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Increasing Foster Youth Stress Management Strategies

Griselda Wall

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

Increasing Foster Youth Stress Management Strategies

Introduction

Most foster youth have been exposed to traumatic experiences both prior to and while being in the foster care system. These experiences may often result in poor stress management, which puts them at higher risk of developing negative health symptoms and problems later in life. To address the lack of stress management strategies in the foster youth population, I created a lesson plan to help youth from foster care manage stress from the “Supportive Transitional Age Youth” (STAY) program, operated by Haven of Hope Inc. located in Santa Cruz, California.

Needs Statement

Youths, ages 18 to 21, who have exited the foster care system, may not have acquired the management strategies they need to help them cope with the trauma and stress they endured from being removed from their family of origin (FOO) and being placed in the foster care system (Haggman-Laitila, Salohekkila, & Karki, 2019). In addition to displacement trauma, trauma that comes from physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse experienced in their FOO, also adds to the stress. In comparison to their non-foster care peers, research shows foster youth are at higher risk of suffering from mental illness, challenges transitioning into adulthood, and low academic achievements (Scherr, 2007). Teaching foster youth stress management strategies can help them manage life stressors and help them flourish in their lives.

Because of their history and lack of skills in managing stress, foster youth are more vulnerable to an array of mental illnesses ranging from moderate depression to anxiety to more serious mental disturbances. In addition, Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010) also reported that 25% of foster youth suffering from a mental illness are more likely to have an unplanned

pregnancy compared to 10% of the general population, which adds stressors to their lives. Many foster youth do not seek professional care for stress or a psychological crisis because of the stigma against it, in addition to not knowing how to navigate the public health systems (Osgood et al., 2010). Over time, the outcomes of poor stress management and untreated mental illnesses may result in making youth more vulnerable in adulthood (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

Youth leaving the foster care system experience more complications transitioning into adulthood compared to their peers who live with their biological families (Osgood et al., 2010). This group of foster youth experience anxiety taking on adult responsibilities. Unlike their non-foster care peers, foster care youth do not have the privilege of having families that provide them with a place to live, financial support and emotional support upon reaching adulthood. Many foster youth end up depending on public systems that may not be equipped to address their needs as young adults, such as the mental health system (Osgood et al., 2010). Haggman-Laitila, et al. (2019) mention that foster youth report their transition into adulthood as a negative life experience. They feel socially isolated, uncertain about their future, suffer with their identity, and feel negatively judged by others. Overall, these youth are vulnerable, and their personas are characterized by anxiety and grief (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Given their anxiety and grief at this developmental transition, stress management strategies, such as yoga, can be particularly useful.

Yoga as a stress management method may be particularly useful for foster youth. Previous studies on the practice of yoga in schools report improvement in stress management and school performance among adolescents (Noggle, Steiner, Minami, & Khalsa, 2012). Youth in foster care often lack academic success and rarely have plans to further their education after high

school due to their unmanageable stress and knowledge of academic shortcomings (Scherr, 2007). According to research by Haggman-Laitila et al. (2019), foster youth are among those who are most likely to fail to obtain a high school diploma. Because of this, foster youth have expressed the need for support programs to help alleviate stress related to academics. Those researchers suggested that support programs need to take more of a holistic approach towards helping youth alleviate the stress related to their poor performance in academics. Teaching youth to identify and manage stress by using strategies like yoga, in addition to maintaining their physical health and wellbeing, might help alleviate some of the stress and potentially improve their academic performance (Gard, Brach, Holzel, Noggle, Conboy, & Lazar, 2012). In return, the reduction of stress through a more holistic approach may also have a positive impact on navigating employment, reaching financial stability, and taking care of their overall well-being (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

Given that foster youth may be at higher risk of developing a mental illness, having challenges transitioning into adulthood, and having poor academic achievements, they may benefit from direct instruction on strategies to manage stress. To increase their experience and knowledge of different management strategies, I have created an interactive lesson on managing stress that incorporates a yoga exercise. I will deliver my project to a youth group from the “Supportive Transitional Age Youth” (STAY) program operated by Haven of Hope Inc., located in Santa Cruz, California.

