

# Stress Management

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to cover the topic of stress management. You will also explore how your reactions to stress and how you approach situations is related to your self and social awareness skill. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

## 1. Coping with Stress

It is important that a person learns proper **stress management**. There are two major approaches to coping with stress:

- **Problem-focused coping:** Occurs when a person attempts to control the thing that caused the stress itself. This can be done by removing the stressor, like turning off a buzzing alarm, or by removing oneself from a stressful situation.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you can't turn off a fire alarm, you simply walk away so you don't have to hear the alarm.

- **Emotion-focused coping:** Attempting to control a person's own mental or emotional reaction to the stressor itself. This is particularly useful in a situation that can't be escaped when problem-focused coping will not work.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Stress Management

Cognitive and behavioral skills that people learn for the purpose of reducing stress and its harmful effects.

### Problem-Focused Coping

Attempting to control the thing causing the stress itself.

### Emotion-Focused Coping

Attempting to control a person's mental and emotional reaction to a stressor.

### 1a. Biofeedback

Understanding how your body is reacting to stressors can help you to control its reactions and reduce the amount of stress that you are experiencing. At its most basic level, this means being aware of when you're

getting stressed out and taking action to reduce the bodily reaction. This is a practical example of how your **self and social awareness skill** connects to psychology.

➔ **EXAMPLE** For example, you may notice that you have an increased heart rate due to stress, and take a deep breath. Controlling your breathing helps to reduce the bodily reaction to stress.

This would be an example of **biofeedback**. Biofeedback is when a person gets information about their body's activities, and they can learn to control those reactions to prevent different problems or illnesses from developing. This has also been used to control a person's blood flow to the head, which can help to reduce the instances of migraines occurring.



#### DID YOU KNOW

At its most sensitive level, biofeedback has been used by Buddhist monks to actually control their body temperature. This means that they have such an awareness of their bodies that they are able to actually control their temperature.



#### WATCH

Watch this video to learn about the three phases of stress—alarm, resistance, and exhaustion—as former Air Force and Thunderbird pilot, Nicole Malachowski, shares her lessons on how she was able to manage stress as a pilot.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Biofeedback**

Giving a person information about their body's activities.

## 1b. Social Support

One of the most important correlations to stress is the **social support** that a person has around them. The more friends and family surrounding a person, the better that person is able to deal with stressful events around them. Those people provide an outlet to talk about that person's stressors and likewise commiserate about stressors in their own lives as well.

Social support also provides a person with a better feeling about themselves. More people around them means more people that are likely to point out the positive things about them and improve their sense of well-being. Social support has been helpful in the treatment of almost every mental disorder.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Social Support**

The quality and amount of relationships that a person has with others.

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## 2. Additional Stress Management Techniques

Stress management is what we refer to as any cognitive or behavioral strategy that a person can learn to reduce their stress and its harmful effects.

### 2a. Meditation

The most popular, and historically the longest-used stress management technique, is **meditation**. Meditation

can take many different forms and is a trained relaxation technique in which a person focuses on something else like their breathing, bodily sensation, or surroundings to gain an increased awareness. This is often considered an altered sense of consciousness. Meditation can help to reduce psychological stress by removing anxious thoughts from the mind, and it can also help to calm the body's excitatory stress reactions.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Meditation**

A trained relaxation technique in which a person focuses on something (like breathing, body sensations, imagery, surroundings, etc.) to gain an increased awareness.

## **2b. Guided Imagery**

A related technique is called **guided imagery**. This is a coping strategy where a person, instead of trying to relax the mind or trying to think of nothing, purposefully thinks of things that are both positive and calming to that person. These are mental images that help to relax the body, as well as reduce a person's stress. This technique can positively affect the body in the same way that meditation does.

A person using guided imagery will often envision themselves in a calming place, like being alone on a tropical beach or out in the middle of the woods. While a person is doing this, they try to use all of their senses.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, someone picturing a beach will try to incorporate sounds, like the waves crashing on the beach, or the smells, like the salt in the air.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Guided Imagery**

A coping strategy related to meditation, where a person, instead of relaxing the mind, instead thinks of things that are positive and calming.

