

Grade 8: Healthy Mind and Emotions

Lesson 6: Puberty and Changing Emotions: What's Going On With Me and What Can I Do About It?

Objectives:

1. Students will identify elements of mental and emotional health.
2. Students identify the mental and emotional developments in puberty.
3. Students will explore how positive self-concept and self-esteem are part of emotional health.
4. Students will identify effective strategies for identifying and expressing emotions.
5. Students will explore the relationship between stress and the mind.
6. Students will identify strategies for coping with stress by strengthening mental and emotional health.

Activity Summary:

In this lesson students will examine the elements of mental and emotional health, the impact of puberty, and the how a positive self-concept and self-esteem is important for emotional health. Students will identify strategies for identifying and expressing emotions and coping with stress by strengthening mental and emotional health.

Background Information for the Teacher:

Puberty and emotional, mental and social development

The growth and sexual development hormones released during puberty not only change the physical body, but the mind and emotions as well. Emotions during this time can be an unpredictable, and seemingly uncontrollable rollercoaster ride. Becoming more easily upset, anxious, or sad, as well as experiencing new sexual feelings can be a fairly confusing mix for most young people to adjust to. All of these changes are, of course, normal even they make it challenging to be around an adolescent.

During puberty young people:

- Develop more complex thinking and reasoning skills
- Increase their understanding of the complexities of many issues and decisions
- Exhibit a preference for the opinions and influence of friends and peers over parents and family relationships begin to lose importance
- Develop an attraction to the opposite sex
- Feel emotions more intensely
- Experience wide emotional swings and moodiness
- Have an increased awareness of the emotions of others

- Begin to think of themselves in the larger context of their community rather than only within their family
- Begin to consider new ideas, values, and attitudes that may be different from their family of origin
- Begin to create a sense of their own identity

Teens have the difficult job of discovering themselves just as their body is making huge life-changing shifts. The young person's self-concept and self-esteem often begin to alter along with the changes occurring in their body. This is a time when important patterns and habits of thought and belief are laid down. These patterns can become a template for behaviors and attitudes lasting well into adulthood. Since everything is in such flux for the young person, the opportunity to develop healthy and affirming self-beliefs and habits is just as great as the opportunity to develop unhealthy and harmful ones.

Elements of Mental and Emotional Health

Good mental and emotional health involves the ability to accept yourself and others, and to deal constructively with the challenges that life brings your way. It requires many qualities including:

- Resiliency
- A positive outlook on life
- A positive view of yourself
- The ability to put things into perspective
- The ability to learn from mistakes and disappointments
- The ability to understand and manage your feelings
- A sense of humor helps, too!

Good emotional and mental health affects every part of life. Being mentally healthy helps us feel good, happy and productive in our life. When we are in a mentally or emotionally unhealthy state we feel unhappy, often hopeless, and distressed. Cultivating good mental and emotional health deserves as much attention from the growing teen as any of the behaviors and habits needed for a healthy physical body. A person who is mentally depressed manifests the effect in their physical body, their social and family connections, and their academic life. The same holds true for any other significant mental and emotional difficulty such as anxiety or anger,

Positive Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

Developing and maintaining a positive self-concept and self-esteem is definitely a challenge for most teens, but being able to do so goes a long way towards creating and maintaining lasting mental and emotional health.

Self-concept is the view we have of ourselves. Having a positive, realistic and accepting view of ourselves is important. Recognizing our strengths and talents, accepting the areas where we are not as strong and talented and viewing them

as opportunities for learning and growth is healthy. Constantly focusing on our limitations and mistakes is not a healthy approach to life. This is where the ability to put things in perspective is definitely useful.

Self-esteem is the way in which we value ourselves and is connected to self-concept. A poor self-concept can contribute to low self-esteem. If we have difficulty learning math or a foreign language, we could tell ourselves that we are “stupid” or not smart. We might be quite a creative writer or artist but if the “I am not smart enough” message is played too long and too loudly in our heads we can end up generalizing a difficulty in learning math to other areas, ending up with a negative self-concept and devaluing ourselves. High self-esteem encourages us to try new things, take risks, learn from our mistakes, and create our own success. High self-esteem helps us view ourselves in a positive light.

Whatever we give a lot of “thought time” to will contribute significantly to our emotional state. If we focus a lot of attention on negative thoughts about not being smart enough, good enough, pretty enough, strong enough, etc., we won’t feel very happy or satisfied. Anxiety, sadness, fear and even depression can be the outcome. On the other hand, if we give a lot of mental energy to positive, uplifting thoughts about our good qualities and talents, and even our mistakes, then happiness, joy, and compassion can be the emotional outcome. We get what we focus on. Understanding and managing our emotions is an important skill for good health.