Theory

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is one's control over the choices made, the degree of effort expended on a task, and the amount of motivation to complete it (Science Education

Resource Center, 2020). A good sense of self-efficacy is when an individual feels positive and hopeful about their abilities to thrive in a specific situation (Mussman, 2016). Youth with a stronger sense of self-efficacy are more likely to recover faster from their hardships and failures and are more likely to challenge themselves, while those with low self-efficacy are less motivated and less likely to take on new challenges (Science Education Resource Center, 2020). Youths that lack self-efficacy commonly perceive things harder than they really are, which creates self-doubt in their capabilities and self-judgment as being inadequate. These traits can negatively impact and hinder their potential and can become stressors and anxieties. One way that self-efficacy can be increased is by cultivating a positive emotional state, while mitigating stressful situations (Science Education Resource Center, 2020). Bandura's self-efficacy theory has been identified as a key factor to have positive impacts on behavioral change associated with health and emotional wellbeing (Mussman, 2016). According to a research by Mussman, 2016, adult participants that engage in yoga exercise show an increase in self-efficacy and self-confidence. Because foster youths' self-efficacy can be diminished from stress caused by their negative life experiences, they may not be aware of the benefits yoga can have in fostering their self-efficacy and managing their stress. Therefore, for my capstone project, I will be conducting a lesson for former foster youth in transitional housing to teach them different ways to manage stress, particularly yoga.

Consideration of Diversity

I will deliver my project with a youth group from the STAY program operated by Haven of Hope Inc. located in Santa Cruz, California. STAY provides youth, 18 to 21 years old, aging out of the child welfare system, additional support until the age of 21 to reside in an independent

home-like living environment that is supportive and safe. The focus of STAY is to successfully transition foster youth into the community with life skills and confidence to become self-sufficient individuals. I do not expect the participants to reflect those youth exiting the child welfare system and not in the STAY program because STAY youth are more focused on being independent. The lesson is geared for youth, 18 to 21 years old, and it will likely not apply to younger children or older adults. Since this project is geared towards youth that experienced being in foster care, and it is not likely that youth who have not experienced being in foster care will have the same responses to what causes them stress and how they cope. In addition, given that part of the project involves engaging in a yoga exercise, youth that are physically unable to perform the exercise are also excluded. However, all the participants are sufficiently able-bodied to participate in the yoga exercise. Modification of the content for participants who are limited physically would be significant

Learning Outcomes

I had planned to provide a 30-minute lesson on how to manage stress along with a 30-minute yoga exercise to a group of young ladies 18-21 years old from the STAY program in Santa Cruz, California.

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

1. identify two negative impacts of stress on the body.
2. indicate three stress-relieving methods that they intend to use in the future.
3. demonstrate one successful yoga pose.

Method

I planned to start my presentation by introducing myself to the group and letting them know I was there to make a presentation on strategies to manage stress along with a yoga exercise. After the introduction I was going to present and discuss a PowerPoint on methods for stress management, see appendix A. After looking at the slides 1-5, we would have discussed the things that cause them stress and how their bodies feel under stress. I was going to list their response on a board in two columns. One column lists the things that cause them stress and the second would list how it affects their body. I would have then concentrated on discussing slide 5 which is on the different strategies used to cope with stress, followed by asking them what types of strategies they use to cope with their stress. I would have then made a third column and list of their responses on the same board. I would have continued with the PowerPoint to slide 6 and 7 that introduced yoga and its benefits on managing stress. I then planned to have a discussion on their feelings and thoughts about practicing yoga. I would have continued to make notes of their responses on the board. At this point, I would have passed out a handout with 9 different yoga poses that we were going to do. See Appendix B. We would have then moved to an area where we could have positioned ourselves with enough room to do the exercise. Standing up, we would have read and reviewed the poses in the handout. I then would have asked if anybody had done yoga before and if there were any questions. I planned to guide them through the yoga exercise three times and observe their effort. I was going to document how many were able to perform at least one pose successfully. This was going to answer learning outcome 3.

At the end of the exercise I was going to pass out a two-question questionnaire. See Appendix C. The first question asked to identify two negative impacts of stress on the body. The second question asked to list three stress management strategies they intend to use in the future.

These 2 questions would have answered learning outcome 1 and 2. To close my presentation, I was going to thank the young ladies for having me and for their participation. I was going to hand out stress balls and have lunch.

Results

Not completed due to the COVID-19

Discussion

Not completed due to the COVID-19

References

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*Appendix A**PowerPoint on stress management*

