



I Am So Stressed Out!!! (An Emotional Health Story) (4th Grade – 9-10 yrs)

This story talks about stress and how it relates to emotional health and behaviors.

- A little bit of stress prepares our bodies for action and activates our sympathetic nervous system – also known as the “fight or flight” system. Too much stress can actually hurt your body and your brain.
- Stress acts on the same parts of your brain that control your emotions, so you need to identify how stressful situations make you feel and act and what kinds of situations you find stressful.
- By understanding how your emotions and behaviors change when you are stressed out, you can then control how you react to the stressful situation. This will help you to feel better about yourself and the situation, which is important for protecting your brain.

• SLIDE #1 - INTRODUCTION:

Good Morning (Afternoon)!

My name is _____ and I (describe who you are and give your relation to neuroscience – ex. you are a Neuroscientist, you study neuroscience, you have a friend that is a neuroscientist or you have recently been learning a lot about neuroscience).

Neuroscience, that’s a really big word! But, a neuroscientist is a person who knows a lot about the brain.

I am here today to talk to you about how you can help to make your brain healthy – feeling good. It is REALLY easy and anyone can do it.

I love to talk about Brain Health because it’s SPECTacular!!! SPECTacular means “GREAT”. When your brain is SPECTacular, you are a happy and healthy person.

This story is about Emotional Health – which is the E in SPECTacular. Emotional Health helps your brain stay healthy when you understanding about how you “feel” – your emotions.

There are lots of emotions. Being happy, sad, surprised, disgusted or mad. These are all emotions.

Understanding that we have emotions and how we control our emotions is very important to making our brain healthy.

When you understand your emotions and learn how to control your emotions, that makes your brain healthy.

So, let’s see how you can keep your brain healthy.

• SLIDE #2 – I Am So Stressed Out!!!

Being stressed out actually can affect your emotions. Being stressed out can change your motivation to do things. Being stressed out can make you more negative. Being stressed out can change the way you behave.

If stressful situations affect your behaviors, that means they are also affecting your brain – and in a negative way.

So, understanding what kinds of things stress you out and how to handle those stressful situations is important for keeping the emotional parts of your brain healthy.

SLIDE #3 – STRESS

First, what is stress?

Stress is a response that your brain has to certain kinds of situations. Stress gets your body ready to respond to a situation.

A little bit of stress is good – it gets your brain to tell your heart beat, pumping blood to your muscles, it makes you breathe faster, so you have oxygen in your blood that can go to your brain. A little bit of stress gets your body ready to do something.

A little bit of stress also activates the emotional parts of your brain so that you care enough about what you need to do that you are motivated to do your best.

SLIDE #4 – LITTLE BIT OF STRESS IS GOOD

There are going to be situations, when you feel a little bit of stress – which is a good thing. You may feel nervous or a bit anxious, but this is only because you care about what you are doing. You have worked hard to prepare and want to do a good job. Your brain activates your stress response so that you can do what you need to do.

So, what are some examples of when stress is good?

Let's say that you are playing soccer and you get the ball when you are right in front of the opponent's goal. You get a little nervous – you want to score. You are ready for this – you have practiced. You move the ball towards the net as fast as you can – avoiding other players who are trying to steal the ball - and you give the ball a good hard kick. Score.

Your brain is happy – the stress was good because it got your body and brain ready to score.

Or, let's say it is your turn to talk in the school play. Your friend says their lines and then it is your turn to speak. You look out into the audience and you see lots of people. You feel like you have butterflies in your stomach, you are a bit nervous. You are ready for this – you have practiced. You take a deep breath and your brain tells you what you are supposed to say. You open your mouth and you speak in a loud, clear voice. You see the people in the audience all smiling.

Your brain is happy – the stress was good because it got your body and brain ready to talk in the school play.

SLIDE #5 – TOO MUCH STRESS – NOT GOOD

While a little bit of stress is a good thing, too much stress – or being stressed out for too long a period of time is not a good thing.

Too much stress is not good – for your body or your brain. In fact, too much stress can actually damage your body and your brain. Too much stress can wreak havoc on the emotional parts of your brain. It can cause you to feel angry, sad, insecure, and scared. It can also cause you to feel any combination of these emotions.

Now, instead of caring about what you need to do – you do not care at all. You can become very negative and you can even “shut down”. Not wanting to do anything – even the things that you usually like to do.

SLIDE #6 – IF YOU ARE TOO STRESSED – YOUR BRAIN IS NOT WORKING RIGHT

If you are too stressed, then your brain will not be able to help you to do what you need to do. Your brain is not working properly.

Let’s go back to the playing soccer example. You get the ball when you are right in front of the opponent’s goal. You do not get nervous, in fact, you do not even care who wins this game. When one of the other players comes over to try to steal the ball, you trip the player and you get called for foul. Your team ends up losing the game...but, you do not even care.