Understanding and Accepting Emotions

Emotions are created in response to events, ideas, and situations. Emotions are a normal, natural part of being human. Being able to feel the emotional rainbow of happiness to sadness, joy to fear, and love to anger is healthy. Knowing that emotions are just emotions and not attributing qualities to them such as “good” or “bad” is helpful in keeping our emotions in perspective. We can’t always choose our emotions but we can choose what we do with them and how we react to them.

For adolescents, feeling emotions perhaps more intensely than before, feeling them swing from one to a seemingly opposite emotion, and managing the expression of those emotions can prove bewildering.

Identifying Emotions

Emotions sometimes come fast and furious and all jumbled up. Even so, learning how to sort through them is quite helpful. It may take a bit of time, and might require being still and quiet.

Here are four steps that help identify emotions:

1. Slow your breathing. Take a long, very slow, and full breath. Hold for a count of four. Exhale very slowly, to the count of four.

2. Close your eyes, or soft-focus them on the floor or wall. Disengage visually for a moment from your surroundings.
3. Pay attention to your feelings, but not your thoughts—not what you are telling yourself in your head. Concentrate only on your feelings.
4. What are your feelings? Name them. Repeat to yourself what your feelings are--ALL of them.

Some examples of feelings are: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, love, anxiety, jealousy, and empathy.

Expressing Emotions

Constructive expression of our emotions is another skill level in mental and emotional health. We have all learned to express emotions from watching the people around us. We watch what they do and learn to do the same thing, sometimes without realizing it. In normal growth and development, we have to learn for ourselves how to express emotions and not simply copy what we see others doing.

1. The first step in expressing emotions is identifying the emotions you are feeling.
2. The second step is to clarify the cause of the emotions. Ask yourself:
 - What has been happening in this situation or with this person?
 - What are the events leading up to it?
 - What am I thinking might happen if the situation continues?
3. The third step is figuring out what to do. How do you want to respond?

When feelings come fast and furious and we often don't give ourselves enough time to respond appropriately. Instead of taking a short "breather," we react in the moment, and the momentary reaction can cause additional hurt, upset, and misunderstanding.

What we want to do is move away from **reacting to** our feelings and instead be **responsive with** our feelings. Often the difference between an emotional response and a reaction is a few seconds, or a minute, or counting to ten, or taking a deep breath, or taking three deep breaths. *Anything that disrupts the immediacy of stimulus-response and gives us a chance to pause can be quite helpful in expressing emotions constructively.*

Sometimes when situations are especially confusing, fear-inducing or hurtful, talking to a friend, a parent, or a teacher who will listen is very helpful. Sometimes just admitting the feelings that you have may help lessen the intensity of them and bring clarity to the situation. Writing in your journal, going for a walk or a run, doing something for someone else, reading something inspirational or calming, drawing a picture, or even mowing the lawn can be helpful. Activities

that take you away from the immediacy of the situation so that your feelings and thoughts can settle are beneficial, allowing what you really feel and how you want to express to become clear.

Stress and the Mind

The body is built to withstand acute stress that is suddenly and immediate. Hormones surge as the body prepares for “fight” or “flight.” Part of the acute stress response is the eventual **recovery** from the stress event, when the body restores itself to normal.

When chronic stress occurs the effects can be debilitating. Constant emotional and/or mental pressure produces a stream of hormones that weaken the immune system, and when there is no break from the stress the adrenaline and cortisol that are released as part of the stress response can have a negative impact on the body. Although the immediacy of an acute response can serve many useful purposes, unremitting long-term stress and the accompanying continuous activation of the nervous system and release of these and other hormones can harm the immune system and use up the body’s reserves.

Some of the same strategies that help manage stress also support mental and emotional health. Much stress is mentally self-induced. It is not so much an event or a person itself as it is what we are telling ourselves about that event or person that is causing us so much stress.

- One of the most effective stress coping strategies involves **managing our thoughts**. Managing thoughts helps keep things in perspective, or helps us feel that events and situations are not out of control or all bad. Managing our thoughts helps us manage our emotions, and helps keep them from running away with us.
- **Develop a positive attitude**. Look at the big picture, and keep things in perspective. This is a mental skill and is about managing thoughts, staying with positive thoughts, and not dwelling on thoughts that create worry, fear and magnify problems out of proportion.
- **Cultivate positive self-esteem and self-concept on a daily basis**. Be realistic, patient, and encouraging with yourself. Give yourself positive strokes, just like you would with your best friend.
- Go to sleep at a good time so you **get enough sleep every day**. Fatigue eats away at mental health, clarity, being optimistic, rolling with disappointments, and good moods.
- **Practice what helps you relax every day**. Really relax. Don’t keep the pressure on yourself 24/7.

