

## Learning Objectives

- ✿ To understand the term stress and be able to describe how level of demand, control and support affect how much stress a person feels (knowledge).
- ✿ To practice using tools to managing stress and explore options (skills).
- ✿ To understand that other people experience feelings differently, and to appreciate how stress is the result of differing reactions to situations (attitudes/values).

Total Time  
**45 mins**  
**+15mins**  
extension  
activities

## Teacher's Notes

This lesson provides a number of stress management tools, if you would like students to practice all the tools, or if you wish to leave more time for discussion, it is advisable to split the exercises over two lessons.

**Ground rules:** Please read the ground rules statement out at the beginning of the lesson.

## Resources

Photocopies for each student:

- ✿ Worksheet 1: Character Descriptions
- ✿ Worksheet 2: Exploring options and action planning grid
- ✿ Worksheet 3: Instructions for counsellors and characters
- ✿ Worksheet 4: Examples of open questions and the circles of control (for extension option 1)
- ✿ Worksheet 5: Relaxation techniques to practice at home
- ✿ [optional] Flipchart paper and pens, Post-it Notes, bags or boxes to represent 'Demand'.

## Introduction

**Explain:** Today's lesson is about stress management. Read out the ground rules:

"In this lesson we will be covering some sensitive issues. You may be affected personally by the topic that we are discussing today, or you may know someone else who is. Please be respectful and thoughtful of others, and treat the subject responsibly. If you would like to talk to someone after the lesson, you can go to... (please either give the contact person in the school, for example a school counsellor, or an outside number, for example Samaritans).

### Thoughtstorm- what is stress?

Draw this stress model on the board, without labelling the boxes. Thoughtstorm these questions with students, filling in their answers in the relevant boxes. When they've got something in each reveal the labels: Demand, Control, Support.

Time  
**10 mins**



## What puts you under pressure?

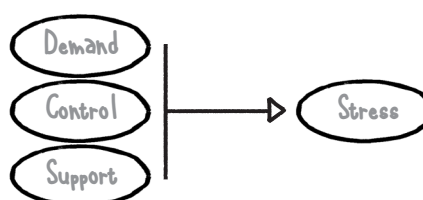
**Demand:** This refers to the level of challenge or difficulty. A little bit of challenge is good, it helps us to strive to be better, and helps us grow. However, where a challenge is very great, or there is a very difficult situation that we are facing, it can be a major contributor to stress.

**Examples of demand:** Exams, moving house, bullying, pressure to look or act a certain way.

## What helps when you're under pressure?

**Control:** When things are 'out of our control' we are likely to experience more stress. For example, a teacher may give you some homework. You may not be able to control what homework you are given, but you should have some control over when you tackle it and how.

**Examples of control:** solving the problem, positive thinking, choosing not to react to bullying.



**Support:** The one thing that will help most, if demands of life are high, and we are experiencing a lack of control, is support. Generally support comes in the form of friends, relatives, teachers or other people we work with. They can help us to cope with the pressures and lower stress.

**Examples of support:** reassurance from friends, counsellor, teacher dealing with a bully

**Optional:** Use bags or boxes as a visual aid to exemplify a greater 'load' of Demands. Control can be varied by tying one of the student's hands behind his/her back whilst trying to carry the 'Demands'. Support can be varied by allowing other students to help carry the load of Demands.

## Meet Jan, Sarina and Yuseth

**Hand out** Worksheet 1 with descriptions of Jan, Sarina and Yuseth.

**Explain:** Stress is a very general word used to describe all sorts of pressures. Each character is feeling under pressure for different reasons, and has decided to visit a counsellor just to talk things through. In pairs, students take on the role of the counsellor, building up a full and accurate picture of what is going on, recording it on the worksheet.

1. How is the person feeling?
2. What is causing the stress, what are they worried about? List their thoughts.
3. How is the stress affecting their behaviour and their life?

Take brief feedback about each character from the group.

**Reflect:** We notice people are stressed when they change the way they usually act. To get a picture about what is going on, we ask not just about actions, but also explore thoughts and feelings, this is the starting point for helping someone find ways to manage their stress.

**Ask the class:** Do you ever feel stressed and not know why? If you do, writing down feelings, thoughts, actions can help you work out whats going on.

