilitate a short discussion with the class using questions like those below, and then introduce and practice a variety of exercises students can use on their own to manage and reduce stress.
  - a. If stress can be both good and bad, how do we know the difference?
  - b. Physical activity is a proven stress-buster. Can it also contribute to stress? If so, how? How can we use physical activity to find our sweet spot?
  - c. What other ways are there to manage stress?
  - d. What advice can we provide to the stressed student in the image?
3. Show the TED talk by health psychologist, Kelly McGonigal, in which she presents stress as a positive ([www.ted.com/talks/kelly\\_mcgonigal\\_how\\_to\\_make\\_stress\\_your\\_friend/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend/transcript?language=en)). Invite students to comment on the video and explore what it might mean for them. The following questions might help.
  - a. What are some situations when stress can be helpful? How might it help?
  - b. McGonigal talks about “making you better at stress.” How might that look for you?
4. Invite students to explore further information provided by the Adolescent Health Survey. Note, that in addition to the provincial report there are 16 regional reports that will provide a closer look at youth in your part of BC. Students might consider things they can do to promote physical activity within their school. The McCreary Centre Society offers Youth Action Grants of up to \$500.00 that might just provide the impetus for some pretty cool activities! Read more at [www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs\\_youth\\_resources](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/ahs_youth_resources)

### Resources

**Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre:** BC’s information source for children, youth and families dealing with mental health and substance use issues. The website includes information and resources on stress, including an interactive Healthy Thinking Activity and an interactive Problem Solving resource, as well as mindfulness audio and video resources. [kelymentalhealth.ca/healthy-living/stress](http://kelymentalhealth.ca/healthy-living/stress)

**Mindcheck.ca:** Website designed to help youth and young adults in British Columbia check out how they’re feeling and quickly connect to mental health resources and support. Website includes information on stress, a stress check quiz, mindfulness related resources and other tips for managing stress & self-care resources. [mindcheck.ca/mood-and-stress/stress](http://mindcheck.ca/mood-and-stress/stress)

**The Psychology Foundation of Canada:** has a range of programs and resources, also available in French, including *Stress Lessons: From Stressed Out to Chilled Out* (a resource for grades 7-9 teachers) and resources for parents of teens. [www.psychologyfoundation.org](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org)

### Additional Tips and Information for Teachers

- The concept of “mental health” is often confused with “mental illness”. The Physical and Health Education curriculum focus on “mental well-being” recognizes that everyone falls somewhere on a continuum between optimal mental health and poor mental health, independent of the presence or absence of a mental illness<sup>1</sup>. From this perspective, classroom-based and whole-school strategies can be geared to enhancing the positive mental health and well-being of all students, including those with and without identified mental health challenges.
- Teachers have an important role to play in fostering the mental well-being of their students, though they do not require specialized or expert knowledge to do so (ie. they are not expected to play the role of psychologist or counsellor). As a guide, teachers may understand their role to include:
  - supporting students to understand how to foster and maintain positive mental health and well-being, and thereby enhance their readiness to learn;
  - creating a welcoming and safe classroom/school environment;
  - highlighting methods to enhance both physical and mental well-being such as adequate sleep, physical activity, healthy eating and stress management techniques;
  - helping students to recognize the signs of common mental health concerns;
  - guiding students to trustworthy information and resources related to mental health;
  - supporting students to know how to seek assistance when needed; and,
  - challenging common stigmas related to mental health.
- There are a number of simple, everyday practices that teachers can use to supplement their instructional approaches to mental well-being. Examples include:
  - increasing opportunities for physical activity
  - taking students outside, even for a short time, to help them to restore readiness to learn
  - leading a circle check-in, where every student has a chance to voice their perspective
  - intentionally strengthening their relationship with students through personal conversations
- For students who are experiencing a problem related to their mental health, sources of support include:
  - talking to a school counsellor
  - Kids Help Phone #1-800-668-6868 ([KidsHelpPhone.ca](http://KidsHelpPhone.ca))
  - [Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#)
- Teachers are encouraged to think about their own mental well-being, and what strategies may be required to support it. A number of helpful health and wellness resources can be found on the [BC Teachers' Federation website](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Consider that “mental health” and “mental illness” can be viewed as two separate but related concepts. From this perspective, someone could have optimal mental health (feeling good about and functioning well in life) while experiencing a mental illness. Conversely, someone without a mental illness could have poor mental health.

