Chapter 6

Stress Coping Model
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STRESS COPING MODEL

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that present is reduced to a mean of getting there? Stress is caused by being “here” but wanting to be “there”, or being in the “present” but wanting to be in “future”. It’s a split, the tears you apart inside”.

Eckhurt tolle, The Power of Now.

In the modern life, we almost have forgotten what it is like to live without Stress because it has become an indispensable part today. Stress can never be good or bad. Stress can be helpful when it facilitates stimulation and contributes to personal growth but when prolonged and excessive, it can be the source of physical as well as psychological illness.

Stress related to studies is a greater threat to the student’s health and well-being than ever before. Stress related to studies is a greater “Sanity” is as important as salubrious health. Social, political, economical and technological developments influence adolescents. Adolescents are exposed to a variety of stress factors in their day-to-day life which imposes a demand upon them to activate mental apparatus.

Before any other system is involved, it is very important for the adolescents to learn how to recognize and deal with stress in a constructive and practical way.

Objectives

General Objective

After going through the guidelines, adolescents will be able to acquire knowledge regarding stress, stress reactions and coping methods. As well as to develop and disseminate guidelines for coping with stress related to studies.
Specific Objective

The foremost specific objective of this Stress Coping Model is to gain knowledge about stressors, to describe their stress reactions and to explain coping strategies to manage academic stress.

Guidelines

Part-1

Concept of Stress

Stress is like a rose bush. It depends on how one looks at it. One might see the rose bush as a treacherous plant, its branches covered with sharp thorns with some rose flowers at the end or one might visualise the rose bush as all roses with a few thorns underneath (Wright, LS.,) (1984). Stress is inevitable in people’s lives. Stress is not always damaging. A mild/moderate stress, for example stress for weekly test or surprise test may lead to an increase in student’s overall performance. On the other hand, stress in people who are in some sort of different creative profession or some time-bound work assignments may be benefitted from mild/moderate stress in order to meet their time bound objectives.

Although stress is widely considered as an unfavorable outcome, stress experiences may also facilitate the development of effective, varied coping behavior, increased personal resources and lead to a sense of competence achievement in development. Moreover, stressful situations/occasions can be used as a tool to enhance the mental strength and emerge as the master of the situation and ultimately of one’s life if given in the right guidance.

What is Stress?

Stress is an internal state that can caused by any physical, environmental and social situation, which is potentially harmful, uncontrollable and exceeding one’s coping resources.

Stress is the body’s response to any unpleasant situation. Anything can cause stress as long as it is perceives as unpleasant. However, some stressful events, such as a close
context in sport, can bring out the best in people. Stress is a common phenomenon in
daily life. It is a natural ongoing process as people adjust to their ever changing
environment. Stress has both physical and emotional effects and creates positive and
negative influence; it can result in destructive feeling, anger and depression, which
further lead to health problems such as headaches, stomach upset, and hypertension and
in some extreme/rare cases such as attempts to suicide etc.

**Symptoms of Stress**

Some of the most common symptoms are Fatigue, Depression, Tearfulness, Restlessness,
nervousness, Irritability, Anger, feeling of being unsolved, Insecurity, Criticism,
Frustration, Disorganization, Night Mares, Hectic Schedule, Restlessness, Rude attitude
of loved ones, Ignorance, Indigestion, Nausea, Coughing, High Blood Pressure, Health
Palpitation, Cold, Asthma, Influenza, Menstrual Distress, Constipation, Over eating, Low
IQ, Lack of Concentration etc.

**Negative Feelings:** Anger, Anxiousness, Confusion, Depression, Embarrassment,
Envy, Fear, Frustration, Hurt, Jealous, Terror, Restlessness.

**What can cause Stress?**

Many adolescents have a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, events, ideas and
expectations for doing well. Constant striving to live up to self-expectations or those of
others, to be the first, can be very stressful. The pressure to excel, accompanied by other
concerns, such as feeling different, self-doubting and the need to prove them can drain
energy and cause excessive stress which usually becomes beyond human control.

**Effects of Stress**

Stress affects thinking, reduces concentration and impairs decision-making. It can lead
to forgetfulness and make young people overly sensitive to criticism. In addition,
prolonged stress and unhealthy techniques can cause significant health problems.

**Coping with Stress**

The art of stress management is to keep oneself at a level of stimulation that is healthy
and enjoyable. People use many kinds of coping strategies.
How to Manage Stress Related to Studies

Stress impinges on individual’s health and performance. Stress, therefore, need to be coped up with or managed to effectively minimize its undesirable consequences. Individuals themselves can help themselves to some extent.

