


Stressed Brains Can't Learn

How Stress Impacts Behavior
in School and at Home &
What We Can Do About It


By Marloes Verhoeven, Psy.D.



© Oasis Mental Health - Aurora, IL

What You Will Learn Today

- * What stress is.
- * What the effects of stress are on our body and mind.
- * What fear and stress responses are and how they affect you and your student – and their performance in school.
- * The difference between a learning brain and a survival (stressed) brain.
- * Goals and strategies for stress management, stress health, and self care.




Mindful Moment

How am I doing right now in this very moment?

Just notice your inner experience, without judgment.



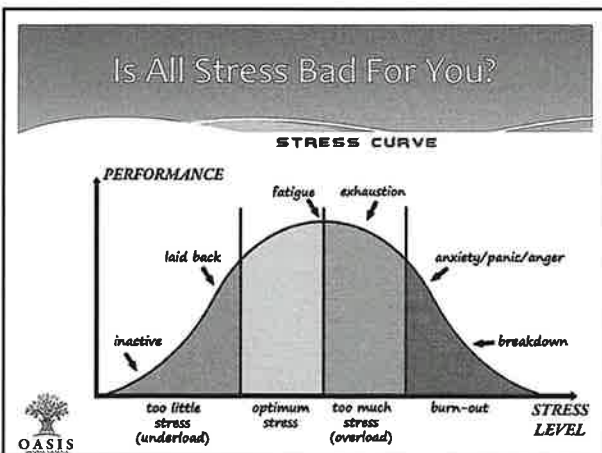
Now take a nice, deep breath. Put your feet flat on the floor and notice a feeling of being rooted to the ground. Take another slow, deep breath.



We're Here to Talk about Stress


I have started coloring to manage my stress and anxiety.

- * But ... what is stress???

Types of Stress

- POSITIVE** Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.
- TOLERABLE** Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.
- TOXIC** Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.




Can You Think of Examples?

POSITIVE

TOLERABLE

TOXIC



Can You Think of Examples?

POSITIVE


TOLERABLE

TOXIC


- Taking a test
- Giving a presentation
- Athletic accomplishments/games
- Losing a friend/Goin through a breakup
- Moving
- Rejection, Ridicule, Humiliation
- Not being soothed when needed - or having to cope with (intense) emotions alone
- Witnessing peers' disruptive or scary behaviors in school
- Being bullied
- Divorce or Separation
- Accidents, Injuries, illnesses, or Death
- Mental Health problems
- Family member (or peers) with substance abuse
- Domestic violence, Abuse, Neglect
- Incarceration
- Systemic racism
- Poverty
- Pandemic



For High Schoolers:




- * Change = Stress
- * Think about how much teenagers change.
- * Consider: Is your 13 year old even the same person as an 18 year old?
- * Therefore: BEING a teenager as well as RAISING a teenager can be stressful
- * In addition, the pandemic severely disrupted the two most important "jobs" for teenagers: Figuring out relationships with peers and gaining independence.

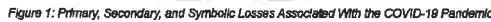



Damour, 2023

A Pandemic of Grief and Loss





Pandemic





The Collective Trauma of the Past Couple of Years

- * Collective trauma (stress) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - * Decreased sense of safety, power, and control in the world.
 - * Grief is pervasive (loss of life as well as loss of life as we knew it).
 - * Ongoing uncertainty and fatigue.
 - * Heightened for marginalized populations (significant disparities in access to/quality of COVID-19 related care and infection/death rates, anti-Asian discrimination).

Racial Trauma is Ongoing




*"In communities of color, trauma and crisis are commonplace, and as result, many African American and Latino families have learned to work and live in persistently traumatic and stressful environments. Let me say that again: **persistent traumatic stress environment (PTSE), not post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).**"*

- Shawn A. Ginwright (2020)

"For many youth of color there is no 'post' as in posttraumatic stress disorder."


- Alex Shevrin Venet (2021, p. 7)

Art: Amarantha Sepla (@embunnycomic)



The Collective Trauma of the Past Two Years


- * Additional events that may lead to an even greater stress (due to perceived lack of safety, power, and control):
 - * High-profile instances of police violence towards people of color, highlighting racial injustice in policing and the criminal justice system.
 - * Nationwide protests in response, some leading to violence/destruction.
 - * Contentious 2020 Presidential election.
 - * Ongoing political and social unrest with significant media coverage.
 - * Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.
 - * Continued divisiveness in national and local politics, including over pandemic precautionary measures.
 - * High-profile conflicts over what can be taught or expressed (such as politics, race, history, gender identity and sexuality).
 - * More frequent and deadly mass shootings, including school shootings.
 - * And for teens: ongoing climate crises.