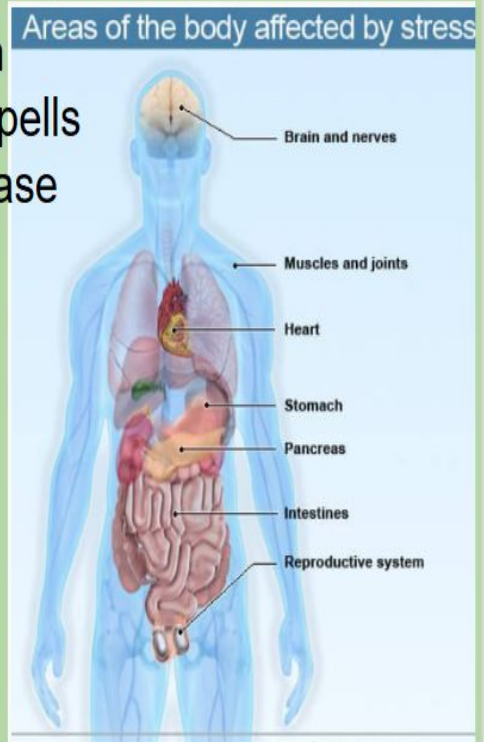
What is Stress

- A normal psychological and physical reaction. A small amount of stress can be good to tackle daily tasks. But multiple daily challenges can push your ability to cope.
- Stress makes the body goes into its “flight-or-fight” response.
- When the stressor is gone the body returns to its normal relax state.
- Unfortunately, some peoples “flight-or-fight” response rarely shuts off letting them remain on high alert when stressed.
- Over time, chronic stress can lead to serious health problems.



Stress-related Symptoms

- Headache
- Chest Pain
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Chronic pain
- Abdominal discomfort
- Heavy chest feeling
- Irregular menstrual cycle
- Depression
- Hot/Cold Spells
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Nausea





Strategies to Help Cope with Stress

- Medication
 - antidepressants

- Nutrition

- Behavior approach
 - exercise, relaxing, listen to music, meditation

- Therapeutic massage

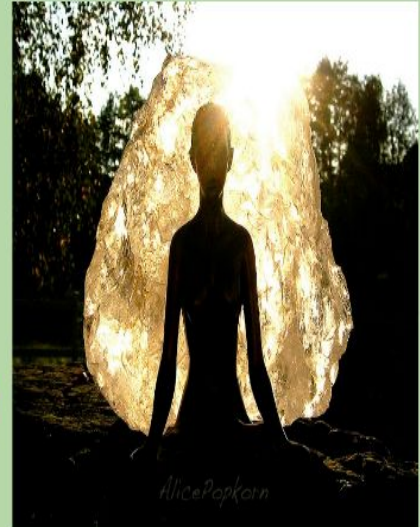


- Yoga, Tai Chi
- Fidget Cubes
- Aromatherapy
- Biofeedback

How do you manage stress?



YOGA



Comprise of Asana (postures/exercise)
Breathing (pranayama)
Meditation

Yoga is geared to “cultivate awareness of your body, mind and ultimately more profound state of consciousness”

Benefits of Practicing Yoga

- Can improve wellbeing and quality of life
- Decrease in fear, anxiety, and sadness
- Reduce negative feelings
- Reduce perceived stress
- Improves sleep, mood
- Helps metabolic regulation



Namaste

“I bow to the divine in you”