Time  
15 mins



## Exploring options & action planning

**Hand out** Worksheet 2 with action planning grid.

**Explain:** When people feel stressed, it can be tempting to make suggestions about what they should do to resolve the situation. No one likes being told what to do, and anyway, you might not know what the best solution is to some one else's situations. What you can do, is help them to explore what the options are, so they can make their own choices.

### EITHER

In small groups fill in the action planning grid.

- ✱ What could the character do/change to improve their situation?
- ✱ What would be the consequences of making this choice?
- ✱ Normally you would ask the person what they want to do. But as you can't in this case, suggest an action plan for them.

### OR

**Explain:** You are going to do a roleplay in pairs, with one person as a counsellor, one person as the character. The aim is to come up with an action plan for the character to improve their situation. The counsellor has a difficult job because they are NOT ALLOWED TO SUGGEST ANY IDEAS. Instead they should explore options using open questions to do this.

20 mins



**Bring the group back together and take feedback.**

- ✦ If you did the roleplay option: how did it feel to be the counsellor, how hard was it not making suggestions? How did it feel to be the character, did you feel it helped you explore options?
- ✦ Remember the control, demand, support model. Did your action plan reduce demand, increase support and increase control?
- ✦ If a student's action plan is very ambitious, ask them, can you suggest one first step that would be easy for the character to take?

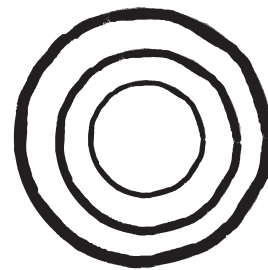
Reflect that people have complex lives and therefore there is rarely one solution to a stressful situation. Suggest the next time students are in a situation where they don't know what to do, they consider using this technique of exploring options and consequences, to come up with an action plan, either writing it down or by talking to someone.

15 mins

**Optional Extension Activities****Consequences wheel + circles of control**

Hand out the circles of control worksheet. **Explain:** There are lots of things people worry about, but we do not always have control over what happens to us. In pairs, take your character, fill in their worries and stresses in the correct circle. For example, Sarina's exams happening is out of her control

Below each of the worries, make a list of actions they could take to deal with that stress. Sarina can't control whether or not the exams happen, but she can control how much she revises (control), and making sure she finds time to relax and spend time with her friends (support).

15 mins  
each  
activity**Reflect and discuss highlighting:**

- ✦ There are stresses in life which we have some control over. When we have control, we can look at ways to solve the problem. For example, though Yuseth has a difficult decision, he can take control by making sure that whatever he decides he explains it sensitively to his mum and his girlfriend so they don't get offended.
- ✦ There are also stresses we can't control. Although we can't change the stressor, we can change the way we think about it and react to it. For example, Jan can't change the bully's behaviour but chooses to avoid them. Sarina has little control over the upcoming exams, but can make sure she takes enough time to relax and look after her health.
- ✦ Ask students: Do they ever find that when they are worried about one thing they start to worry about everything else as well? Next time this happens they can consider using the control circles idea to keep worries in perspective.

**OR****1 Who is most stressed? (15 mins)**

Get 3 volunteers to each hold the picture of their character. They stand in a row at the front. Ask each person to briefly explain to the rest of the class who their character is and what is going on in their life.

Ask the class: Who is most stressed and who is least stressed? Move the volunteers around so they are standing in the order suggested by the class.



## Reflect and Discuss

xx mins



**Ask:** If Sarina was going through the same thing as Yuseth, would they be equally stressed?

1 How stressed someone is depends on how they experience the situation. What one person finds easy to cope with another person may find very hard. Coping well with one thing doesn't mean you will cope well with everything.

**Ask:** Is it possible to measure how stressed someone is?

2 We can make a rough guess by judging the levels of demand, control and support, but in the end the only way to really find out what someone is feeling on the inside is to ask them. Sometimes we can make judgements about other people without really knowing all the facts, so try to talk things through with them first. Also, you may be a good source of support for someone.

### Coping with stress:

If there is time, give each student a post-it note. Ask them to write down ways they deal with stress and get them to stick these on a sheet at the front. Read them out and see if there is any new ideas in there for people to take away and try.

## Summary

5 mins



Draw together all the lessons learned today about stress and how they can manage it to make sure they keep their life balanced.

