

**Don't Stress Out About It:**  
**Stress Management for Teens**  
**Grades 5-9**  
**45 Minutes**

**Program Introduction**

*Don't Stress Out About It: Stress Management for Teens is a 45-minute program and 12-lesson plan Health Quest curriculum designed to introduce viewers 10-16 years old to the tools which can help them deal with stress and develop life long habits of health and wellbeing.*

**Program Objectives:**

After viewing the program and participating in the lesson plans, viewers/participants should be able to:

- Define and identify stress - its causes and effects.
- Describe the relationship between stress and the body, mind, emotions, and spirit.
- Understand the physiology of stress.
- Describe the “fight or flight response.”
- Demonstrate the role of diet, exercise, sleep, and relaxation in reducing stress.
- Explain the importance of drinking plenty of water in managing stress.
- Identify the role that negative self talk plays in creating stress.
- Define strategies for reducing negative self talk.
- Discuss the relationship between technology and stress.
- Understand the role of mismanaging anger in creating stress.
- Identify their own anger style or “hot stone.”
- Define strategies to cool down/drop their hot stones.
- Understand the role that meditation plays in managing stress.
- Design a personal wellness plan.

**Summary of Program:**

**Don't Stress Out About It** introduces the concepts of stress and health as it follows a group of the students who are involved in HEALTH QUEST – a 12-week stress management course offered at Sunset Middle School in Longmont, Colorado. The video sections and a 12 lesson plan and curriculum help viewers are designed to replicate the lessons taught in the class.

The video is divided into the following sections:

**Introduction and Title Sequence** introduces viewers to the concept and experience of stress.

**What Is Stress?** – presents the following definition of stress:

***STRESS IS A RESPONSE TO THE DEMANDS PLACED ON US IN OUR LIVES***

**The Physiology of Stress** presents the origins of stress as a response to physical danger and discusses the physiological changes that take place in the fight or flight response.

**What Causes Stress?** – explores the idea that stress affects us in four ways: *physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.*

**What Is Health?** – introduces the following definition of health:

***HEALTH IS BRINGING BALANCE TO OUR BODY, MIND, SPIRIT AND EMOTIONS***

The section introduces the concept that anything in our lives can become stressful and that stress management involves learning how to manage our response to situations in our lives so that the demands placed on us don't stress us out.

**Stress and the Body** describes the ways in which stress can affect our body and discusses different ways to manage physical stress through:

- Relaxation techniques* including deep breathing, massage, and centering.
- What we eat and drink* in particular, emphasizing the importance of drinking water.
- Sleep*
- Exercise*

**Stress and the Mind** introduces the concept of *Negative Self Talk* and discusses the dangers of perfectionism and the stress that technology adds to our lives. Youth participants in the program present their strategies for changing negative self talk.

**Stress and the Emotions** discusses how our emotions are the filter through which we see the world. It presents the concept of *Mismanaged Anger*, using the metaphor of four hot stones to describe four different styles of mismanaging anger. The four hot stones are:

1. *The Silent But Deadly Stone*
2. *The Volcanic Stone*
3. *The Razor Stone, and*
4. *The Revenge Stone.*

The following strategies for *Cooling Down Our Hot Stones* are presented:

- Humor*
- Crying*
- Thinking before you act*
- Getting physical*
- Doing something creative*

Extended learning sections are included on:

- Art Therapy*
- Building a Crisis Kit* – including using journaling and music as ways to relieve stress
- Meditation*

**Stress and the Spirit** discusses the importance of making connections with others through volunteering, mentoring, joining groups, and other community involvement.

The final statements or *Lessons Learned* by the Health Quest students are included in this last section.

## Introduction to the Health Quest Curriculum:

The Health Quest curriculum is based on a program initiated at Sunset Middle School in Longmont, Colorado. The Health Quest Stress Management Program involves a community partnership in which health and wellness professionals volunteer to share their knowledge, strategies, and techniques for identifying and managing stress with a select group of middle school students. The program was developed by teacher Linda Bartlett in response to her growing awareness of the changes she was seeing in her students' health issues. Here is how she describes the beginning of Health Quest:

“When I began teaching in the mid ‘70s, I can remember checking in the nurse’s office to see if any of my participants had medical conditions requiring my attention. I skimmed a two-page list of participant names attached to a clipboard.

Times change. By the late ‘90s, the list of children in my school diagnosed with medical conditions needed a three-ring notebook to contain it. From asthma and allergies to migraine headaches and depression, the number of my students and students across our nation with health concerns was growing at an alarming rate. Why?

To seek an answer, I approached a member of our local Chamber of Commerce who introduced me to a vast network of health care professionals in our community. Together, we began an exploratory course for teens to examine the most prevalent health issues facing today’s youth. By the end of the first 20-week seminar, the participants unanimously identified “stress” as a primary contributor to the health issues they faced. From their recommendations, participants, instructors and health professionals joined together and *Health Quest: A Stress Management Seminar* was born.”

In the beginning, *Health Quest* was more of a smorgasbord of guest speakers. Committed to the program, many of the doctors, nurses, and complementary wellness practitioners now return yearly. Stress management consultant and writer, Dr. Brian Luke Seaward has joined Linda as an active participant in the program. As they continue to work together, they have joined pedagogical skills with the content knowledge of the visiting health experts. *Health Quest* has grown and evolved to include a host of themes and activities to fully engage participants to take an active role in their own health and well-being; to see themselves as active participants rather than passive victims in a hectic and often rapidly changing world.

