



Strand 4 | Emotional Wellbeing

Learning Outcome 4.3:	Students should be able to consider the impact of stress and draw upon a variety of techniques to help self-regulate emotions and cope with the day-to-day stresses of life.
Pre-learning:	Before addressing Learning Outcome 4.3, students need to have engaged with related learning outcomes, including learning about the nature of wellbeing (4.1) and thoughts, feelings and behaviours (4.2) .

The focus of learning

Learning Outcome 4.3 is aimed at creating awareness of the impact of stress in all our lives and ways of managing stress. Remember, not all stress is harmful. Stress can be viewed as a continuum, ranging from positive stress that is useful in helping us cope (for example, when making a presentation in class or before an important match) through to chronic stress which, if prolonged, can reduce our ability to take in information, remember and think clearly. Our bodies can handle stress for a short period of time, but people are not equipped to cope with chronic stress.

Chronic stress is stress that continues for a long period of time. Chronic stress can be caused by one event or circumstance, such as problems within the family, a health problem, being overworked or trying to juggle too much, relationship issues with peers, or living in an unsafe environment. Stress can also be cumulative, which means that when different stressors occur at the same time or one after the other and the person does not have an opportunity or time to recover, this can cause stress levels to rise and stay high.

Understanding stress and different ways of coping (both positive and harmful) is crucial for young people so that they know how to support themselves when they feel uncomfortable levels of stress. The capacity to self-regulate emotions is one of most important protective factors against stress. This capacity to self-regulate our emotions, thoughts and behaviours allows us to reason and think straight in times of stress, so that we can use our coping strategies.

Students need to explore helpful coping strategies and understand that coping strategies which involve avoidance (such as unprescribed drugs or alcohol) can be harmful and can ultimately exacerbate feelings of distress. In addition, it is important to highlight that while everyone needs to develop healthy ways to manage the normal stresses of life, if someone is experiencing chronic stress, they should seek help from a doctor or another trusted adult.

Approaches to consider

It is important to explore a range of techniques that can help self-regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviour. Remember one size does not fit all. While many people find mindfulness, relaxation and visualisation exercises beneficial, others may have difficulty with these techniques. For example, if a student is feeling stressed, anxious, emotionally raw or has experienced a trauma, a mindfulness activity may be overwhelming or trigger unpleasant emotions. Students should always be given a choice to participate. Some students may struggle to sit still and need a movement activity or music to help calm their emotions. Engaging in **acts of kindness** and regularly **expressing gratitude** are proven to have a positive impact on mood, outlook and overall wellbeing. There is also evidence that suggests that religious beliefs and the practice of spirituality can support emotional wellbeing.

Possible follow-on
learning outcome: 4.4

Go to the 2023 SPHE
Toolkit for teaching
resources linked to LO 4.3