

5-2020

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Increasing Healthy Coping in At Risk Adolescents

Francisca Frieda M. Rios

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

Increasing Healthy Coping in At-Risk Adolescents

Introduction

At-risk youth lack healthy coping skills needed to manage stress. This lack of skills leaves adolescents vulnerable to more risky behaviors such as substance use. Therefore, I created a two-day lesson on healthy coping skills for adolescents at Mount Toro High School in Salinas, California.

Need Statement

At-risk adolescents lack the proper healthy coping strategies needed to manage the stress they experience. In this context, at-risk adolescents are individuals who have been exposed to antecedent risk factors such as dangerous neighborhoods, inadequate housing, and negative peer and adult role models (Resnick & Burt, 1996). At-risk adolescents are likely to use poor coping mechanisms to manage stress, which can lead to harmful outcomes and increased problem behaviors such as drug use and depression. The selected coping strategies chosen when facing a highly stressful event or when under persistent stress is what can make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful adaptation (Boxer, Sloan-Power, Mercado & Schappell, 2012). Due to dire outcomes such as substance use, at risk adolescents should develop healthy coping strategies in order to strengthen autonomy and be able to manage stress independently in a healthy manner. I will be teaching students from Mount Toro High School healthy coping strategies to manage the stress that they experience.

The long-term exposure to stress is toxic to development and may lead to problems in adolescence(). Roberts, English, Thompson, and White (2018) found that

adolescents who were exposed to stress in the form of economic instability and residential instability in childhood were more likely to engage in substance abuse and have poor mental health. Economic instability and residential instability are long-term stressors. When maladaptive coping and perceived stress are both present, adolescents can experience depression as a result. In a study that explored continuation high school students, it was identified that 14% of the entire sample self reported being depressed (Galaif, Chou, Sussman, & Dent). This finding supports how at-risk adolescents struggle to properly cope with the stress that they experience. Maladaptive coping mechanisms can also include anger coping (Galaif et. al., 2003). When maladaptive coping is demonstrated in males, they tend to resolve conflict through non-verbal behaviors such as acting out and using substances, whereas females tend to resolve conflict through rumination (Galaif et. al., 2003).

Adolescents should use adaptive coping strategies, which fall within coping families known as problem solving, self-reliance, support seeking, or accommodation (Francisco, Loios & Pedro, 2015). Support-seeking provides adolescents with tools on how to manage the effects of stress (Francisco, Loios & Pedro, 2015). Support seeking can be found within the availability of social support that adolescents have. Social support benefits adolescents positively and helps minimize the effects of stress. Social support provides a sense of belonging and provides adolescents with someone to talk to when help is needed. Adolescents who have a supportive family have been found to engage in more problem-focused strategies (Crean, 2004). The use of adaptive coping strategies such as social support and problem solving are predictors of better

psychological well being (Chua, Milfont & Jose, 2014). In addition, future orientation has been found to have a positive correlation with adaptive coping strategies. Future orientation is the basic process of motivation, planning, and evaluation (Chua, Milfont & Jose, 2014). Both adaptive coping and future orientation together lead to a better well being in individuals.

During the critical developmental stage of adolescence, individuals are undergoing biological and psychosocial changes, which itself can be a considerable source of stress. The lack of knowledge of healthy coping skills and the lack of social support that at-risk adolescents experience may inhibit healthy coping. The project will teach at-risk adolescents healthy coping skills that they can implement into their daily lives in order to manage stress. Therefore, I created a three-day lesson on the effects of stress and healthy coping skills for adolescents at Mount Toro High School in Salinas, California.

Theory Application

According to Erik Erikson, in his psychosocial theory of development, each of the eight stages is correlated with an existing conflict or crisis that individuals must confront and resolve successfully in order to progress developmentally (Sokol, 2009).

