

5-2023

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Stephanie Lopez

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Increasing Coping Skills for First-Generation Stressors

Increasing Coping Skills to Reduce First-Generation College Students' Stressors

Stephanie Lopez

Capstone for the Bachelors of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Increasing Coping Skills to Reduce First-Generation College Students' Stressors

Introduction

First-generation, college students may face challenges balancing family and social life. They may experience pressure from their family to do well in their studies. Thus, many students' mental health may be impacted by the multiple pressures, experiencing stress-depression, having the desire to drop-out, and may experience burn out. When college students learn ways to manage multiple stressors, it will help improve their mental health which allows for them to focus on their studies. In order to increase their coping skills, I have created a workshop to help first generation students in the CAMP at California State University, Monterey Bay.

Needs Statement

First generation college students' mental health may be impacted due to the particular stress they face, given they are the first in their families to go to college. Being away from their family and balancing a social life along with their studies can affect their mental health (Wilbur, 2021). First-generation college students may experience worsening mental health (e.g., depression), burn out, and are at risk for dropping out.

First-generation students may be conscious that there are certain familial expectations and standards to exceed because they are the first to attend college (Holden et al., 2021). Some familial expectations could be to major in what will result in a high paying job (regardless of one's interest), being the perfect role model for siblings and other relatives, taking parents' feelings and opinions into consideration and fixing problems at home despite being enrolled in college (Holden et al., 2021). Holden, et al. (2021) found that families of first-generation students are unaware of what is needed to succeed in college and do not understand the obligations that first-generation college students face. These college students may experience

constant pressure to succeed in their studies and exceed expectations, which is a main factor for first-generation college students to experience stress (Suwinyattichaiorn et al., 2022).

First-generation college students' parents often have high demands and expect nothing but the best from their children (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Therefore, first-generation students may feel undue stress trying to meet the expectations of their families and avoid letting them down (Holden et al., 2021). These familial expectations make it hard for first-generation students to balance their own life resulting in accumulated stress.

Depression is a common symptom experienced amongst college students. For first-generation college students, in particular, they may carry guilt when moving out of their homes to pursue their college career, which can lead to having depressive symptoms (Covarrubias et al., 2019). In a more recent study, Suwinyattichaiorn and Johnson (2022) indicated that nearly 20% of college students have reported feelings of depression. Thus, first-generation college students are more vulnerable to experiencing depression since they are first-generation. The college transition is not easy being that students leave the social support of their family (Covarrubias et al., 2019). A way to reduce the feeling of stress and depression is by having social support which has shown to positively impact first-generation college students' mental health (Suwinyattichaiorn and Johnson et al., 2022). These systems of social support are imperative because they can resemble the familial support and community that many leave behind at home. While important and beneficial, these systems can be difficult to establish when many first-generation students are unfamiliar with or unaware of the college resources available to them.

First-generation college students will also experience being burnt out. Burn out can be defined as accumulated stress that leads to a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion

leaving one with a lower sense of accomplishment and sense of self. Covarrubias et al. (2019) found that first-generation college students still kept the family role of sibling caregiver by providing financial support, being a language broker, and providing physical support all while being full time college students. In another study, 25% of first-generation students reported that other familial issues along with schoolwork contributed to being burnt out (Cushman et al., 2006). Balancing their studies along with keeping up with their family life played a part in students having a lack of motivation (Cushman et al., 2006). This lack of motivation contributes to being overwhelmed by the accumulating responsibilities students have; thus, making burn out an undesirable yet common and justifiable experience.

There is a probability that first-generation college students' mental health may be affected due to experiencing multiple pressures, experiencing stress and depression, feeling the desire of dropping out, and experiencing burnt out. In order to increase coping skills for first-generation college students, I intend on creating a workshop to help first generation students in the CAMP program at California State University, Monterey Bay.

