

MODULE

9

“let’s talk”

STRESS REDUCTION



LEARNING GOALS

During this module, participants will:

- Map out potential stressors and crises that youth may experience.
- Understand that solid problem-solving and stress management skills can help them manage stress in their lives.
- Learn informal options and resources that may help youth cope with stress.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

Stress is a normal part of the human experience, however, when stress builds or there is a level of urgency added to stress, it can quickly escalate to a crisis. As we know, the adolescent brain is still developing, and the way young people communicate and experience stress is different from adults.

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) defines a crisis as something a person deems intolerable or unmanageable. This will vary from person to person, as each individual has different levels of tolerance and ways of coping. As an organization that provides crisis services to young people, we hear about a wide range of challenges, such as an argument with a friend and dealing with multiple forms of abuse. Our research has shown conflict resolution and problem solving are very important skills to prevent runaway incidents.

Module 9 asks participants to consider their daily experiences and the resources available to them. Participants will walk through a sample decision tree and brainstorm positive and negative options and their consequences.

ICONS

For further details, see the Introduction Module.



MODULE ACTIVITIES




ACTIVITY	TIME	METHODOLOGY
A. Defining and Identifying Stress	25 minutes	Discussion/Activity
B. Problem-Solving Skills	10 minutes	Discussion/Activity
C. Strategies to Deal with Stress	10 minutes	Discussion/Activity



Total time required: **45 minutes**

MATERIALS

- Poster paper or chalk/dry-erase board
- Markers or chalk
- National Runaway Safeline's "10 Ways to Deal with Stress" bookmarks
 *Bookmarks can be printed directly from the NRS website (1800RUNAWAY.org) or ordered through the "Materials Order Form" on the NRS website*
- "Stress + Resources = Crisis Averted" worksheet
- "Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Problem Solving Skills" worksheet
- "Decision Tree" worksheet
- "Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Stress Management Skills" worksheet



Anger, Stress, and Trauma Management + Families - Roles and Responsibilities



Consider showing the companion film, *American Street Kid*.



Contact the NRS Prevention & Youth Engagement Coordinator at **773-289-1723** or prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org for support and technical assistance.

ACTIVITY 9A

DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING STRESS



25 minutes

INTRODUCE defining and identifying stress.

STATE Let's talk about some words and their meanings that we will be using in this session. It is important we do this, because these terms can mean different things to each of us. Stress is that feeling of difficulty or worry, and a stressor is the person, place, thing, or event that causes stress. A crisis is any situation where the stress becomes intolerable or unmanageable.

When in a moment of high stress, or when we perceive a threat, our brains and bodies act instinctively to protect ourselves using a set of survival responses that have developed over millions of years. These reactions to stress are called fight (meaning your body's way of facing any perceived threat aggressively), flight (meaning your body urges you to run from danger), freeze (meaning your body's inability to move or act against a threat), and fawn (meaning your body's stress response is to try to please someone to avoid conflict). They are initiated by a part of the brain called the amygdala. This part of the brain is like an alarm, and it is always checking to make sure we are safe. When you feel worried, stressed, or scared, the alarm turns on; we don't think as clearly and our bodies react instinctively. When the alarm tells our body to "fight", we might become more argumentative, raise our voice, or even feel our muscles tighten. When our bodies enter "flight" they might feel like they need to run away or leave the situation, have a hard time sitting still, or feel their heart beating. When someone is in "freeze", they might feel disconnected from themselves, spacey, or checked out. If someone is experiencing a dangerous or stressful situation for a long time, the alarm could become overactive and perceive stress or danger even after the crisis has passed.

ASK When might stress be beneficial to our well-being?

DISCUSS responses. Examples might include emergencies, such as a home fire or car accident.

ASK When might stress be hazardous to our health?

DISCUSS responses. Examples might include arguments where someone gets out of control or is constantly worrying about potential threats or abuse.

STATE Feeling stressed for a long period of time can be negative to our overall well-being, and can be linked to mental illnesses, heart disease, high blood pressure, and other physical health conditions. In our everyday lives, stress can make even the most routine tasks difficult.