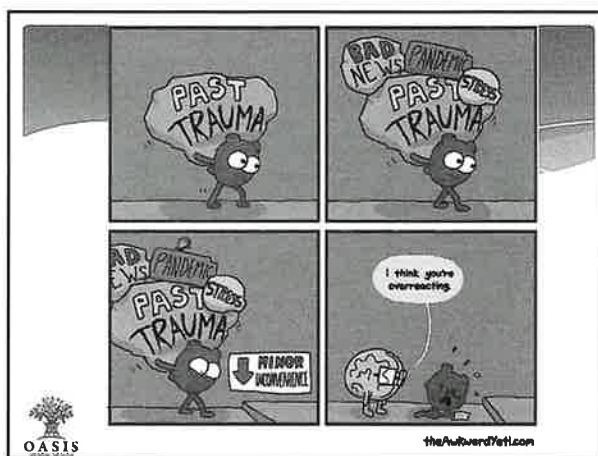

Stressed Parents/Caregivers

- * The COVID-19 pandemic has added significant stress to parents/caregivers.
 - * Anxiety/fear regarding the virus itself, vaccinations, school, etc.
 - * Financial constraints, job loss/unemployment.
 - * Social isolation.
 - * Having to play multiple roles (parent, teacher, doctor/nurse).
 - * Working from home.
 - * Being pushed outside intimacy threshold.
 - * Childcare issues.
 - * Separation from and/or death of ill family members/friends.


Add to this the stress, anxiety, fear, anger, sadness regarding the racial/social injustice and social unrest.




Gomez (2020)



Carry Over Into the Classroom





- * Every student carries an “emotional backpack” to school, the contents and weight of which impact how they think, feel, and behave at school.
- * Past and present/ongoing difficulties, stressors, and traumatic experiences – related to home, school, community, society – take up space and add weight.
- * Positive internal and external resources and supports clear space and lighten the load.
- * Right now, students’ “emotional backpacks” are heavier than ever, as evidenced through their words and behaviors.




What’s Inside Our Backpacks?


- * Take a moment to think about what you (and your student) may carry on a day-to-day basis.
- * What past and present experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs may increase the burden?
- * How have experiences during the pandemic impacted the weight of our “backpacks?”
- * What **positive** resources/supports help lighten the load at present?

What Makes the Difference?



- * What kind of supportive buffers can you put in place that can stop stress from going from tolerable to toxic – or reverse its course?
 - **Psst...** Psst: for children, having at least one caring adult who is attuned to their needs has proven to be the most effective buffer!
 - For adolescents the most effective and wanted behavior is Curiosity and Empathy (Compassion)
- * We are going to talk about these buffers and overall wellness today.
- * But first, we have to understand how stress affects our body and our mind (so that we can also understand what works, and why).




What Happens When Stress Levels Are Too High?


Lavender Reduces Stress



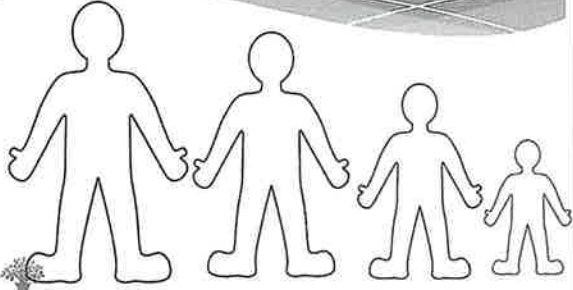


Stress Lives In The Body, or: The Issue Is In The Tissue



Picture from "Superpowered: Transform Anxiety Into Courage, Confidence, and Resilience" by Renee Jain & Shelal Teabary





Where Do You Feel Your Stress?



Stress Also Affects the Mind

- * If you have ever felt stressed, overwhelmed, panicked, or pressured, you probably noticed that:
 - * It was hard to think straight.
 - * You could not remember things that you can usually remember.
 - * You felt irritable and were snapping at people.
 - * You may have felt anxious or depressed.
 - * It was difficult to problem-solve.
 - * Your mind was going 60 miles an hour - and
 - * It was hard to focus.

Stress and the Brain


- * That's because stress also affects our brains.
- * We have been stewing in stress soup for the last couple of years (or even longer).
- * Fortunately, there are things we can do.
 - * First, let's learn about the brain some more
 - * Once we understand why stressed brains can't learn, we can figure out some ways to make the brain less stressed.

