

Life Balance

A balanced lifestyle sets the stage for optimal health and happiness, now and for the long term. Creating a lifestyle that is satisfying, maintainable, realistic, and supportive of all of one's personal values is balance. Use the steps that follow to help teens explore what balance looks like for them and how they can achieve it.

What You Need

- Electronic devices for each participant or one with a larger screen that can be seen by all
- Internet connection
- Smart Board or projector
- Copies of the [“Values Circle” worksheet \(pdf\)](#) *
- Copies of the [“Gratitude” worksheet \(pdf\)](#) *
- Pen or pencil (one for each participant for writing)
- Small, individually wrapped candy (chocolate, chewable fruit) or other food that will work for a guided mindful eating meditation
- Copies of the [“Sleep Tracker”\(pdf\)](#) *
- Copies of the [“Better Sleep Tips” flier \(pdf\)](#) *

**Worksheets and handouts are optional and can also be used as guides for group discussion facilitation*

Determine Your Stress Factors

Complete the stress quiz as a group or individually, as appropriate. As a group, talk about different ways stress affects the participants and what they can do to help relax and relieve stress. Do participants experience symptoms they didn't realize are caused by stress? Did they find a new recommendation to help them reduce stress?

After a bit of discussion, spend a few minutes doing some deep belly breathing or other relaxation techniques before getting started with the session.

Stress Factor Quiz: <http://www.changetochill.org/stress-factor-quiz/>

Life Balance

The Achieve Balance section of the site focuses on becoming aware of how teens are balancing their life. Explain to the group that leading a life that isn't in alignment with their values and priorities can be a huge source of stress. Do the activity that follows.

Values Circle—Distribute the “Values Circle” worksheet or blank pieces of paper to each participant along with a pen or pencil. Follow the directions for the activity as they are listed on

A decorative horizontal band with a blue wavy, concentric line pattern.

the handouts and website. When participants are done filling in the two worksheets as directed spend a few minutes discussing the following:

- What do you notice about how your values compare with how you spend your time?
- Are you happy with what you discovered by doing this activity? Why or why not?
- What's one thing you'd like to do differently in order to have your life more aligned with your values?

[“Values Circle” worksheet \(pdf\)](#)

Gratitude

Ask participants if they have ever thought about what it takes to be happy? More money, more stuff? Ask the group to share their ideas on what material items people think make them happy.

Then, explain that people who take time to appreciate what they have in the moment are actually happier than those who don't! Research shows only about 10 percent of our happiness depends on our situation. In other words, WE are responsible for our own level of happiness! One of the keys to happiness is our resilience and ability to successfully manage stress.

Tell the group that resilience can be learned. The more we practice stress management and resilience skills, the happier we can become. Change to Chill includes many techniques and skills to help participants manage stress (deep breathing, meditation, better sleep and more). Another great tool to help build up the “resilience muscle” is gratitude. Think about it – how often do we take the small things like a beautiful sky, amazing sunset and family or friends for granted? Research shows expressing gratitude truly makes us happier people, especially if we do it often and in-person.

Explain to the group that the following activities will help build the “resilience muscle” through practicing gratitude.

Gratitude Worksheet

Walk participants through the “Gratitude” worksheet, taking time to discuss each question, as time allows. Once they have completed the worksheet have participants intentionally set aside time to write a thank you letter to someone they are grateful for.

[“Gratitude” worksheet \(pdf\)](#)

Gratitude Meditation

Listen to the audio or read the meditation aloud to the group. After the meditation, ask the group how they can practice gratitude every day. Give the following examples, if they are not brought up by the group.

- Live in the present. Notice what is today instead of focusing on yesterday or tomorrow's worries.
- Start the day with gratitude. Practice giving thanks before you go on with the day's activities, and notice new opportunities to be grateful for throughout the day.
- Start a gratitude journal. Write down the things you are grateful for every day, then look at it at the end of the month or when you struggle to notice anything good.

Reiterate the idea of practicing being content, focusing on what we have, not on what we don't.

[Gratitude Meditation Audio](#)

[Gratitude Meditation Script \(pdf\)](#)

Sleep – What's the Big Deal

Explain that sleep is a critical component of dealing with stress. If we don't get enough sleep the hard stuff gets a lot harder.