When our bodies experience trauma or high amounts of stress, these stressors (even slightly, like a smell or a sound or place) can trigger a very intense stress response.

A resource is a person, place, or thing that provides support or help in managing the stress or reducing stressors causing that feeling.

ACTIVITY 9A →

ASK What are some stressors that might be found in a young person's life?

WRITE participants' responses on a piece of posterboard or a chalk/dry-erase board. Responses might include:

- Abuse
- Addiction
- Blended families
- Bullying
- Community Violence
- Death
- Divorce
- Domestic violence
- Friends
- Housing Insecurity
- Illness or death
- Money
- Neglect
- Parent remarrying
- Peer pressure
- Pregnancy/Parenting
- Romantic relationships
- School/Education
- Sexual assault or harassment
- Systems Involvement
- Unemployment

ASK How might these stressors make someone feel? What if someone is experiencing more than 1 of these stressors in their life?

DISCUSS responses.

STATE Sometimes we have stressful events in our life that we can control, and sometimes our stressors happen independently of us. When stress becomes overwhelming and there is a lack of resources available to help manage or change a situation, a crisis may occur. Thinking back to what we learned about our brains when we're feeling a high level of stress; the alarm turns on, we don't think as clearly, and our bodies react instinctively and impulsively. This reaction helps us identify the stressors that are bringing us to the point of crisis and the resources we have to manage them.

HAND OUT "Stress + Resources = Crisis Averted" worksheets.

ASK Looking at the Young People Category, what events or feelings do most young people experience? This is also known as a "time of firsts." (For example, first time driving, first date, and first job).

DISCUSS responses. If you recreated the chart, fill in the “Young People” column with participants’ responses. These might include:

- Addiction
- Being independent
- Bullying
- Curfew
- Dating
- Doing chores
- Doing well in school
- Driver’s education
- Fights with parents
- First job
- Having friends
- Money
- Peer pressure
- Pregnancy/Parenting
- Unemployment
- Wanting more freedom
- Wanting to fit in

ASK What stressors do young people often face? These might be your own or those of someone you know. Also, remember a stressor may be an event that a friend or family member experiences but still affects you.

DISCUSS responses. If you recreated the chart, fill in the “Stress” column with participants’ responses. These might include:

- Abuse
- Addiction
- Blended families
- Bullying
- Community Violence
- Death
- Divorce
- Domestic violence
- Friends
- Housing Insecurity or worrying about a place to stay
- Illness or death
- Justice System Involvement
- Money
- Neglect
- Parent remarrying
- Peer pressure
- Pregnancy/Parenting
- Romantic relationships
- School
- Sexual assault or harassment
- STDs
- Unemployment

ASK What can happen when someone becomes overwhelmed and doesn’t know where to turn for help?

DISCUSS responses. If you recreated the chart, fill in the “Crisis” column with participants’ responses. These might include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Dropping out of school
- Drug use or addiction
- Eating disorder
- Gang involvement
- Moving out
- Problems at school
- Running away
- Self-harm
- Self-isolating
- Stealing
- Suicidal thoughts

ASK What resources or certain people might help someone in a crisis?

DISCUSS responses. These might include:

- Coaches
- Community Centers
- Doctors
- Family
- Friends
- Hotlines
- Lawyers
- National Runaway Safeline
- Neighbors
- Safe Place
- School Counselors
- Social Services
- Social Workers
- Sports
- Teachers
- Therapist

STATE Some life events may be more stressful than others, and the degree of stress one experiences may depend on the person’s unique qualities.

In most cases, the decision to run doesn’t occur “out of the blue.” That is, young people who choose to run are usually faced with a series of stressful events that lead to their decisions. We must remember that young people run for a variety of reasons. However, at each point in a stressful situation, there are resources available. If we use our resources appropriately, we may be able to avoid a crisis.

The chart shows that we have many resources to rely on during the stressful situation.

Remember that at any point during a stressful situation, you may call or text the National Runaway Safeline at 1-800-RUNAWAY or chat at 1800RUNAWAY.org and talk about what’s stressing you.

ASK Do you have any questions or comments?

DISCUSS responses.