Fight or Flight



Only 3 kinds of snakes scare me:

1. Big snakes
2. Little snakes
3. Sticks that look like snakes



Fear and Stress Responses

- * More than fight or flight:
 - * Freeze
 - * Fawn/Submit
- * Stress Hormones: Adrenaline, Cortisol
 - * Adaptive and life saving vs. maladaptive and health damaging.
- * Children are especially sensitive to this repeated stress activation (toxic stress).

Fear and Stress Responses

Fight - Flight	Freeze - Submit
Sympathetic Nervous System	Parasympathetic Nervous System

Adapted from Fischer, J. (2007)


Fear and Stress Responses

Fight - Flight	Freeze - Submit
Seeking Safety via ACTION	Seeking Safety via DISCONNECTION

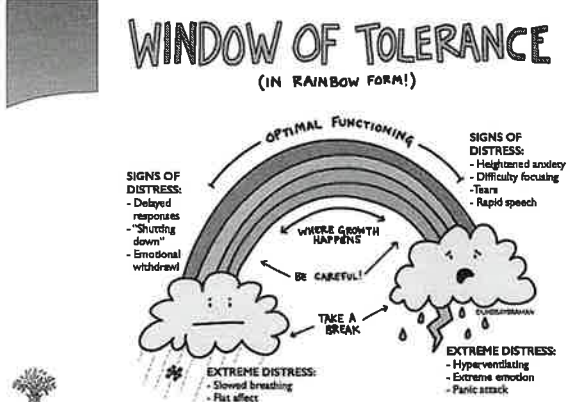
Adapted from Fischer, J. (2007)

Fear and Stress Responses

ACTION	DISCONNECTION
<p>* Can look like:</p> <p>Anxiety, panic, extreme emotional reactions, anger and lashing out, hostility/aggression, overeating, difficulty focusing, tearfulness/crying, rapid breathing or talking.</p>	<p>* Can look like:</p> <p>Sullen mood, depression, feeling hopeless or even suicidal, staying in room, withdrawing from others, loss of interest, loss of appetite, flat affect, spacing out, always being tired, slowed breathing/talking</p>



WINDOW OF TOLERANCE (IN RAINBOW FORM!)



SIGNS OF DISTRESS:

- Delayed responses
- "Shutting down"
- Emotional withdrawal

SIGNS OF DISTRESS:

- Heightened anxiety
- Difficulty focusing
- Tears
- Rapid speech


EXTREME DISTRESS:

- Hyperventilating
- Extreme emotion
- Panic attack

EXTREME DISTRESS:

- Slowed breathing
- Flat affect
- Dissociation

lindsaybramen.com



IT'S NORMAL TO HAVE A SMALLER WINDOW OF TOLERANCE DURING STRESSFUL TIMES

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

DURING STRESSFUL TIMES

@LINDSAYBRAMAN

SHUT DOWN

LEARNING & LISTENING

BLOW UP

OASIS

lindsaybramen.com

The Triune Brain

NEOCORTEX: rational

LYMBIC: amygdala, hippocampus: emotional/relational

BRAIN STEM & CEREBELLUM: basic survival instincts (fight, flight, freeze, and fear)

REASONING SELF "chatterbox": reasoning, thinking, planning

FURRY L'IL MAMMAL: emotions, less friendship status, anger, sadness

OUR LIZARD LEGACY: food, sex, safety

OASIS

Connie Barlow (in Levine & Klone, 2007)

Hand Model Of The Brain

The hand model of the triune brain

Fingers: Cerebral Cortex Or Neocortex/limbic brain (mammals)

Thumb: Limbic System or Mammalian brain

Palm & wrist: Brain Stem or Reptilian Brain

OASIS

"Flipping Your Lid"

"Flipping One's Lid"

Prefrontal cortex PFC "THE WISE LEADER"

"Flipped Your Lid"

The big emotions, anger, fear, anxiety etc... The AMYGDALA - The alarm center Acts on instinct fight, flight or freeze

OASIS

What Happens In Our Brains

When I'm outside my window of tolerance or when I have flipped my lid:

When I am within my window of tolerance and can stay calm (without flipping my lid):

Survival Brain

Learning Brain

OASIS



Learning Brain Vs. Survival Brain

- When our brain is in Survival Mode, we cannot:
 - Pay attention,
 - Stay focused,
 - Think before we act/speak,
 - Problem-solve,
 - Be patient and kind,
 - Remember things,
 - Process language (talking things through, asking for help, understanding what others are saying),
 - LEARN!
- So it is important that we move from survival brain to learning brain.