Or, let’s go back to the school play example. It is your turn to talk in the school play. Your friend says their lines and then it is your turn to speak. You look out into the audience and you see lots of people. You think – “What are all these silly people doing? They just want to see me mess up.” Because you did not spend time memorizing your lines, you mumble something and then the other kids continue with the play. You do not care about the stupid play and you do not want to be there. You just walk off the stage and leave even though the teacher is calling your name.

Too much stress can cause you to do behaviors which can get you into trouble and can cause you to lose friends, but because too much stress can damage your brain – you do not care.

SLIDE #7 – STRESSFUL THINGS

So, if stress can do so many bad things to your body and brain and can affect your emotions so much that you become negative and do not care anymore – then obviously we need to learn how to handle the stressful situations in our lives.

QUESTION: What are some of the situations that you encounter where you say, “I am so stressed out!!!”?

List of things that might stress out 4th graders. Yes, I can see how some of these situations can be stressful.

- Taking a test
- Writing an essay
- You don’t know an answer
- You want to get all A’s
- Too much homework
- Sports
- Being home alone

There are SOOOOO many things that can stress you out!!! And, these are just some of them. There are also things going on at home, with friends, and with neighborhoods.

SLIDE #8– 2 KINDS OF STRESS

We can separate stressful situations into 2 different kinds of stressful situations, the ones you can control and the ones you cannot control.

It is important to figure out what kind of situations stress you out because each situation can be handled differently.

For the stressful situations that we can control, we can prepare for and do what we need to do so that the situation no longer activates our stress response to cause damage to our brain.

Like organizing our schedule to have time to get ready for that school project or exam. Or, practicing our soccer skills so that games are more fun because we are ready.

There are a lot of stressful situations which you can control – once you know what is causing you stress.

For the stressful situations that we cannot control, we can come up with coping mechanisms that will allow us to deal with the stress so that it does not damage our brain.

Everyone is different, so the types of coping mechanisms may not be the same for all people. You can take deep breaths, talk to people you love and trust or come up with other ways that help you to COPE with the stress that is out of your control.

SLIDE #9 – CONTROL THE SITUATION

If you can identify situations that cause you stress and then figure out which ones you can control, then you can probably eliminate a lot of that stress. This will protect your emotional brain.

If you get stressed out when you have to take a test – this is actually something that you can control.

You just need to organize your schedule so that you have time to prepare for the test. This also means that you need to figure out the best way for you to prepare. It may be rewriting your notes, or practicing math equations, or making up flash cards, or saying the information out loud. Everyone is different and you need to figure out the best way for you to prepare.

Based on what we know about the brain, whatever you do to prepare should be done in multiple times prior to having to use the information. We know that every time you use information, it gets stored better in your brain.

If you get stressed out when you are in loud places – this is something that you can control.

You can get headphones that cancel out noise. This way the loud place will not stress you out.

If you get stressed out when you have to play a sport, or perform in a play or musical event, then this is something that you can control.

You need to practice or prepare so that you can do the best you can do. Remember, these are things that you are doing presumably because you like something about doing it.

Either you want to learn and get better, or you like to do it because you like the people that are doing it with you. So, do not think you have to be perfect – you just need to enjoy yourself and do your best.

Coming up with practical ways that allow you to control your response to stress will help you to feel better and will help your brain stay healthy.

SLIDE #10 – BE PREPARED

Remember, it is okay to get a little nervous or anxious before stressful situations – like taking a test, or playing in a soccer game, or are trying to work in a classroom that is too loud.

Getting a little stressed only means that you care enough to do your best and your brain is getting your body ready to do what you need to do.

As long as you have prepared for these situations, then you should not get too stressed out. You can have control over the situation.

When you realize that you have control over the stressful situation, then you will be motivated to do what you need to do and you can be happy with yourself whatever the outcome. This will definitely help your brain stay healthy.

SLIDE #11 – NO CONTROL

Now, remember there will always be some situations that you cannot control.

Maybe your family has to move around a lot, so you are always going to new schools.

Maybe you have lots of siblings – lots of responsibilities and not enough space in your house to do your work.

Maybe there are people that are always fighting in your house.

These are situations where you do not have control and they can be very stressful.

SLIDE #12 – NO CONTROL

When you are in a stressful situation that you cannot control, you need to realize that even though you cannot change the situation you can control how you respond to the stress.

First, figure out how the situation is affecting you.

Let's say you live in a house where people are always fighting. How does this make you feel? Are you sad about it or does it make you feel angry and then you start fighting too?

Remember, stress has a negative effect on the emotional parts of your brain. So, if you do not do anything about how you are feeling it is going to hurt your brain.

You may start behaving badly, not just at home but at school too. You may start to not care about anything anymore. If these things happen, then you are too stressed.

