

# Week 1



CENTRE FOR STUDIES  
ON HUMAN STRESS  
(CSHS)



CENTRE  
DE RECHERCHE  
DE L'USMM  
CENTRE AFFILIÉ À  
L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

DESTRESS FOR  
SUCCESS

**This week, your child has followed the program and has learned...**

## We all experience stressful situations differently

For example, one child may be stressed because he/she is afraid of not passing an exam. Another may be stressed because their friend will not talk to them anymore. A third may be stressed because you had planned to spend the weekend together and then something came up at the last minute. Some kids will not be stressed out by any of these situations, but will be stressed out because the cafeteria menu changed...

Everyone reacts differently to different situations, therefore, not everyone is going to be stressed for the same reasons.

## A universal recipe for stress

Regardless of the situation that stresses your child and no matter the age or context in which your child lives, in order for a situation to be considered stressful, it must contain one or more of the following ingredients: novelty, unpredictability, threat to personality, sense of low control.

The more ingredients in a situation, the more stressed your child will be by that situation.

An easy way to remember these 4 ingredients is to take the first letters of each element. The result is: "Don't go NUTS with stress!".

## This week...

This week your child should write down, in their logbook, the stressful situations they experience and identify the ingredients that each situation contains.

### Stress elements

Novel **N**  
Unpredictable **U**  
Threat to ego **T**  
Sense of low control **S**

## Follow-up to the Destress for Success program



The program takes place over 5 weeks, with one workshop per week. Each week, we will inform you of what your child learned in the workshop. This way, you will be able to better understand what your child is talking about if he/she feels like sharing this experience with you.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the research team responsible for this project: [cesh-cshs.cemtl@ssss.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:cesh-cshs.cemtl@ssss.gouv.qc.ca)

# Week 2



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SUCCESS

This week, your child has followed the program and has learned...

## We are all different in the type of stress we perceive

Using the logbook, your child will share the stressful situations that he/she has experienced during the week. As explained in Workshop 1, we all encounter different stressful situations in our daily lives. Some children are stressed because they cannot go out on the weekend, others are stressed when their mother asks them to clean their room, and so on. The ingredients of stress that explain why we find these situations stressful always remain the same.

## There are also common stressors

It is very likely that the same situation is stressful for several children. For example, when a child has an argument with a sibling, or when a child is stressed about an upcoming math test. Even though this situation is stressful for many, the reasons that lead to stress are not necessarily the same for everyone. Remember the ingredients of stress (NUTS). Some may perceive an attack on their ego when arguing with a brother, while others may be stressed because they lack control over the situation.

And... action! In this activity, children will act out a stressful situation in teams of two.

This gives them a chance to become aware of how stress can be experienced in everyday life and how people can experience the same situation and perceive it as stressful for different reasons.

## This week...

Using the logbook, your child should record the stressful situations that he/she experiences and the cues that the body gives when stressed. In other words, "how do you know when you are stressed?"

## Stress ingredients

Novel **N**  
Unpredictable **U**  
Threat to ego **T**  
Sense of low control **S**

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# Week 3



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## DESTRESS FOR SUCCESS

This week, your child has followed the program and has learned...

### How does the body react when we are stressed?

With the use of the logbook, your child will share the stressful situations experienced during the week, and the ways in which he/she noticed that he/she was stressed. While participating in a small physical activity, your child will notice that his/her pulse rate increases in order to pump more blood to the body's muscles. When we feel stressed, our body reacts in the same way. It gathers all its energy so that we can use it. This is the concept of energy mobilization, the way the body prepares us to face a stressful situation. A stress response is the energy that prepares us to flee or fight when faced with a stressful situation.

### Ways that the body react to a stressor...

Increase in cortisol (the body's main stress hormone):

- Pupils in the eyes dilate
- The heart rate increases to pump more blood to our muscles
- Breathing is accelerated to increase the supply of oxygen to the body. etc.

