



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



STRATEGIES TO MINIMIZE MY STRESS

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: All children, teenagers and young adults

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals | Parents



Centre RBC
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– Details: E.g. Teachers, professionals and parents of children, teenagers and young adults.

TARGET AUDIENCE: All children, teenagers and young adults

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– All children, teens and young adults who would like to try strategies to reduce their stress and anxiety.

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To provide concrete strategies and practical tools to better manage stress and anxiety.

TOOL CONTENT

This web page provides an explanation and practical tools for the following stress management strategies:

- Physical exercise;
- Diaphragmatic breathing;
- Cardiac coherence;
- Muscle contraction;
- Mindfulness;
- Yoga;
- Contact with nature;
- Artistic activities;
- Drawing;
- Dance;
- Singing;
- Music.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Link to the web page: Stratégies pour apprivoiser mon stress

<https://sante-mentale-jeunesse.usherbrooke.ca/je-suis-un-jeune/boite-a-outils-2/strategies-pour-apprivoiser-mon-stress/>

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Strategies to Minimize My Stress

Are there strategies to help you manage stress? There are an infinite number of them and you probably know several! I hear you asking, “Yeah, so then why am I still stressed?”

I'm going to tell you something very straightforward, but it's a bit more complicated to put into practice (I admit). Despite all these strategies, not everyone reacts in the same way. In short, what works for one person won't necessarily work for you! So, you may have to try a few strategies before you find one that will change your life (or at least give you a little peace and quiet)!

Also, there are no miracle solutions—other than commitment and practice. To be effective, you have to regularly practise the strategy you've chosen. And by “regularly,” I mean when you feel stressed AND when you feel good. In fact, the more you practise the strategy when you feel good, the easier it will be to use when you're stressed.

Physical exercise

Exercise has many physical and mental health benefits, including a decrease in muscle tension and improved sleep. It also improves the metabolization of adrenaline and thyroxine (two natural substances that increase feelings of apprehension and alertness) and the production of endorphins (a natural substance that causes a feeling of well-being) (Leroux, 2016).

Here are some websites to give you ideas:

Children: [Bouge au cube Zumbatonic](#)

Teens: [Zumba avec Subito texto](#)

Adults: [Entraînement Cardiomilitaire](#)

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If you are experiencing intense stress or anxiety, in order to relax, you should focus on physical movements that require a large range of motion, such as walking, running, swimming and dancing (Leroux, 2016).

Diaphragmatic breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing!?! Let me explain. When you practise diaphragmatic breathing, to properly use your diaphragm, you have to take long, deep breaths and do the same when exhaling. The diaphragm is the muscle that separates your lungs from your stomach and has the function of controlling your lung's expansion (during inhalation) and contraction (during exhalation). Researchers have shown that practising this type of breathing helps reduce stress, among other things (Hopper, Murray, Ferrara & Singleton, 2019).

To practise, place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Inhale through your nose, slowly counting to three. At that moment, your diaphragm goes down and you should feel your belly swell. Then exhale through your nose, slowly counting to three. Your diaphragm will rise and you should feel your belly deflate. Be sure to keep the muscles of your face, shoulders and stomach relaxed. With a little practice, you will soon feel the relaxing benefits of this practice.

Cardiac coherence

Have you ever noticed the effect that your emotions can have on your body? For example, when you're overcome by a strong emotion, do you feel your heart racing, beating faster and stronger? Then you're feeling consumed by this emotion and panic!

However, you can regain control of your emotions by regulating your heart rate. This will bring you back to a state of calm and well-being.

There are mobile apps to help you practise cardiac coherence: [Respirelax](#) on iPhone and [Ma Cohérence Cardiaque](#) for Android.

Here's a 5-minute Cardiac Coherence exercise on YouTube: [Relaxation anti-stress](#)

How do I regulate my heart, you ask? Simply by using your breathing. Studies show that the speed of breathing is directly related to that of heartbeats. This helps to change your mental balance, reduce your stress and anxiety and be calmer (Montreal Heart Institute, 2017). Optimally, it takes five to seven breaths per minute to feel its relaxing effects.

Muscle contraction

Muscle contraction or Jacobson's method, known as “progressive relaxation,” is based on the principle that there is a relationship between emotional state and muscle tension: the tighter you are, the less relaxed you are. As indicated by the name, it was popularized by Dr. Edmund Jacobson (1888-1983), an American physician. This technique involves tightening and relaxing certain muscles using successive exercises in order to induce a state of muscular and psychological relaxation. (Leroux, 2016).

For example, you can take a stuffed toy in your arms or a stress ball in your hand, squeeze it very tightly for 5 seconds and release it. You can repeat the exercise a few times to feel the calming effects.

Here's a guided progressive relaxation for teens and adults:
[Relaxation progressive de Jacobson](#)

Mindfulness

Recognized for its beneficial effects on reducing stress and anxiety (Berghmans, Tarquinio & Kretsch, 2010), mindfulness is a state of consciousness that results from paying sustained, intentional and non-judgmental attention to what is happening in the present moment. It may be practiced formally with meditation or in a more informal way.

Formal meditation consists in being in the present moment of your experiences: what you feel in your body, head and heart and what is happening around you (for example, noises in the room) while keeping your attention on the focus of your meditation (for example, your breathing).

You can also informally practise mindfulness by focusing your attention on every moment of a daily activity, such as eating, for example, by enjoying each bite. You thus experience the present moment (Curry & Kasser, 2005).