STRESS + RESOURCES = CRISIS AVERTED

Think about whether resources could help you avoid a crisis.

Directions:

- Step 1:** Under the Young People category, list events/feelings all young people experience.
- Step 2:** Under the Stress category, list stressors some young people experience.
- Step 3:** Under Crisis, list what can happen when young people are overwhelmed.
- Step 4:** Under the Resources/Support category, list resources or individuals a young person might rely on for help.
- Step 5:** Discuss the questions. Can resources help young people avert a crisis? How??

TEENS	STRESS	CRISIS

RESOURCES/SUPPORT

ACTIVITY 9B

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS



10 minutes

HAND OUT “Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Problem-Solving Skills” worksheets.

INTRODUCE problem-solving skills.

STATE It’s important to learn your limits. There are things you can control, such as yourself and your reactions. There are things you can only influence, such as other people. And there are some issues that are outside of your power of control or influence, such as a parent’s divorce.

ASK Who has an example of a situation or issue that you CANNOT control?

DISCUSS responses.

ASK Who has an example of a situation that you CAN control?

DISCUSS responses

HAND OUT “Decision Tree” worksheets.

STATE As the handout says, we’re going to learn how to use a decision tree to help us map out options and consequences for any problem.

READ the directions to the participants.

STATE First, we want to state the stressor at the root level. Then, for every different way that the problem could be resolved—whether positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy—we create a branch. On each of these, we map out the pros, cons, and consequences of each possible solution. Do this by using different, smaller branches connected to the larger branch. The goal of a decision tree is to see all the possible options and consequences laid out on one sheet of paper, which can help us make the best decision.

DRAW a decision tree. Using the example, make a decision tree on poster paper or a chalk/dryerase board.

Draw a figure that resembles a tree trunk with roots buried in the ground. Encourage participants to find a solution to the problem you present, as well as pros and cons to the solution. Have participants consider consequences to each pro and con.

You can enlarge the decision tree from the handout in advance and post it in the room.

PRO

Avoids problem
(LEAF)

CON

Will miss dad
(LEAF)

SOLUTION

Run away
(BRANCH)

PRO

May improve situation and
allows feelings to be heard
(LEAF)

CON

May make things worse
(LEAF)

SOLUTION

Stay and talk with dad
(BRANCH)

PRO

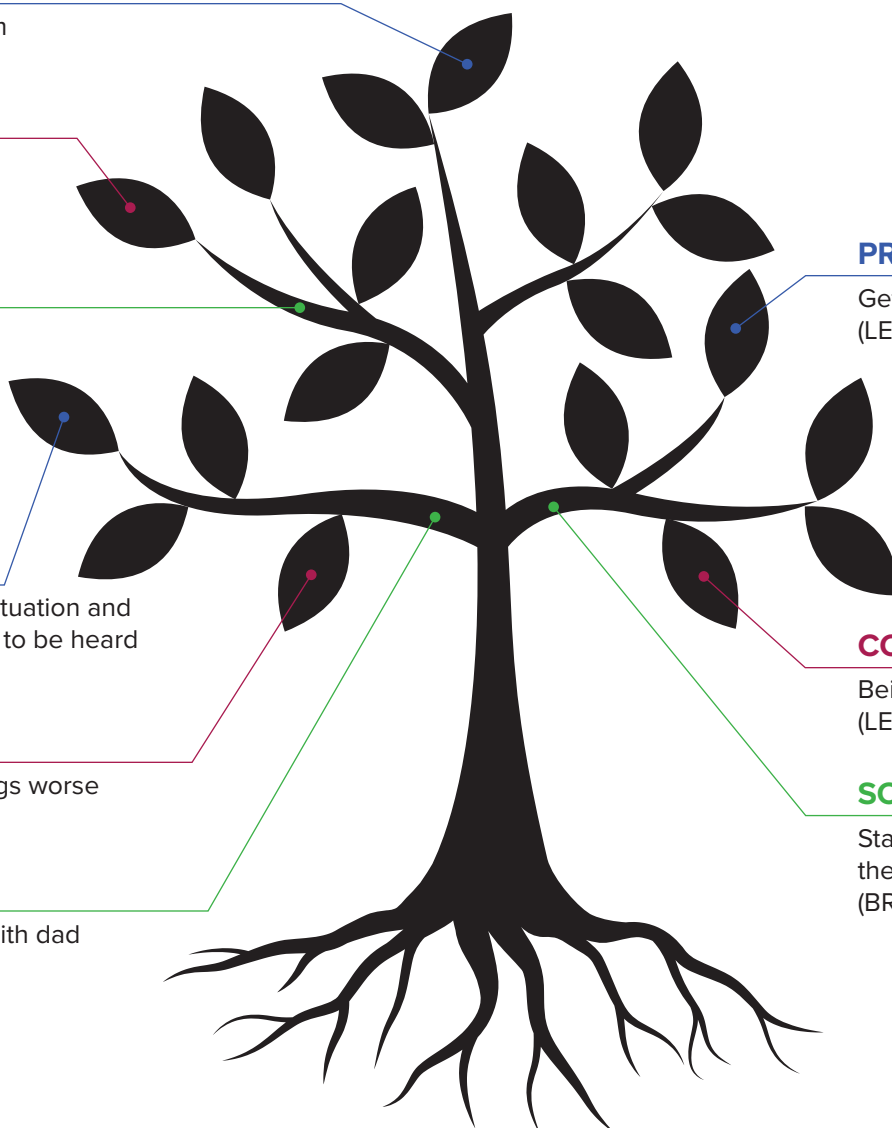
Get to stay w/dad
(LEAF)

