



TGGS Stress Management Guide

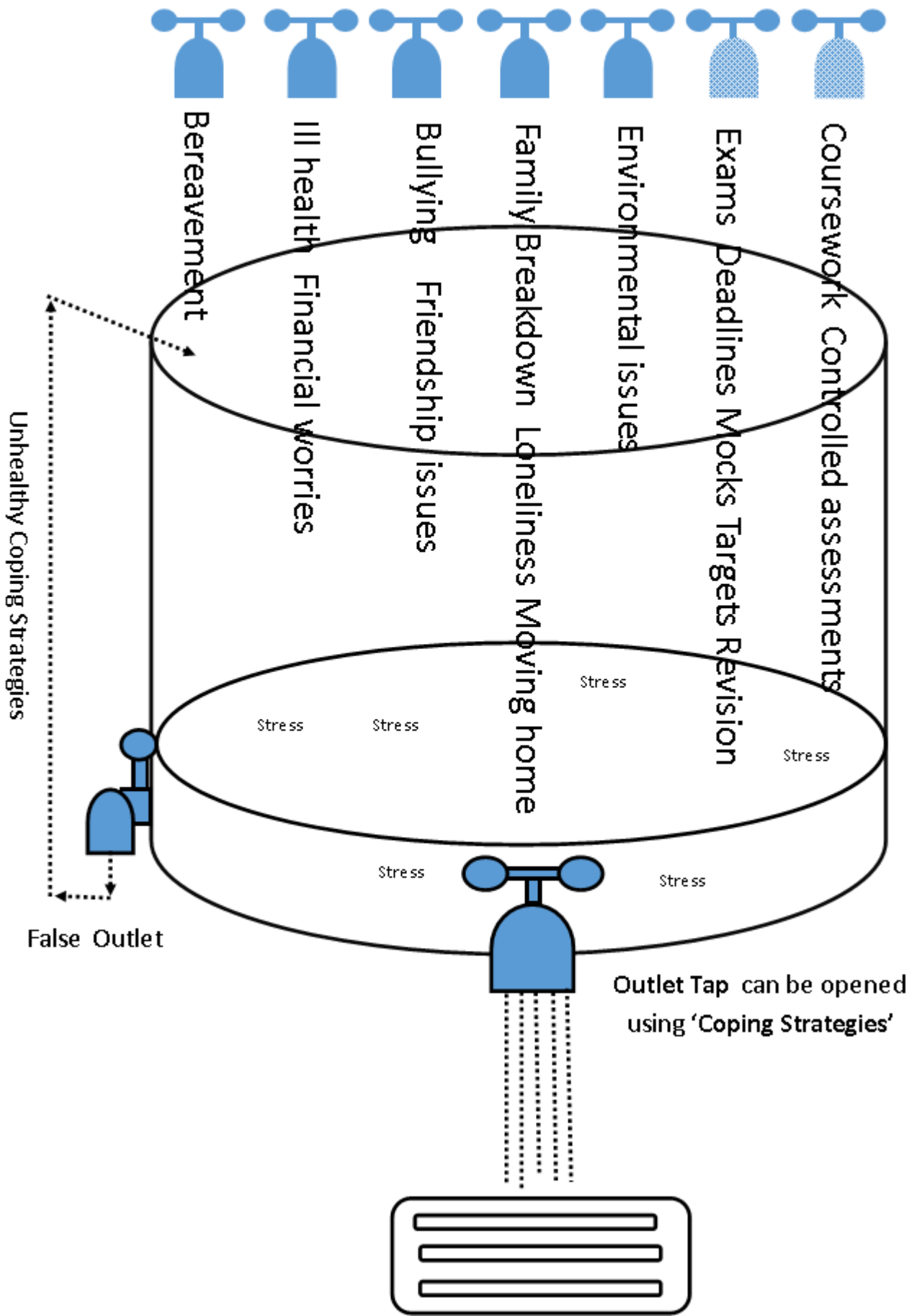
How to reduce and cope with stress; now and in the future



Using

- The Stress Bucket model
- The Six A's (Coping Strategies)
- An Appendix full of practical tips and sources of support

The Stress Bucket



The **Stress Bucket** diagram opposite can be a helpful way of looking at stress. Each of us has a different capacity for stress (bucket size.) If your bucket fills to the top and overflows it will adversely affect your mental health and you could become ill. To prevent this you can:

1. **Reduce** the flow of stress (turn off some of the taps)
2. Learn to how to **cope** with the stress you receive (open the outlet tap)

Some causes of stress you may have no control over (**Taps 1-5.**) Others like school based stresses (**Taps 6&7**) you can reduce by applying some of our **Learning Skills** like planning, being organised and knowing how you learn best.