- ✦ Ask students what they have learned in this lesson. and when they might use the techniques.
- ✦ Give everyone a copy of Worksheet 5 to take home and practice relaxation techniques.
- ✦ Ensure that students know where to go for help if they want to talk further about stress management, or any issues in their life that may be causing them to feel stressed at the moment.

# WORKSHEET

## Stress Management: Worksheet 1 - Character Descriptions



### JAN

He is the oldest son in a big family. He is quite funny and people generally like him. There is a small group of people at school that make comments about his appearance. His parents say not to worry and that it's just part of growing up. Recently these people have started throwing things at him and pushing him around. Jan doesn't like conflict and does his best to avoid them but feels humiliated. It means he steers clear of the youth centre where he used to hang out and sometimes keeps away from school for a few days.

### SARINA

Sarina is 15. She has always achieved high grades at school and is hoping to go to 6th form college. She is also captain of the netball team and learns music in her spare time. She lives with her parents who are very proud of her and encourage her to do well. She also lives with her brother who thinks she is too uptight. In the past few months Sarina's weight has steadily dropped to 8 stone and she sometimes suffers dizzy spells. Exams are now two months away and Sarina is getting more and more stressed. She has stopped seeing her friends to concentrate on revision.



### YUSETH

Yuseth is 17. He is an apprentice electrician and his boss has said he is doing well. He lives at home with his mother who works two jobs to make ends meet. They don't get much time together but some evenings they relax in front of the TV and have a few drinks. Yuseth's girlfriend is 16 and has just finished school. They've been together a year and she is putting pressure on him to move in together. Though he does really like her he's not ready for that sort of commitment. He knows she has a hard time at home and that's making the decision even tougher. It's on his mind at work and it's sometimes difficult to concentrate on the job. The thought of telling her is really stressing him out. He has been avoiding her calls and spending a lot of time in the pub with his mates.



# WORKSHEET

## Stress Management: Worksheet 1 - Understanding stress - Character group exercise

1. Which character have your group chosen? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How is the person feeling? (List at least three).

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3. What is causing the stress, what are they worried about? List their thoughts.

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4. How is the character behaving differently? How is it affecting their life?

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# WORKSHEET

## Worksheet 2: Exploring options and action planning

Options	Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences

Action plan:

# WORKSHEET

## Worksheet 3: Exploring options and action planning Information for the Counsellor

You are the counsellor supporting the other person by helping them to find ways to cope with the pressures they are dealing with. You need to work with them to fill out the action sheet. However, YOU MAY NOT SUGGEST ANY ACTIONS. Instead you have to use open questions to help them think of options by themselves. Each time they think of an option explore the possible consequences of it, good and bad. Fill out the sheet as you go along. At the end of the 5 minutes look at the list you have come up with and ask them to agree what the first step is that they will take.

