

# THE STRESS DETECTIVES

Knowing what situations stress you out



Target competency	Manage one's emotions and stress effectively
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct their identity</li> <li>Cooperate with others</li> <li>Use creative thinking</li> </ul>
General objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize situations in daily life that can generate stress</li> <li>Use certain strategies to calm oneself</li> </ul>

## INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS AND THE PROGRAM

If this is the first year your students are participating in the program, introduce the characters and the program using the materials provided for this purpose on the [OFF-TRAIL website](#), under [Workshops and tools for students/Basic workshops/Introduction to the program and the characters](#). To get your students more involved, don't hesitate to involve them in reading the story, or to make it into a skit in which they play the various characters.

## IN THE LIVES OF LEO AND CHARLIE

Leo, Charlie and the rest of their class are on the bus, on their way to Camp OFF-TRAIL for the last time. Just before getting to camp, Ms. Nathalie, the cook and chaperone, says to the group: "Since this is your last year of elementary school and we wanted to end the activities at Camp OFF-TRAIL with an unforgettable experience, we've decided to organize a little surprise for you."

Their teacher Ms. Catherine continues: "Tomorrow morning, we are going to Québec's second-highest mountain for a big hike. We're going to climb to over 1,200 metres! It's going to be intense but fun, I guarantee it!"

After hearing the announcement, Charlie and Leo are a little worried about doing this hike, which sounds rather difficult.

Leo shares his concern with Charlie: "I know I should be happy, but I feel weird. Do you remember the first time we went to camp in first grade? I was really scared of bears and I couldn't sleep. It feels like the same thing inside me right now."

Gently, Charlie replies: "Yes. I remember and I understand. I feel the same way, Leo."

After a moment's thought, Leo continues:

"Do you ever feel like this at other times, like in school or at home?"

- Oh yes, every time we have an exam! exclaims Charlie.
- Me too! And also when I have to do a new activity that I've never done before," adds Leo.
- Oh, yeah? Not me, I love new activities!
- I guess that some situations which make us uncomfortable are similar, while others are completely different," concludes Leo. Could we help each other and share our tips for feeling better when this happens to us?
- Okay, but if I share my tips with you, will you share yours with me? asks Charlie.
- For sure, Charlie, don't worry," says Leo in a cheerful voice.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Supporting students in the healthy management of their stress helps establish a positive classroom climate that is more focused on learning. This support also enables students to develop skills that will help them to become more independent in stressful situations. What's more, this optimal climate brings on openness and support from others, motivating students to ask questions, be curious, try out different strategies without fear of making mistakes, and be sensitive and empathetic to the stress experienced by their peers.





(Tummers, 2011)

This support commences with identifying stressful situations. Recognizing sources of stress is a step toward finding solutions for students.

Indeed, the role of teachers and parents appears to be crucial in students' development of their own sound strategies, as part of their stress management. This role includes establishing a clear communication channel for expressing stress and emotions, with the aim of fostering learning and interpersonal relationships.

(Jensen, 2005)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Tell the students that, like Charlie and Leo, they too experience different sources of stress.
2. Hand out some *Post-it*® notes to the students. Ask them to write down everything that is a source of stress for them on a daily basis, one source of stress per *Post-it*, using a pencil, to prevent them from identifying each other.  8
3. Give them a few minutes to think and write. If the students have difficulty, you can give them examples from your own experience or from the *Sample stressful situations* supplementary sheet, below. Next, collect the *Post-it notes*.
4. Take the *Post-it* notes and read them aloud (anonymously), then stick them on the board, grouping them in the following categories: academic success, friendship, family, sports, public performances (shows/presentations), health, others.
5. Lead a discussion on what the students observe using the following questions:  9-10
  - Which categories seem to be the biggest (most common) sources of stress for most students? The smallest (least common) sources?
  - How does it make you feel to see that others are stressed by the same things you are?
  - How does it make you feel to see that others are not stressed by the same things you are?
6. To conclude the activity, point out that students are all different. So, it's normal that the situations that stress us out vary from person to person. Add that it's important recognize what's stressing us out so we can find solutions that work for us.  11
7. Explain to the students that they have learned a few tips and tricks to help you when you're feeling stressed or anxious. Ask the students to name a few. Give each student a copy of the handout (below), listing different ways of calming down. Encourage the students to keep this sheet as a reminder.
8. End the activity by proposing that the group do a cardiac coherence exercise for 3 to 5 minutes using this video: <https://youtu.be/XqWCr1qISd4>.  12

*Suggested facilitation: if students have difficulty concentrating, you can suggest a more active exercise by asking them to doodle a mountain with their pencil for each breath. With each inhalation, they can trace the ascent of the mountain. With each exhalation, they can trace the descent of the mountain. They can draw lots of little mountains or go over the same lines again and again. Ask them to follow the rhythm of the gong. In this case, provide a sheet of paper and a pencil for each student. You can also use this silent version of cardiac coherence, depending on the needs of the group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rjYOzddu44>.*

*These videos may start with advertisements, so remember to open them before the students arrive.*

## CHALLENGE

Suggest the following challenge:

- Before the next OFF-TRAIL workshop, pay attention to the situations that cause you stress, and pick an option from the *Ways to calm yourself down* handout.



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## ENABLING REINVESTMENT

If classroom space allows, set up a “calm corner” where students can go to refocus and calm down. Carry out an activity in which you ask your students to write encouraging or helpful phrases or calming tips on coloured cards that you can post in your calm corner.

## READING SUGGESTIONS

- Romain, T., & Verdick, E. (2018). *Stress Can Really Get on Your Nerves*. Free Spirit Publishing.



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## SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

### Sample stressful situations

- Meeting a new person
- Sitting an examination
- Experiencing conflict with a classmate
- Expressing your ideas
- Eating dinner alone
- Facing a fear
- Making an oral presentation
- Changing schools
- Moving
- Taking part in a sports competition
- Singing, dancing or playing a musical instrument in front of an audience
- Losing an important object
- Getting lost

## HANDOUT TO PRINT

### Ways to calm yourself down



Yoga



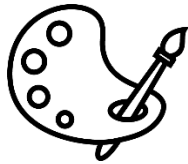
Physical activity



Meditation



Dancing



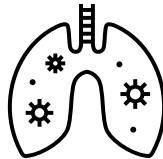
Drawing



Sharing



Nature



Breathing

**Others:**



Scan me



To learn more about ways you can calm yourself down (website currently available in French only):