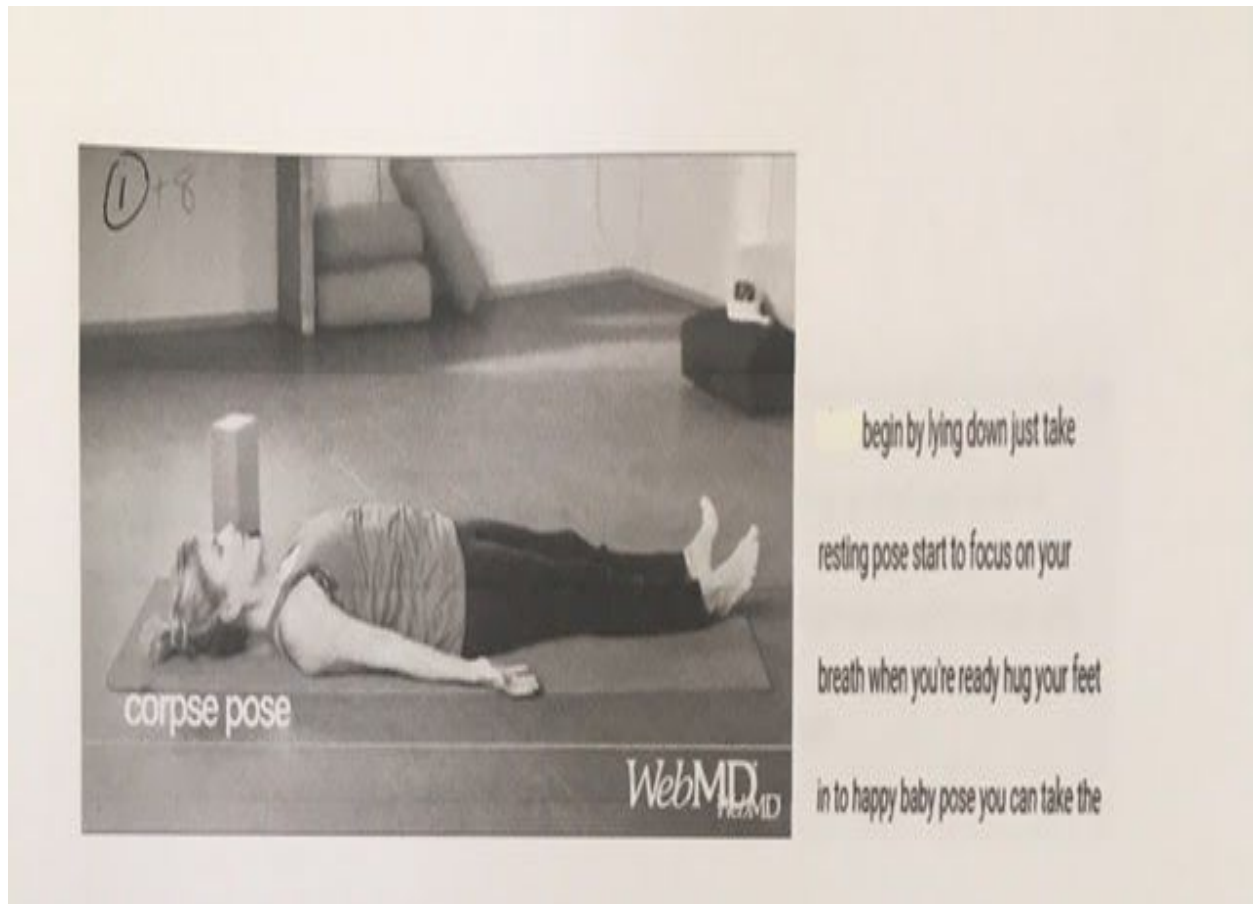
Appendix B

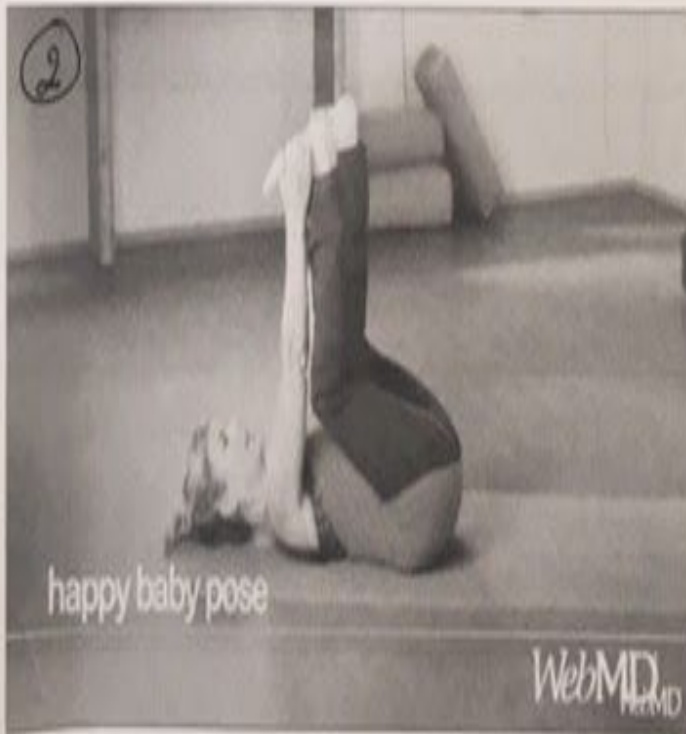
Yoga exercise hand out

Note. Reprinted from WebMd. (2018, Jan 21). *Yoga to ease anxiety and depression/WebMD*

[Video file]. Retrieved form

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK90NqYx1Hg&feature=youtu.be>





