

 Frameworks
SEL MONTHLY™
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
*SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)
& COPING WITH ACADEMIC STRESS*

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WHAT IS ACADEMIC STRESS?

by *Eddie Underwood, SEL Programs Specialist*

We are entering one of the most stressful times in the school year - we have passed the halfway point and test season is looming. Academic pressures are the main cause for stress in students and teachers, and we respond to these stressors in different ways. These sources of stress not only affect students and teachers, but also parents. Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure, or even the fear of the possibility of academic failure. There are many causes of academic stress, and here are just a few: developmentally inappropriate classrooms, high-stakes testing, pressure from parents, demanding academic content, peer relationships, fear of failure, overbooked schedules, conflicts with teachers, and poor health decisions. Academic stress often leads to physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms such as frequent illnesses, depression, irritability, decreased academic performance, drug or alcohol experimentation, and cheating. This month, we will provide strategies, research, and resources to help with coping with academic stress leading to a healthy and successful finish to the school year.

EARLY LEARNING

Setting up the right expectations can draw the line between academic stress and emotional wellbeing. School readiness in early years involves children developing the foundation of social and emotional skills. As children transition to kindergarten, academic expectations become part of their goal-setting process. Creating appropriate goals for your children increases their productivity and decreases the risk of academic stress. At this age, emotions play a vital role in children's actions because they are still learning how to recognize and manage their emotions. Teachers also experience academic pressure as they plan to get children ready for first grade. Teachers' stress can have an impact on classroom climate, teacher and student relationships, and child's development (Denoon, 2007).

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Elementary school children enjoy going to school and making friends. Now, as children start to get ready for state testing, they are more likely to experience stress. This kind of stress impacts the child's desire to go to school as well as school performance. For parents, it can be common to see their children performing differently while doing homework than when they are taking a test. That is because at home the child feels safer, and protected from triggers. To help children cope with academic stress, parents need to acknowledge the child's feelings and physical cues. Parents can practice different techniques one on one with their children to help them calm down. Then create a plan with the practices that work best for their child like breathings, scribbling, or doodling.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

As children transition to middle school, they must learn how to navigate through new peer dynamics. These changes can affect the way middle schoolers socialize and feel about themselves. At this age, children become more likely to experience bullying than in younger ages. Parents must create a trusting relationship with their children. This gives children a coping mechanism they can pull from their toolbox. Having a trusting relationship also allows them to talk about their challenges. Parents can use this opportunity to create goals that require both child and parent involvement. For example, a reading challenge, or becoming more physically active (Marsh, 2021).

HIGH SCHOOL

As teenagers start talking about career goals or college choices, their stress levels increase not only for them but also for their parents. Parents and children must take time to talk about their emotions, as well as taking time to discuss the teen's choices to create a plan. Teenagers also experience a greater level of anxiety when getting a lower grade than expected on a test because a grade could impact their college choices. Teenagers must continue cultivating a growth mindset - this will help them be more optimistic about continuing to work towards their goal, even after lower performance. Teenagers can also practice other stress management techniques like getting enough sleep, a healthier diet, and organizing school and personal schedules (Marsh, 2021).



COPING WITH ACADEMIC STRESS

by Jordan Sims
Community Programs Specialist

Everyone copes with academic stress in different ways and not every strategy will work in every situation. For this reason, we suggest building a diverse toolbox of social and emotional strategies to pull from when needed. Below is a list of different strategies that will help you support your child and strengthen their coping skills:

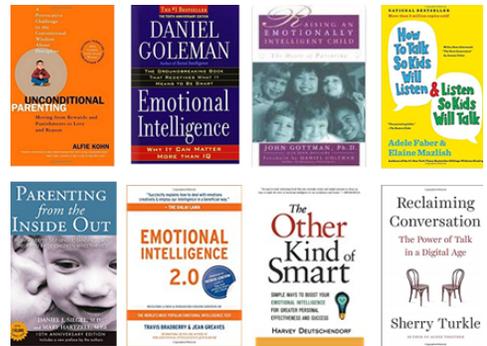
- **Encourage naming emotions** related to the stress to help your child identify the best solution for tackling it. For example, they may be afraid of failing, confused by the content, or frustrated with their environment, all which will require different solutions.
- **Practice self-care** with your child and your family to proactively keep stress levels lower. This could be practicing mindfulness strategies, taking a short study break, or simply getting enough sleep each night.
- **Offer validation and support** when your child is feeling comfortable and uncomfortable emotions. Start by acknowledging how your child is feeling and then show support by cheering them on or sitting calmly with them while they work through the discomfort.
- **Identify available resources** at your school or in your area. If your child is feeling stressed or needs academic assistance, check in with your child's teacher or guidance counselor to see what free or paid resources are available to give your child extra support.
- **Model healthy coping strategies** for your child. This will give them a real, live example of what it looks like to cope with stress in a healthy way, and it will help keep you calm too!

SETTING HEALTHY EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

by Siomara Bridges-Mata
Sr. Community Programs Specialist

We can set and have high expectations for our students, but we must also meet their social and emotional needs. The American Institute for Research (AIR) shows us that there is a strong relationship between our emotional intelligence and our levels of academic stress, including how we support others and communicate expectations in a healthy way. Here are some keys ways you can communicate high expectations in a healthy manner and set your students up for success:

- **Meet each student where they are.** That means differentiating—for example, giving different tasks to different students, or holding small groups to support students on a task. It also means gradual release—for example, the I do/we do/you do rollout of a skill, and starting with less complex material and working toward more complex material.
- **Communicate to students that they are in charge of their academic growth.** It is important to support students by reminding them in an empowering way: “How do you feel? How can you set yourself up for success next time? You can do this!” You can praise students for their effort over their outcomes—what matters is that they do their best. Tell students that you expect their best effort and that their effort is connected with the results they will get.
- **Focus on “doing their best.”** Offer students tasks where there is more than one correct answer so that it’s less about right or wrong and more about learning to defend their answers. This can go a long way in helping students focus less on being correct and more on doing their best and offering evidence.
- **Let them know you care!** When we challenge students, we want to give an especially strong focus on offering social and emotional support. For example, letting them know that you care about them no matter what.

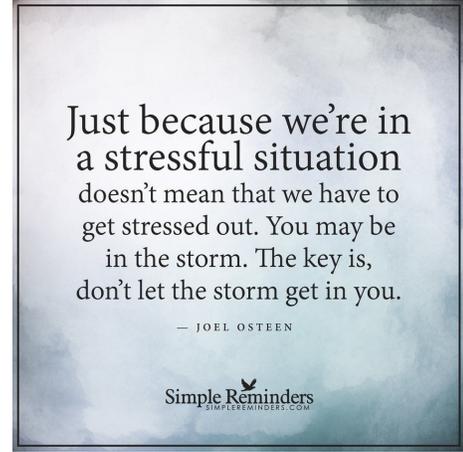


RESOURCES AND READINGS

by Brian Schank
Senior SEL Programs Specialist

As discussed so far in this newsletter, stress comes from different sources and for all age groups. This stress can affect students mentally and physically. The following are some resources to dive a little deeper, and also explain the causes and effects of academic stress as well as some social and emotional learning strategies to combat this stress. The key is to identify what you are dealing with and find some strategies that work for you.

- [The Case for Social and Emotional Learning: How Academic Stress Affects Student Mental Health | Michigan Virtual](#)
- [10 Social and Emotional Learning activities to help students with stress management \(eschoolnews.com\)](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning: Social Awareness: Coping Skills \(houstonisd.org\)](#)



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