Adolescents, in Erik Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development, Identity vs. Role confusion, are to form an identity and a sense of self. The task in this stage leads to the emergence of identity questions such as, "Who am I?" and "What is my place in this world?" (Sokol, 2009). Once adolescents successfully go through this stage, then he or she is able to use self perception to develop a stable personal identity. This leads to a

strengthening in performance of different roles (Ragelienė, 2016). When identity is successfully achieved, it is associated with fewer psychosomatic and neurotic symptoms, which include reduced depression amongst other symptoms (Ragelienė, 2016).

Considering that adolescence is a stage of many changes where identity is being challenged and explored, it can be useful to provide adolescents with support and guidance on how to manage stress in order to form a more stable identity. Adolescents are balancing many roles such as being a sister, daughter, and student. This can provide a sense of loss to autonomy on identity. Replacing poor coping with healthy coping strategies can help minimize psychosomatic and neurotic symptoms caused by stress from oneself in order to continue to progress developmentally and successfully exit the fifth stage of psychosocial development. My lesson will provide adolescents with skills needed to manage stress to avoid further disruptions in their identity.

Consideration of Diversity

My project was going to be conducted at the continuation high school Mount Toro, located in Salinas, California. Although Mount Toro High School serves grades 10 through 12, there are currently only 11th and 12 graders. According to Ed Data (2018), there were 40 eleventh grade students and 134 twelfth grade students attending the school during the 2018/2019 school year. I am expecting to have more participation from 12th grade students considering that they make up a majority of the student population. The current student population is made up of 100 male and 75 female students. The ethnic diversity of Mount Toro High School students for the 2018/2019

school year was 99.4% Hispanic and 0.6% White (Ed Data, 2018). In addition, 33.7% of students are English learners. I expect the participants to reflect the ethnic population of the school. I also expect the participants to reflect the English learner background. As a result, it is possible that participants may not have the language proficiency needed to understand the content. My project will be delivered in English, which will require all participants to have English proficiency in reading and writing. The students participating in my project will be in 11th and 12th grade. This project is geared towards at-risk adolescents, which is not geared towards younger children and adults.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide two, 50-minute lessons to junior and senior-level students enrolled at Mount Toro High School.

At the end of my project, participants will be able to:

1. Identify two effects that stress has on their health.
2. Indicate two healthy stress management techniques.
3. Differentiate healthy coping techniques and unhealthy coping techniques.

Method

Day 1

First, I was going to introduce myself and tell the students why I was there. Then, I was going to do an icebreaker where all the participants would introduce themselves and say a fun fact about themselves. To begin my powerpoint presentation, I was going to start by asking the participants "What is stress?" followed by me providing a

definition. See Appendix A. I then continued the lesson using the powerpoint that I created. Before ending the lesson I was going to measure if learning outcome one was met by playing a Kahoot game. See Appendix B. Then I was going to ask the participants why managing stress is important. To conclude, I was going to ask the participants how they manage stress and have them think of healthy coping alternatives if needed as a transition for day 2.

Day 2

For day 2 I was going to begin with guided mindful breathing using a video from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-SFdhVwrVA&feature=youtu.be>. Then, I was going to present what a coping strategy is and discuss coping strategies. See Appendix A. Then, I was going to do an activity where students were to identify healthy coping strategies. Participants were going to break out into small groups and work together to brainstorm as many healthy coping strategies as they could think of. After, they were going to draw or write them on a blank piece of paper. Then, I was going to regroup the participants and have them share their drawing with everyone. Then, I was going to give them a worksheet with four scenarios where they would identify whether the coping strategy is healthy or unhealthy. See Appendix C. To conclude, I was going to provide participants two resources. I was going to discuss the Stop, Breathe, and Think app that can be used anywhere to help reduce stress. I was also going to provide them with information about Teenline, which is a hotline that teens can access from their phones.

Results

Not complete due to COVID-19

Discussion

Not complete due to COVID-19

References

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Appendix A

STRESS MANAGEMENT: WHAT IS STRESS?

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ICEBREAKER

Who am I?



Introduce yourselves:

- Name
- Fun Fact

WHAT IS STRESS?