Whatever the cause of stress, one thing you can do is to develop your ability to cope. (Open the **Outlet tap.**) No individual is stress-free, but those who are affected less are those who have developed their ability to manage stress through coping strategies.

There are some unhealthy ways of alleviating stress in the short-term (**False outlet tap**) but ultimately these cause more damage in the long run and should be avoided.

Exams won't go away, there will never be more hours in the day, and relationships can often be demanding. However you have more control over the resultant stress than you might think. Simply realising that you have some control is the foundation of stress management. Managing stress is all about taking charge: of your thoughts, emotions, schedule, and the way you deal with problems.

Identify the sources of stress in your life

Start by identifying the sources of stress in your life. Actually this isn't as easy as it sounds because your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook **your own** stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. For example you may be constantly worried about coursework deadlines, but it is possible that it's your procrastination, rather than the actual work demands, that leads to deadline stress.

To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do you explain away stress as temporary ("I just have a million things going on at the moment") even though you can't remember the last time you took a breather?
- Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life ("Things are always crazy around here") or as a part of your personality ("I have a lot of nervous energy, that's all").
- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?

It is important that you realise your role in creating or maintaining stress because only then you can begin to control it.

Start a Stress Journal

A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns and common themes. Write down:

- What caused your stress (make a guess if you're unsure)
- How you felt, both physically and emotionally
- How you acted in response
- What you did to make yourself feel better

Look at how you currently cope with stress

Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life. Your stress journal can help you identify them. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem.

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV/ computer/Xbox
- Excessive social networking
- Smoking, drinking, drugs
- Overeating or under-eating
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Sleeping too much
- Putting things off
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, arguing, irritability)
- Self-harm

Learning healthier ways to manage stress

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the six As: **avoid, alter, adapt, or accept**. The last two A's are if you change your lifestyle through certain **activities** or **adopt** a healthy lifestyle.

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Coping Strategies: The Six A's

Change the situation:

1. Avoid the stress
2. Alter the stress

Change your reaction:

3. Adapt to the stress
4. Accept the stress

Change your lifestyle

5. Activities
6. Adopt a healthy lifestyle



Stress management strategy 1: Avoid unnecessary stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stresses in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Refuse to accept added responsibilities, activities or social demands. A good example would be taking on extra part-time work in the lead up to exams because taking on more than you can handle is a recipe for stress.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely. For example, maybe you know someone out of school who is less motivated than you and always draws you away from your work.
- **Take control of your environment** – If you find it difficult to work at home, come into school early, go to the study centre or catch-up clinics at lunch-time or the library after school.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Slim down your to-do list** – Analyse your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts.” Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.



Stress management strategy 2: Alter the situation

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same. You can talk to good friends, parents, your tutor, head of year or a subject teacher you get on well with. You can also contact arrange to speak to the school counsellor if you would like to speak confidentially to someone not connected to the school
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behaviour, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty friend calls, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk. Take control of what happens to you.
- **Manage your time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.



Stress management strategy 3: Adapt to the stress

If you can't change the stress, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- **Reframe problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a time-consuming journey home, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favourite music, or enjoy some socialising with fellow travellers.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of each stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."
- **Focus on the positive.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. You girls have many! This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Adjusting Your Attitude

How you think can have a profound effect on your emotional and physical well-being. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were facing a threat. If you see good things about yourself, you are more likely to feel good; the reverse is also true. Eliminate words such as "always," "never," "should," and "must." These are tell-tale marks of self-defeating thoughts.



Stress management strategy 4: Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behaviour of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a friend, teacher, parent or counsellor. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.



Stress management strategy 5: Pursue fun and relaxing Activities

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles.
- Savour a warm cup of coffee or tea.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.
- Curl up with a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy.
- Go see some live drama/music

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or going for a walk.
- **Keep your sense of humour.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.



Stress management strategy 6: Adopt a healthy lifestyle

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

Appendix - Some quick and practical tips.

Meditation, Mini-relaxations, Anchoring and Stress relief plans

Key Points

- Effective stress relief doesn't have to take a lot of time.
- Mini-relaxations can help bring down your stress levels when you only have a few minutes to spare.
- It's important to have a personalized plan for dealing with the stresses in your life.

Sometimes just thinking about embarking on a program of stress control can be stressful. Rather than freeze in your tracks, start small and bask in the glow of your successes. Give yourself a week to focus on practical solutions that could help you cope with just one stumbling block or source of stress in your life. Pick a problem, and see if these suggestions work for you.