### Examples of useful open questions:

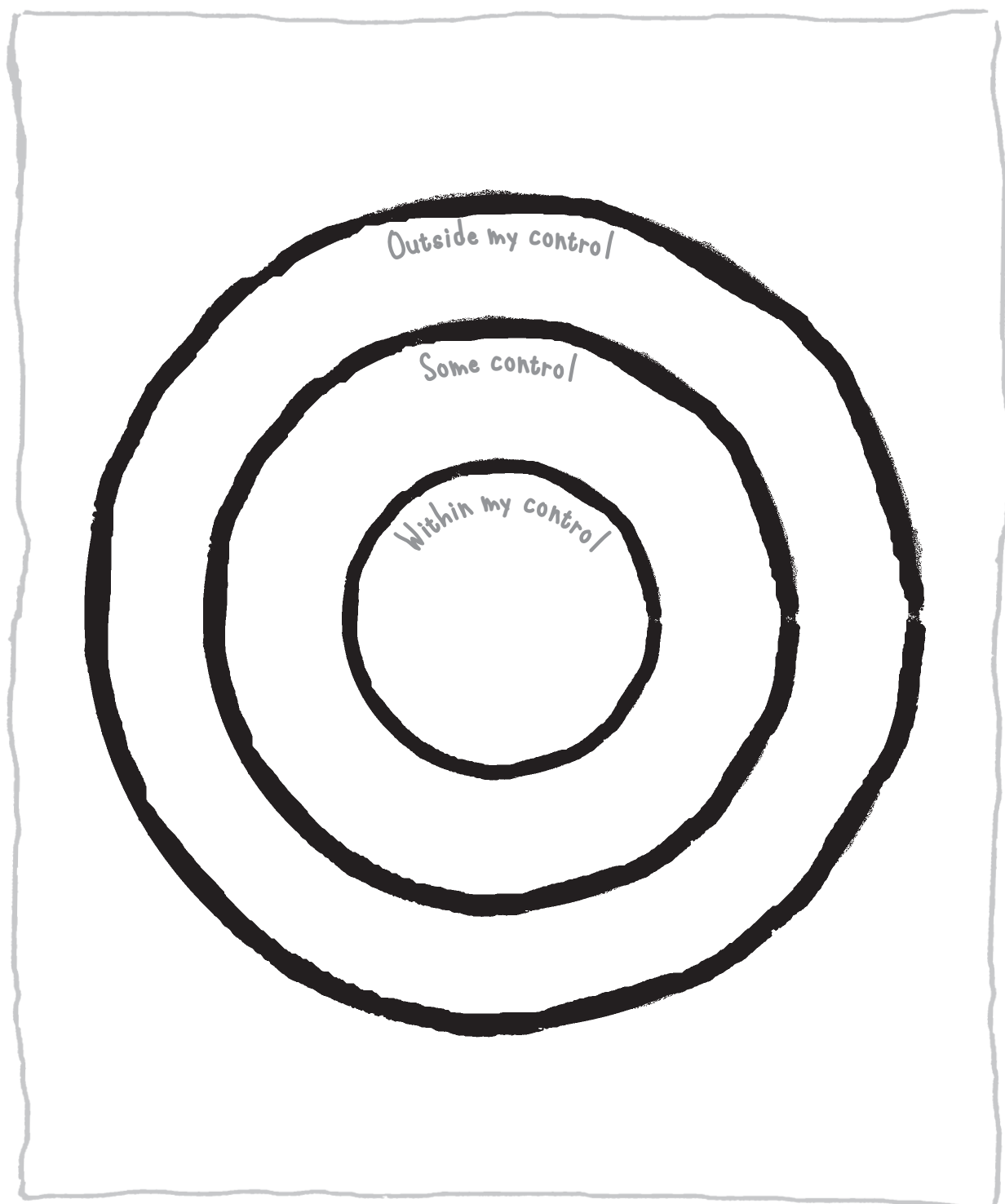
- \* Can you tell me a bit about your situation?
- \* What do you think might help?
- \* So you're suggesting.....? What do you think would happen if you did that?
- \* How do you think people would react? How do you feel about that?
- \* What have you tried already? What effect did this have?
- \* What might be the disadvantages of that choice?
- \* You've come up with a few different options, what would be a good first step?

### Information for Jan/Sarina/Yuseth roleplayer

You are taking on the role of one of these characters. You have asked the counsellor to help you think through how to cope with the stress you are facing. Tell them the ideas you've had and fill these in on the sheet. They will ask you questions to help you along. At the end you should have a list of options, try to think about what your first step would be.

# WORKSHEET

## Worksheet 4: Circles of control



# WORKSHEET

## Worksheet 5: Relaxation techniques to try at home

### Breathing to relax

When we're upset, we breathe faster, taking up to 16 or more breaths per minute. This makes us feel strange and can lead to hyperventilation (over breathing).

### Breathe calmly

Breathe in deeply, and out slowly, taking 6-10 breaths per minute. Keep your body relaxed as you do this. Do this slowly for a few minutes.

### Mental quieting

Take a breath in, and breathe out slowly. Relax your shoulders and your hands. Say to yourself "I feel calm and relaxed". Take another breath and, as you breathe out, relax your lips and jaw. Repeat this a few times.

### Hand relaxation

Clench your hands and fists tight. Now shake your hands loose, stretching your fingers. Rest your hands in a comfortable position on your lap or on the desktop. Can you feel the tension being released by shaking your hands?

### Shoulder relaxation

Tighten your shoulders slightly, then release. Shrug your shoulders up and down. Wriggle them until they feel relaxed. Let your shoulders drop as low as they can, then relax. Circle your shoulders up to your ears and down again, then relax.

Adapted from 'Improving your chances' pack, a Life Tracks Careers Productions resource, 2002