Here are a couple links to try mindfulness exercises:

[Mindfulness meditation audio links for children and teens](#)

[Guide de présence à soi](#)

Yoga

Yoga combines posture, breathing and meditation in a quite dynamic way. It's a great way to promote physical and mental balance. Yoga promotes relaxation, calm, emotional management, body knowledge, flexibility and muscle building. In addition, it helps to reduce stress and anxiety (Streeter, Whitfield, Owen, Rein, Karri, Yakhkind, Perlmutter, Prescott, Renshaw, Ciraulo & Jensen, 2010).

Group studio classes are sometimes offered to children, teens and adults. You can also practise yoga from the comfort of your home using free online videos.

Here are a few examples:

Children: [Cubes d'énergie : Yoga pour enfant](#)

Teens: [Yoga pour adolescents](#)

Adults: [Hatha yoga débutant "une découverte en douceur"](#)

Contact with nature

A great deal of research has shown the positive impact of contact with nature on mental health. For example, a 30-minute walk in the wild reduces stress, increases relaxation, decreases blood pressure and heart rate (Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs, 2019). Go for a walk outside, in a park, forest or wooded area and explore various aspects of nature with your 5 senses:

Sight: Take the time to observe around you, look into the distance, or closer up, or look at the sky, ground or any other element of nature within your reach; breathe deeply while carefully observing your environment for two or three minutes. Natural light stimulates essential functions of the brain, the nervous system and endocrine system; this has a positive effect on mood and energy levels (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002).

Hearing: Listen carefully to the sounds around you for a few minutes. The closest, the farthest, the ones that are pleasant or unpleasant. Are there moments of silence? Silence has been recognized as a kind of brain shower. It releases tension in just two minutes (Borrelli, 2016). In addition, sounds in nature facilitate recovery from psychological stress. Birdsong is often associated with this stress recovery and attention restoration (Ratcliffe, Gatersleben & Sowden, 2013).

Touch: Touch tree bark with the palm of your hand, ideally with your eyes closed. Take a deep breath and keep this position for at least a minute and a half. Touching raw wood with the palm calms the activity of the prefrontal cortex and induces parasympathetic nerve activity, thereby inducing physiological relaxation (Ikei, Song & Miyazaki, 2017). In addition, bark is bactericidal, that is, it kills bacteria, in order to protect the tree.

Smell: Breathe deeply and feel the air that enters your lungs. Is it cold? Hot? Dry? Moist? What smells do you recognize? The air is cleaner under trees because they act as filters. They also spread phytocides, known for boosting the immune system and reducing stress hormones (Matthews & Jenks, 2010).

So let nature take care of you!

To find out more, check out this video:

<https://youtu.be/iUxbuyUkBdM>

Artistic activities

“Bringing art into someone's life through activities such as dancing, singing or visiting museums and attending concerts gives us an additional key to improving our physical and mental health,” says Piroska Östlin, WHO Regional Director for Europe. Art is therefore an excellent complement to traditional medicine, whether to help you manage physical health problems (diabetes, obesity, etc.) or mental health problems (reduce stress, improve self-confidence, sleep, etc.) (World Health Organization, 2019). In addition, the pleasures we derive from it are undeniable.

Art allows human beings to express themselves through something other than speech, thus leaving aside intellect, logic and control. Art allows you to access aspects of yourself that speech does not always manage to bring out (Martin, 2014).

Drawing

By drawing, you not only use your senses, but you also learn to follow your intuition and trust yourself. No matter what shapes you trace or the colours you use, there is no right or wrong answer. The drawing reflects what's going on inside of you. The practice of all forms of art facilitates mindfulness, since it brings about a complete immersion in the present moment and attaches as much importance to the process as to the result, without making any judgment (Willard & Salzman, 2017).

Here are some free links to draw mandalas:

Children: [Mandala](#)

Teens and adults: [Mandala](#)

Dance

Dance is a language, a universal mode of body language and emotional expression (Burkhardt & Brennan, 2012) that allows you to increase your well-being. In fact, it increases your production of endorphins, those happiness hormones that naturally fight stress and anxiety.

In addition, the movements initiated by dance help eliminate tension accumulated in your muscles, caused, for example, by maintaining bad posture (Hanna, 2017).

You can dance freely to music you love or you can have fun creating choreography using inspiring videos.

Here are a couple examples:

Children: [Zumba Kids](#)

Children and teens: [Waka Waka This Time for Africa](#)

Singing

Did you know that singing, specifically group singing, can have many positive effects? Participants in a study showed various benefits in different aspects of their lives, including social and health benefits, their feeling of accomplishment and personal satisfaction (Plumb & Stickley, 2017).

In addition, after a group singing session, the level of cortisol, a stress marker easily found in saliva, significantly decreases.

If group singing isn't for you, you can feel the benefits of solo singing. Have you ever felt the calming and relaxing effect after singing loudly? Besides, you know what? You don't even need to have any talent to enjoy it (Collingwood, 2016).

Music

Here are a couple examples:

[Musique classique pour enfants](#)

[Classical Music for Anti-Stress Effect & Stress Relief: Bach and Mozart](#)

It is known that music has calming effects. This is particularly true for gentle and relaxing music, which calms our body and mind. Classical music has an even greater impact on health. It has an effect on certain physiological functions, such as slowing down the heartbeat, decreasing blood pressure, and decreasing cortisol, the stress hormone. Music is therefore a very effective stress management tool (Collingwood, 2016).

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