

NEXT ENGINEERS



ENGINEERING ACADEMY

Unit 2 Stress and Time Management



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Stress and Time Management is part of the Engineering Academy series curated by FHI 360 for Next Engineers. Next Engineers is a college and career readiness program that inspires and develops the next generation of engineers. Adapted content and graphic design courtesy of FHI 360.



Stress and Time Management

Time	Ages	Cost	Group size
90 minutes	15-18	Low	Pairs

Overview

In this activity, students will learn about the causes and symptoms of stress, in addition to healthy coping strategies to manage it. This activity will be followed by a discussion of time management and strategies that can improve overall well-being.

Learning outcomes

As a result of this activity, students will be able to:

- Understand what stress is, recognize symptoms, and explore how it can be helpful or harmful to performance.
- Learn and apply various strategies for managing stress and time.

Materials

- Laptop or computer with Internet access and projector
- PowerPoint Presentation: Stress and Time Management
- Student Handout: Stress and Time Management, *1 per student*
- Colored pencils or markers, *available to each student*
- Timer

Optional Materials for The Jar of Life Demonstration:

- 1 Clear glass or plastic jar, approximately 1 liter or 32 ounces
- A mixture of the following items, enough to fill the jar:
 - Large rocks, approximately 2-3 inches wide
 - Pebbles or marbles, smaller in size than the rocks
 - Sand

Preparation

1. Print copies of the student worksheet for each student or share a digital version.
2. Preview resources to ensure they are appropriate for your students. For The Jar of Life Demonstration, decide if you will do the demo live or show the video. For a live demonstration you will need the materials listed above.
 - **The Stress Bucket**
<https://youtu.be/FrfYcNFKi3A>
 - **The Jar of Life**
https://youtu.be/cMBM7K_yHog

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

These are the sets of skills necessary for students to succeed in postsecondary education and work settings as determined by universities and employers.

The employability skills addressed by this activity:

- Self-management skills



- **The Eisenhower matrix: How to manage your tasks with EISENHOWER**

<https://youtu.be/tT89OZ7TNwc>

What to do

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise (15 minutes)

- **Slide 1:** Welcome students and begin the session with a grounding exercise to help students focus their attention and lower any stress they may be feeling in the moment. Start by asking students to sit in their chairs with their feet flat on the ground and nothing in their hands. Everyone should remain seated and quiet throughout this exercise.
- **Slide 2:** Next, ask students to focus on their breathing, taking deep steady breaths. One by one, read the prompts below. Allow a few moments before moving on to the next item:
 - **What are 5 things you can see?** Look around the room and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before, maybe a pattern on the wall or an object in the corner.
 - **What are 4 things you can touch?** Maybe you can feel the texture of your clothes or the firmness of the floor under your feet. Pick up an object close by and notice the texture.
 - **What are 3 things you can hear?** Notice all the background sounds you were filtering out, such as the air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars driving by in the distance.
 - **What are 2 things you can smell?** Maybe you can smell coffee or the scent of leftover food. Hold up a scarf, jacket, or other piece of clothing to your nose and smell it.
 - **What is 1 emotion that you feel?** Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and try to identify what you are feeling right now. Maybe you feel calm, sleepy, or curious.
- After the final prompt, ask students to open their eyes. Lead a quick debrief of this exercise by asking for a few volunteers to share their thoughts. How are they feeling afterward? Is this a helpful technique for lowering stress? How many students will try this again?
- Share with students that the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise is an example of a grounding technique. These are strategies that can help us manage stress and anxiety and focus our minds on the present. Now that everyone is feeling a little more grounded, the session will move into a discussion about stress.

All About Stress (35 minutes)

- **Slide 3:** Ask the group: What is stress? Call on a few students to share their definitions.
- **Slide 4:** Show and read the definition of stress and stressor.
- **Slide 5:** Show the examples of internal and external stressors. Ask students to share any other examples they think could be added to the lists.
- **Slide 6:** Note that not all stress is bad. There is a connection between our stress levels and our ability to perform. The graph demonstrates this relationship (moving from left to right):
 - When we have too little stress/stimulus, we may find ourselves bored and unable to focus. Think about trying to study when you are tired.