breath when you're ready hug your feet

In to happy baby pose you can take the

sides of the feet or your big toes sway

a little bit just opening up your hips

rub the hamstrings and just do a little

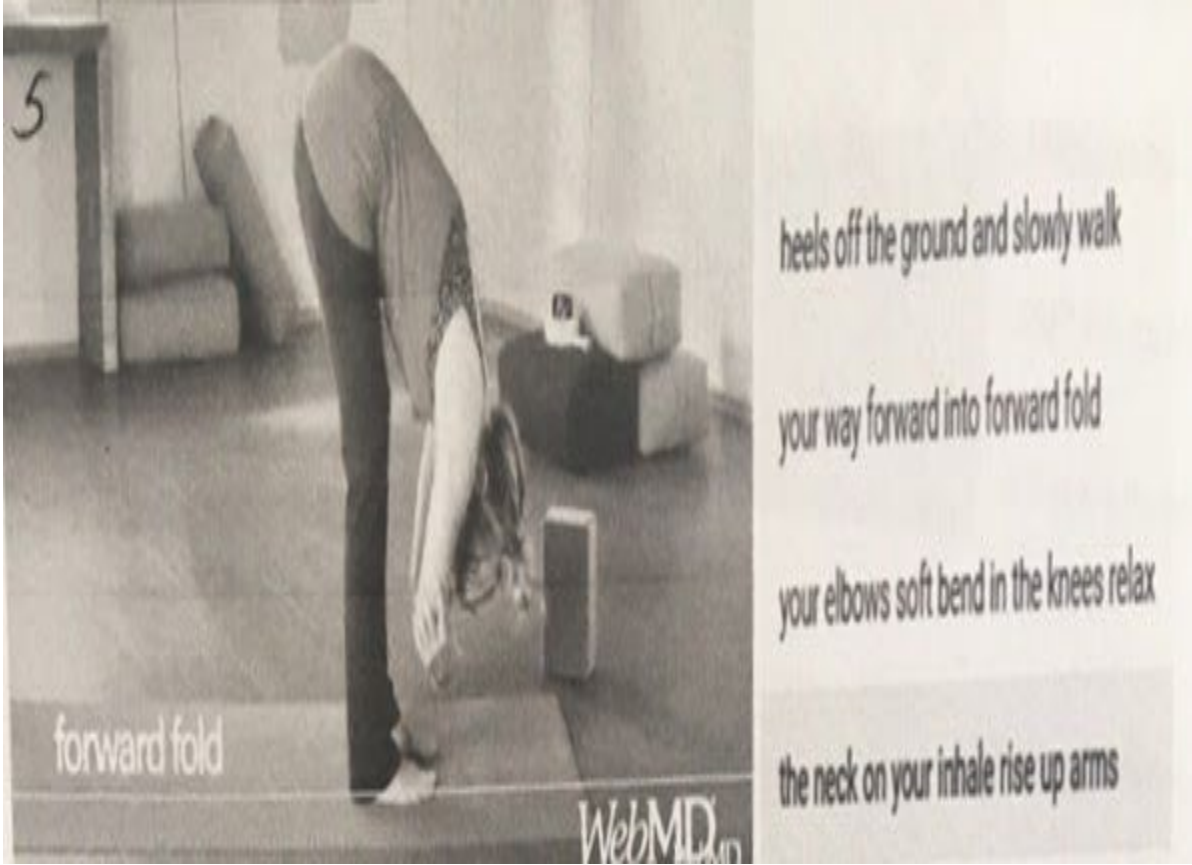
rock and roll in the spine slowly easy

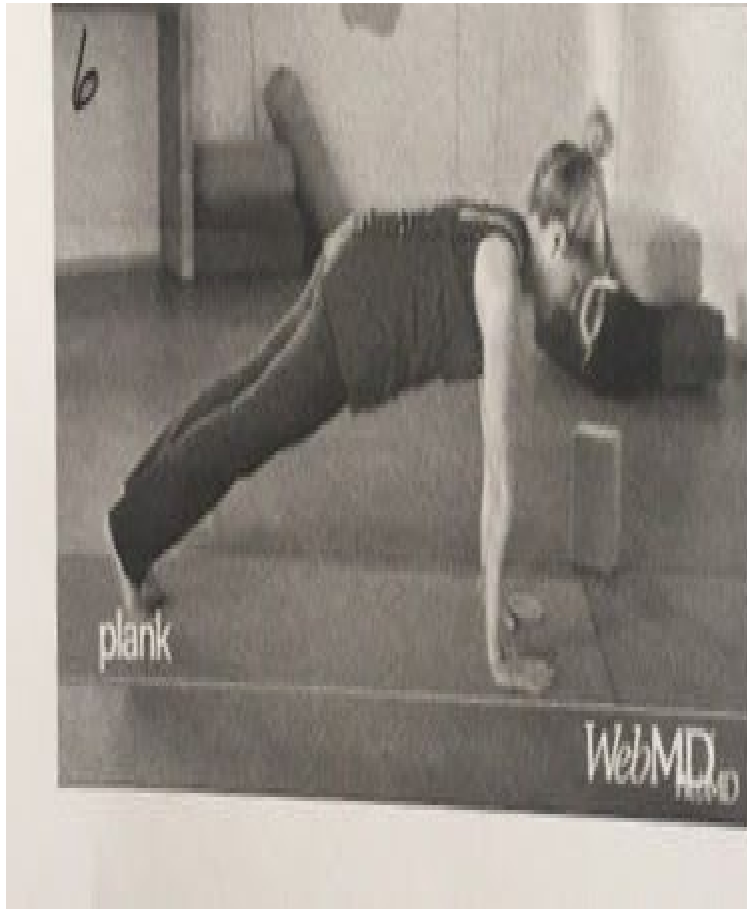


kind of waking up the spinal nerves come
on up into a table pose spread the
fingers take a breath here lengthen the
spine