Theory

According to Arnett, Emerging Adulthood is a phase in the lifespan, between 18 and 25 years old, where individuals can have a feeling of being in between the end of adolescence and emerging adult responsibilities (Munesy, 2006). This theory conceptualizes how emerging adulthood is characterized by feelings of instability and increasing independence. Between the ages of 18 to 25, there is a lot of confusion of what one's life is supposed to look like. Challenges such as how to be financially independent, new responsibilities, family and relationship problems, struggles academically, and exploring different identities can be experienced through emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). These challenges can cause stress due to rising uncertainty or

fear of failure. Stress can evoke one to experience a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. The majority of undergraduates may find themselves between these formative ages of increasing responsibilities. Being that the participants are first-generation college students, there is likely no one to guide them or give them advice on how to navigate higher education. Therefore, it is imperative for college students to learn ways to cope with stressors as they begin to develop their sense of self and desires for their future. Some emerging adults might participate in risky behaviors as coping mechanisms for their stressors (Arnett, 2000). These behaviors can range from driving at high speed to intoxicated driving to substance abuse or unprotected sex. The reason for partaking in these behaviors can be derived from their increased freedom as young adults who are not yet weighed by the responsibilities and duties of full adulthood as Arnett theorizes. I intend on creating a 60 minute workshop of alternative coping techniques when experiencing stressors for emerging adult, college students.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted for California State University, Monterey Bay College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) 2022-2023 first-generation students. Participants do not represent the general student population of California State University, Monterey Bay because they are part of CAMP. CAMP helps first-generation students of migrant and farmworker background with academic challenges, and on this campus, have a Latino background. Therefore, my participants look differently from the general CSUMB population. I will be conducting my presentation in English, and the participants will have to be English proficient to understand the content and complete activities. The content is specified for first-generation college students, which can not be applied to others that might not face their multiple stressors. It is tailored to those in the emerging adulthood which is from the ages of 18 to 25. In order to

present to younger students, the curriculum would be changed to stressors that all high school students may experience throughout college not tailored to first-generation students. This project is designed for first generation college students. On the other hand, it could be more inclusive to all first generation students who are applying to college, such as seniors in high school. It is possible for those first generation students to already experience these multiple pressures even if not in college.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the project, participants will be able to ...

1. Identify five situations that require specific coping techniques
2. Identify two common stressors
3. Indicate two coping techniques when dealing with stressors (i.e, deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, emotional supportive peers)

Method

First, I introduced myself and the reason as to why I was there. As an ice breaker, I asked the students to define stress in their own words with their peers. For this, students were divided into five groups of four students. Students collaboratively worked together to come up with a definition and shared it out loud. Procrastination, financial problems, relationship problems (friends and family), and academic pressure are stressors that college students have experienced. Next, I showed them this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZTc8_FwHGM. In their groups, students discussed for five minutes on what stressors they related to from the video. After discussing, students shared five common stressors that they identified with. See Table 1.

Secondly, I presented to them a presentation I created that listed more than 10 common stressors experienced by college students. See Appendix A. Following, students individually were to list two common stressors that they related to from the presentation. Students were asked to identify at least two common stressors that they related to and briefly describe how they felt. Students shared this via *padelt.com* that was accessed by a QR. See Table 2.

Then, students were presented new coping techniques (i.e, deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, emotional supportive peers). See Appendix A. After, students were handed a worksheet in which they were asked to identify at least two stressful situations in which those techniques would help. See Appendix B. I walked around answering questions that any students may have. Once they completed the worksheet, students were given stress balls with motivational quotes.

Results

Learning outcome 1 was that students would list five situations that would require specific coping techniques. The students were put in groups before presenting the video. After the video was presented to them, I asked to collaboratively work on five situations that all of them related to from the video. When done, the groups shared their five situations and I wrote them down. All students were able to list five situations that they related to. See Table 1 for detail. I forgot to incorporate them listing the coping techniques for the stressors and switched the order of activities that affected the learning outcomes. Originally, I planned for students to collaboratively list five stressful situations they have experienced after learning coping techniques. This would have allowed for them to learn how to incorporate coping strategies to the stressors they have listed which all students would benefit from. Therefore, the five situations were the only ones listed. Because of this, this learning outcome was not met.

Learning outcome 2 was that the students would be able to list two common stressors. I believe that this learning outcome was partially met. The presentation that I gave listed more than 10 common stressors experienced by college students. Via the use of *padlet.com*, students individually scanned the QR code and were asked to list two common stressors. There were multiple common stressors that were listed more than once. See Table 2. Out of 18 students, 11 students were able to list two common stressors that they related to or have experienced. On the other hand, all students were able to list common stressors that they related to or have experienced, partially meeting this outcome.

