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Improving Stress Management Among First Graders

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A Capstone project for the Bachelor's of Science in Human Development and Family Sciences

## **Introduction**

Children may not recognize stressors and be able to handle them in an appropriate way. Not only addressing that children face stress in their everyday life but there is a large importance, as parents, educators, and the community, to help children learn to cope and better themselves with their stress. To support the development of stress management skills in young children, I developed a curriculum for first graders at Monte Bella Elementary School, in Salinas, California.

## **Need Statement**

Many elementary school aged children may not be aware of healthy ways to handle stress. Children who do not know how to regulate their stress often have trouble with forming relationships, succeeding in school, and maintaining positive mental health. Youth benefit from identifying triggers and symptoms of stress by having coping techniques, and carrying out stress management techniques.

When children learn how to cope with stress and stress-related feelings, their overall mental health improves (Langley, Gonzalez, Sugar et al., 2015). In contrast, children who are facing stressful experiences as they grow up can easily develop depression, anxiety, or PTSD (Langley, Gonzalez, Sugar et al., 2015). Stress management and emotional regulation helps reduce the impact of stress-inducing experiences.

Personal relationships may be affected by poor stress management. When one has poor stress regulation, the likelihood that they have communication and other attributes that will better support healthy peer relationships is high (Guralnick 2006). When children do have ways to handle their stress, not only will their peer relationships improve, but this will give for a better chance for their relationships to form in healthier ways as they get older. Relationships can be

hard to form, especially for children with poor abilities to regulate their emotions (Ahnert, Harwardt-Heinecke, Kappler, et al., 2012). Added stress can occur in children when unable to form adequate peer relationships (Persike & Seiffge-Krenke 2016). This means it is an added stressor having trouble making friends brings to one's life, in which they are unable to deal with that stress in a healthy way. Children learning stress management skills will benefit their ability to form and maintain relationships.

Children's school success can benefit from learning stress management techniques. For example, poor stress regulation in the classroom can lead to bursts of temper. This can cause distractions for all students, not only the student who is under distress. If children were exposed to healthy habits to deal with their emotions when feeling stressed, this can be very positive. In an instance, in a classroom setting, it can stop children from making a scene and stopping the lesson when feeling overwhelmed. Children having experiences that can be considered stressful may detour their educational development. Not only the issue of stress damages children's cognitive development, but also can cause the lack of motivation and importance for school (Bosquet, Egeland, Blood, et al., 2012). Children who are exposed to distress, often have behavior changes and tantrums that can be detrimental to their learning in the classroom (Alisic 2012). In spite of this, the way a child handles their stress can show in the classroom, through bad test taking or even a lack of asking for help (Alisic 2012). A child's current state in the classroom is not the only issue at hand, but also their future success as well. In many studies, it is found that even children with the aspiration of furthering their education, will still not pursue it (Morton 2017). The issue of the lack of furthering education in young adults can very well begin at a young age and one's education throughout childhood and adolescence. This is a reason for

the need for stress regulation in Elementary schools. To not only encourage healthy habits for young children for their present time in school, but for their future success as well.

There is a great deal of elementary school aged children who may not be familiar with appropriate ways to handle stress to better themselves for their development. When children cannot manage their stress, their mental health is affected, personal relationships are compromised, and school success may be lower . Given that mental health, forming personal relationships, and school success are affected by stress management, I have created a two-day lesson for a first grade class at Monte Bella Elementary School in Salinas, California.

### **Theory**

In Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Bandura emphasized observing, the imitation of behavior, and emotional reactions of others. Two elements of the theory or developmental application that apply to my approach is observational learning and mediational processes. Bandura asserts that most human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling which is observational learning within the mediational process. Observational learning applies because in children's development, many learn by observing, meaning watching actions of others. For example, a child in a school environment will see another student pull out a pencil, while watching that action, the said child may do the same by copying what they did. Mediational processes include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and are the processes for a child between the stimulus and the response. Attention is when a child notices a behavior, retention is when a child will remember the behavior, reproduction is whether a child can perform said behavior, and motivation is the thought of whether the reward is more important than the cost. This will be helpful in my application because of the focus on the mental aspect in children's learning.

