

Overview of Stress Management Program Techniques

Mrs. Banbury, presenter

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You can experience stress from a variety of sources. Some stress can be positive like during a sports competition or just before a performance or test, but too much stress can quickly become overwhelming. We experience stress and its impact on all levels of our daily living: physically in our bodies, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. When the challenges and demands, felt internally (ex. anxiety around grades or appearance) and/or externally (ex. COVID, virtual learning, being overscheduling), out-weigh your feelings and/or abilities to manage and to feel positive and confident in daily life, we uncomfortably feel the pressure of stress rise.

Some manifestations of too much stress, can include one or more of the following: irritability, losing your temper, feeling overwhelmed, feeling hopeless, having your faith shaken, panic attacks, headaches, sleeping difficulties, changes in appetite, racing thoughts, constant worry, procrastination and avoiding responsibilities, alcohol, drug and cigarette use, more nervous behaviors such as nail biting, fidgeting and pacing, struggles with relationships, difficulties with memory and concentration, and a negative attitude towards one's self and others - just to name a few! All this was proven in the ACES study funded by Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 that Mrs. Banbury mentioned.

These techniques Mrs. Banbury shared along with exercise, healthy diet, sleep, emotional connectedness to God, self and others are simple yet effective strategies for maintaining your physical and mental health. Let's start with how we breath.

Breathing exercise

The first technique Mrs. Banbury introduced was a breathing method that helps reset our diaphragm and assists in consciously regulating your breathing. The 5-5-5 breathing technique helps to reset our diaphragm thereby helping to reduce the body's reaction to stress. We can train the body to avoid shallow breathing when under stress when we practice deep breathing regularly. When you breathe as if you are relaxed, as in the 5-5-5 breathing technique we used, the brain recognizes the cue and the physical body responds.



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Try 5-5-5 breathing. Follow the steps we used together.

1. Inhale very slowly through your nose for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
2. Hold for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
3. Exhale very slowly through your nose or mouth for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
4. Inhale very slowly through your nose for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
5. Exhale very slowly through you nose or mouth for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
6. Inhale very slowly through your nose for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
7. Exhale very slowly through your nose or mouth for 5 seconds: 1-2-3-4-5.
8. Notice how you feel. Do you feel different than you did before you started this technique?

Be aware of challenges we discussed like your posture, especially your shoulders or shallow breathing.

Don't worry as you practice it becomes easier and your brain will thank you for stopping and grabbing some extra oxygen!

RAIN

In being honest with our feelings, we can nurture a healing relationship with our self, filled with compassion. This allows us to not only be the person God created us to be, but to love ourselves and grow closer to God!

In order to foster self-compassion, we must try to shift our negative thoughts and feelings which can often cause us to feel anxious, unworthy, fearful and live on auto-pilot. Self-compassion requires that we are honest with ourselves and our vulnerabilities. To fully engage in self-compassion, we need to re-align our emotions and our actions, switch off the auto-pilot and shed the feelings of unworthiness, judgment and insecurity. You are worthy of self-care! You are a child of God! You are a beloved original creation! What is important is the here and now – who you are at this moment. To help you focus on re-aligning your sense of self, we practiced the RAIN meditation. The acronym *RAIN*, first coined about 20 years ago by Michele McDonald, is an easy-to-remember tool for practicing self-compassion. It has four steps:

1. *Recognize* what is going on, what burdens you? What are your thoughts, feelings or behaviors that are impacting you right now? Avoiding thoughts and feelings only gives them more power later on as they will chase you. Take a pause and identify how you might be stuck. What is the critical recording of your inner voice? Is it feelings of shame or fear? Is it weight of anxiety or the burden of depression. Again, try to identify what you are feeling.
2. *Allow* the experience to be there, just as it is. This is difficult, but just sit for a moment and be with the thoughts, feelings and emotions you have just recognized without trying to fix, avoid or judge. By sitting with your feelings, you are not saying you are unworthy, you are just acknowledging that they exist. It might be helpful to offer yourself a word or two of encouragement such as a yes or It's ok, in order to acknowledge and accept what you are feeling in this moment.
3. *Investigate* with kindness. In investigating your feelings, you are not judging you are simply focusing on what you are feeling. Where do I feel this physically? How am I experiencing this in my body being careful not to project negative beliefs of yourself or others. It is critical that you approach yourself in a non-judgmental way so you can honestly connect with your feelings.
4. *Nurture* with self-compassion. What can you do for yourself to promote healing or forgiveness? How can you show yourself compassion? Place your hands on your heart as a way of nurturing compassion and kindness for yourself.