- **Solve or let go of the problems of everyday life, every day.** Don't let them accumulate in your life, and don't let them accumulate in your mind and emotions either.
- **Use the calming breathing exercises** (or Relaxation Response at end of lesson) to slow our thoughts, emotions and bodies down when we are stressed out.
- **Build your resilience.** This is a trait that can be cultivated if it doesn't come easily to you. People who are able to be resilient with stressful circumstances are able to "take things in stride". They have perspective that problems and difficulties are temporary and not permanent, believe in themselves and their ability to handle difficulty, believe in their self-worth, use problem-solving strategies, and balance themselves with play, relaxation and strong family and friend relationships.

Vocabulary:

Self-concept
 Self-esteem
 Mental health
 Emotional health
 Acute stress
 Chronic stress
 Adrenaline
 Cortisol
 Resilience

Engage:

1. Ask students to identify music videos, movies, television programs, or video games which demonstrate **healthy** emotional growth, development, and/or expression.
2. Next, have students identify some that show **unhealthy** emotional growth, development, and/or expression.
3. Choose three of each type that are familiar to most of the students.
4. Ask: "**How do these different formats show healthy emotional development and expression? How do they show unhealthy development and expression?**" Help students analyze these different venues for the messages they contain about emotional development and expression. Describe specific words, personal behaviors, actions towards others, etc.
5. Have students summarize their analysis and contribute their own opinions about healthy emotional development. Create a list of descriptive

behaviors, attitudes, and modes of communication that demonstrate healthy emotional development and expression.

Explore: (Students may work individually OR in small groups for the following activity.)

1. Question: ***“What is different about your stress levels and emotions now from when you were two (or three) years younger?”*** (Think of situations involving family, friends, school, athletics, personal interests, and goals.)
2. Divide a piece of paper into two columns. Label one column **“NOW”** and the other column **“TWO YEARS AGO.”** Under each column list the events, situations, and concerns that you feel stressed about (or have stressed you in the past) and describe the kinds of emotions you felt. Review both columns and do a quick write about the differences.
3. Have students share their information. Discuss the kinds of things that caused stress at an earlier age and now. Discuss the changes in emotions.
4. Question: ***“What is the difference between now and then? What’s happening with your development that might be contributing to these changes?”***
5. Have students brainstorm ideas. Discuss answers. Draw out the connections between puberty and mental, emotional, and social development.

Explain:

1. Organize students to work in small groups. Have groups review the lists they made of stressors in the Explore activity. Compile all the stressors into one combined list.
2. Have the entire class create a Likert scale of 1 to 5, 7, or 10. Decide on the values and the definition of the values as a class. (For an explanation of the Likert scale and its use, go to: www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/scallik.php)
3. Have the groups apply the scale to their stressor list. Rank each event on the scale. Have the groups discuss the reasons for their rankings. What makes one event more stressful than another?
4. Have each group report back their results to the class.

5. Ask: ***“What is the connection between your mind, your thoughts about these events (people, concerns, etc.) and the amount of stress you feel?”*** (Discuss answers.)
6. Ask: ***“What is the connection between your thoughts about these events, etc., and the emotions you feel?”*** (Discuss answers.)

Practice the connection between thoughts and emotions

1. Have the students sit quietly and focus on their breathing for a couple of minutes. Think about a situation in the past few weeks that was particularly stressful for you. Recall the thoughts you had about that situation. Recall those thoughts for a couple of minutes. Now recall how you felt about the situation. Recall those emotions for a couple of minutes.
 - a. Slow down your breathing. Take a long, very slow, full breath. Hold for a count of four. Exhale very slowly, to the count of four.
 - b. Keep your eyes closed, or soft-focus them on the floor or wall. (Disengage visually for a moment from your surroundings.)
 - c. Focus on your feelings and your emotions. Pay attention to your feelings, **BUT NOT YOUR THOUGHTS**—not what you are telling yourself in your head. Just the feelings.
 - d. What are the emotions you’re feeling? Name them. Say to yourself what the feelings are. All of them.
2. Have students spend a few minutes writing what they recalled about that particular situation, along with their thoughts and the emotions they named, on a piece of paper for a few minutes. Ask students to share their experience.
3. Ask: ***“What process did we use to identify our feelings?”***
4. Clarify the four steps for identifying feelings.