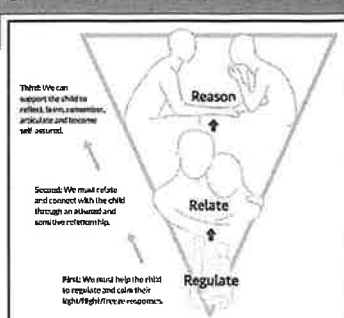
OASIS

How do we do that?

- * By calming our brains and regulating ourselves, and by improving our Stress Health.
- * In other words, when we self or co-regulate (instead of “fight or flight” or “freeze/submit”) we find safety via **CONNECTION** with self or others.
- * Here are some ways how we can do that – and/or help our students do that.





Regulate, Relate, then Reason




Heading straight for the “reasoning” part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.


www.be-acornhouse.org.uk



Co-regulation



A dysregulated adult will never regulate a dysregulated child.



Relate = Validate Feelings

The Infinite Value of Validation

Troubled relationships often lack validation, as in both parties are not feeling heard or supported


Validating Statements	Invalidating Statements
✓ This must be painful.	✗ You'll be fine.
✓ You've worked so hard, this must feel amazing!	✗ You shouldn't feel that way.
✓ I can see how upset you are.	✗ It could be so much worse!
✓ She said that to you? I'd be pissed, too.	✗ I'm NOT having this conversation.
✓ I totally get why you're mad that I was late.	✗ Just put a smile on your face and laugh it out.
✓ Woah—that is so confusing and sad.	✗ Things will work out... it's not THAT big of a deal.

Reflect on their feelings, summarize what you've heard them say, and say it back without their advice.

Whitney Goodman, LMFT
@whitneyg

Examples of validating or affirming statements:
 - “that makes sense.”
 - “I get why you'd feel that way.”
 - “that's a normal way to feel right now.”
 - “other people feel like this, too.”
 - “you're not alone.”
 - “I can see why that would be hard.”
 - “that sounds really difficult.”

On a scale from 0 - 10 (with 0 being the worst and 10 being the best), how well did I summarize what you are thinking and feeling?



8 Things Your Child Needs to Hear from You

© from happyfamily.com



It's ok to be different from others



It's ok to feel mad. You are allowed to feel all your feelings



You are a caring brother/sister



I love being your mom/dad



There is no one else in the world like you!



You are an important part of this family



Your voice matters



I am proud of you!



Alexander James @mxdgordon

Some years back my wife and I got into the habit of asking each other "do you want comfort or solutions" when the other was having a bad time. That one sentence can save us from an argument 3/10 times.

6:22 AM - 10/3/21 - Twitter for iPhone

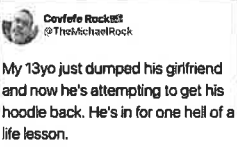
15.6K Retweets 1,443 Quote Tweets 49K Likes

A.J. Hendley @TheAJHendley replying to @mxdgordon


This is me. My brain wants "are we listening or problem-solving?"




Remember...



- * Not all stress is bad! Stressful situations can and do teach our teenagers important life lessons.
- * Even intense emotional experiences are normal – as long as they are appropriate (understandable) for the situation and are not extending far beyond reasonable expectations.
- * As parents, we don't have to "fix" or dampen our teenagers' experiences. This gives the message that our emotions threaten our "mental health" and actually puts MORE pressure (stress) on our kids.
- * Instead, we want to help and teach them how to regulate and manage.




Damour, 2023



In the last five to ten years I've found myself caring for teenagers who feel that they have failed at wellness' if they are stressed or unhappy.

- Dr. Lisa Damour




Damour, 2023

Who Can Relate?

"How are you?"

Broken. Useless. Alone. Clueless.
 Confused. Betrayed. Fragile. On the verge
 of tears. Depressed. Anxious. About to
 break down. Rejected. Pathetic.
 Annoying. I'm just a burden. Distant.
 Lonely. Bitter. Miserable. Lonely.
 Rejected. Crushed. I feel like I'm going to
 just fall apart at any moment. Empty.
 Defeated. Never good enough.