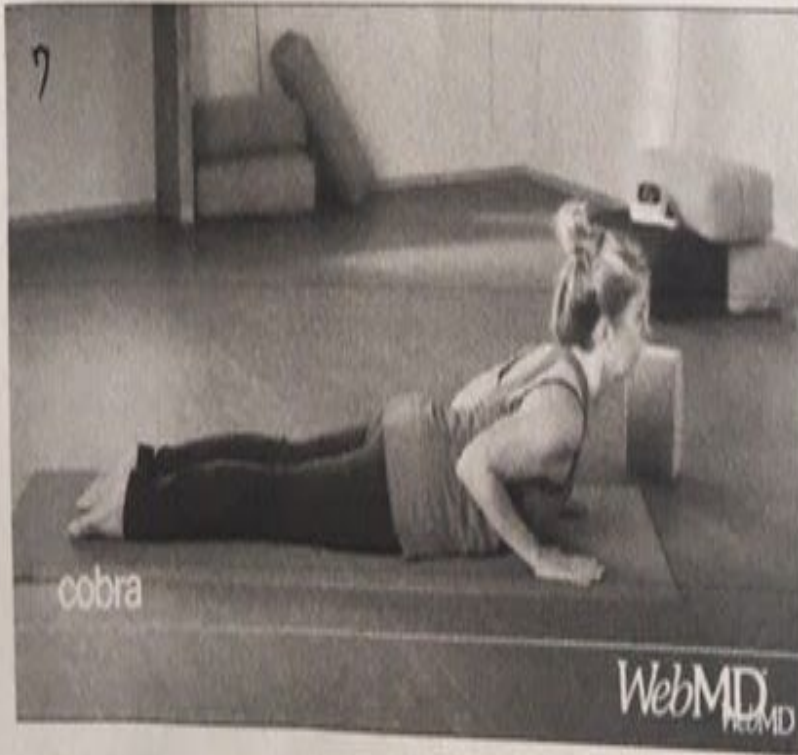


come back to the center table pose reach
your arms your hands forward take down
dog where you lift the tailbone lengthen
the arms spread your fingers you can
lift the heels off the ground if you'd
like opening up the backs of your
hamstrings your heels don't have to be
on the floor they can be anywhere just
lengthen the whole back body for down
dog you can also put your hands on a
block if they can't reach the floor