- An uncomfortable feeling we get when we are overwhelmed, worried, frustrated, scared, or angry
- Caused by emotions, and also affects our mood
- Normal reaction our bodies have

DO YOU KNOW WHERE STRESS COMES FROM?

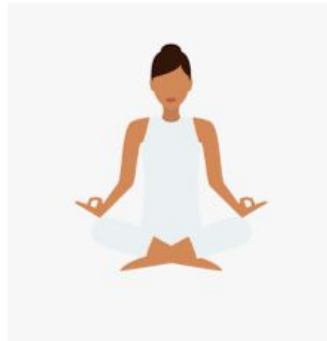
Can be caused by:

- Family
- Friends/Peers
- Ourselves (“I need to get better grades, wear the right clothes, etc.”)
- Conflict at home
- Thinking of the future
- Peer pressure
- Worries about personal changes



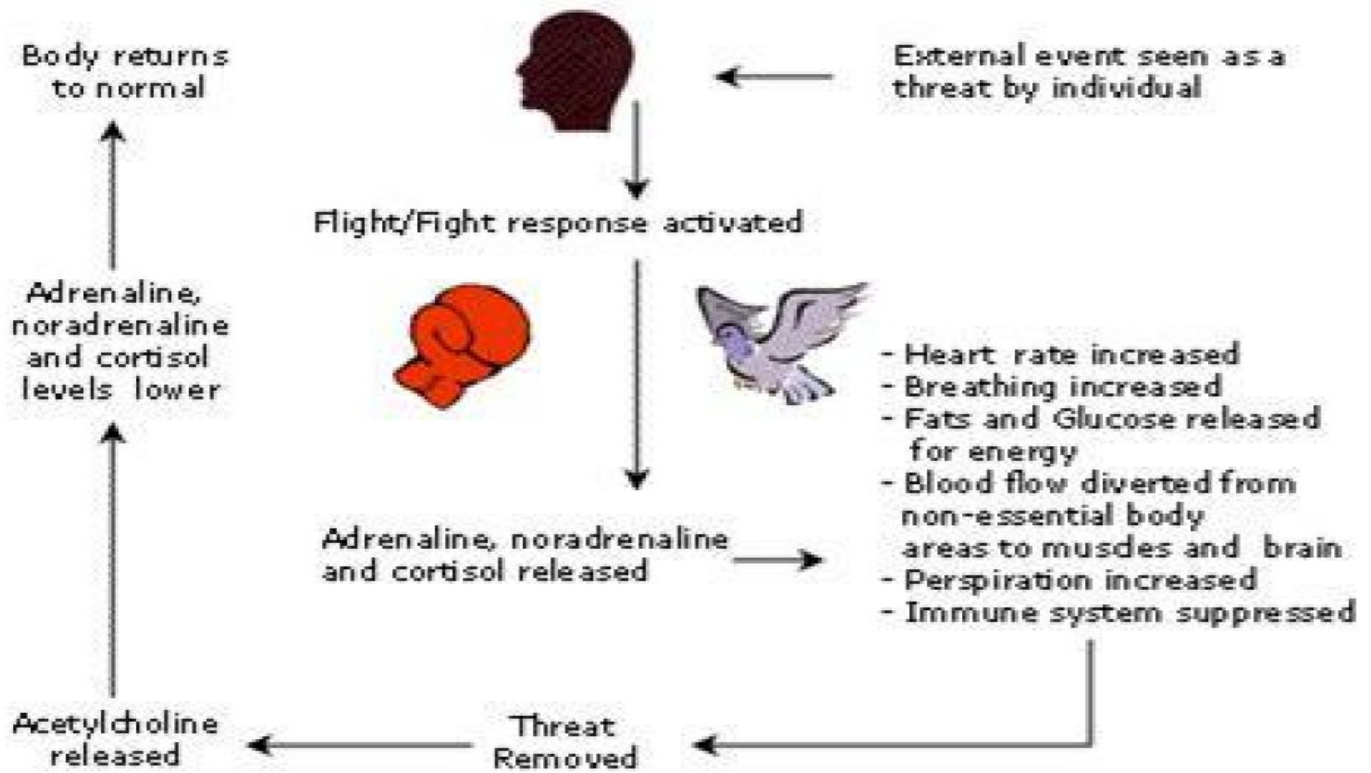
OUR BODIES AND STRESS

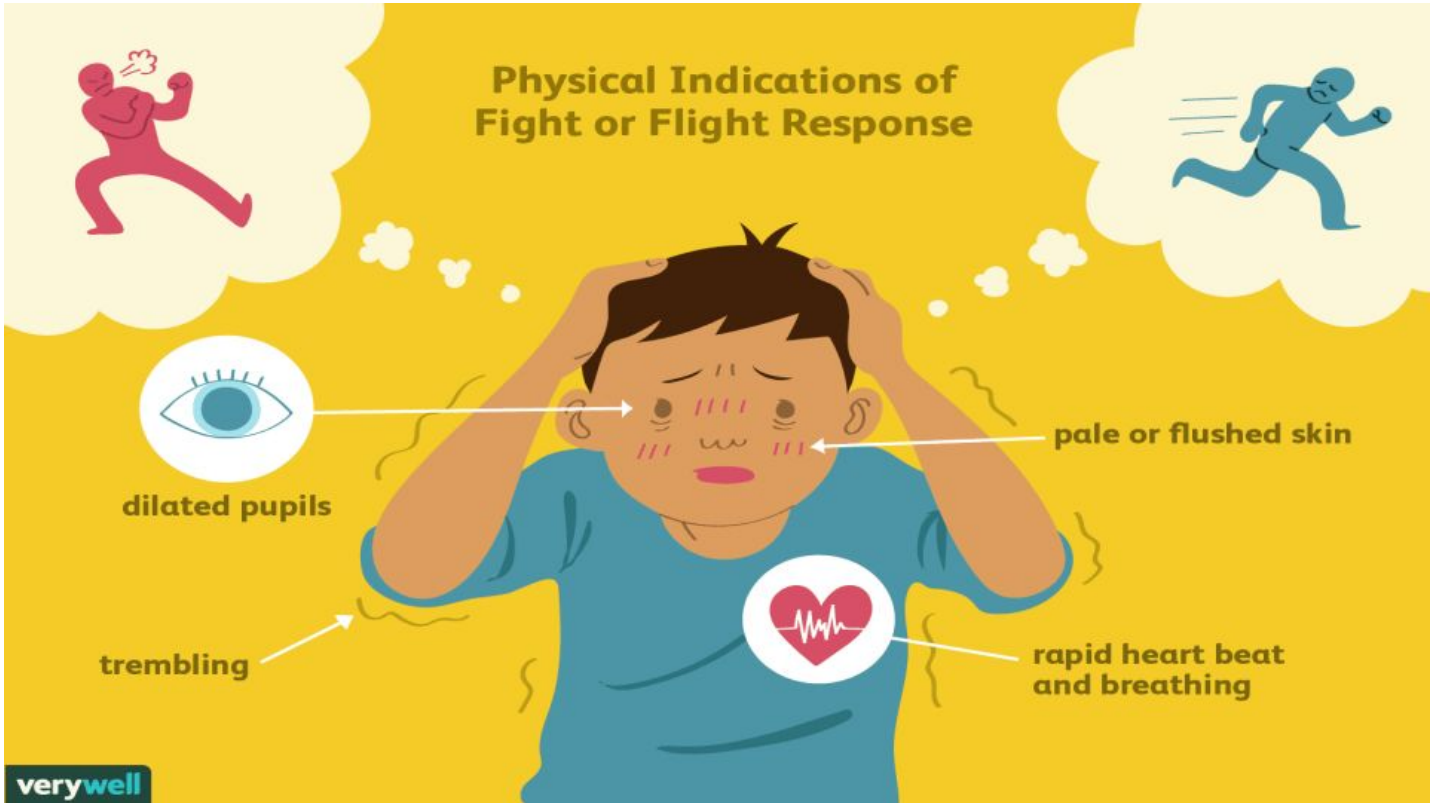
Hormone: chemical made by one part of our body that travels through our blood to send messages to the rest of our body



Nervous system: Brain, spinal cord, and all of the nerves

Nerves send messages between our brain and the rest of our body





IF STRESS IS A SURVIVAL TOOL, WHY DOES IT MAKE US FEEL BAD?