Fine.



for more: Cue2a.com

Adolescents and Talking about Feelings

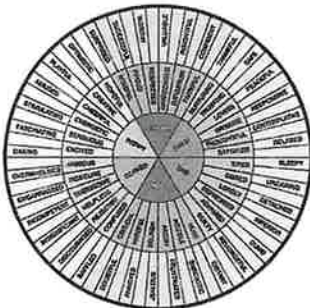


- * We can help teenagers understand that they are okay to have "the right feelings at the right time" and that they can manage them effectively.
- * We all gain relief from (destabilizing) emotions by finding healthy ways to express them and by taking a break from them by regaining control.
- * Putting feelings into words brings comfort, helps us gain insight, and reduces our sense of isolation, esp. if there is a trusted adult who really listens.
- * Therefore: Before you jump in with reassurance, advice, or your own experience, see what happens if you just listen - and then validate/offer empathy.
- * It helps to be able to describe our emotions with precision – keep in mind that teens don't always know how to name what is going on inside, and may use overly generalized terms such as "fine," "anxious," or "not happy."
- * You can use the feelings wheel.




Damour, 2023

"Name It To Tame It"




FEELINGS


**"Your feelings are valid.
 You have a right to feel them.
 Let them come as they are,
 as they will soon pass."**



Getting Your Teen to Open Up



- * Teenagers, especially the tight-lipped ones, *really* don't like to be put on the spot, so keep your teen out of the hot seat.
- * Steer clear of direct questions, and try to ask what "the word on the street" is or: "What are others saying about..."
- * Save conversations or questions for times that you are not face-to-face with your teen, for example when you go for a drive or a walk.
- * Try reaching out by text - so they can take as long as they need to answer, don't have to look at you, and can process their response/emotions before replying.



Damour, 2023


Getting Your Teen to Open Up

Julianne W Miller
@JulianneMiller

Introduce My Minor

Commonly occurring answers to:
How was school today?
1. Fine
2. I don't know
3. What? (removes one AirPods while glaring)
4. Can we get food?
5. Serious, meaningful response & discussion (only after 11pm)

- * Engage with them on their terms, not yours - even if this means engaging in late night chats or when you're "busy"
- * Notice invitations to talk when your attention is divided (checking tasks off your to-do list or having a night to yourself) and see if you can tune in.



Damour, 2023



Getting Your Teen to Open Up

WHEN YOUR TEENAGER ASKS YOU TO SEE A MOVIE WITH HIM, YOU DO NOT ASK "WHAT MOVIE?" YOU DO NOT ASK "WHAT TIME?" YOU LOU-KEY SAY "SURE" AND YOU FORCE YOURSELF NOT TO JUMP UP AND DANCE.

HE WASHES THE DROPPIN' FLOWIN'

- * Be around (nearby), for example: work next to them when they do homework, fold laundry in the living room, clean up after dinner when they are around.
- * Don't betray their confidence and work with your teen on how to handle sensitive information.
- * Try to refrain from judgment/criticism.

When you're trying to be supportive of your teenager's choices but you're dying a little bit on the inside.


Damour, 2023

What Do We Often Get Wrong?

- * ASK your teen: what is it that adults do that doesn't work when you feel stressed?
- * Common answers:
 - Don't compare us
 - Don't lecture - but listen
 - Don't tell us about your own experiences (and make it about you)
 - Don't ask too many questions (all at once)
 - Give us space, time, power/control
 - Allow us to find out what works for us and trust us when we are managing our "bad days" our way - and don't expect us to always "talk about it."
 - Understand that we will tell you when we are ready and don't make us feel bad about having a bad day
 - Don't regard us with lowered respect / negative bias - Instead be genuinely curious and earnestly engaged


Instagram: @myminor

Jenny Kim, aged 37, changed her career three times and has achieved becoming a Navy SEAL, trained Harvard doctor and NASA astronaut.



Make the O



My minor teenagers would be if Jenny's mean and talker are friends.



Damour, 2023

Take Note: Talking Is Not the Only Way to Express Emotions

- * Physical activity
- * Creative outlets (art, writing, composing)
- * Listening to music (notice their playlists)
 - Note that music cannot make teenagers angrier, more sad, more anxious, etc.
- * Playing with pets.
- * Accept and deliberately support idiosyncratic, quirky methods - as long as it brings relief and does not cause any harm.



Damour, 2023

Helping Teens Regain Control

- * When active listening, validating, and expressing emotions does not have the desired effect, and feelings have become so intense or overwhelming that they get in the way of teens doing what they want or need to do, then we can help our teens control their emotions.

I want you to focus on managing your emotions.

THAT DOESN'T SOUND ANYTHING LIKE ME!