In a nutshell, the important thing is to **listen to your body**. Being aware of the way your body reacts can help you realize that you are stressed.

### Where does the energy go?

When your child has a pop quiz at school, he/she cannot run away from it! Since the body has gathered up all the pent-up energy from the stressful situation, that energy has to be released somehow. For example, after working out, your teen feels calm and less stressed because he/she has spent the built up energy from the stressful day.

### How to "destress"

(Emotion-focused coping strategies)

- Move
- Do good around you
- Laugh
- Breathe with your belly
- Sing
- Pray
- Listen to music

Everyone has their own **UNIQUE** way of reducing stress. Just as our **PERCEPTION** of stress is different, so is our way of **REACTING** to stress.

### This week...

Your child will do the same exercise as last week. However, this time, your child should also write down how his/her energy was spent.

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### Stress ingredients

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# Week 4



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DESTRESS FOR SUCCESS

This week, your child has followed the program and has learned...

## One way to tackle stress is to breakdown the problem

With the use of the logbook, your child will share the stressful situations that he/she has experienced, as well as the methods used to get rid of the energy mobilized by stress. It is impossible to completely eliminate stress so we must learn to live with it! One way to cope with a stressful situation is to **breakdown the problem** and to see what makes one stressed. Once your child knows what elements of the NUTS model are present in the situation that is causing them stress, they can then come up with solutions to make the situation less stressful.

## "Reconstruct" stress

Once your child has broken down their stress, the best way to live with it is to:

**Reconstruct their stress**, that is, find ways to adapt to the specific reasons why a situation is stressful.

For example, if your child is stressed because of constant arguments with you about tidying up his/her bedroom (lack of control, personality threatened...), your child must reconstruct the situation by asking him/herself the following questions and finding the right solutions:

**"What can I do to decrease the threat to my personality?"**

-Maybe I could talk about my stress with my parents. Maybe we can find a solution that will make me feel better.

**"What can I do to increase my sense of control over this situation?"**

-I could create a cleaning schedule that gives me the choice of which days I can clean my room.

## Plan B

It is helpful to have a plan B in case the original plan does not work as well as your child expected.

The important thing to remember is that the only thing the brain needs to stop the stress response is a way out! This makes you feel much better.

## This week

Your child will need to identify the things that stressed him/her during the week. He/she will need to identify the NUTS items that were part of the solution and will need to write down what he/she did to deal with the stressor. Did the strategy work? If not, how about Plan B? (C? D?...)

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# Week 5



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## DESTRESS FOR SUCCESS

### This week, your child has followed the program and has learned...

#### The benefits of social support

A very good way to cope with stressful situations is to seek social support. For example, when your teen talks to a friend about what is stressing him/her out or asks for advice from an adult. By sharing stressful situations with others, your child does not become isolated. By receiving the kind of support that your child needs, he/she will feel less stressed.

An activity is planned to demonstrate the positive effects of social support on stress. The results of this activity will show that being in a group increases social support between members and, therefore, this situation may seem less stressful.

#### Social support vs social pressure

We carried out another activity to demonstrate that sometimes social support becomes social pressure...and can cause stress.

For example, your teen has a group of friends that he/she spends a lot of time with and can reply on. But one day, they challenge your child to try smoking and they tell him/her that if he/she does not, he/she will no longer be accepted into the group.

All of a sudden, your child's group of friends who used to support him/her (social support) are placing social pressure on him/her (smoking). The situation causes your child to be stressed.

If your teen suffers from social pressure, he/she should find healthy friendship networks to help cope with stress.

#### Identify your social support groups versus social pressure groups...

Using the social support tree in his/her logbook, your child will write down the names of people he/she considers to be part of his/her social support group. If these people become a social pressure, your child will circle their names. The tree will help your child determine who is socially supportive and who is a source of social pressure.

#### This week

Your child's job will be to teach his/her friends and/or family about the NUTS model and how to manage stress. If they are able to explain to someone else what they have learned, it means that they have understood what was taught to them in these workshops.

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