Physical Exercise: Exercise in any form, be it walking, jogging, swimming, riding bicycles or playing games helps individuals combat stress. It can be said that at least some sort of exercise such as relaxation, enhanced self – esteem and simply getting one’s mind off the work for a while help in better coping with stress.

Behavioral Self-Control: Behavioral self-control refers to self-management. A conscious analysis of the causes and consequences of their own behavior helps students achieve self-control. In the ultimate sense, the self-control strategy implies students controlling the situation instead of letting the situation control them. Accordingly, one way to avoid stress is to avoid people or situation that will influence individual under stress.

Increase Your Friends Zone: Research has confirmed that individuals could be benefitted from social, parental and family members support. It can therefore, be used as a strategy to reduce stress too. Doing so would entail bring close associations with trusted friends, adults and other social support who are good listeners and confidence builders.

Counseling: Counseling is yet another strategy to manage stress. Adolescents can be helped through counseling to identify their own strengths, weaknesses and response pattern and then to change their behavior accordingly.

Part–2

Study Related Stress

One might expect one of the main sources of stress in adolescents is their concerned with examinations. Whereas it may have been possible for a student to conceal his/her failures in the learning process during the course, failure in an examination is strain for all to see, family friends and fellow- students, whatever excuses are made to explain his/her inadequacies.
Any sort of testing time invites some degree of anxiety and examinations are no exception. As the weeks speed by and examination approach, it is quite normal to undergo a certain amount of anxiety and complain of sleeping problems, through some students tend to react by becoming panicky or developing a phobia about examinations. Panic and phobias, though tend to be resolved for the examination itself and may occur just as easily in those who are bright and have no cause for anxiety, as in psychiatrically vulnerable students. Psychiatric symptoms begin to appear in students during the weekend prior to final examinations. Some students report stomachaches, asthma and rashes and a few become sick because of physical and mental exhaustion. On the morning of the examination, diarrhea is also quite common.

During the Period of Examination, A number of behaviors may be observed.

- If any student thinks he is doing well, then student becomes more confident.
- If he thinks he is doing badly, this may interfere with his performance in the remaining papers too.
- The student will discuss his examination papers with others if he feels he has done well, but not if he thinks he has done badly.
- Students become more anxious if they discover that their answers do not correspond with those given by their peers.
- An elated mood may be detached in those who are happy with their performance.
- Post-examination anxiety increases, if students realize that they have made mistakes in their answers.
- Students who are convinced that they have given a poor examination performance adopted anticipated failure reactions.

Some elements of examination pressure:

- Getting down working (poor motivation to work; difficulties in understanding work; lack of concentration).
- Schools ethos (pretty regulations; rigid discipline; noisy class environment).
- Parents (Over-anxious, parental demands, conflicting attitudes between students, parents or family members).
- Standard of work (knowledge of standards of work required by the teacher).
- Future goals (immediate plans; ultimate future career).
- Demands of academic life (teacher too demanding; too much homework; too many subjects in time table; examination syllabus too demanding).
- Examination pressures (self-reported student stress, letting down parents or family members).
- Travelling to school (problems with travelling to school).
- Personal (boy/girl relationships; personal problems; concern about health).
- Peers (little contact with people of one’s own age outside school).
- Home/parental (lack of privacy; parents who do not understand about study commitments).

**Stress of Examination**

- Exam anxiety is infectious.
- Optimal anxiety motivates and stimulates action.
- Over anxiety disturbs/destroys the preparation.

**Students when stressful**

Perceive everything as emergency

Common physical reactions during exam preparations:

- Muscle Tension
- Indigestion
- Sleep Difficulties
- Rapid, Uneven or Pounding heart beat
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Change in appetite, constipation or diarrhea
- Backache etc.
Common psychological stress reactions to stress:

- Feeling under pressure, frustration and aggression.
- Feeling tense and unable to relax.
- Feeling mentally drained out.
- Fussy, gloomy or suspicious, being constantly frightened or irritable.
- Inability to concentrate or complete the task etc.

