



Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress

Educational Unit

Lesson Plan Module #5: *Stress is a Funny Thing*

Overview

Humor is more than just entertainment. There are three ways humor can help people deal with stress:

1. It can distract them.
2. It can reframe for them.
3. It can refuel them.

Short-Term Benefits: A good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it does not just lighten your load mentally, it induces physical changes in your body.

Laughter can:

- **Stimulate many organs.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs, and muscles, and increases the endorphins released by your brain.
- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Long-Term Effects: Laughter is not just a quick pick-me-up, though. It is also good for you over the long term.

Laughter may:

- **Improve your immune system.** Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. By contrast, positive thoughts can release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- **Relieve pain.** Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.
- **Increase personal satisfaction.** Laughter can also make it easier to cope with difficult situations. It also helps you connect with other people.
- **Improve your mood.** Many people experience depression, sometimes due to chronic illness. Laughter can help lessen your depression and anxiety, which may make you feel happier.



Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress

Educational Unit

Lesson Objectives

After viewing Episode #5: *Stress is a Funny Thing*, participants will be able to:

1. Discuss how humor helps relieve stress.
2. Use/create personal reminders (photos, memes, trinkets, etc.) to help alleviate and navigate stress more effectively.
3. Understand how humor effects stress and pain.

Vocabulary:

Parasympathetic Nervous System

Limbic System

Neurotransmitters

Cognitive Capacity Cascade

Lesson Discussion Points:

- What are some of the short-term benefits of humor? Long term effects?
- How does humor help people deal with stress more effectively?
- What are some ways you can distract yourself when you are stressed? How does this alleviate stress?
- How does reframing help someone effectively handle stress? Can you think of a time or situation you used reframing in your own life?
- What are ways you refuel yourself?
- Why is smiling not always effective for dealing with stress?
- How does humor allow us to build the cognitive capacity with others?

Activities:

Activity #1: Progressive Relaxation Activity (Deep Muscle Relaxation)

Read and model the following instructions to your students:

1. Raise your eyebrows and wrinkle your forehead. Try to touch your hairline with your eyebrows. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
2. Make a frown. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.



Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress

Educational Unit

3. Close your eyes as tightly as you can. Draw the corners of your mouth back with your lips closed. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
4. Open your eyes and your mouth as wide as you can. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your face.
5. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Close your fist tightly. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.
6. Stretch your arms out to the side. Pretend you are pushing against an invisible wall with your hands. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
7. Bend your elbows and make a muscle in your upper arm. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax. Feel the tension leave your arms.
8. Lift your shoulders. Try to make your shoulders touch your ears. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
9. Arch your back away from the back of your chair (or off the floor). Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
10. Round your back. Try to push it against the back of your chair (or against the floor). Hold for 5 seconds...and relax. Feel the tension leaving your back.
11. Tighten your stomach muscles. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
12. Tighten your hip and buttock muscles. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
13. Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing your legs together as close as you can. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax.
14. Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can. Hold for 5 seconds ...and relax.
15. Curl your toes under as far as you can. Hold for 5 seconds...and relax. Feel the tension leave your legs.
16. Tighten all the muscles in your whole body. Hold for ten seconds...and relax. Let your entire body be heavy and clam. Sit quietly (or lie quietly) and enjoy this feeling of relaxation for a couple of minutes.

Activity #2: Watch Video

View Episode #5: *Stress is a Funny Thing* and discuss content using discussion questions above.



Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress

Educational Unit

Name _____ Grade or Employee Dept _____

Module #5 Quiz: *Stress is a Funny Thing*

Directions: Please circle the correct answer.

- 1. Karyn Buxman is a:**
 - a. Comedian
 - b. Doctor
 - c. Teacher
 - d. Neurohumorist

- 2. The benefits of humor are psychological.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 3. Teaching people how to harness humor and leverage laughter can be an effective strategy for relieving stress in the workplace.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 4. The use of humor helps people deal with stress in all the following ways except:**
 - a. Providing distraction
 - b. Review and rethink choices
 - c. Allow time to refuel oneself
 - d. Reframe a situation

- 5. A person does not have to laugh to receive the benefit of finding humor in a situation.**
 - a. True
 - b. False



Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress

Educational Unit

- 6. One of the first things you notice when you are stressed is:**
 - a. Muscle tension
 - b. Headache
 - c. Sleepiness
 - d. Earache

- 7. Use of an object in your environment can unconsciously cue the brain to shift from feeling stressed to finding humor.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 8. Smiling only helps if it is:**
 - a. Real
 - b. Fake
 - c. Shown
 - d. Hidden

- 9. Humor is a whole brain activity.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 10. How does humor effect stress and pain?**
 - a. It increases stress and pain
 - b. It decreases stress and pain
 - c. It has no effect on stress and pain
 - d. It immediately increases stress and pain, then it decreases it