Damour, 2023



Strategies That Help With Stress (When We Flip Our Lids)

IN CONTROL IN CONTROL






Breathing Exercises

- * Belly/diaphragmatic breathing
- * 4 Square or 4x4 breathing
- * 4-7-8 breathing (in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8)
- * Lengthening the exhale after each inhale (inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth)





Mindfulness


- * Mindfulness is paying attention to what is happening in the present moment, both internally and externally, without judgment.
- * Mindfulness exercises can be used **proactively** to help you or your student be more aware of feelings/sensations, as well as **reactively** to help calm.

Mindfulness




- * Mindful check-in
 - Notice your surroundings, describing to yourself or out loud what you notice with your five senses.
 - Then notice how you are feeling, both emotionally and physically.
- * Mindful breathing
 - Focus your attention on your breathing, whether deep or natural breathing.
 - Each time a thought comes to mind or your attention shifts, just notice that it happened without judgment and redirect your focus back to the breath.
 - Continue to refocus your attention back to the breath as needed.
- * Body scan
 - Starting at the top of your head, scan your awareness through your body, down to your feet.
 - Notice how each part of your body feels, without judgment.




Mindfulness of Emotions

Riding the wave of emotion.

- * "The feeling you're having is okay" (all your feelings are normal).
- * "The emotion is rough now but it won't last forever."
- * **"Feelings come and feelings go."**
- * All feelings are **temporary**. Emotions typically peak and subside in **90 seconds** if we don't feed into them (Boite Taylor, 2008).
- * Feelings wash up like big waves but remember: feelings don't stay. **You can have your feelings and still be okay**



"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."
(Kabat-Zinn, 2004)





Mindfulness: Grounding

These mindfulness strategies help you and/or your student ground and reorient to the present while regulating the downstairs/lizard brain.

- Feel your feet on the floor, press your toes into the floor, rooting yourself in the present moment. Feel the chair underneath you. Squeeze the desk with your hands. Notice that you are here in this moment.
- Imagine your feet are like the roots of a tree, rooting yourself in the ground, and your body is standing tall and strong like a tree.
- "I Spy" (e.g., "Find five things in this room that are red," or "Find all the square items in the room.")
- Pick one thing in this room and describe it to me in detail, as if I've never seen the thing before.
 - Focus on the color, shape, texture, etc.
 - Describe this room to me as if I've never been in it before.
 - Focus on sights, sounds, smells, and textures.

After each strategy, notice how you feel emotionally and physically (mindful check-in).

Grounding and Self-Soothing: Sensory Strategies



- * Engage the senses to bring the thinking brain back online.
 - Create a self-soothe kit with items that engage each of the five senses.
 - Examples: a fidget, lotion with a calming scent, hard candy, a photo of a helpful person/loved one, music.
 - Create a calming corner in your house complete with self-soothe kit.
- * Use fidgets and other sensory strategies not as a method of distraction, but as a mindful activity.
 - Tangles, putty, stress balls, etc.
 - Drawing, zen-tangles, mandalas, scribbling
 - Weighted blankets, sitting in comfortable spaces
 - Glitter calming jars
 - Old fashioned Slinky
 - Crumpling/tearing paper




Mindfully Moving the Body

Rhythmic and repetitive activities to calm the lizard brain!

- * Drumming or dancing
- * Playing with a slinky
- * Playing catch
- * Progressive muscle relaxation exercises
- * Side-to-side standing crunches
- * Clench and release
- * Uncooked/cooked spaghetti (aka robot/ragdoll)
- * Tapping/rubbing own shoulders, arms, legs
- * Yoga (check out *Yoga Pretzels* cards or *ABC Yoga* by Christiane Engel, or *Yoga with Adriene* on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>)
- * Braiding, friendship bracelets








Check These Out!

Helpful Apps:



- * MyLife (formerly Stop, Breathe, and Think)
- * Calm
- * Headspace
- * What's Up?
- * Insight Meditation Timer
- * Smiling Mind
- * Three Good Things
- * GoZen
- * YouTube (search for mindfulness exercises or guided meditations).

<https://www.mindfulnessforteens.com>







Healthy Distractions


- * Puzzles (Perplexus ball provides distraction and tactile stimuli).
- * Reading, listening to music, games, sports, etc.
- * Name as many animals/items in a grocery store, car brands, etc. as you can for each letter of the alphabet.
- * Distractions may prevent the lid from flipping but may not always work when you have flipped your lid already.


