



Unit: Stress Management  
**Skill 13: Managing your Emotions**  
**Activity A: Calm in the Storm**

**Activity Skills:**

Small group discussion and personal reflection.

**Leadership Skills:**

Understanding how the development of a strategic plan can help guide an action plan and provide direction for work.

**Suggested Level:**

Beginner

**Time:**

20-30 minutes

**Supplies needed:**

- Paper.
- Pens or pencils to write.

**Do Ahead:**

- Make copies of worksheet

**Source:**

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Based on:  
[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)  
[www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)

**BACKGROUND:**

Are you feeling like there are too many pressures and demands on you? Has it reached a point where you are losing sleep worrying? Eating on the run because your schedule is just too busy? You're not alone. Everyone experiences stress at times - adults, teens, and even kids. But there are things you can do to minimize stress and manage the stress that's unavoidable, and hopefully learn to eliminate issues that cause stress before it happens.

***What Is Stress?***

Stress is a feeling that's created when we react to particular events. It's the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness. Factors that cause stress are called "stressors," and how people respond to stressors varies from person to person. However we're all wired with the same basic physiology. This physical response is often called the "fight or flight response," and refers to our bodies production of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones speed up our heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism, resulting in that feeling of being stressed, and still keep their calm when circumstances get difficult. Your body is quite literally prepared to either fight off the stressor, or run from it.

When people lose their tempers, it is usually because they are under stress. Factors that normally would not provoke an angry response suddenly create problems when added on top of stress. What can you do to deal with stress overload or, better yet, to avoid it in the first place? The most helpful method of dealing with stress is learning how to manage the stress that comes along with any new challenge, good or bad. Stress-management skills work best when they're used regularly, not just when the pressure's on. Knowing how to "de-stress" and doing it when things are relatively calm can help you get through challenging circumstances that may arise. What are some ways that people can deal with stress?

**WHAT TO DO:**

This activity starts with individual reflection, and includes small group discussion.

Have individuals spend 4-5 minutes listing the stressors in their lives, and how they typically respond. For example, when you get anxious about taking a test, you might tend to eat more, or when you're worried about being able to pay the bills, you might get more defensive and argumentative. Encourage participants to be honest and thorough in their list, as it will only be seen by them.

Next have participants break into small groups and discuss how they might respond to various stressors. They do not have to share their own

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**Notes:**

stressors, but can talk about stressors in theory. After they've talked for 5-8 minutes, hand out the worksheet and review all together.

#### **TALK IT OVER:**

**Reflect:**

- What are some of the stressors that people named?
- What are some of the unhealthy responses? Healthy responses?
- What are some of the ways that your small group identified to cope with stress? (among the groups, did the items on the worksheet all come up in some form?)

**Apply:**

- Are there practical ways to keep stress from happening in the first place?
- If circumstances get stressful, did you learn of some ways to better respond?
- Will you always be able to control stress? Respond well?
- How can we learn to think of challenges as opportunities and stressors as temporary problems, not disasters?
- How do we practice healthy responses to stress?

#### **BEYOND THE BOX:**

**Optional Homework:**

Ask students to list 3 stressors in their life (their list from class still stays confidential). How have they coped with these stressors in the past, and what other options will they consider after doing this activity?

**Resources and Web Links:**

<http://www.kidshealth.org>

<http://www.familydoctor.org>