KEY VOCABULARY

Stress: A feeling of emotional or physical tension

Stressor: An internal or external stimulus that causes stress

Coping strategy: The thoughts and actions used to manage our response to stressful events. Unhealthy coping strategies may feel good in the moment but have long-term negative consequences. Healthy coping strategies may not provide instant gratification, but they lead to long-term positive outcomes.

Grounding techniques: Strategies to help us focus our mind on the present and relieve feelings of stress and anxiety

Eisenhower Matrix: A tool for prioritizing tasks by urgency and importance, also referred to as "Urgent-Important Matrix"



- As our stimulus level increases, so does our attention. Think about an athlete who psyches herself up before a game – she is channeling her nervous energy into her performance.
 - If our stress gets too high or lasts too long, then we may experience anxiety. Too much stress makes it difficult to focus on the task as our body and mind can get overwhelmed.
- Direct students to turn to a partner and share about a time when their stress level impacted their performance – either positively or negatively.
- **Slide 7:** Distribute copies of the Student Handout. Explain that everyone experiences stress differently and it is important that we can recognize our own signs of stress. With their partners, students should discuss the various ways people exhibit physical, emotional, and behavioral signs of stress. Allow students a few minutes to fill out the Signs of Stress section of the worksheet.
- **Slide 8:** Review the examples of physical, emotional, and behavioral signs of stress. Now that students have a better understanding of stress and how to recognize it, the next portion of the activity will focus on relieving stress.
- **Slide 9:** Show the video [The Stress Bucket](#). The video names a few ways that we can stop our stress from building up.
- **Slide 10:** Review the list of healthy coping strategies. Explain that coping strategies are the actions we take to manage stress.
 - Unhealthy coping strategies (such as procrastinating or eating junk food) may provide temporary relief, but they do not relieve stress in the long term (and may create more problems later).
 - Healthy coping strategies may not provide instant gratification, but they address our needs and are beneficial in the long term to minimize stress.
- **Slide 11:** Direct students to complete their own stress bucket and coping strategies on the student worksheet. Allow about 10 minutes for them to write down the stressors they experience and make a list of healthy coping strategies that will stop their bucket from overflowing.
- Wrap up this section by letting students know that the next part of the session focuses on time management, which is one of the best coping strategies for managing stress.

Time Management (30 minutes)

- **Slide 12-13:** Start by asking everyone to stand up or raise a hand if they are seated. Move to slide 13 and explain the instructions. Cover all the clocks and watches in the room, or have students close their eyes. Set a timer for one minute and instruct students to sit down when they think a minute has passed.
- **Slide 14:** Start the timer and notice that students will sit down at various times during the minute. After the time expires, ask everyone to return to their seats. Use the slide to explain that the purpose of this exercise was to show that we all experience time differently.
- **Slides 15-16:** To help us manage our time, we can use different strategies to prioritize our tasks. To demonstrate this concept, use [The Jar of Life](#) demonstration. Show the video on the slide OR do the live demonstration. Slide 16 summarizes the meaning of the demonstration and the value of prioritizing our time.
- **Slide 17:** To help students learn how to prioritize, show the video [The Eisenhower Matrix: How to manage your tasks](#).



- **Slide 18:** Review the parts of the matrix, also called the Urgent-Important Matrix. On the student worksheet, students should fill out the matrix:
 - First, make a list of your tasks and responsibilities for the upcoming week.
 - Next, review the tasks and determine the urgency and importance of each one.
 - Finally, organize and write the tasks into the four quadrants.
- Allow about 10 minutes for students to complete the matrix. If they are having trouble prioritizing, encourage them to talk through their tasks with a partner.

Conclusion (10 minutes)

- **Slide 19:** To end the session, ask students to respond to the reflection questions. Ask students to write down their responses and encourage them to return to these reflections when they are experiencing stress.
 - Why is it important to have multiple healthy coping strategies?
 - Think about the Jar of Life demonstration, what are the big rocks that you want to add to your jar over the next year? How will you create space?
- **Slide 20:** Answer any questions students may have, as time permits.

References

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