Children are able to adopt behaviors by observational learning by watching actions of others and learning by behavior copying. They are also able to take on behaviors with mediational processes because the steps it requires, teaches children to actively learn behaviors. When a child sees a specific action from another, their focus goes to that action specifically. When it is planted in their brain and they think back and remember what was done and how it was done, that is when a child retains that information of an action. A child will then make an effort to see if they are able to perform the action. Which then concludes with an interesting part of the process of learning behaviors, is the mental conversation weighing out the outcomes of an action. This coincides with Bandura's theory and my thoughts on my project. My learning outcomes include identifying two symptoms of stressors, indicating three stress management techniques, being able to discuss stressors and coping strategies. While my participants, that I will be teaching my curriculum to, are first graders, they are still at the age where they learn by watching and mimicking. I based my lesson plans around visual learning with videos, that way students were able to observe behaviors and actions within the clips I showed them, as well as practice certain actions alongside them. An example of this would be breathing exercises, that were displayed in the videos to help practice calming techniques when faced with stress. The children watched the video of the breathing movement, and I went ahead and paused the video, to then participate with them by doing the action of deep breathing.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

This content is geared towards first graders and not older or younger children. This may be an issue of diversity, since the focal points are six and seven year olds. Monte Bella Elementary School is located in Salinas, California, where around 75 percent of the population is Latino. Because of the location where the Elementary School is, the students that would be

participating are majority of Latino descent. With that being said, another issue of diversity may be their proficiency in English. This class in particular, which this research is being conducted, is being taught in both Spanish and English because it is a bilingual education class. In order to participate, they will have to be able to understand English because I will be delivering the content in English. I would not expect my participants to be reflective of the larger population, because first graders and their stage in life can be very differentiated from other groups. For example, other students in older grades would give me different results if the curriculum was conducted with them. My project can not be applied and tailored to other audiences, because my project is only for first graders.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of my project, participants...

1. Identify two symptoms of personal or academic stressors.
  - Measured by recognizing triggers to stress and writing down causes and effects of stress-related issues.
2. Indicate three stress management and coping techniques
  - Measured by assembling stress management techniques and relay its importance in one's personal circumstances.
3. Understand and be able to discuss stressors and demonstrate techniques.
  - Measured by reviewing techniques and assessing its benefits or effectiveness, to then improve upon techniques based on inclination.

### **Method**

#### **Day 1**

Beginning my first session, which was conducted via zoom, I started by asking the group of twelve students if they knew what stress means. I then explained to these first graders that

essentially stress is having a lot of feelings about something that may seem like too much to handle. I moved on to explaining what I had planned for them to learn about the topic of stress. I told them they would be watching a short video and then do a Kahoot online quiz on the video. Introducing the topic and plan took about five minutes. This two-minute video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpOrMqDoqE>, was on managing stress and the focus was the effects stress can cause, as well as techniques to help when feeling stressed. I paused throughout this two-minute video to make sure they understood the key points that were being demonstrated. I also did this to ensure the first graders were engaged throughout the video and did not get distracted. After the video, I transitioned to the Kahoot online quiz, where I read each question and answers, out loud to the students. The students then completed the Kahoot online quiz, see Appendix A for what question and answer options the quiz consisted of. This took around ten minutes. Concluding this session, which took another ten minutes, I asked about specific subject matter that was presented in the video and Kahoot online quiz. I also asked what everyone's thoughts were and what they learned from the day's activities.

## **Day 2**

I began by asking the thirteen students what they remember about what stress is. I told the class they would be watching another video and completing a Kahoot online quiz, to then end the session with a drawing activity of a stress coping strategy that would be shown in the video. This conversation took around five minutes. The video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK5KOXLT15g>, was another two-minute video and it focused on symptoms or signs that may be present when you begin to feel stressed. Throughout the video, I again paused multiple times so I could go into more detail about certain information. When beginning the quiz, I read each question and answer out loud to the students. They



completed the Kahoot online quiz, see Appendix B for questions and answer options. This took them about ten minutes. After talking about what was learned, there was a drawing activity they participated in, see Appendix C. That took about five minutes. The drawing activity was for the students to be able to practice a stress management technique they learned from the videos.

### **Results**

Learning outcome 1 was that participants would identify two symptoms of personal or academic stressors. I believe this outcome was somewhat met. From videos shown and discussions that were had, the students were able to display their knowledge of signs of stress. As a part of the 2-day lesson, I conducted a Kahoot online quiz to specifically assess if the students could identify two signs of stress. See Table 1, the third question was: what is an example of what can cause stress, where 83% of the students got correct. Another question that was intended to assess whether the students reached this learning outcome was: which one of these is a sign of stress? See Table 3, the first question, of the participants, 71% answered this question correctly. The questions were answered correctly by the majority of the students, but the questions strayed from what my learning outcomes originally stated.