SLIDE #13 – COPE

You need to be an advocate for yourself, which means you have to help yourself. You can help yourself by talking to people in your support system. You need to figure out how to deal with this stressful situation that you cannot control. But, remember...you are not alone.

You can talk to people in your support system; family, friends, teachers, doctors, counselors. Remember, a support system is made up of people you trust. Tell them how the constant fighting is making you feel.

People in your support system may know how to stop the people who are fighting from fighting all the time.

They may also be able to give you ideas of what you can do, so the constant fighting does not hurt your brain.

Coming up with practical solutions – coping mechanisms – will give you some control over how the stressful situation is affecting your emotional brain.

Even if the stressful situation is one you cannot change or control, by coming up with coping mechanisms you will be doing something and that will help your brain stay healthy.

SLIDE #14 – COPING MECHANISMS

You need to learn how to know when you are feeling too stressed and then you need to do things that will help you alleviate – or get rid - of the stress.

If people are always fighting at your house and it is stressing you out, you could try to ignore it and go into another part of the house. But, if that does not work, you need other options – coping mechanisms.

Maybe instead of going home and trying to do your homework where everyone is fighting, you can go to a friend's house to study – or go to the community center or the library.

Maybe you could do something nice for the people who are fighting. Doing something nice always makes your brain happier and maybe it will stop the people from fighting.

Getting involved with other groups after school either doing something physical, like sports or dance classes, or just playing outside – this will help your brain to be healthy even though the stressful situation is not changed.

You need to keep trying to figure out what you can do so that the stressful situation is not hurting your brain health.

SLIDE #15 – TAKE CONTROL

In our soccer example, instead of trying to score a goal, you got angry with the player who tried to steal the ball and you tripped them. Yup, we are probably stressed out about something.

When you feel your emotional response (or your behavior) to a situation does not match the situation, then you are probably stressed out.

One thing that we could do is to take a deep breath and try to figure out what is stressing you out. Then, try to figure out if it is a situation that you have some control over or one that you have no control.

It turns out that the people who are always fighting in your house make it impossible for you to do your homework or get a good night's sleep. You are always in trouble at school and you are always tired.

So, you were not really angry at the player who was trying to steal the soccer ball, you were just tired and angry with life. You are way too stressed out.

Acknowledging your emotions is a good thing and trying to understand and control your emotions and your behaviors, will help you to deal with whatever stressful situation you are in.

Taking control of how you respond to stressful situations is something that will help you keep your brain healthy.

SLIDE #16 – YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE

When you are behaving in a way that is disrespectful to yourself and others - like acting out in school or at home, or shutting down and not caring about anything - then you are probably stressed out and you do not even know it.

You are responsible for your emotions and for your behaviors.

If stress is making you feel and do things that are making you unhappy or keeping you from being the best you can be, then you need to figure out how to deal with the stressful situation.

Remember, you do not have to do this alone. Talking to people in your support system will help you to take control of the situation and may help you come up with ways to handle how you are responding to the stressful situation.

SLIDE #17 – DEALING WITH STRESS

Because stress can have such a negative effect on your emotions and your behaviors, you need to learn to identify when you are feeling stress - before you get too stressed out.

Then you need to ask yourself if this is a situation that you can control or one that you cannot control.

If the stressful situation is one you could have controlled – by preparing yourself, like getting ready for a test – but, you did not. Forgive yourself for your mistake and LEARN from it. Learning to prepare for situations that have the potential to stress you out will mean there will be less stress in your life.

If the stressful situation is one that you cannot control, then using one of your coping mechanisms to help you deal with the situation will allow you to feel like you are in more control of your emotions and your behaviors. This will make you feel better about yourself and the better you feel about yourself the easier it will be to handle these stressful situations.

Whatever you do, do not let your stress get so bad that you are unable to control your emotions, or you do not care about anything and you just “shut down” or become negative about everything.

If this happens, then you are definitely too stressed out and you are not helping your brain to be healthy.

If you deal with the situation, by identifying what is stressing you out and then being prepared for the things you can control and coping with things you cannot – then you will be a happier healthier person AND so will your brain.

SLIDE #18 – CONCLUSION

Thank you all for letting me talk to you about what to do when you are stressed out.

I have enjoyed spending time with you today talking about the brain. I hope that you have had some fun and learned something about your brain.

REMEMBER, learning to recognize when you are feeling too much stress and then figuring out what kinds of situations are stressful for you will help you to come up with coping mechanisms to deal with the stress. You can PREPARE for the stressful situations you can control and you can COPE with the stressful situation you can control. By understanding how your emotions and behaviors change when you are stressed out, you can then control how you react to the stressful situation. This will help you to feel better about yourself and the situation which is important for protecting your brain. And, helping your brain stay healthy is SPECTacular.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR HELP!!! Brain Health is not just SPECTacular...it is FUN!!!