CON

Being stressed out
(LEAF)

SOLUTION

Stay and deal with
them
(BRANCH)



PROBLEM: Fights with dad about stepmom and her children

ACTIVITY 9B CONTINUED

- STATE** Let's see an example of how to map out a problem using the decision tree before you map your own. Let's say I'm 13 and stressed out from fighting with my dad because of his new wife and her kids. So the problem that's stressing me out is I don't know how to tell my dad that I don't like my new stepmom and her children. This problem should be written at the root of my decision tree.
- ASK** What's a possible solution to my problem?
- DRAW** a branch from the tree trunk.
- ASK** What are some pros, cons, and consequences to this solution?
- DRAW** additional branches from the solution branch.
- CONTINUE** drawing solution branches and their additional branches.
- STATE** Now I'd like for you to spend a few minutes creating your own trees. You may add more branches if you need them.
- ALLOW** 3-4 minutes for participants to map out their own problem, or one of someone they know. Encourage participants to add more branches to their trees as necessary and emphasize that their trees should be as dense as possible.
- ASK** Who would like to share their decision tree? This is completely voluntary. And we must remember the importance of keeping the trees confidential. What is shared here stays here.
- ALLOW** 3-5 minutes for participants to share their trees. Reinforce the importance of confidentiality.
- ASK** Do you have any questions or comments?
- DISCUSS** responses.

DECISION TREE

Directions: State the problem at the root level. For every different way the problem could be resolved, create a branch. Map out the pros, cons, and consequences of each option, using different branches connected to the main option. Use the tree below as a guide to start your decision tree.



PROBLEM:

ACTIVITY 9C

THINGS TO DO TO DEAL WITH STRESS



10 minutes

INTRODUCE stress management skills.

STATE Stress comes from every avenue in a young person's life. Some young people can learn to manage their stress by participating in various activities or by learning coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms are ways to manage something stressful or challenging. For example, some people may cope with stress by writing a blog or journal entry while others may choose to exercise. In addition to learning helpful coping mechanisms, we can all benefit from practicing problem-solving exercises to manage stress. For the next few minutes, we'll discuss stress management skills.

Everyone experiences burnout from time to time. We're going to talk about four different activities that can help you feel better when you're feeling down. These activities correspond with four basic human needs, which are to live, to learn, to love, and to leave a legacy.

HAND OUT "Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Stress Management Skills" worksheets.

READ the worksheet to the participants.

DIVIDE participants into four groups.

