

Stress Busters: Understanding Stress to Effectively Walk Through It

Stress – we all experience it! A common (yet unrealistic) view is that we should avoid stress or try not to experience it. Stress is a part of life and I hope you'll find the following to be helpful information, tools, and resources to assist you as you face and walk through stress.

What is a stressor? A stressor is an event or situation that causes reactions of our mind and body. Stressors can relate to things such as family, friends, school, work or career planning, to name a few. While stressors can be part of daily life such as conflict in a family or friend relationship, managing homework or schoolwork at home, or a current job, they can also be life changes such as moving, birth of a sibling, or loss of a loved one or pet. They can also be life circumstances such as financial hardship, chronic illness, or disability. When we encounter stressors, our body responds and that response is *stress*, which can cause physical changes in our bodies as well as changes in emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For example, if your upcoming test causes stress, you might eat less healthy, rely more on caffeine, or increase your intake of sugar (behavioral change). If you face a challenge with a friend, you might experience an upset stomach (physical change).

Why is it important to know how you respond to stressors? If you are aware of your stress response (how stress manifests for you) it allows you to know when you are experiencing stress and utilize tools to help relieve and effectively manage it. This may sound obvious – stressors have an impact on us. Yet, when I explore this topic with students they often struggle to describe (or know) their stress response – how their minds and bodies react to stress. It is worth taking time to think about and become in tune with your body's stress response to allow you to effectively manage it.

Some stress is good! Did you know that? There are different types of stress, and in manageable amounts, stress helps us develop resiliency and skills to overcome adversity. When facing a stressor, it is common to experience some level of anxiety. Anxiety is feelings of worry or uneasiness and is a common part of the stress response. It is also typically temporary (anxiety that is not a mental health disorder). Our stress response including anxiety, can motivate us to move forward, solve a problem or overcome a hardship. Walking through what is causing anxiety, with support when needed, often results in it subsiding. Avoiding what is causing it, on the other hand, can lead to increased anxiety.

Why do different people react to stressors differently? Something to consider is that while many factors contribute to stress, many factors are also protective when it comes to stress. Protective factors include experiences that make you happy, support you receive, tools you use to cope, and individual characteristics (such as positive outlook or motivated to succeed). There is no one way stress plays out in a mind or body. Rather, there are many which circles back to the importance of knowing your stress response to allow you to effectively respond to and manage it.

What tools help manage stress? Deep breathing – full inhalations and full exhalations – is one of the best ways to manage our stress response when we feel it in the moment. A healthy diet, exercise/sports/activity, hobbies, being outside, time with family or friends, time with pets, journaling, drawing, writing, talking with someone about challenges you face, and relaxation techniques are tools that help you cope and manage stress. Consider the things that bring you joy or make you happy as they can also assist when you feel stress.

We all experience stress, and some good news is that **we can decide how we will manage and respond to it**. Please know I am a resource and support for all CP students. If you would like to discuss these topics more, you're welcome to stop by my office anytime!

Have a great end to the school year!
Mrs. Wehrman