It's fair to say that overall, teens in the U.S. are in the middle of a sleep crisis. For most, 9-10 hours a night is ideal. However, many teenagers aren't getting enough sleep to recharge their bodies. Many teens report being drowsy upon waking, tired during the day, and wakeful at night.

But if teens are getting by this way, does sleep really matter?

The answer is yes, it absolutely matters. In addition to *feeling* better physically and emotionally, getting enough sleep has many benefits for teens, including:

- Lower likelihood of getting sick.
- Greater likelihood of staying at a healthy weight because lack of sleep causes hormones that affect weight to become out of balance.
- Lower risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes.
- Boosting brainpower! Teens will be able to think more clearly at school and perform better on things that matter to them, whether it's school, work, arts, sports, or just life in general.
- Increased likelihood of making better, more healthful decisions.

Now share with the group some signs that *they* might be suffering from a lack of sleep:

- Irritability
- Difficulty making decisions
- Decreases ability to concentrate
- Lower hand-eye coordination
- Increased illness (both mental and physical)
- FEELING TIRED A LOT!

Explain that some people think it's okay to get just a few hours of sleep a night during the week and then make up for it on the weekends. However, sleep doesn't work that way. Our bodies need regular, consistent rest and time to reset.

Getting enough sleep is easier said than done, right? Many teens find the rest of the world doesn't function on the same schedule their bodies do. That's because biological changes during adolescence can make it difficult to fall asleep before 11:00 or so, which in turn means sleeping later in the morning.

Fortunately there are some things they can do to help improve their chances of a good night's sleep. A first step is to learn about their own sleep-related habits. Have participants use the Sleep Tracker and Better Sleep Tips flier provided at the end of the lesson to figure out how much sleep they're getting and what things they're doing at night that might be helping or causing problems.

[“Sleep Tracker”\(pdf\)](#)

[“Better Sleep Tips” flier \(pdf\)](#)

Head-to-Toe Relaxation

Listen to either option of the audio or read either of the “Head-to-Toe Relaxation” meditation scripts 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?

Point out that doing this relaxation activity in bed at night can be a way to help participants fall asleep.

[“Head-to-Toe Relaxation” meditation script \(pdf\)](#)

[“Extended Head-to-Toe Relaxation” meditation script \(pdf\)](#)

Just Breathe Meditation

Listen to the audio or read the “Just Breath” 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?

Point out that doing this relaxation activity in bed at night can be a way to help participants fall asleep.

[“Just Breathe” meditation script \(pdf\)](#)

Optional: Chill at Home Skill Building Activities

- ✓ **Gratitude Note:** write a gratitude note to someone you care about and read it aloud to them
- ✓ **Mindful Eating:** as you eat your next meal or snack, be mindful about it. Notice the smells, tastes, textures and colors of what you are putting in your body.
- ✓ **Listening:** have a conversation with a family member, friend or teacher and focus all your attention on being present and listening. Share with that person something new you learned from the conversation.
- ✓ **Connecting:** ask your parent/guardian about their day and share something about your day.
- ✓ **Lend a Hand:** help your parent/guardian/friend make a meal. Focus on being present with each step of the meal preparation process and enjoy the fruit of your labor at the end!
- ✓ **Unplug:** take a walk this week, but leave your cell phone at home. Notice the things around you: sounds, smells, nature and objects you have not paid attention to before.
- ✓ **Take a Break:** devote 20 minutes to reading a book without interruptions – leave your phone in a different room!
- ✓ **Be Present:** pick one day this week and leave your cell phone at home in the morning. Go the entire day at school without being connected. Take time to notice your feelings, emotions and observations without the interruption and distraction of your phone.

- ✓ **Get Some Rest:** commit to getting at least 7 hours of sleep 3 days this week. If you feel up for it, jot down how you feel in the morning and reflect back on your notes at the end of the week.
- ✓ **Take a Deep Breathe:** practice deep breathing once a day. Count to 3 as you inhale and count to 4 as your exhale, repeating as many times as you want.