Learning outcome 3 was that students would indicate two coping techniques when dealing with stressors (i.e, deep breathing, mindfulness exercise, emotional supportive peers). After the presentation was done, I explained the worksheet handed out to them before beginning. See Appendix B. All of the students were able to list two coping techniques when dealing with stressors. To compile this data, I sorted through the worksheets and noted the number of times similar stressors students listed to the coping techniques in which they would use. See Table 3. 11 out of 18 students were able to complete the whole form. I think that some students did not understand or care enough to fill out the form. Therefore, this learning outcome was partially met.

Discussion

I recognize that this project was not entirely successful. Nonetheless, the participants were captivated by the topic and learned a lot from it. The participants fall within the scope of Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood and related to what was talked about in the presentation given, such as increased responsibilities, identity of expiration, and feeling in-between. I think that the first activity brought students together to freely speak out about stressors that they've

experienced, many of which are common during emerging adulthood. On the other hand, the success of this project was hindered as a result of switching activities and not implementing the other half of the learning outcome. Thus, one outcome was not met. In response to them sharing it out on padlet.com, not all students participated in the activity even though I specified it was anonymous. I saw not all students were participating so adding that it was anonymous was to reassure them that no one would who posted it. When discussing coping techniques, participants showed interest in learning new coping techniques that would help alleviate the stressors that they listed.

To be more inclusive of diversity, given that the participants come from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds, I could have incorporated the stressors they experienced growing up. This inclusion would have allowed me to demonstrate coping techniques that were more specific to those diverse stressors and accessible to the demographic of my participants.

If I had to do this over again, I wish that I could have followed through with the activities that I originally planned or add more onto them. Being more detailed and providing participants with further examples would have tied the presentation together. Due to participants having to leave, I did not receive much feedback from them and ended with fewer participants for the activities I had planned. I think some participants were tired and disengaged which caused them to not fully fill out the forms as I would have liked. Also, I could have asked for help with note taking during the group discussion so that I would not rush to type and memorize what was being said. Nevertheless, I think that participants walked away with the knowledge of new coping techniques to incorporate in their everyday life when dealing with stressors.

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*Table 1**List of 5 common stressors related to from the video*

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
School	Life	Financial problems	Changes in life	Family life
Public speaking	Family	Procrastination	School	Life balance
Procrastination	Relationships	Exams	Work	Relationships
Work	Responsibilities	Speeches	Relationships	Money
?	School	Presentations	Money	?

*Table 2**List of two common stressors that students related from the presentation*

Stressors	Number of times mentioned
Academic stress	8
Healthy struggles	5
Financial issues	4
Time management	3
Exams	3
Work	3
Family problems	3
Life balance	3
Sleeping late	2
Life changes	2
Healthy boundaries	1
Procrastination	1