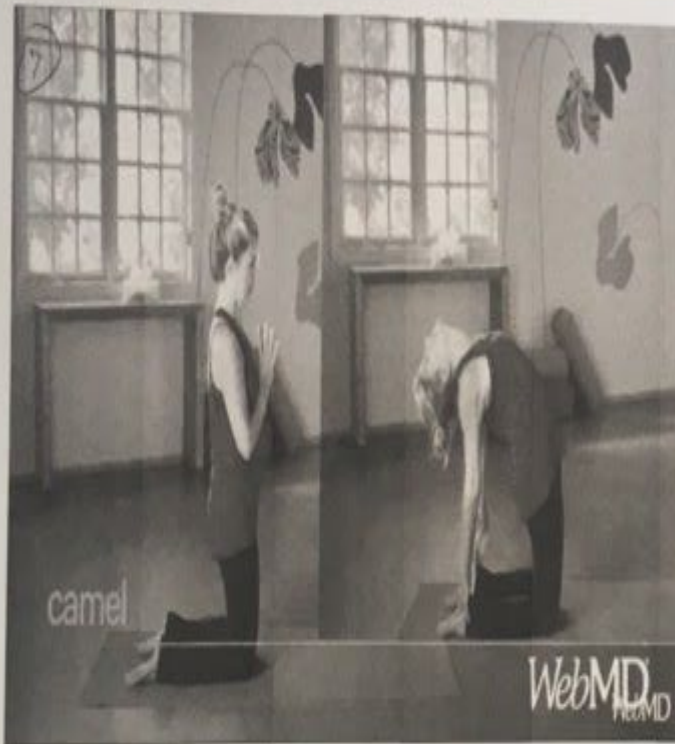




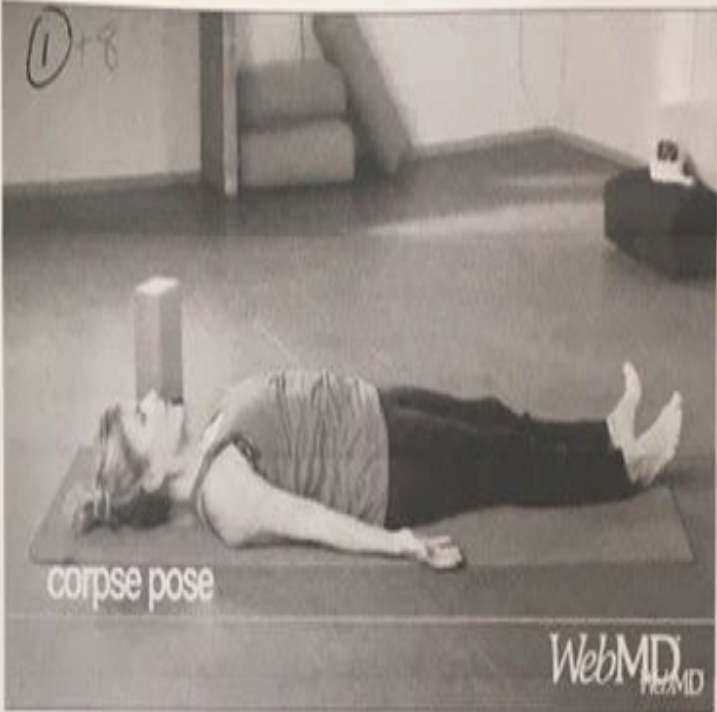
lengthen the spine you can walk back to
plank or lightly hop just hang out and
plank with the heels move back lengthen
the spine this strengthens the core and
the back inhale here exhale long and



bending the knees and chest touch the
floor sliding the heart through easy
lift into Cobra press your feet into the
floor roll the shoulders a few times is
removing tension the upper back
shoulders the neck relax the face



reach your arms to the sky you can just stay here with the breath bring the hands to the heart if you want to try camel you can reach back gently reach back toward the heels very slowly lifting the sternum stretching the chest muscles opening the heart camel pose is a gently stimulating pose opening the muscles in the chest opening the heart toning up the back body slowly come out of camel pose as you



begin by lying down just take
resting pose start to focus on your
breath when you're ready hug your feet
in to happy baby pose you can take the

Appendix C

Questionnaire sheet to achieve Learning Outcome 2 and 3

Questionnaire Sheet

1. Identify two negative impacts of unmanageable stress on the body.

1. _____

2. _____

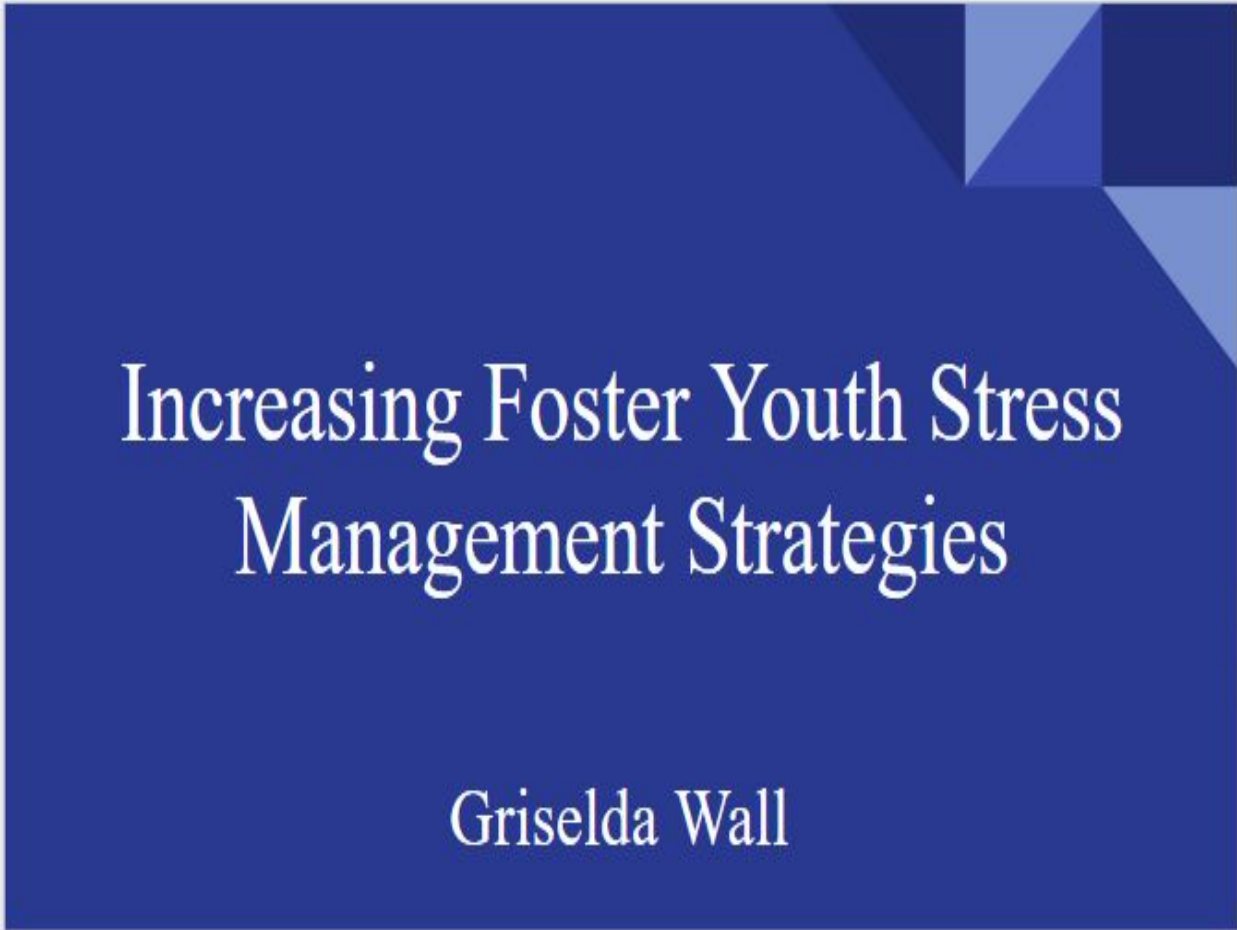
2. Indicate three stress-relieving methods you intend to use in the future.