Just as flowers bloom after the rain, embrace this heightened sense of awareness. Know that as you are more aware of your feelings, you will have more control over your happiness and can grow to have greater alignment within yourself. As you learn to trust yourself and be truthful of who you are, you will have a greater sense of belonging a greater sense of forgiveness for yourselves and others. By being vulnerable and honest, the heart naturally opens allowing us to release the judgment, the fear and the hurt and embrace kindness, compassion and acceptance. We naturally create more room for God and his love.

The Happiness Lab

You might think more money, a better job, or Instagram-worthy vacations would make you happy. You're dead wrong. In "The Happiness Lab" podcast, Yale professor Dr Laurie Santos will take you through the latest scientific research and share some surprising and inspiring stories that will forever alter the way you think about happiness. She's changed the lives of thousands of people through her class "Psychology and the Good Life," and she'll change yours, too.

The podcast Mrs. Banbury mentioned is available here: <https://www.happinesslab.fm/>

A Prayer for Inner Peace

Lord, please put Your peace in my heart.

With all that is going on in this world it is easy to
worry and be anxious.

My mind races and can obsess.

I can't help thinking about my problems.

And the more I think about them,
the more overwhelmed I become.

I feel like I'm sinking down in quicksand
and can't get out.

Calm me, Lord.

Slow me down, put Your peace in my heart.

Remind me that no matter what problem I have, Lord,

You are bigger,

You are more powerful than it is.

So I bring my problems and my stress to You.

I know what I want.

I know my will.

I do not know Yours.

I do not know how You will use this to strengthen me.

I trust You.

I trust Your goodness and Your wisdom.

So I place myself in Your hands.

Please fill my heart with your peace.

Lord, in your name we pray,

Amen

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery allows us to take a quick vacation without leaving where we are. This technique has been proven to give our brain the same benefit as going on a physical vacation! While you can follow a guided meditation prompt you can do this on your own by closing your eyes and imagining a place that is special to you. Carefully visualize where you are. Use your senses. What is the temperature? What do you smell? What do you hear? What season is it? What are the textures under your feet?

Let the feelings of comfort, peace and safety wash over you. Simply relax and enjoy this space. Below are some additional tips from the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Guided Imagery

From University of Rochester Medical Center

Guided Imagery

Tips for guided imagery:

- Before you begin, think about a special image or place. This can be a place where you have been, or it can be a made-up place. Choose a relaxing place. Think about the whole scene. What does it look like? What do you hear? What do you taste or smell? Be as detailed as you like.
- Some examples of pleasant places might include a warm sunny beach, a sparkling lake, a walk in the woods, or a lovely snow-capped mountain.
- Your image should be a place where you can be very relaxed. It is a place with no stress or worry. You can go to this place when you need a break.

Example of a Guided Imagery scene

I am lying alone on a beach in the late afternoon sun. It is nice and warm, but not too hot. The water is aqua blue, with small white caps close to the shore. The sky is light blue, with a few white puffy clouds. I am lying with my feet in the water, with the sun moving to the right of me. I can feel my warm beach towel under me and warm sand on my hands and feet. I feel the soothing sun on my body. I hear seagulls flying over me. I hear sea grass swaying in the breeze behind me. I hear some children playing in the sand, but I can't hear what they are saying. The water is gently lapping on the shore, over and over and over...

Follow-up

It is OK to fall asleep during either progressive muscle relaxation or guided imagery. It does not mean that it is not working. It may mean that you need the sleep. Allow yourself to enjoy the rest that comes with a relaxed body and mind.

Medical Reviewers:

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Progressive Muscle Relaxation

While a certain amount of muscle tension is normal, we can become too tense when we are overwhelmed. This technique is helpful to return to your base-line stress level and involves tensing and relaxing your muscles one group at a time. Below are tips from the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Here is how to prepare:

- Find a quiet, comfortable spot to practice.
- Sit up or lie down while you practice.
- Have a blanket or sheet handy. Often when people are relaxed, they find they are cooler and need a light blanket.
- Take a few minutes to think about your breathing. (You can keep your eyes open or closed.) Try to do stomach breathing. Fill your stomach as you breathe in and then breathe out. Begin to slow your breathing down. Try to focus only on your breathing.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Steps to follow for progressive muscle relaxation:

- Take in a deep breath. Hold that breath for a count of 4, let it out, and begin to relax. Do this about 4 times. As you breathe in, think about good, soothing energy flowing in. As you breathe out, breathe out your stress and bad thoughts.
- Allow your mind to focus on one body part at a time. Move from the top of your head all the way down to your toes.
- Relax your head and your scalp. Repeat this 2 or 3 times.
- Move down to your eyes. Relax your eyes and the muscles around your eyes. Squeeze your eyes tight for 4 counts, then relax. Notice the difference in your eyes and face when your eyes are squeezed and tense, and when they are relaxed.
- Focus on your mouth, relax your mouth. Allow it to go limp.... Move down your neck and relax your neck muscles.... Relax your shoulders....
- When you get to your arms, you may relax them one at a time or both at the same time. You may even choose to relax each finger, one at a time.
- Move all the way down to your toes using this skill.