Table 3

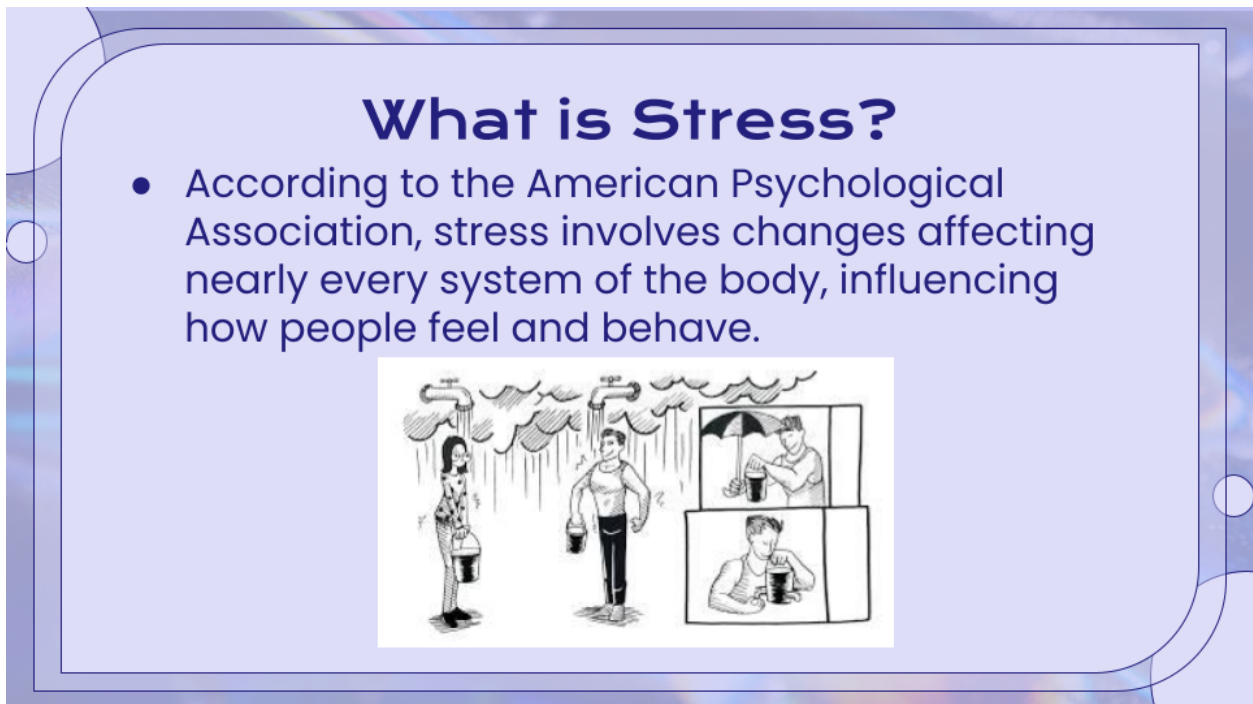
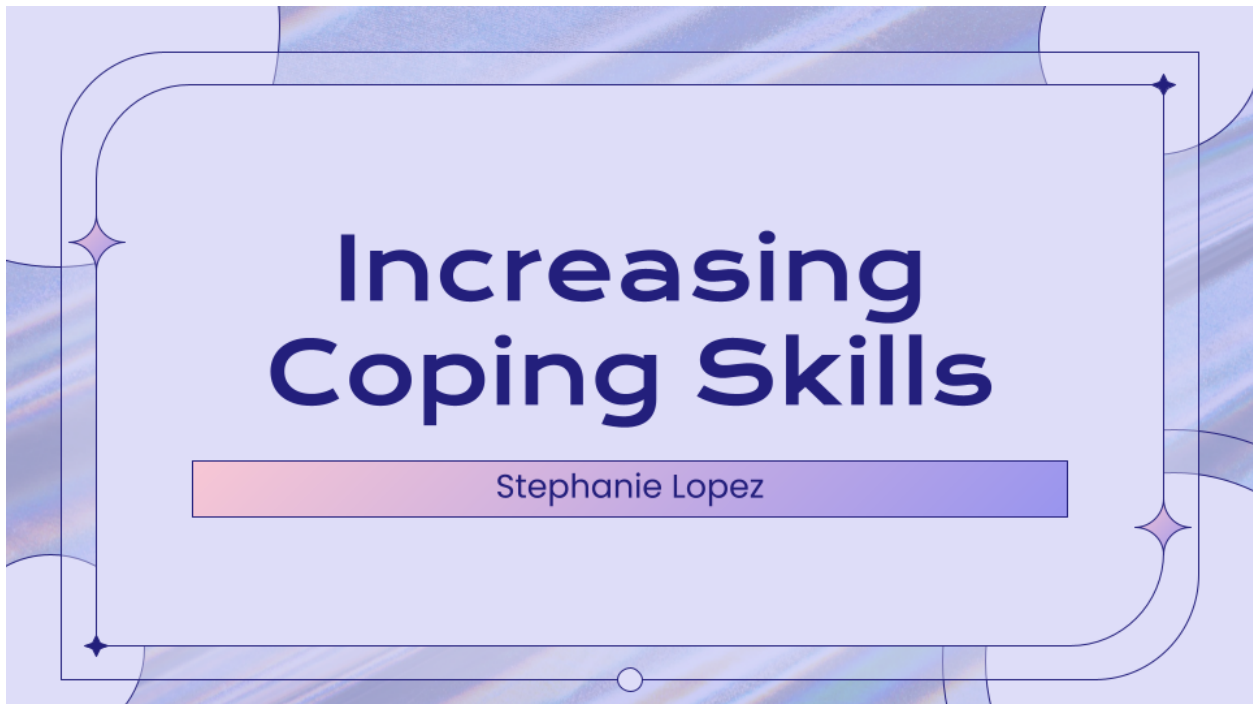
List of students responses of coping techniques that will be used when dealing with those stressors

(Number of times mentioned)