Create an Imaginary Calm/Happy Place




- * Think of a place you have been or can imagine being where you feel completely calm and happy, where everything goes your way and nothing bad happens.
 - * If you can't think of a place, create one in your mind. What would that place look like?
 - * If you need to make it safe, feel free to add fences, guards, anything to keep you safe.
- * **Five senses:** What would you see around you in that place? What would you hear? What would you smell? What would you feel on your skin or with your hands (tactile)? What would you taste, if anything?
- * Really focus on how it makes you feel in the present, both emotionally and physically, when you think of that place.
- * Notice any shifts that occur in your emotions and your body when you think of being in that place.




Create an Imaginary Calm/Happy Place (part 2)



- * If this place had a name, or if there was a word/phrase that would make you immediately think of this place, what would it be?
- * Say the name/word/phrase and think about your place. Notice any shifts that occur in your emotions and your body when you think of being in that place.
- * Now test out how your calm/happy place works in helping you shift feeling states:
 - * Think about something that is mildly annoying and really put yourself in that situation. Notice how it makes you feel emotionally and physically when you think about that annoying situation.
 - * Now say the name or cue word/phrase for your calm/happy place. Notice any shifts that occur in your emotions and body.




Managing the Not-OK: Container Exercise




- * **Purpose of a container:**
 - * To contain overwhelming internal experiences temporarily until you get to a safe and appropriate place/person.
- * **When to use:**
 - * When experiencing any intense, intrusive, and/or unhelpful thoughts, feelings, body sensations, memories that you're not able or willing to deal with in the present moment.
 - * Great exercise for helping you move on from difficult situations.
 - * Helpful to use prior to tests, at start and end of school day, when your anxiety would like you to avoid something.
- * **How to create your container:**
 - * Imagine some sort of object (e.g., box, chest, vault/safe, bag, etc.) that can hold anything that is intolerable. The container must be able to seal/shut.
 - * Really imagine what it would look like and how it would keep everything inside (e.g., lock, chains, guards, etc.).
 - * Visualize your container, draw it, or even create a tangible container.
- * **How to use your container:**
 - * Envision taking your upsetting thoughts, feelings, and/or body sensations out of yourself and putting them in the container.
 - * Shut/lock the container and put it somewhere in your mind for the moment. You will then access it when you are in a place/state of mind to tolerate what is inside.

The container is not to repress memories or feelings forever, but to set them aside until you are in a safe place or have safe people around you to help you navigate and manage them.



Practice Gratitude


- * Go to <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/calendars> for monthly calendars that promote a healthier and kinder world
- * Create a Gratitude Jar or Journal



The image shows a screenshot of a monthly action calendar for families with various activities and a photo of a hand holding a glass jar with a heart on it, labeled 'Gratitude Jar'.

Stress Health & Self Care

- * Seven essential aspects of stress health:
 - * Mental Health
 - * Mindfulness and Meditation
 - * Supportive Relationships
 - * Sleep
 - * Nutrition
 - * Exercise
 - * Getting Out in Nature
 - * Self Care
- * Remember: stress lives in the body.
- * These stress health areas build resilience and can reduce – and even reverse! – the effects of toxic stress.
- * **It helps to set attainable goals!**



The image features a word cloud where 'MEDITATION' and 'RELAXATION' are the largest words, surrounded by other terms like 'HEALTHY', 'FITNESS', 'SPIRITUALITY', 'RELATIONSHIPS', and 'ENERGY'.

Mental Health Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Having a conversation as a family about our beliefs about mental health
 - Learning more about mental health treatment options (i.e., counseling, therapy, medication)
 - Identifying a local mental health professional
 - Scheduling an appointment with a mental health professional
 - Create your own goal: _____

OASIS <https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

Meditation/Mindfulness Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Taking moments throughout the day to notice how I'm feeling, both physically and emotionally
 - Downloading a mindfulness app such as Calm, Stop, Breathe, and Think, or Headspace
 - Practicing mindful breathing during stressful situations
 - Creating a routine of prayer, meditation, and/or a moment of gratitude daily
 - Attending a yoga (online or in person) or martial arts class regularly
 - Create your own goal: _____

OASIS <https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

Supportive Relationship Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Using respectful communication even when we are upset or angry
 - Spending more quality time together as a family, such as:
 - Having regular family meals together
 - Having regular "no electronics" time for us to talk/play together
 - Making time to see friends to create a healthy support system for ourselves and our family
 - Connecting regularly with our community in settings like gyms, the YMCA, the library, place of worship, or a local support group
 - Create your own goal: _____

OASIS <https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

The Importance Of Sleep

- * Exposure to stress significantly increases the risk for sleep difficulties.
- * Sleep influences brain function, hormones, immune system, and even the transcription of DNA.
- * Sleep helps regulate brain activity.
 - * During sleep, levels of cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline drop.
- * Hence, lack of sleep is associated with increased levels of stress hormones and increased stress reactivity.
- * As a result of this kind of "toxic stress," cognitive function, memory, and mood regulation are affected.
- * Lack of sleep is also associated with increased inflammation and reduced effectiveness of the immune system, so it literally makes you sick!