Frequently late or overextended? Apply time management principles. Consider your priorities (be sure to include time for yourself) and delegate or discard unnecessary tasks. Map out your day, segment by segment, setting aside time for different tasks, such as writing or phone calls. If you are overly optimistic about travel time, consistently give yourself an extra 15 minutes or more to get to your destinations. If lateness stems from dragging your heels, consider the underlying issue. Are you anxious about what will happen after you get to school or to a social event, for example? Or maybe you're trying to jam too many tasks into too little time. Take note of Mr Charlwood's sessions on Covey's Square. (*LS 1 & 2 Planning and Being Organised*)

Often angry or irritated? Consider whether your response is reasonable. Are you magnifying a problem, leaping to conclusions? Take the time to stop, breathe, reflect, and choose. (*LS 4 Managing your Emotions*)

Unsure of your ability to do something? Review your previous successes. If the problem is school work, talk to a classmate or teacher. Ask a knowledgeable friend, attend the lunchtime subject clinics or talk to one of the teaching students from the red bus scheme. Alternatively visit the library or study centre and seek help from books or on-line. (*LS 13 Confidence in your ability*)

Not enough time for stress relief? Try mini-relaxations. Or make a commitment to yourself to slim down your schedule for just one week so you can practice evoking the relaxation response every day. Slowing down to pay attention to just one task or pleasure at hand is an excellent method of stress relief.

Feeling unbearably tense? Try a hot bath, mini-relaxations, a body scan, or a mindful walk. Practically any exercise—a brisk walk, a quick run, a sprint up and down the stairs—will help, too. Done regularly, exercise wards off tension, as do relaxation response techniques.

Frequently feel pessimistic? Remind yourself of the value of learned optimism: a more joyful life and, quite possibly, better health. Rent funny movies and read amusing books. Create a mental list of reasons you have to feel grateful. If the list seems too short, consider beefing up your social network and adding creative, productive, and leisure pursuits to your life.

Upset by conflicts with others? State your needs or distress directly, avoiding "you always" or "you never" zingers. Say, "I feel _____ when you _____." "I would really appreciate it if you could _____."

Worn out or burned out? Focus on self-nurturing. Carve out time to practice relaxation response techniques or at least indulge in mini-relaxations. Care for your body by eating good, healthy food and for your heart by seeking out others. Give thought to creative, productive, and leisure activities. Consider your priorities in life: is it worth feeling this way, or is another path open to you?



Practice meditation on the go

Meditation can evoke the relaxation response, and it appears to have health benefits as well. It's also simple to perform. Here's how to get started:

- Choose a mental device to help you focus. Silently repeat a word, sound, prayer, or phrase (such as "one," "peace," "Om," or "breathing in calm"). You may close your eyes if you like or focus your gaze on an object.
- Adopt a passive attitude. Disregard distracting thoughts or concerns about how well you're doing. Any time your attention drifts, simply say, "Oh, well" to yourself and return to silently repeating your focus word or phrase.
- Now slowly relax your muscles, moving your attention gradually from your face to your feet. Breathe easily and naturally while using your focal device for 10 to 20 minutes. After you finish, sit quietly for a minute or so with your eyes closed. Then open your eyes, and wait another minute before standing up.
- Try to practice this meditation daily for 10 to 20 minutes, preferably at a specific time each day.

Try a mini-relaxation

Mini-relaxations can help allay fear and reduce pain while you sit in the dentist's chair. They're equally helpful in thwarting stress before an exam, while stuck in traffic, or when faced with people or situations that annoy you. Here are a few quick relaxation techniques to try.

When you've got one minute

Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in slowly. Pause for a count of three. Breathe out. Pause for a count of three. Continue to breathe deeply for one minute, pausing for a count of three after each inhalation and exhalation.

Or alternatively, while sitting comfortably, take a few slow deep breaths and quietly repeat to yourself "I am" as you breathe in and "at peace" as you breathe out. Repeat slowly two or three times. Then feel your entire body relax into the support of the chair.

When you've got two minutes

Count down slowly from 10 to zero. With each number, take one complete breath, inhaling and exhaling. For example, breathe in deeply, saying "10" to yourself. Breathe out slowly. On your next breath, say "nine," and so on. If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly to space your breaths further apart. When you reach zero, you should feel more relaxed. If not, go through the exercise again.

When you've got three minutes

While sitting down, take a break from whatever you're doing and check your body for tension. Relax your facial muscles and allow your jaw to fall open slightly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your arms fall to your sides. Allow your hands to loosen so that there are spaces between your fingers. Uncross your legs or ankles. Feel your thighs sink into your chair, letting your legs fall comfortably apart. Feel your shins and calves become heavier and your feet grow roots into the floor. Now breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly.

When you've got five minutes

Try self-massage. A combination of strokes works well to relieve muscle tension. Try gentle chops with the edge of your hands or tapping with fingers or cupped palms. Put fingertip pressure on muscle knots. Knead across muscles, and try long, light, gliding strokes. You can apply these strokes to any part of the body that falls easily within your reach. For a short session like this, try focusing on your neck and head.