Common Stressors	Coping Techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Video Games (2) ● Work (5) ● School (10) ● Homework Deadlines (9) ● Stressful Situation (6) 	Relaxation Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Healthy Eating (6) ● Sleeping Habit (3) ● Insecurity (3) ● Energy Drinks (4) 	Diet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Academic Stress (9) ● Mental Load (4) 	Physical Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeling Lonely (6) ● Friendships (3) ● Volunteer (3) ● Overwhelmed (3) 	Spiritual or Community Involvement

Appendix A

Powerpoint on Stressors and Coping Techniques



Common Stressors

- Burn-Out
- Depression
- Academic Pressure
- Family Problems
- Relationships (friendships/romantic)
- Homesickness
- Increased Responsibilities
- Social Stress
- Death of a loved one
- Financial Problems
- Adjust to new environment
- Time management

Share Common Stressors



Coping Skills

<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- sleep 7+ hrs, take power naps, stretch, get a massage, exercise, hobbies <p>Mental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- write down your to do-s, meditate, create a routine to separate work and life, take a break from problem-solving <p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- spend time with people who give you energy, spend less time with people who steal your energy, if introvert, block out time to be alone	<p>Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Volunteer, participate in faith-based activities, time with nature, journal, mindfulness <p>Sensory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- take a break from social media, limit screen time, set relaxing ambiance (soothing music, candles, etc.) <p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Spend time with authentic people, spend time/talk to someone you trust, increase positive thinking, seeking out therapy
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Thank You !

Appendix B

Stress Management Worksheet

Stress Management Worksheet

Effective stress management techniques can be incorporated into your daily and weekly routines. This worksheet considers several main areas: Relaxation Skills, Diet Changes, Physical Activity, Spirituality, and Community Involvement. In the following boxes, add at least two stressful situations in which those techniques would help.

1. Relaxation Practices: (Ex. Mindfulness, breathing exercises, journaling, hobbies)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

2. Diet: (Ex. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, eat less sugar, eat more whole foods)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

3. Physical Activity: (Ex. Walking, yoga, hiking, exercise, hobbies, team sports)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

4. Spiritual or Community Involvement: (Ex. Volunteering, time in nature, attending religious services, building friendships, etc.)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

Appendix C

Presentation from Capstone Festival

Increasing Coping Skills to Reduce First-Generation College Students' Stressors

Stephanie Lopez

Need Statement

- First-generation college students mental health may be impacted by the stress they face
 - Away from home (supportive peers)
 - Familial expectations
 - Balancing a family and social life along with studies
- Their mental health is impacted by stress that may lead to,
 - Mental health to worsen (e.g., depression)
 - Burnt out
 - Risk of dropping out
- ➔ Because of this, learning coping techniques will help first-generation students manage their stressors.

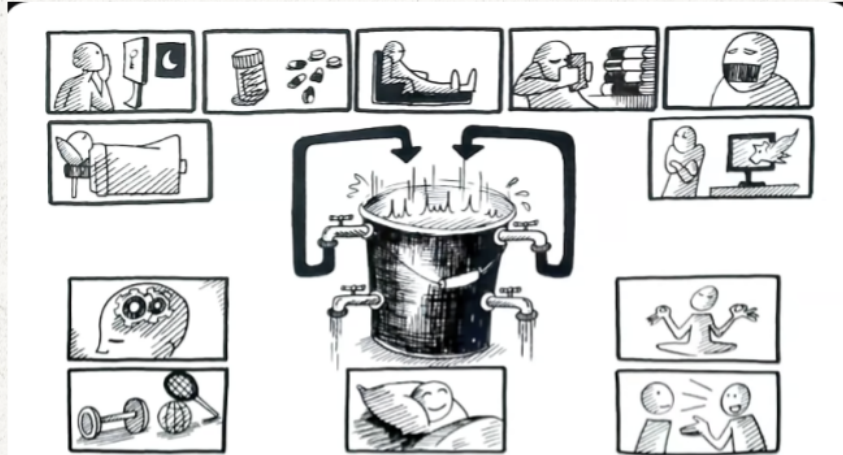
Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood

- The lifespan of 18-25 years old, individuals can have a feeling of being in between the end of adolescence and emerging adult responsibilities.
 - feelings of instability
 - increasing independence
 - identity exploration
 - feeling in-between

What did I do?

