

Date Used: _____

Group: _____

STRESSED OUT

Topic: Stress

Purpose of this Session:

Stress is a fact of life to young people as well as adults. Unfortunately, teenagers face an undeserved amount of stress today, most of which was not formerly encountered until adulthood. This TalkSheet will help your group talk about stress and how a Christian can best handle it.

To Introduce the Topic:

Perform a "stress test" on a balloon. Blow it up as far as possible, then blow some more air into it, stressing the surface. If too much pressure is applied, the balloon will pop (demonstrate this if you wish). If you release some of the pressure, the balloon is under less stress.

Make the point that we are like the balloon. If there is too much pressure upon us, we become stressed out. Some people reach the breaking point and that's not good. We need to find ways to relieve the pressure and to reduce stress in our lives. That's what this session is about.

The Discussion:

Item #1: Ask for a show of hands on this True or False question. Explain the best answer would be "false" because (1) some stress is normal and actually beneficial — the anxiety caused by stress is a warning system that helps us respond properly to whatever is causing the stress; and (2) avoidance of all stress is extremely unhealthy. For example, some people turn to drugs or alcohol as a way of escaping stress, which creates even more stress.

Item #2: This activity brings the topic closer to home. Rather than have the students tell you which items they checked, ask "How many of you checked more than three of these? More than five? More than eight?" You can give some sort of "super-stressed" award to the one that checked the most. You might ask the group to vote on the one or two items they think most teens are faced with. Ask them why this is so stressful. Focus on how your students feel when faced with pressures and how they have handled stressful situations.

Item #3: Have the group share their ideas on this. Talk about practical things they can do when they feel overwhelmed by the pressures in their lives.

Item #4: A good way to deal with this "Tension Getter" is to have two students role-play Leslie and a friend who is trying to help her. Or, you can play Leslie and the entire group can advise you. You can give excuses such as "I already tried that" and "That would never work for me", just to keep the ideas generating.

Item #5: Divide the students into smaller groups for this exercise. Each group should take a different Bible verse and come up with a statement about what the Bible says concerning coping with stress.

To Close the Session:

Emphasize the fact that stress is normal, but that unresolved stress can wear them down, both physically and mentally. Stress needs to be dealt with and resolved.

Make sure your students understand if stress, worry, or pressure is getting the best of them, to the point where they are feeling depressed or ill, they must talk to someone about it. Let them know you and other responsible adults are available to listen. Sometimes just talking over a situation can help things get better. A shared load is lighter than one you carry alone.

Help the students realize, too, their parents may be under a great deal of stress at times and they need to be supportive and understanding of them. When their father or mother comes home from work and acts grumpy and upset (and maybe takes it out on them), it might be best for them to stay out of the way and try to be as helpful and positive as they can. Chances are it is just a temporary situation.

Remind your teenagers to set aside time every day to be alone with God. This is not only a great habit to develop, but is a healthy way to handle stress.

Outside Activities:

1. Ask your teens to call three people in their youth group during the coming week and encourage them.
2. Have the students ask their parents how they handle stress as adults and how they handled it as teenagers. They can share what they found out with the group.