



# LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

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## P.L.U.S. Parent's Guide Lesson 8 Stress and Anger Management

This lesson focuses on two connected issues. The first being *stress* and the second being *feelings of anger*. We define stress as *a body's reaction, both mental and physical, to things that happen to it*. Anger can be one reaction to being stressed. But.... does anger always come from stress? No. However, anger certainly causes stress.

This lesson begins by creating some *stress* in the class. The P.L.U.S. Officer announces a pop quiz. As you can imagine the students' stress level climbs as the P.L.U.S. Officer proceeds with each question. We find that one of the biggest stress producers is the desire to *do well*. After a few minutes of "*taking the test*" we let the students know that we were just performing an experiment. We discuss what just happened to the students during the *test*. How did they react mentally and physically? The reactions to this are very mixed. Some of the students feel as though they could have done better knowing the test was coming, others feel tricked, some are relieved because it wasn't really a test, and others are disappointed because they were going to do really well.

*Physical Stress* is caused by a release of adrenaline (a natural chemical in our body) into the body that prepares us for "fight-or-flight" response. We explain that anything that causes stress is a stressor. Stressors can have positive or negative effects on us. Some *stress* is good because it helps us perform better - like being able to run faster to get away from something dangerous or maybe scoring the extra point needed to win the game. When *stress* builds up and has no way out of the body it becomes dangerous to us. Some reactions to trapped adrenaline (*stress*) inside the body are: increased heart rate and breathing, tensing of muscles, headaches, increase in body temperature, trouble falling asleep, or feeling jittery, upset, and tense. A prolonged build up of *stress* is harmful to us, and our bodies try to find ways to release it. We discuss among the class different appropriate ways to help reduce *stress*. Some of the ways the students suggest are: exercising or being physically active, studying for a test ahead of time, talking with your parents about what is bothering you, relaxing by reading a book or listening to music, taking a walk and getting in touch with your feelings, going to a quiet place where you can think, accepting things about yourself that you cannot change and changing the things you can that you don't like, scheduling your time, taking a deep breath and slowly let it out, and sometimes just crying. We then ask the students if they think using drugs would get in the way of any of the things we just mentioned. Their answer is "YES".

Drinking alcohol is the most identified drug associated with reducing stress. The message is loud and clear throughout our society: If you want to relax and have fun....reach for a drink. Alcohol affects the brain, which in turn numbs ones feelings..... momentarily. BUT has the stressor gone away? No! Tobacco is another drug of choice related to stress reduction. This is another myth. The drug nicotine is a stimulant, causing your heart to beat faster, your blood vessels to constrict, and your blood pressure to go up. Does this sound like your body is relaxing? The relaxation related to tobacco use only happens after addiction to nicotine. The body craves nicotine, the nicotine is acquired by smoking, and the body relaxes because it got the drug it needed. Marijuana is another drug thought to help reduce stress, which couldn't be further from the truth. Marijuana affects two of the four memory portions of the brain (*Today thinking*, Short term memory, *Long term memory*, Futuristic thought). Normal growth and development has gotten many youth into trouble for things they didn't remember to do or for bad decisions they had made. Let's add to this normal process a drug which inhibits *short term memory* and *futuristic thought*. These youth can remember when life was going well (*long term memory*), but now it's not (*today memory*). A feeling tends to develop within the user that they are being treated unfairly or unjustly because he/she can't remember the conversation or rules talked about a few days ago (inhibited *short-term memory*). If you put all of these incidents together, the feeling adds up to one of great frustration. The last part of the memory to be affected is *futuristic thought*. This is the part of the memory that gives us our motivation, goals and dreams. Combine the frustration developed by the effects marijuana has on the brain with a loss of goals and dreams for a future and a lack of motivation to be able to change things. This is a formula for suicide. Marijuana is so much more powerful

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today that these effects happen faster and are more severe than experienced by marijuana users of years gone by. The messages our children get associating drugs with stress reduction is dangerous. Not only is putting the drugs into our bodies dangerous, but self-medicating our feelings, rather than dealing with them, leads to an easy, but not so healthy, escape route when other difficult issues come up.

Next the officer asks the students to think of a time when they were angry. As they do this, we ask some questions like: Where do you physically feel the anger? (stomach, muscles, heart beat, flushed face, etc.) Were your muscles tensed up? Did you feel like you wanted to hit something or yell? Did you grit your teeth, clench your fists, get red in the face, or make an angry face? Anger is full of energy, and we need to have good ways to release that energy. If we don't, we usually *explode*.

The officer then takes a balloon and blows air into it each time a student identifies something that makes him/her angry. When too much anger goes into the balloon, it explodes. The balloon demonstration is a way to show what happens when someone *pops* because of too much anger. Yelling at someone, bad language, hitting others, putting others down, and overreacting are all negative ways to deal with anger and stress. The officer then blows air into another balloon. -This time, the officer asks the students to identify positive things they can do to release some of the energy (stress) before they *explode*. Timing myself out (walking away), hitting a punching bag, screaming into a pillow, talking the problem out with someone I trust, exercising, and crying are all ways to release some of the energy (stress). We don't get rid of all of our anger, but when we are able to control our anger, it is easier to let things that make us angry bounce off. The key is to stay in control of our anger and not let it explode onto someone or something else.

We explain three rules for expressing anger:

It is NOT OK to hurt yourself.

It is NOT OK to hurt someone else (physically or emotionally).

It is NOT OK to hurt property.

The officer introduces the word *TRIGGERS: those things that get us mad immediately*. It is important to know that some things can get us mad without us even knowing why. If we can identify some of the triggers we have and know some positive things we can do to release the angry energy before we feel like we will pop, we will be well ahead in controlling our anger.

### **Student/Parent Homework (Week 8): Daily Schedule and Trigger Words & Situations**

The students are to track their daily schedule, one day during the week and one day during the weekend. They are to keep track of the general things they are doing throughout the day in no less than ½ hour increments. For example, the day could start at 7:00am *Get out of Bed*, 7:45am *Catch the Bus*, 8:30am *Start School*, 3:00pm *Home from School*, 3:30pm *Watch TV*, 6:00pm *Eat Dinner*, 7:30pm *Play Video Games*, 8:30pm *Watch TV*, 10:00pm *Go To Bed*. What does this day look like? What could your child change to reduce stress; add more time for schoolwork, be better prepared for the next day, etc.? After your child has completed both of the schedules, discuss with your child what you see is going on and what you would suggest that could help them reduce some stress.

On the other side of the daily schedule homework is a "Trigger Words and Situations" worksheet. (Most of this should have been completed in class.) Review this side of the worksheet with your child to your satisfaction.

### **Did You Know???????**

*Boys and girls encounter differences in drug offers.<sup>1</sup>*

- ⊗ Boys are usually offered drugs at younger ages than girls.
- ⊗ Boys are more likely to be offered drugs by parents, other males, older acquaintances, and strangers.
- ⊗ Girls are more likely to be offered drugs by other girls, acquaintances of same age, and older boyfriends.
- ⊗ Boys are more likely to be offered drugs in public settings, and offers typically emphasize the "benefits" of improved status or self-image.
- ⊗ Girls are more likely to be offered drugs in private settings and friend's homes with a straightforward "do you want some" or offer that minimizes the risks of use.

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<sup>1</sup> Moon, D.G.; Hecht, M.L.; Jackson K.M.; and Spellers, R.E. "Ethnic and Gender Difference and Similarities in Adolescent Drug Use and Refusals." *Substance Use & Misuse* 34 (8): 1059 1083, 1999