

# LEAdvocate

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A Basic Right...  
A Great  
Public School  
for Every  
Child.

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## “Got Stress?”

The holidays are over along with the joys and stress they often bring, but for teachers one of the most stressful times of the year is fast approaching.

With first semester coming to a close, papers needing to be graded and grades having to be calculated and submitted; with planning for the new semester and supply orders coming due soon for what seems to be a school year that is *far away*, teachers often find January and February a rough go.

Here are some tips on how to reduce, prevent, and cope with stress from the non-profit Helpguide.org. The entire

article may be accessed at:

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_management\\_relief\\_coping.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm)

### 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 stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you're close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire 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.
- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- **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 subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Pare down your to-do list** – Analyze 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 is avoided 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.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behavior, 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.
- **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, you can avoid these stress-inducing pitfalls.

Time management tips to reduce stress:

**Create a balanced schedule** All work and no play is a recipe for burnout. Try to find a balance between work and family life, social activities and solitary pursuits, daily responsibilities and downtime.

**Don’t over-commit yourself** Avoid scheduling things back-to-back or trying to fit too much into one day. All too often, we underestimate how long things will take.

**Prioritize tasks** Make a list of tasks you have to do, and tackle them in order of importance. Do the high-priority items first. If you have something particularly unpleasant to do, get it over with early. The rest of your day will be more pleasant as a result.

**Break projects into small steps** If a large project seems overwhelming, make a step-by-step plan. Focus on one manageable step at a time, rather than taking on everything at once.

**Delegate responsibility** You don’t have to do it all yourself, whether at home, school, or on the job. If other people can take care of the task, why not let them? Let go of the desire to control or oversee every little step. You’ll be letting go of unnecessary stress in the process.

## **Stress management strategy #3: 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 behavior 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 trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. 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 #4: Adapt to the stressor**

If you can't change the stressor, 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 traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of the 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. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

### **Stress reduction tips**

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by making healthy lifestyle choices and taking care of yourself. If you regularly make time for rest and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

### **Nurture yourself**

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 working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

### **Healthy stress reducers**

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Talk to a supportive friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.
- Get a massage.
- Curl up with a good book.

- Do something for someone else.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Take a yoga class.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy.

Think about the ways you cope with stress. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem. These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run.

### **Unhealthy ways of coping with stress**

- Smoking
- Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs
- Using sleeping pills or tranquilizers to relax
- Overeating or eating too little
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find ones that do.

### **Learn positive ways to deal with stress**

There are many healthy ways to reduce stress or cope with its effects, 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 four A's: **avoid**, **alter**, **accept**, or **adapt**.

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 every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

From the LEAdvocate Editor:

NO, there won't be a test over this material... so relax, already,

and make it a good day!