- Same stress hormones from flight or fight response are present
- Those hormones hang around unused and confused
- If our brains think something terrible is happening, our body will react as if it really is

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Headaches
- Chest Pain
- Fatigue
- Upset stomach
- Muscle Tension

MENTAL HEALTH

- Lack of Focus
- Irritability or Anger
- Sleep Disruptions
- Eating Changes
- Sadness or Depression
- Anxious

LONG TERM EFFECTS

- Anxiety
- Depression
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Weakened Immune System



TIME TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE!

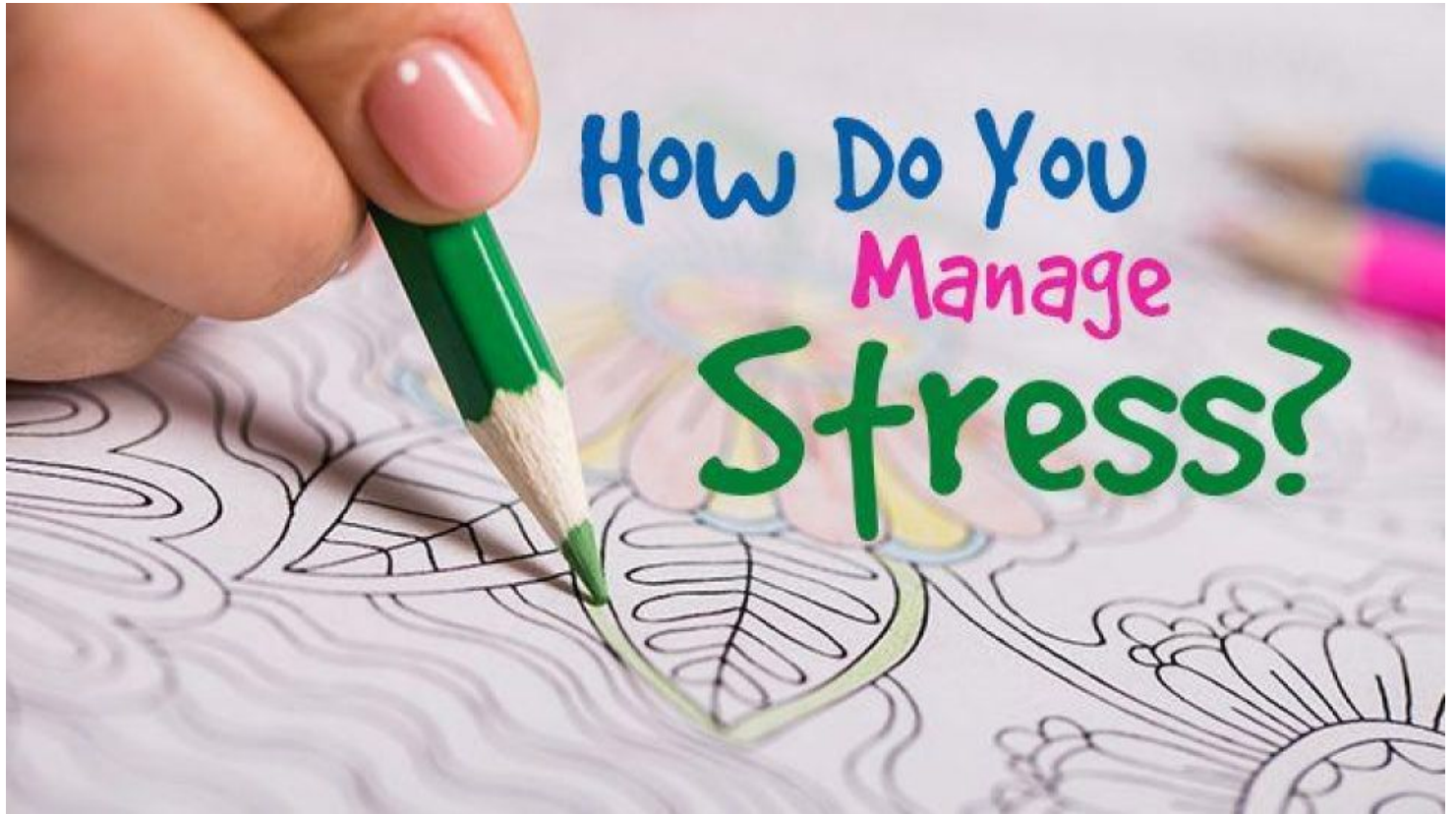


WHY IS MANAGING STRESS IMPORTANT?

When stress is managed, there is

- Increased brain function
- Boosted immune system
- Improved mental health
- Prepared for future stressful situations





NEXT WEEK WE WILL:

- Discuss healthy coping techniques
- Practice mindful breathing
- Say goodbye

STRESS MANAGEMENT:

WHAT CAN WE DO?

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WHAT IS A COPING STRATEGY?

A coping strategy is the thought or action someone uses to deal with a difficult situation. Just like stress, coping strategies can be either positive or negative.



HOW DO PEOPLE DEAL WITH STRESS?

- Alcohol
- Bullying
- Fighting
- Self Harming Behaviors
- Skipping School
- Procrastinating

ARE THESE HEALTHY?

- These harmful choices only make us feel better temporarily and some are very dangerous
- Do you know what we can do instead?



WHAT ARE HEALTHIER WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS?

- Mindful Breathing
- Eating Well
- Sleeping Well
- Talking to Someone
- Journaling





ACTIVITY TIME!

- Get in groups of 4
- As a team work together to identify as many healthy coping skills as you can think of