## **2c. Progressive Relaxation**

Another technique that people use is called **progressive relaxation**. This technique is where a person intentionally tenses up, then relaxes specific muscles in their body in succession. They will start with one particular part of their body, like their shoulders, back, or legs, and they will tense it up, and then release it. The person focuses on that feeling of relaxation when they release that tension, which helps to reduce that person's stress. This technique controls the mind by first controlling the body, and was developed by an American physician in the 1920s. It has been proven to be very effective against stress-related illnesses, and is still very popular today.



#### TRY IT

Try out this technique right now! First, focus on one part of your body. Tense it up for a few seconds, and then focus on the release as you relax it.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Progressive Relaxation**

A technique where a person intentionally tenses, then relaxes specific muscles of the body in succession.

# 3. Stress Inoculation

One of the biggest factors that leads to ongoing and long-term stress are the negative thoughts caused by a person themselves. Some events might initiate the stress, but a person dwelling on it, or the bad feelings that are caused by the stress, will cause that stress to continue or worsen over time.

Psychologist Donald Meichenbaum proposed a technique called **stress inoculation**, which is when a person, instead of focusing on those negative thoughts, focuses instead on positive thoughts and feelings to reduce anxiety. Meichenbaum said that **negative self-statements** were a reflection of these negative thoughts and emotions. These are critical thoughts that a person has that increase the stress, particularly in anticipation of an upcoming event.



## Self and Social Awareness: Skill Reflect

A person might say to themselves, “I can’t do this” or “I’m terrible at this.” These kinds of self-statements can serve to make them feel defeated or increase their stress over time.

His technique involves countering these thoughts with what he called **coping statements**. Coping statements are positive, reassuring statements that help to stop negative self-statements. Simply put, it’s a way of talking yourself up. These statements might include phrases like, “I’ll do this one step at a time,” to enable a person to talk themselves through a situation, or “I’ve done this before,” to remind themselves that a situation isn’t a big deal. A person might remind themselves to stay focused, or that a situation will be over soon.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Stress Inoculation

Where a person focuses on positive thoughts and feelings to reduce anxiety.

### Negative Self-Statements

Critical thoughts a person has that increase stress, particularly in anticipation of an event.

### Coping Statements

Positive, reassuring statements to stop negative self-statements.



## SUMMARY

**Stress** is the body’s reaction to changes in a person’s environment. Some of these reactions are useful to a person, but long-term stress can be harmful. Learning to **cope with stress** is very important. Strong self and social awareness skill can help you do this. Two major approaches include problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. You can also develop an awareness of your body’s reactions to stress and take steps to control it when you notice those reactions, known as biofeedback. Social support can also be very helpful in managing stress, as well as other mental health conditions, by providing an outlet to discuss stressors and boost a person’s sense of self.

**Stress management techniques** are any cognitive or behavioral strategies that a person can learn to

help cope with stress and its harmful effects. Meditation is one of the most popular techniques for stress management. It is a trained relaxation technique that involves focusing on something else, like breathing, body sensations, imagery, surroundings, etc., to gain an increased awareness and remove anxious thoughts from the mind.

Another technique is called guided imagery, and involves visualizing things that are positive and calming. With this technique, a person tries to incorporate other senses as well. Progressive relaxation is where a person intentionally tenses a part of their body and then relaxes it. Focusing on the sensation of relaxing that body part will help ease stress. **Stress inoculation** is a way to counteract negative self-statements a person might have, by using your self and social awareness skill to focus on positive thoughts and feelings to reduce anxiety.

Good luck!

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Biofeedback**

Giving a person information about their body's activities.

### **Coping Statements**

Positive, reassuring statements to stop negative self-statements.

### **Emotion-Focused Coping**

Attempting to control a person's mental and emotional reaction to a stressor.

### **Guided Imagery**

A coping strategy related to meditation, where a person, instead of relaxing the mind, instead thinks of things that are positive and calming.

### **Meditation**

A trained relaxation technique in which a person focuses on something (like breathing, body sensations, imagery, surroundings, etc.) to gain an increased awareness.

### **Negative Self-Statements**

Critical thoughts a person has that increase stress, particularly in anticipation of an event.

### **Problem-Focused Coping**

Attempting to control the thing causing the stress itself.

### **Progressive Relaxation**

A technique where a person intentionally tenses, then relaxes specific muscles of the body in succession.

### **Social Support**

The quality and amount of relationships that a person has with others.

### **Stress Inoculation**

Where a person focuses on positive thoughts and feelings to reduce anxiety.

**Stress Management**

Cognitive and behavioral skills that people learn for the purpose of reducing stress and its harmful effects.