Start by kneading the muscles at the back of your neck and shoulders. Make a loose fist and drum swiftly up and down the sides and back of your neck. Next, use your thumbs to work tiny circles around the base of your skull. Slowly massage the rest of your scalp with your fingertips. Then tap your fingers against your scalp, moving from the front to the back and then over the sides.

Now massage your face. Make a series of tiny circles with your thumbs or fingertips. Pay particular attention to your temples, forehead, and jaw muscles. Use your middle fingers to massage the bridge of your nose and work outward over your eyebrows to your temples.

Finally, close your eyes. Cup your hands loosely over your face and inhale and exhale easily for a short while.

When you've got 10 minutes

Try imagery. Start by sitting comfortably in a quiet room. Breathe deeply for a few minutes. Now picture yourself in a place that conjures up good memories. What do you smell—the heavy scent of roses on a hot day, crisp fall air, the wholesome smell of baking bread? What do you hear? Drink in the colours and shapes that surround you. Focus on sensory pleasures: the swoosh of a gentle wind; soft, cool grass tickling your feet; the salty smell and rhythmic beat of the ocean. Passively observe intrusive thoughts, and then gently disengage from them to return to the world you've created.



Using 'Anchoring' to Create a Relaxed, Receptive Mind for Learning



A very useful technique to reduce stress you can do anywhere is called 'anchoring'

A) Definition

The idea of anchoring is that it is possible to **train or condition your mind** to conjure up **relaxed images, emotions and associations**. The technique can be a very effective way of **reducing stress levels** and thus help **maximise one's effectiveness as a learner!** The principle is similar to the idea of **counting sheep** to go to sleep!

B) Method

- Choose a **memory, piece of music, smell, image or other sensation** which evokes **feelings of relaxation** to act as your 'anchor'.
- The technique is then to **select some action or trigger** which you can link with your anchor: **clicking a finger** is a common strategy.
- After some **practice** it will be possible to conjure up your anchor at will using your trigger!

C) Example

The **impressionist paintings of artists like Monet and Renoir** are **hugely popular** - few households don't have a print of these artists somewhere; if not on their walls, then as a card etc! Why is this? Part of the answer is undoubtedly that people use their work - albeit unwittingly as anchors! There are apparently sound theoretical reasons why painting like the one overleaf can work in this positive way.

- **Colour:** calming blues and green.

- **Composition:** static using verticals (trees) and horizontals (horizon) as strong elements. These are not demanding for the eyes as opposed to diagonals which encourage the eyes to move around the canvas.
- **Indistinctive nature:** impressionist art rewards a more meditative or contemplative inspection through its use of layers of paint, muted tones and the different textures created by the variety of brush strokes.
- **Subject matter:** nature inspires the imagination conjuring up the pleasant sounds and other sensations associated with water and the hazy conditions.
- **Time of day:** frequent choice of early morning/evening scenes - peaceful times of the day.



In short, the spectator can imagine themselves as part of the scene - either standing on the bridge or in a boat on the water: the perfect frame of mind for learning or revising!!

Give anchoring a try. It is a relaxation technique used by many highly successful people from all walks of life, the world over.

Developing your personal plan for stress relief

Having a personalized stress-relief plan can help you manage stressful situations better and even prevent stress from building in the first place.

Whenever you notice symptoms of stress, take a moment to do the following:

- **Stop and breathe.** Can you identify a specific stressful event?
- **Reflect.** What were your automatic thoughts? Write these down. Were there any distortions?
- **Choose.** Ask yourself: Is there another way to think about this situation? What steps can you take to reduce your stress level?
- **Notice how you feel now and write it down.** Congratulate yourself for coping with the situation better.

Remember to take one step at a time. The more you practise, the easier the process gets.

Remember, you are not on your own!



Someone somewhere can help you.

The following are sources of help;

- Your good **Friends**
- Your **Family** (and that includes parents!)
- Your **Tutor**
- A **Teacher** you know and trust
- Your **Head of Year** or **Assistant Head of Year**
- **Claire Farley Youth Worker for LiNX** contact through reception or HOY
- The school **Nurse** - arrange a meeting at the office or through a teacher
- The **Counsellor** – arrange a meeting at the office or through a teacher. The counsellor is not a member of teaching staff and complies with confidentiality rules.
- The **Child Protection Officer** – Mrs Cross
- Your **GP**
- Try the **MIND** website at www.mind.org.uk MIND is a well-established mental health charity and you can ring their infoline on **0300 123 3393** for confidential advice
- Try the **YOUNGMINDS** website at www.youngminds.org.uk YoungMinds is a leading UK charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people. You can access lots of support from their site.