Key Steps in Dealing with Emotions

1. **Accept and understand your feelings.** Don’t judge them, and don’t believe they will last forever.
2. **Attempt to identify your feelings.** Practice the four steps when you feel confused, distraught and upset. Identifying our emotions is the first step to expressing them effectively.
3. **Express feelings constructively.** Attempt to clarify the cause of your emotions. Ask yourself:
 - ***“What has been happening in this situation or with this person? What are the events leading up to it?”***

- ***“What am I thinking might happen if the situation continues?”***
4. The final step is figuring out what to do. Ask yourself: ***“How do I want to respond?”*** Ask: ***“What are other helpful strategies in dealing with emotions?”***
- Talking to a friend, a parent, or a teacher who will listen helps.
 - Just admitting the feelings helps lessen the intensity of them and gives clarity.
 - Writing in your journal, going for a walk or a run, doing something for someone else, reading something inspirational or calming, drawing a picture, or even mowing the lawn can be helpful.
 - Activities that take you away from the immediacy of the situation allow your thoughts and feelings to subside, and help you calm down.

Ask: ***“What helps you handle the stress of your life?”*** (Have class brainstorm ideas. Emphasize that 1) Strategies that help manage stress also support mental and emotional health; 2) Much stress is mentally self-induced; and 3) It is not so much an event or a person itself as it is ***what we are telling ourselves about that event or person that is causing us so much stress.***) Other key points:

- One of the most effective stress-coping strategies involves **managing our thoughts**. Managing thoughts helps keep things in perspective, or helps us feel that events and situations are not out of control or all bad. Managing our thoughts helps us manage our emotions, and helps keep them from running away with us.
- **Develop a positive attitude**. Look at the big picture, and keep things in perspective. This is a mental skill and is about managing thoughts, staying with positive thoughts, and not dwelling on thoughts that create worry, fear and magnify problems out of proportion.
- **Cultivate positive self-esteem and self-concept on a daily basis**. Be realistic, patient, and encouraging with yourself. Give yourself positive strokes just like you would with your best friend. Give yourself a lot of affirming and realistic “thought-time.”
- Go to sleep at approximately the same time every night so you **get enough sleep**. Fatigue eats away at mental health, clarity, being optimistic, rolling with disappointments, and good moods.
- Practice what helps you relax every day. Really relax. Don’t keep the pressure on yourself 24/7.

- **Solve or let go of the problems of everyday life, every day.** Don't let problems accumulate in your life, and don't let them accumulate in your mind and emotions either.
- **Use the calming breathing exercises** (or Relaxation Response at end of lesson) to slow your thoughts, emotions and body down when you are stressed out.
- **Increase your resilience.** This is a trait that can be cultivated if it doesn't come easily to you. People who are able to be resilient under stressful circumstances are able to "take things in stride." They maintain the perspective that problems and difficulties are usually temporary, they believe in themselves and their ability to handle difficulties, they believe in their inherent self-worth, they use problem-solving strategies, and they balance work and stress with play, relaxation and strong family and friendship relationships.

Extend: Group Study Project

1. Have students work in research/study groups to explore the effects of chronic stress and the use of sensory therapies for stress reduction. Information can be gathered from school and local library as well as internet sources.
2. The following topics should be explored among the groups:
 - Physiologically, what is chronic stress? What causes it and what are its effect on the body?
 - How does color affect stress levels? Can the effects be measured scientifically?
 - How does music affect stress levels? Can the effects be measured scientifically?
 - How does aromatherapy affect stress levels? Can the effects be measured scientifically?
 - How does biofeedback affect stress levels? Can the effects be measured scientifically?
3. Students can recommend other related topics, keeping the focus on scientific evidence and other information about non-traditional stress reduction/management approaches. Groups should compile their information and results and give oral presentations to the class. Written reports with appropriate graphs, charts, and supporting research data, should also be presented.

4. Have the class draw conclusions about what they consider to be the most effective stress reduction methods from the overall evidence presented.

Evaluate:

- **Individuals** - Analyze the relationship between your self-concept and your emotional health and the relationship between your self-esteem and your emotional health. Create strategies for strengthening your emotional health and for managing your stress.
- **Groups** - Have students choose several of the events or concerns they identified in the Explain activity as being the most stressful. Assign small groups to work on one event. Develop a scenario for this event and write a short skit to act out the situation. What roles are involved? What emotions are involved? How can the situation and the emotions be dealt with?

Have group members role-play the different parts, practicing different ways to handle the situation and accompanying emotions and exploring different communication strategies. Present scenarios to the entire class.

Finally, have students complete write about how they can incorporate these ideas and strategies into their own approach to handling their emotions and behavior in stressful situations.

Additional Web Resources:

- Teen Health Homepage at Kidshealth.org - <http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/>
Search: Stress, Anger, Depression, Dealing with Anger, All about Anxiety

Missouri Standards

Health and Physical Education Frameworks

II. Health Maintenance and Enhancement

D. Life Management Skills

What All Students Should Know:

1. Life management skills such as stress management...can be applied to personal situations that adolescents encounter.

What All Student Should Be Able To Do:

- e. Apply stress management skills to reduce stress-related problems