Learning outcome 2 was that the students will be able to indicate three stress management techniques or coping strategies. I believe this outcome was met within the two sessions that I conducted. In Table 1, question 2, it asked: what is something that can help when feeling stressed. This was to determine one stress management technique, and out of my participants, 83% got this correct. Table 3, question 1 contains another question asking about a different stress management technique than from the first quiz. The question being: which is a way to help with stress, 79% of the students answered this correctly. A third question was asked, in the form of a true or false statement. See Table 3, question 4, where it states you should do something you enjoy when feeling stressed. Out of my participants, 86% answered correctly.

These questions resulted in high percentages of correct answers, which can be determined as my outcome is met.

Learning outcome 3 was that the participants will be able to understand and be able to discuss stressors and coping mechanisms. This outcome was not met. Unlike the first two learning outcomes, this one was not able to be measured. Although after each session I conducted, some students were engaged in discussion about what was learned from the video and quizzes, it was not enough for me to assess whether the learning outcome was met.

### **Discussion**

I believe that this project was partially successful. The outcomes that needed to be met were discussed and the participants were tested on them, but with the testing method, outcomes could have been met in a more substantial way. There was a bit of a misalignment between the first learning outcome and the questions in the quiz, which was placed in order to assess whether the learning outcome was met. The second outcome was met, and the third outcome was not able to be measured. In my opinion, the project did work because it consisted of two sessions with groups of first grade students watching a video and being taught a lesson about stress management. Overall, the results came out high, with 75 percent correct, and the subject matter appears to have been learned, but there was just a small mishap between subject matter and quiz content and my learning outcomes.

My results were somewhat consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This theory focuses on the observational aspect of behavior and emotional reactions. The key point in my teaching method was to display a lesson focused on visual learning by playing videos for them to watch. The videos displayed characters that showed certain behaviors and actions. My goal was for the children to observe what was shown in the video and learn the key themes by

being able to copy what they saw. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children will learn better by watching behaviors and copying them. With that, my objective was that the children would be able to identify stressors, coping strategies, as well as be able to discuss what they had learned from the lesson.

To be more inclusive of diversity, my only slight change would be to make the curriculum a bilingual-friendly lesson. My participants were in a dual-language classroom, learning in English and Spanish. Although the majority of the students are able to understand and participate in English. There were one or two students who may have struggled more, and it reflected in the results.

Along with making my curriculum into a dual language course, I would also include video examples of real life situations where students face stress and show exactly what to do to calm themselves. That way, after watching multiple scenarios of stress regulation, my participants would have learned observationally. I would also make different quizzing activities for the students to test their knowledge and understanding that might be more specific than the Kahoot online quizzing method.

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Table 1

*Quiz Results of Session 1*

Session 1 Table					
	A.	B.	C.	D.	Percent %
What is stress?	Feeling happy	<b>Having bad feelings</b>	Singing	Laughing with friends	67%
What can you do to help when you are stressed?	Homework	Do not tell anyone	<b>Take deep breaths</b>	Scream	83%
What is an example of what can cause stress?	<b>Losing something important</b>	Eating a popart	Watching TV	High Fiving your friend	83%
With stress, it is hard to think clearly, learn, and remember things.	<b>TRUE</b>	FALSE			83%
When feeling stressed, you should stay in place and not talk about it.	TRUE	<b>FALSE</b>			58.00%

*Table 2**Student's percentage of correct answers of Session 1*

Session 1 Student Results	Percentage of correct answers
Student 1	100%
Student 2	100%
Student 3	100%
Student 4	80%
Student 5	80%
Student 6	80%
Student 7	80%
Student 8	60%
Student 9	60%
Student 10	60%
Student 11	60%
Student 12	40%

Table 3

*Quiz results of Session 2*

Session 2 Table	A.	B.	C.	D.	Percent %
Which one of these is a sign of stress?	<b>Only focusing on bad things.</b>	Watching your favorite show	Spending time with your family	Playing with toys.	71%
Is having a lot going on in your life a sign of stress?	<b>TRUE</b>	FALSE			71%
Which is a way to help with your stress?	Scream	<b>Relax</b>	Shout	Yell	79%
When you're stressed, you should do something you enjoy.	<b>TRUE</b>	FALSE			86%
You should be active when feeling stressed.	<b>TRUE</b>	FALSE			71%