Extra tips

Tips that may help other body areas that are tense or painful:

- As you move down your body, you may want to tighten and then relax certain body parts. This helps to show how different your body feels when it is tense and when it is relaxed. You can tense and then relax your eyes, hands, toes, mouth, and shoulders. You should get more relaxed as you move down your body. If you feel relaxed, you may not feel like doing this part past your mouth or shoulders.
- Warm often feels good. Think about any part of your body being warmed by the sun. For example, if your right arm has pain, you can focus on this arm. Think about warm rays of sun on your arm as you relax.

Running a film of your day or The Ignatian Examen

This is a powerful exercise to do at the end of the day that can help you find victories, struggles and God in your day.

Take time before you go to sleep and “run a film of your day.” Review and reflect upon your day:

Did your actions align with who you want to be?

What were your feelings throughout the day? Were they appropriate for the situation?

Fully reflect on your feelings, actions and thoughts – are they in tune with who we are or who we aspire to be?

Take a pause and reflect on your whole being: how are you with yourself, with others and with God?

Daily Examen

(A pocket card is also in your bag!)

- 1. Beginning Prayer.** Take a few moments to quiet down, take a few deep breaths and know that God is with you at this very moment and has been with you throughout the day.
- 2. Gratitude.** Identify reasons to thank God for the blessings you have received throughout the day. Examine your day, hour by hour, pointing out specifics: a beautiful sunrise, a shared laugh, extra time with a friend, food you liked, a great sports or choir practice, help from a stranger, support from your teacher or parents. Gratitude helps us to notice how and when God is working around us. Gratitude also opens our heart to see how much God loves us by noticing him in our daily life.
- 3. Ask for honesty-** invite the Holy Spirit to join you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you honestly review your day. What were your thoughts? How did your actions correlate to your thoughts?
- 4. Review your day honestly.** When did you feel closest to God or the person God created you to be? How did that feel? When were you accepting, loving, generous? When were you filled with joy? What was going on at that moment? When did you feel anxious, short, angry? Is this a place to ask for God's grace or to ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the strength to make changes and seek forgiveness? Think about:
 - What were the high points of your day – the things that filled your heart?
 - What were the low points of your day – the things that zapped you of your peace and joy?
 - When did you fall short of the person you want to be?
 - Are there any habits or patterns you can change?
 - When were you loving and accepting of others?
 - When did you see God working around you or through you?
 - Where were you the face of God for others? Did you miss any opportunities?
 - Who in your day was the face of God for you?
- 5. Looking forward.** The last step invites us to look forward. We ask Jesus for forgiveness, encouragement, strength and grace to overcome habits that do not serve us. Is there someone I need to reconcile with? Can I change how I react or treat others to be closer to Christ? Is there a way I can be more accepting of who I am at this moment? Tomorrow is a clean slate - try to come up with one or two things you can do tomorrow to be closer to God. Remember, God loves you as you are and is ready for you to open your heart to his gifts and strength. Ask God to guide you, strengthen you, and fill you with his grace to make changes, to see your blessings, and to find peace.

The more you practice the Examen the greater the rewards as you will not only more easily see God working in and around you, but also identify habits that don't serve you or ways in which you can make simple changes to spread God's light and love.

SLOW ME DOWN LORD

Slow me down Lord
Ease the pounding of my heart
By the quieting of my mind.
Study my harried pace.

Give me,
Amidst the confusion of my day,
The calmness of everlasting hills.
Break the tensions of my nerves
With the soothing music
Of singing streams or crashing waves
that live in my memory.

Help me to know
The magical power of sleep,
Teach me the art
Of taking minute vacations
Of slowing down

To watch the snow fall,
to look at a flower,
to watch the clouds move.
To chat with an old friend
Or make a new one;
To pet a dog;
To smile at a child.

Remind me each day
That the race is not always won by the quick
And that you are by my side.

Amen