1. _____

2. _____

Appendix D

Capstone Festival Presentation



Increasing Foster Youth Stress Management Strategies

Griselda Wall

Need

Foster youth transitioning out of foster care, ages 18-21, suffer from residual trauma and stress.

Stress can negatively impacts their

- mental health
- access to proper health care
- risk of teen pregnancy
- transition into adulthood
- academic achievements
- self worth



Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory

- One's choice, effort, and amount of motivation to complete a task.
- Fosters positive feelings and hope about one's own capacity to thrive.

Where and with whom



STAY Program

(“Supportive Transitional Age Youth”)

Haven of Hope Inc.

Santa Cruz, Ca

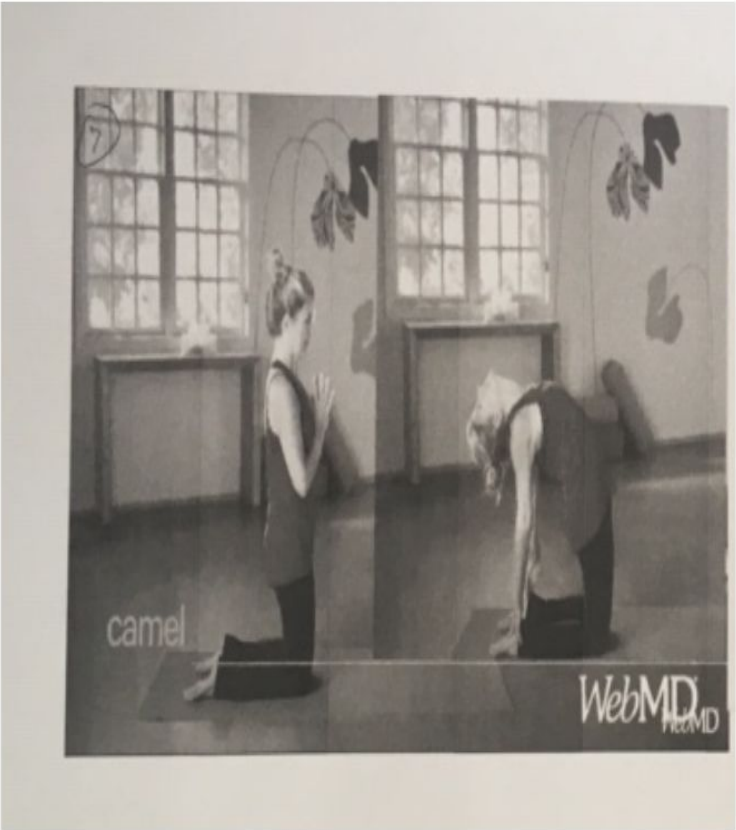
Serves 18-21 year old youth

Planned Method

- Powerpoint/discussion
- Review yoga exercise handout
- Do exercise 3 times
- Questionnaire
- Close



Camel Pose



Directions

reach your arms to the sky you can just
stay here with the breath bring the
hands to the heart if you want to try
camel you can reach back gently reach
back toward the heels very slowly
lifting the sternum stretching the chest
muscles
opening the heart camel pose is a gently
stimulating pose opening the muscles in
the chest opening the heart, toning up
the back body
slowly come out of camel


Questionnaire

Questionnaire Sheet

1. Identify two negative impacts of unmanageable stress on the body.
 1. _____
 2. _____
2. Indicate three stress-relieving methods you intend to use in the future.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

Learning Outcomes

At the end of my project participants would have been able to:

1. Identify 2 negative impacts of stress on the body
 2. Indicate 3 stress-relieving methods they intent to use in the future
 3. Demonstrate one successful yoga pose
- 

Results

Incomplete due to COVID-19



Discussion

Incomplete due to COVID-19