*Table 4**Student's percentage of correct answers of Session 2*

Session 2 Student Results	Percentage of correct answers
Student 1	100%
Student 2	100%
Student 3	100%
Student 4	100%
Student 5	100%
Student 6	100%
Student 7	100%
Student 8	80%
Student 9	80%
Student 10	60%
Student 11	60%
Student 12	40%
Student 13	40%

*Appendix A*

*Kahoot Quiz 1 focused on meaning and stress management techniques*

1. What is stress?
  - A) Feeling happy B) Having bad feelings C) Singing D) Laughing with friends
2. What can you do to help when you feel stressed?
  - A) Homework B) Don't tell anyone C) Take deep breaths D) Scream
3. What is an example of what stress can cause?
  - A) Losing something important B) Eating a popart C) Watching TV D) High-fiving a friend
4. With stress, it is hard to think clearly, learn, and remember things.
  - A) True B) False
5. When feeling stressed, you should stay in place and not talk about it.
  - A) True B) False

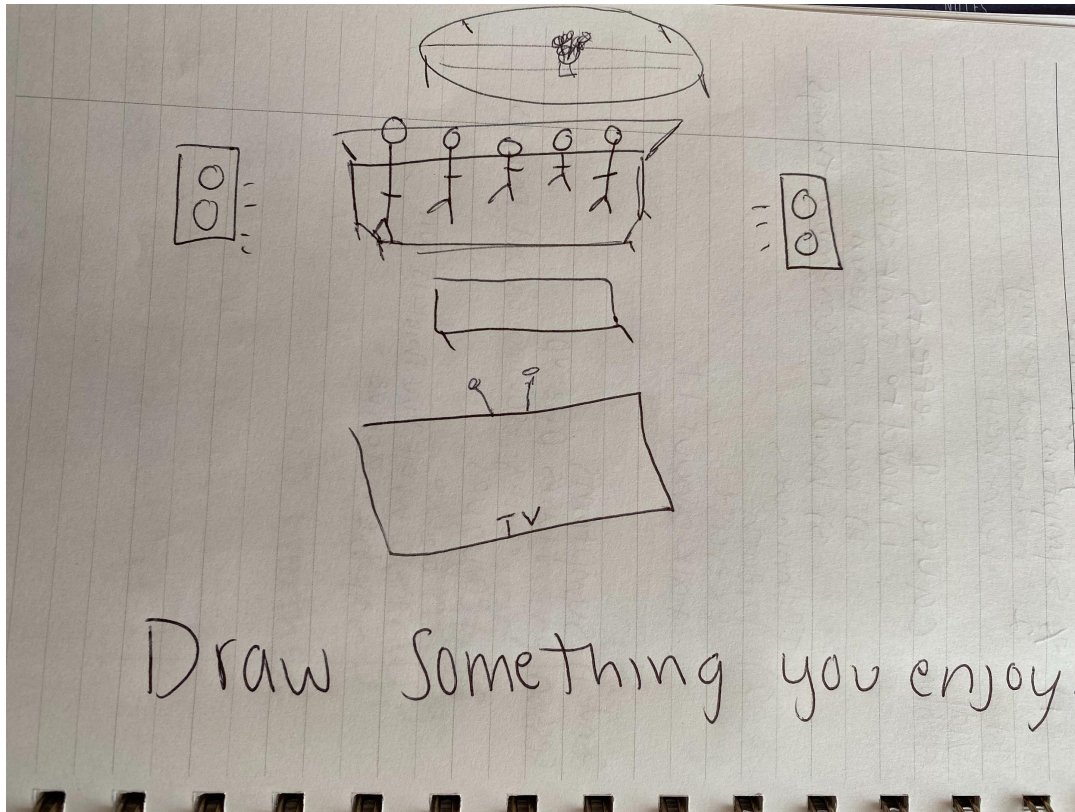
*Appendix B*

*Kahoot Quiz 2 focused on symptoms*

1. Which one of these is a sign of stress?
  - A) Only focusing on bad things
  - B) Watching your favorite show
  - C) Spending time with your family
  - D) Playing with toys
2. Is having a lot going on in your life a sign of stress?
  - A) True
  - B) False
3. Which is a way to help with your stress?
  - A) Scream
  - B) Relax
  - C) Shout
  - D) Yell
4. When you're stressed you should do something you enjoy.
  - A) True
  - B) False
5. You should be active when you feel stressed.
  - A) True
  - B) False

*Appendix C*

*Drawing activity focus for learning outcome application*



Draw something you enjoy.