- I created a 50 minute workshop,
 - Presentation on Stressors & Coping Skills
 - YouTube Video: *How Stress Affects Your Body and Mind*
 - Padlet accessed by a QR Code
 - Stress Management Worksheet

How Stress Affects Your Body and Mind



A collaborative web platform in which users can upload, organize and share content to virtual bulletin boards.

Stephanie Lopez • 17 • 1-6d

Common Stressors Video

Identify at least two common stressors that you related to and briefly describe how you felt when experiencing these stressors

<p>Procrastination</p> <p>Due to leaving things to last minute I end up having to sleep late to finish the assignment before it's due also with study I wait until there is little time left for the exam which gives me even more stress and has me feeling tired the next day</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>School</p> <p>I have been enjoying my Cinema Classes this semester but the amount of projects and work that I have to do can be stressful at time. I have been time managing to help me to reduce stress while getting all my work done.</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>life changes</p> <p>Was forced to learn a new relationship with food and taking care of myself and as a freshmen it felt like i never had the time or money to properly take care of myself which led to anxiety about my health</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>Work</p> <p>My old job was very stressful although the tasks I had to do were very easy the work environment was very toxic and at times stressful to work with. My new job has a better work environment and management has a lot more communication with the employees.</p> <p>Add comment</p>
<p>Financial issues, and exams</p> <p>Financial issues have become quite burdensome as I enter adulthood and slowly becoming more independent, exams will always be stressful as I try to prepare and worry if I'll fail.</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>Financial & Health Struggles</p> <p>Stressing about financial situations such as not being able to afford rent & living expenses leads to health problems that increase that amount of stress to a maximum.</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>Setting healthy boundaries is overwhelming because it's hard to say no or stand up for yourself without feeling guilty</p> <p>Add comment</p>	<p>Work/School/ Finance</p> <p>Having to find a balance between work and school especially because as a commuter gas, food, etc are very high prices to pay and not having much of the time to put into work affected me financially for a while</p> <p>Add comment</p>

Stress Management Worksheet

Effective stress management techniques can be incorporated into your daily and weekly routines. This worksheet considers several main areas: Relaxation Skills, Diet Changes, Physical Activity, Spirituality, and Community Involvement. In the following boxes, add at least two stressful situations in which those techniques would help.

1. Relaxation Practices: (Ex. Mindfulness, breathing exercises, journaling, hobbies)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

2. Diet: (Ex. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, eat less sugar, eat more whole foods)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

3. Physical Activity: (Ex. Walking, yoga, hiking, exercise, hobbies, team sports)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

4. Spiritual or Community Involvement: (Ex. Volunteering, time in nature, attending religious services, building friendships, etc.)

How I can make this part of my daily life:

Who and Where?

- College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)
- California State University, Monterey Bay
- First-year students
- 18 participants



Learning Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to,

1. Identify five situations that require specific coping techniques
2. Identify two common stressors
3. Indicate two coping techniques when dealing with stressors (i.e, deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, emotional supportive peers)

LO 1: Identify three situations that require specific coping techniques

- *How Stress Affects Your Body and Mind*
 - 5 groups of 4 students
 - Listed 5 situations from the video that they related to
- As the group of students listed their 5 situations, I wrote them down.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
School	Life	Financial problems	Changes in life	Family life
Public speaking	Family	Procrastination	School	Life balance
Procrastination	Relationships	Exams	Work	Relationships
Work	Responsibilities	Speeches	Relationships	Money
?	School	Presentations	Money	?

- All students were able to identify 5 situations related to from the video
- Did not mention to “specific coping techniques”
 → Learning Outcome 1 was not met



LO 2: Identify two common stressors

- Presented more than 10 common stressors experienced by college students
- Padlet accessed by a QR Code
 - Identify at least two common stressors that you related to and briefly describe how you felt when experiencing these stressors.