Academic stress:

- Appearing for examination is one of very common situations, which student finds difficult to cope up with this type of stress, if it beyond his/her control.
- A hardworking student with good level of intelligence may not be able to give his full performance in an examination.
- Right approach and right strategies may stimulate an individual to overcome anxiety and maximize his/her own performance in the examination.
- The student population of India in general and the students living in metropolitan areas in particular has shown alarming increases in manifestations of stress and related disorders in recent times.
- A large amount of the stress seems to be examination related with sharp peaks in psychological emergencies around the time of competitive examinations.
- However, primary prevention would always be preferable to counseling after the event. An important step towards the goal would be recording the extent of anxiety experienced by the individual student, as well as the specific factors that seems to contribute to this menace. If one could identify the possible sources of examination stress, we could do our utmost, both as teachers or as professionals to pre-empt the stress.
- Largely, it cannot be denied that the existing examination system put in place is responsible for a large amount of students stress.
- With its emphasis on rote learning and the need to cram a whole year of learning into an answer paper of three hours duration, is why students feel pressured.
- Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.
Coping with Academic Stress

The literary meaning of the word cope is to deal effectively or contend / struggle successfully with a person or task; manage successfully or deal with a problem or situation etc. Coping refers to strategies where individuals accept and actively attempt to deal with their situation. Active coping includes strategies such as problem – solving, seeking emotional support and planning.

Avoidant and maladaptive coping primarily refers to strategies where individuals try to avoid dealing with problems by cognitively and physically distancing themselves from the situation. Active coping is viewed as generally positive and avoidant coping viewed as negative. Avoidant coping includes denial behavior, disengagement and alcohol/drug abuse. Lazarus contends that one strategy is not necessarily good or bad, rather it depends on the situation and the outcome that follows its particular use.

Activities to Cope with Stress

Just recognize stress as something that can be tackled, controlled or vanquished. Then go ahead and just do that. Make stress work for you. The following are some suggestions to harness the extra adrenaline released by stress.

1. **Stretch:** Whenever you feel under pressure and stress in your body. Pretend you are reaching out to grasp something a few centimeters beyond you immediate reach

2. **Laugh Hard:** As much as you can see a comic, cartoon film and share a joke with a friend. They make effective emergency substitutes to relieve stress.

3. **Be a Breathing Beauty:** The right kind of breathing can dispel stress. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly, concentrate on the air leaving your lungs. Slow down your breathing. A two-second inhalation and five second exhalation is ideal activity. Do it five times in morning and five times in the evening, as and when required.

4. **Listen to Music:** Music has always had a soothing effect. Put on the music of your choice like any film song, ghazal, remix etc.
5. **See the Sunlight:** Feel the morning sunshine soak into every pore of your body. Feel the incredible sense of wellbeing it brings along.

6. **Discover the Yogi in You:** Yoga has always been a panacea for stress. Pick up a book on yoga exercises or go to a teacher and get started with half an hour sessions whenever you can spare the time for reducing the stress level.

7. **Practice Shrugging Shrug:** “You don’t know you don’t care.” Whenever you feel stressed, roll your neck from right to left a few times. Follow this by shrugging your shoulders. Loosen your muscles. Believe sincerely that you do not care.

8. **Talk Less, Listen More- An Age-Old Remedy:** Listening banishes stress, make you more popular, more knowledgeable, more sensitive, altogether a nicer person. It does not take much effort and time.

9. **Count Your Blessings:** There is no better way to vanish/reduce stress. No one has bad things happening to him or her all the time. Make a mental note of good things. Then put it down on paper and refer to it every time you feel stressed.

10. **Compare with Yourself:** See the changes. If you want genuine pleasure in life, compare yourself not with others but yourself only.

11. **Do Nothing Sit Out:** This requires no effort from us, as nothing stays bad forever. Acceptance of the situation helps to reduce stress.

12. **Express Your Stress:** Let the emotions flow – stress is a highly emotional experience. When we bottle up or stress, we become increasingly dysfunctional. Stress increases because of which health, wealth and relationships suffer. Our anger, depression, fear, frustration and rage need to “FLOW” out of us. Flowing out can take the form of writing, talking, poetry, vigorous physical activity and all types of recreations etc. Mind and body become clearer and more energized. Situations and opportunities perceive more clearly. The result is wiser choices and decisions.

13. **Take Change:** Believe that “I am in change of my life. The major parts of our stress feelings come from how we react to what is (or is not) happening and others reactions.
Conclusion

Stress is becoming a leading cause of increasing morbidity/poor health in students with subsequent rise to various diseases in their life. All of us need to be aware of the magnitude of the problem. Beyond all prejudices and generation gaps, it becomes a moral duty of the parents and teachers to help the students come out of their difficulties and lead a meaningful, socially productive life. An emphatic listening, trust and confidence, positive support and guidance halt the emergence of stress. HALT = Hungry, Angry, Lonely & Tired.

“It is observed that Oftentimes, we all get overly stressed. How many times have you heard someone say, “I’m so STRESSED OUT”. A technique for pinpointing what is causing the stress is remembering a simple little word shared by a friend – H.A.L.T