- Draw and/or write them out on the piece of paper in front of you
- Regroup and share with the class



RESOURCES



Stop, Breathe & Think

Meditation and mindfulness app that can help you find peace anywhere



<https://teenlineonline.org/>

CALL 310-855-4673

TEXT TEEN to 839863

Appendix B

What is stress?

The image shows a Kahoot! quiz interface. At the top center, the question "What is stress?" is displayed. Below the question is a large teal graphic with the Kahoot! logo. On the left side, a purple circle contains the number "14", indicating the number of correct answers. On the right side, the text "49 Answers" is shown. Below the question are four answer options, each in a colored box: a red box with a triangle icon and the text "A hairstyle"; a blue box with a diamond icon and the text "A muscle in our body"; a yellow box with a circle icon and the text "Uncomfortable feeling we get when we are overwhelmed, worried, etc."; and a green box with a square icon and the text "When we feel happy, excited, and full of energy". At the bottom center, there is a dark grey navigation bar with the text "Exit preview", a left arrow, "1 of 10", a right arrow, and a plus sign icon.

Stress is a normal reaction

17

9 Answers

◆ True

▲ False

Exit preview < 2 of 10 > +

This screenshot shows a Kahoot! quiz question. The question is "Stress is a normal reaction". The interface includes a purple circle with the number "17" on the left, a teal Kahoot! logo in the center, and the number "9" with the word "Answers" on the right. Below the question are two large colored buttons: a blue button with a white diamond icon and the text "True", and a red button with a white triangle icon and the text "False". At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with "Exit preview", a left arrow, "2 of 10", a right arrow, and a plus sign.

Where does stress come from?