OASIS

Addressing Sleeping Problems



- * Understand the importance of good sleep.
- * Create a routine that helps you and your student sleep for long stretches:
 - * Go to bed at the same time every night
 - * Make the bedroom a cool, dark, and quiet environment
 - * Avoid stressful or stimulating activities just before bedtime
 - * Engage in soothing activities instead (warm shower, reading)
 - * Meditate/ground (Calm app has sleep stories to prepare for bedtime)
 - * May use Melatonin or Magnesium



OASIS

Sleep Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Turning off screens 30 minutes before bedtime and/or using blue light blocking glasses
 - Going to bed at the same time every night
 - Making a routine (i.e. of reading a book) before bed
 - Creating a calm place for sleep by dimming the lights and keeping the noise level down
 - Using mindfulness or other stress reduction tools if worry is keeping me/my child up at night
 - Create your own goal: _____



OASIS

<https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

The Importance of Nutrition



- * Proper nutrition not only helps people maintain healthy weight, it also:
 - * Improves the body's ability to regulate itself
 - * Helps boost the immune system
 - * Improves brain function.
- * Eating foods that are high in Omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and fiber from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains helps fight inflammation and brings the body and immune system back into balance.
- * By contrast, a diet high in refined sugar, starches, and saturated fats can promote further inflammation and imbalance.



OASIS

Nutrition Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Drinking water instead of juice or soda
 - Eating 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day
 - Choosing whole grains like brown rice instead of white rice, and whole wheat bread/pasta instead of white bread/pasta
 - Paying attention to gut health, for example by adding fish oil and fiber to my diet
 - Create your own goal: _____



OASIS

<https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

The Importance of Exercise

- * Regular exercise helps increase the release of a protein called BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor) which helps the brain and nervous system grow.
- * BDNF is active in parts of the brain that are important for learning and memory.
- * Moving our bodies builds our brains as well as our muscles!
- * Regular exercise has also been shown to help regulate the stress response and reduce inflammation (which can fire up your immune system and tell it to fight or flight). **Moderate** physical activity can help the body better decide which fights to pick and which ones to walk away from.



OASIS

Exercise Goals

- * We've set a goal of:
 - Reducing sedentary time by limiting screen time for fun (not school or homework related) to less than 2 hours per day (and none for children under 2 years old)
 - Walking at least 20 minutes every day
 - Finding a type of exercise that I/we enjoy doing; exercise with a friend or family member
 - Getting involved in a sport, dance, or other form of routine exercise
 - Create your own goal: _____



OASIS

<https://centerforyouthwellness.org/resources/>

Getting Out In Nature



- * When you are stressed, go outside!
- * Being out in nature boosts your mood, improves attention and memory, lowers stress, promotes self control and mental flexibility, and increases empathy and cooperation (it makes us nicer!).
- * Feeling connected to the natural world contributes to our happiness.
- * When children go outside it has lasting effects – the opposite is also true!
- * Set a goal to spend at least 20 minutes outside every day. Try looking at pictures of nature or listen to nature sounds as an alternative.



Self Care



- * Self care goals:
 - * Making a plan for what to do when I'm feeling stressed out, angry, or overwhelmed.
 - * Planning with my partner, friends, or family to have time for myself.
 - * Calling for help if I am not safe at home.
 - * Making a regular appointment with my medical provider for preventative care.
 - * Seeing a mental health care provider for stress management.
 - * Separating work from "me" time or time with family and friends.
 - * Going out in nature.
 - * Getting creative (drawing, painting, making music).
 - * Learning a new skill.
 - * Treating myself to something nice (and healthy).
 - * Have compassion for self and others.





GO EASY ON YOURSELF
You're Doing Great. This IS JUST Really Hard!



Marloes Verhoeven, Psy.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Oasis Mental Health, P.C.
1900 Ogden Ave., Suite 106
Aurora, IL 60504
(630) 256-8007

marloes.verhoeven@oasis-mental-health.com
www.oasis-mental-health.com

 @Oasismentalhealth
 @OasisMH

