

Lead a series of youth workshops – Lesson 1: How Can I Change to Chill?

Almost all teens experience stress. The good news is that even though the causes vary and some stress is unavoidable there are lots of ways to manage it. Use the steps below to teach young people about the causes of their own stress and ways to deal with it in order to thrive.

What You Need

- Electronic devices for each participant or one with a larger screen that can be seen by all
- Internet connection
- Pen or pencil (one for each participant)
- Copies of [“Stress: What Brings It On?” worksheet \(pdf\)](#) or blank pieces of paper (one for each participant)
- Copies of [“What is Stressing You Out?” flier \(pdf\)](#) (one for each participant)
- Copies of [“Feeling Anxious?” flier \(pdf\)](#) (one for each participant)

Step 1: Get Started

Start by showing the group the introductory Change to Chill video. Explain that you are going to introduce them to and practice using some of the Change to Chill resources, which are available any time and anywhere they have internet access. Take a few minutes to see if anyone in the group has a reaction, comment or question they’d like to share about the video or about stress in general. Don’t spend too much time on this, but do give people a chance to speak.

Change to Chill Intro video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7S_WVQ0LRo

Step 2: Create a Safe Space

Point out that when talking about stress, what causes it, and ways to deal with it, teens might at some point address sensitive or emotional topics, including mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. There is nothing wrong with having a mental health condition and it’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s no different from having diabetes or high blood pressure. In fact, 1 in 4 people struggles with a mental health condition. Still, there is stigma around mental health: stereotypes, pre-judgment, fears, labeling. Stigma can make it so that people who really need help don’t get it. For example, we know that even though depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions are treatable, in the United States people who have these conditions wait an average of 10 years before seeking treatment. Part of the problem is stigma.

It’s important therefore that you work together to create a safe space where people feel they can share information and ideas, be honest about their experiences, and be respected and treated well. Ask the group to brainstorm a list of expectations, norms or agreements that will help make that so. If necessary, provide a few examples to get them started. Write their ideas on a piece of poster board or flip chart paper and then post it where everyone can see and that

you can point to if people need reminding. If they don't mention the following consider adding them:

- **Confidentiality:** What's said in the room stays in the room.
- **Non-judgment:** The causes of stress and ways of dealing with it are different for everyone. This group is about learning how to recognize and manage your own stress, not "fix" others. Refrain from counseling, coaching or critiquing what others say or do in the group.
- **Listen to hear, not respond:** Again, each person is unique. When others are sharing their stories, thoughts or ideas, listen and try to understand, ask clarifying questions, affirm what's being said, but don't try to argue points, persuade others, or correct things you think are wrong.
- **Respect self, others and the space:** Be good citizens of the group. If you choose not to participate, make sure you are not distracting or otherwise making it difficult for your peers to participate in the ways they choose.

Step 3: Awareness Experiment

This short experiment gives you a taste of what Buddhists call *mindfulness*.

Listen to the audio or read the "Awareness Experiment" meditation script aloud to the group. When you've finished, ask the group these questions:

- How do you feel?
- What did you notice during this relaxation practice?
- At what points during your day could you use a few minutes of relaxation? Do you think practicing using this method could help you do that?

Listen to the audio: https://youtu.be/c13l2XQ_3sM

["Awareness Experiment" meditation script \(pdf\)](#)

Step 4: Meditation Experiment

Before you start talking about stress, lead a little experiment. Let participants know that there is no right or wrong way to do this...that it's just about trying it and seeing what happens. Give the following instructions:

This experiment will be done sitting in a chair, with no particular position. We will be sitting in silence for about one minute, breathing normally. As we do this simply become aware of the inhale as your breath comes into your body, and exhale as it leaves.

Let them breathe in silence for about 15-30 seconds, then say the following:

Now, as you do this you may notice, within seconds, that thoughts begin to arise. Some of these thoughts dissolve quickly. Others may hold your attention so much that you cannot focus on your inhale and your exhale at all. When you find this is the case, acknowledge the thoughts and then focus once again as much as possible on following closely the inhale and the exhale of your breath.

Do this for an additional 30-60 seconds. Then talk about that experience. What was it like? How did it feel? Was it comfortable? Uncomfortable? Relaxing? Stressful? Explain that in the sessions that follow you will be learning about and practicing various forms of *meditation* and *mindfulness* and that this was one example. Mindfulness and meditation are two of the healthiest and most effective stress-busting strategies.

- Mindfulness is *the objective observation of the present moment*. It reduces anxiety by focusing on the present moment—not the past or the future, both of which can create anxiety.
- Meditation is *the practice of turning your attention to a single point of focus*. It can take many different forms.

Change to Chill has a number of options for learning about mindfulness and trying meditation with the help of videos and guided audio recordings. Learning some easy relaxation and meditation techniques can help you think more clearly, make better decisions and manage whatever comes your way. They will probably become much more comfortable with these practices over time and learn to use them to cope with and even prevent stress.

Step 5: What Is Stress and Causes of Stress

Read through as a group or individually the Causes of Stress section. Distribute copies of the Stress: What Brings It On? worksheet or have them each draw three matching columns on a blank piece of paper, marking the top of the columns (from left to right) “then,” “now” and “when.” Follow the instructions on the worksheet.

[Stress: What Brings It On? worksheet \(pdf\)](#)

Next, watch the “Stress Test” video and try the breathing technique described at the end. Also, ask participants to pay attention to when they are stressed and how their bodies react. Then ask each of them to reflect by saying aloud one word that describes how they are thinking or feeling at the moment.

Stress Test video: <https://youtu.be/XBXVljwuuSk>

Just as the video pointed out, when your body reacts to stress, you can feel it. It’s the sensation known as fight-or-flight. You may feel energy surge through your body if you are worried or anxious about something, or if you are in an emergency. Your instincts take over and tell you that you are facing danger and you either need to defend yourself (fight) or get away (flight).

Stress causes all kinds of problems, discuss the symptoms of stress from the “What is stressing you out?” handout or What is stress? section.

[“What is stressing you out?” handout \(pdf\)](#)

Anxiety is also a response to everyday stress. Facing play tryouts, a basketball game or a math test can cause anxiety. Everyone feels anxious at some time. This is normal! Anxiety can cause emotional and physical problems; read more from the “Feeling Anxious?” handout.

[“Feeling Anxious” handout \(pdf\)](#)

Step 6: Mindful Movement

As time and space allow, pick and choose as many or as little of the following mindful movement relaxation activities to follow along with. These simple, short exercises provide teens with more options to help them feel better and stress less.

- Front Stretch Right: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSs06opurd0>
- Front Stretch Left: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBDSIH_t-k
- Basic Spine Flex: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRxbqzq1oEw>
- Neck Turns: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmY85gSirlc>
- Washing Machine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutpgAQZj6Y>
- Shoulder Rolls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK6VtanFiZI>
- Shoulder Shrugs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaICnGnZ7NY>
- Half-Moon Neck Rolls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9SF1e7B8h4>

Step 7: Chill at Home – Determine Your Stress Factors

Encourage teens to take the Stress Factors Quiz sometime between now and your next meeting. The Stress Factors Quiz can be accessed by clicking the green bar below or found on the Change to Chill website homepage. There are five questions and no right or wrong answers. By taking the quiz teens will learn where their stress is coming from and what it does to them.

Stress Factor Quiz: changetochill.org/stress-factor-quiz/

Once participants have answered the 5th and final question and clicked “next,” a results page will appear. Participants should review the customized results and explore the recommended resources on the website. This can be done individually or in a group setting. Don’t pressure individuals to share their answers or results if they don’t want to.