17

11 Answers

Upgrade to enable

▲ Ourselves

◆ Friends

● Family

■ All answers are correct

Exit preview < 3 of 10 > +

This screenshot shows a Kahoot! quiz question. The question is "Where does stress come from?". The interface includes a purple circle with the number "17" on the left, a teal Kahoot! logo in the center, and the number "11" with the word "Answers" on the right. Below the question are four large colored buttons: a red button with a white triangle icon and the text "Ourselves", a blue button with a white diamond icon and the text "Friends", a yellow button with a white circle icon and the text "Family", and a green button with a white square icon and the text "All answers are correct". A purple tooltip with the text "Upgrade to enable" is positioned over the Kahoot! logo. At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with "Exit preview", a left arrow, "3 of 10", a right arrow, and a plus sign.

Stress can affect our physical health

17

Upgrade to enable

Kahoot!

10 Answers

◆ True

▲ False

Exit preview < 4 of 10 > +

Physical symptoms include

16

Kahoot!

14 Answers

▲ Headaches and chest pain

◆ Feeling taller


● Being hungry and cold

■ Nose hurting

Exit preview < 5 of 10 > +

Stress causes fatigue and an upset stomach

17



9 Answers


◆ True

▲ False

Exit preview < 6 of 10 > +

Stress affects our mental health

18



6 Answers

◆ True

▲ False

Exit preview < 7 of 10 > +

Mental health symptoms include

17

Kahoot!

9 Answers

▲ Irritability or anger	◆ Untied shoelaces
● Excitement	■ Joy

Exit preview < 8 of 10 > +

The image shows a Kahoot! quiz interface. At the top, the title 'Mental health symptoms include' is displayed. Below the title is a purple Kahoot! logo with two dark purple triangles. To the left of the logo is a purple circle containing the number '17'. To the right is the text '9 Answers'. Below the logo are four colored buttons representing answer choices: a red button with a triangle icon and the text 'Irritability or anger', a blue button with a diamond icon and the text 'Untied shoelaces', a yellow button with a circle icon and the text 'Excitement', and a green button with a square icon and the text 'Joy'. At the bottom of the interface is a dark grey navigation bar with the text 'Exit preview', a left arrow, '8 of 10', a right arrow, and a plus sign.

Stress causes sleep disruptions

A Kahoot! quiz interface showing a question about stress and sleep. The top left has a purple circle with the number '18'. The top right shows '6 Answers'. The central image is a purple rectangle with the Kahoot! logo. Below the image are two large buttons: a blue one labeled 'True' with a white diamond icon, and a red one labeled 'False' with a white triangle icon. At the bottom center is a dark grey navigation bar with the text 'Exit preview', a left arrow, '9 of 10', a right arrow, and a plus sign.

Stress causes sadness or depression

A Kahoot! quiz interface showing a question about stress and mood. The top left has a purple circle with the number '18'. The top right shows '8 Answers'. The central image is a purple rectangle with the Kahoot! logo. Below the image are two large buttons: a blue one labeled 'True' with a white diamond icon, and a red one labeled 'False' with a white triangle icon. At the bottom center is a dark grey navigation bar with the text 'Exit preview', a left arrow, '10 of 10', a right arrow, and a plus sign.

Appendix C

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are actions we take, consciously or unconsciously, to deal with stress, problems, or uncomfortable emotions. Unhealthy coping strategies tend to feel good in the moment, but have long-term negative consequences. Healthy coping strategies may not provide instant gratification, but tend to lead to long-lasting positive outcomes.

Scenarios

For the following scenarios identify whether the coping strategy is healthy or unhealthy. If it is unhealthy, provide a healthy alternative.

Alex was very close with his dog Tyson. Tyson comforted Alex during hard times. Tyson suddenly passed away and left Alex feeling devastated. To numb out the pain, Alex turns to drinking alcohol.

Edgar is about to get into a fight with a friend but instead decides to take a deep breathe and walk away from the situation. The next day, when he is calm, he approaches his friend and has a conversation with him instead.

Tony has been feeling angry and sad lately because of school and his relationship with his parents. He reaches out to the school counselor to talk about how he has been feeling.

Sarah's parents have been arguing a lot lately. This has made Sarah feel angry and sad. She decides to run away from home to her best friends house without telling her parents.