ASSIGN one of the four activity areas to each group. One group will brainstorm ideas for "To Live" and will give examples of physical activities that can reduce stress. Another group will brainstorm ideas for "To Learn," "To Love," and "To Leave a Legacy."

DISTRIBUTE markers and one sheet of poster paper to each group.

STATE Now I'd like each group to title their poster according to their assigned topic. Next, list the activities for that topic that people can do to reduce stress. Be creative!

MONITOR the activity. Ideas for each topic include:

- To Live = Physical Activities (Group 1) - Going for a jog or stretching
- To Learn = Mental Activities (Group 2) - Reading a book or visiting a library
- To Love = Social and Emotional Activities (Group 3) - Talking with friends, drawing, or writing a poem or rap
- To Leave a Legacy = Spiritual Activities (Group 4) - Meditating or volunteering



Spiritual activities do not have to be religious. Some people feel that taking a walk, relaxing on a sailboat during the sunset, or volunteering is spiritual.

ALLOW 3-4 minutes for groups to brainstorm ideas and create their posters.

STATE Now I'd like for one person from each group to present their group's ideas.

ALLOW 4-5 minutes for each group to present its ideas.

HAVE each participant fill in the examples in the blanks on their worksheet.

STATE That was great! We learned how to manage stress by sharing ideas on how to make sure we're meeting our four basic needs. Now you all have written down some things that you'll remember the next time you feel stressed or have a problem.

Here's one more resource for you on ways to deal with stress. You can always call or text 1-800-RUNAWAY and talk with someone at the hotline 24 hours a day or use their online services at 1800RUNAWAY.org.

HAND OUT "10 Ways to Deal with Stress" bookmarks.

ASK Do you have any questions or comments?

DISCUSS responses.

WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Learn limits:

- What you can control—**YOURSELF**.
→ For example, the decisions you make.
- What you can only influence—**OTHERS**.
→ For example, encouraging others to be healthy and fostering healthy relationships.
- What is outside of your power of control.
→ For example, financial struggle and strain at home.

Use a decision tree to map out options and consequences for any stressor that might be in your life. This will help you make an educated decision by laying out all of your options and consequences on one sheet of paper.

STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Everyone feels run down now and then. To feel better, try activities in one of these areas:

TO LIVE = PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES	TO LEARN = MENTAL ACTIVITIES	TO LOVE = SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES	TO LEAVE A LEGACY = SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 9

SUMMARY

- STATE**
- Stress is a state of difficulty or worry.
 - Everyone experiences stress from time to time.
 - In certain circumstances, stress can be good.
 - Feeling stressed for prolonged periods of time or in situations where stressful responses are not necessary is unhealthy.
 - A stressor is a person, place, thing, or event that causes stress.
 - A resource is a person, place, or thing that provides support or help.
 - A crisis is any situation that an individual finds intolerable or unmanageable.
 - Everyone has stress and resources. The balance of these two is key.
 - When people become overwhelmed and don't know where to turn to for help, they may engage in negative or destructive behaviors.
 - A decision tree lets us see all the possible options and consequences and can help us make the best decision.
 - Coping mechanisms are ways to manage something stressful or challenging in our lives.
 - Activities that will help you feel better when you're feeling down correspond with four basic human needs: to live, to learn, to love, and to leave a legacy.

HANDOUTS AND WORKSHEETS

- A. Stress + Resources = Crisis Averted
- B. Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Problem-Solving Skills
- C. Decision Tree
- D. Ways to Reduce Your Stress: Stress Management Skills

REFERENCES

National Runaway Switchboard. (2001). *Runaway prevention curriculum for classroom and community educators*. Chicago, IL: NRS.

RESOURCES

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education, and advocacy (<http://www.afsp.org/>).

KidsHealth is a website that provides doctor-approved health information about children from before birth through adolescence. KidsHealth has separate areas for kids, young adults, and parents—each with its own design, age-appropriate content, and tone (<http://kidshealth.org/>).

National Runaway Safeline (NRS) works to keep America's runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth safe and off the streets. NRS operates the 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline (call and text) and 1800RUNAWAY.org online services, including live chat, email and forums. NRS provides youth and families in crisis with support and access to resources 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (<http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org>).