Common Stressors

- Burn-Out
- Depression
- Academic Pressure
- Family Problems
- Relationships (friendships/romantic)
- Homesickness
- Increased Responsibilities
- Social Stress
- Death of a loved one
- Financial Problems
- Adjust to new environment
- Time management

Procrastination

Due to leaving things to last minute I end up having to sleep late to finish the assignment before it's due also with study I wait until there is little time left for the exam which gives me even more stress and has me feeling tired the next day

Balance between college and personal life

To find a balance between my family and having to stay behind because of assignment and still find time to spend with my family

family life and school stress

i feel like family life affects how i do academically since i try helping out as much as i can and sometimes they don't understand. school stresses with the amount of work and the deadlines

Work/School/ Finance

Having to find a balance between work and school especially because as a commuter gas, food, etc are very high prices to pay and not having much of the time to put into work affected me financially for a while

Stressors	Number of times mentioned
Academic stress	8
Health struggles	5
Financial issues	4
Time management	3
Exams	3
Work	3
Family problems	3
Life balance	3
Sleeping late	2
Life changes	2
Healthy boundaries	1
Procrastination	1

- Not all students participated in the padlet activity
- 11 out of 18 students were able to identify two common stressors
 - Learning Outcome 2 was partially met



LO 3: Indicate two coping techniques when dealing with stressors

- Presented coping techniques (physical, mental health, social, spiritual, sensory, and emotional)
 - Handed out “Stress Management Worksheet”
 - Sorted through their responses and found the most common stressor matched to the coping technique

Coping Skills

Physical

- sleep 7+ hrs, take power naps, stretch, get a massage, exercise, hobbies

Mental

- write down your to do-s, meditate, create a routine to separate work and life, take a break from problem-solving

Social

- spend time with people who give you energy, spend less time with people who steal your energy, if introvert, block out time to be alone

Spiritual

- Volunteer, participate in faith-based activities, time with nature, journal, mindfulness

Sensory

- take a break from social media, limit screen time, set relaxing ambiance (soothing music, candles, etc.)

Emotional

- Spend time with authentic people, spend time/talk to someone you trust, increase positive thinking, seeking out therapy

1. Relaxation Practices: (Ex. Mindfulness, breathing exercises, journaling, hobbies)

~~Stressful thoughts~~
When exams are coming up
When you are late

How I can make this part of my daily life:
while driving to school/work do breathing exercises

2. Diet: (Ex. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, eat less sugar, eat more whole foods)

Studying / Test ; stress eating

How I can make this part of my daily life:
Whenever I want to eat chips eat an orange instead

3. Physical Activity: (Ex. Walking, yoga, hiking, exercise, hobbies, team sports)

Feeling very anxious
CANT concentrate

How I can make this part of my daily life:
Start mornings off with some exercise

4. Spiritual or Community Involvement: (Ex. Volunteering, time in nature, attending religious services, building friendships, etc.)

feeling isolated / left out

How I can make this part of my daily life:
on weekends join some volunteer work

1. Relaxation Practices: (Ex. Mindfulness, breathing exercises, journaling, hobbies)

1) When I get called out in front of CAMP.
2) A stressful argument with a loved one

How I can make this part of my daily life:
Focusing on my breathing,
drawing.

2. Diet: (Ex. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, eat less sugar, eat more whole foods)

1) When I get cravings
2) Being in a rush and grabbing unhealthy snacks.

How I can make this part of my daily life:
Avoiding addictive
processed foods

3. Physical Activity: (Ex. Walking, yoga, hiking, exercise, hobbies, team sports)

1) When I need to distract myself a little physically
2) When I have too little energy.

How I can make this part of my daily life:
going to the gym
often. (4-6x a week)

4. Spiritual or Community Involvement: (Ex. Volunteering, time in nature, attending religious services, building friendships, etc.)

1) When I feel like the world is out to get me
2) When too much is on my mind

How I can make this part of my daily life:
going on walks
in the weekends.

Common Stressors	Coping Techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Games (2) • Work (5) • School (10) • Homework Deadlines (9) • Stressful Situation (6) 	Relaxation Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Eating (6) • Sleeping Habit (3) • Insecurity (3) • Energy Drinks (4) 	Diet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Stress (9) • Mental Load (4) 	Physical Activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling Lonely (6) • Friendships (3) • Volunteer (3) • Overwhelmed (3) 	Spiritual or Community Involvement

- All students listed at least one stressors but did not fully complete the worksheet
 - 11 out of 18 students were able to complete the worksheet
- Learning Outcome 3 was partially met



Discussion

Was it successful?

- Yes!
 - all participants are aware of new coping techniques when dealing with everyday stressors

What would I do differently?

- Demographic Stressors
- Followed through with activities planned
- More detailed and give more examples
- Asked for help with note taking

Thank You!
Any
Questions?

Stephanie Lopez