***Health Quest is not just for kids, however!*** Instructors, administrators, secretaries, custodians, and parents can benefit from a better understanding of stress and how to incorporate skills and strategies for managing stress, coping with change, and maintaining balance in their personal and professional life. The lessons provided need little adaptation to be relevant to an adult audience.

The *Health Quest* curriculum makes the assumption that the instructor/facilitator may not have a degree in counseling, be in the health and wellness field, or have access to professional volunteers. Step by step lesson plans guide the course leader through the process of providing opportunities for participants to identify and better manage stress. Suggestions for extended reading are offered, as are suggestions for possible guest speakers should sources be available.

In the summer of 2001, Dr. interviewed on a number of subjects ranging from what stressed them out as a teenager to positive ways in which to cope with anger and stress. The result of this remarkable endeavor, *Hot Stones and Funny Bones : Teens Helping Teens Cope with Stress and Anger: Teens Helping Teens Cope With Stress and Anger* was released through Health Communications, Inc., in the fall of 2002. A copy of this book can be obtained through any bookstore to be used as a resource for information and discussion.

The “hot stones” which represent mismanaged anger (inflamed by stress) will be joined by “gemstones” in the pages to follow. Gemstones are the daily attitudes and stress management habits we can adopt to help shield us from chronic stress.

There are 12 complete lesson plans in the curriculum written by Health Quest educators Dr. Brian Luke Seaward and Linda Bartlett. Each lesson relates to a topic introduced in the video. The lessons are grouped by video section. Included in the lesson plan are discussion questions for the video, extended learning activities and blackline masters.

Curriculum materials are the copyright of Health Quest Institute, Longmont, Colorado. Luke Seaward and Linda Bartlett were invited to write a book on teen anger as an answer to the events at Columbine High School. Over 100 teens from around the country were

**For more information and additional lesson guides contact Paramount Wellness Institute at [www.brianlukeseaward.net](http://www.brianlukeseaward.net). Or email Linda Bartlett at: [Bartlett\\_Linda@stvrain.k12.co.us](mailto:Bartlett_Linda@stvrain.k12.co.us)**

#### **Background information for facilitators:**

Stress has become so ubiquitous that the World Health Organization calls it a “global epidemic.” While there is no commonly accepted definition of stress, experts in the allied health fields suggest that the words “stress” and “change” are now used synonymously, and there is no doubt that we are living in times of great change today.

**Why learn about stress?** Because simply stated, stress kills! Stress knows no demographic boundaries. It affects men, women, children; people of all backgrounds. Stress is often called the equal opportunity destroyer. The relationship between stress and disease approaches 85%, and by some estimates, this is too low. Here is a short list of illnesses and diseases that are either caused or aggravated by stress: diabetes, ulcers, acne, lupus, colds, flu, TMJD, fibromyalgia, IBS, cancer, and coronary heart disease.

**Definitions:** Stress is such a big topic that it crosses over many disciplines: physiology, sociology, psychology, theology, anthropology, and perhaps many, many more. Depending on with whom you talk from one or more disciplines, stress goes by many different definitions. The definition we use in this program is:

*Stress is a response to the demands placed on us in our lives.*

Another way of looking at this is that stress is a perceived threat (real or imagined) to one’s mind, body, spirit, or emotions. Under a perceived threat, the body rapidly goes into what is commonly known as “fight or flight,” a physiological response that allows us to survive physical threats. This stress response is useful for physical threats; it is not appropriate for mental, emotional and spiritual threats; problems most people encounter today.

**Is all stress bad for you?** No! Not all stress is bad. In fact, we need some stress to function on a day to day basis, particularly when we encounter physical danger (e.g., a burning building, an oncoming car, etc.). First and foremost, stress is a survival dynamic. The problem is it gets overused for reasons that are not really threatening.

**What does stress teach us?** In simple terms stress can teach us to avoid danger. Now, you may think this comes naturally, but if you were to stop and talk to first responders and police officers, you would be in for a whole new education process.

**Acute and Chronic Stress?** Yes! There are two kinds of stress. Acute stress is very intense, but very short term (about 20 minutes). Think of the time you were pulled over for a speeding ticket or locked your keys in your car and know exactly what acute stress is. Your heart pounds out of your chest. Luckily, the human body cannot withstand acute stress very long and calms down all by itself.

Chronic stress is quite another story. The word chronic means over time, and this kind of stress is no where near as intense, but it seems to last for days, weeks, months, even years. The end result of this perpetual flood of stress hormones continually circulating in the body runs the gamut from a compromised immune system to severe problems with the gastrointestinal track, none of which is good, and in fact can ultimately kill you. It use to be that we wouldn't see the physiological symptoms of stress until people hit their 50s or 60s. Sadly, we now see it in people as young as 10 years old.

**Post Traumatic Stress** is an anxiety disorder that is triggered by memories of a traumatic event in which you were directly impacted or in which you were a witness. PTSD is associated with a wide range of events such as war, physical assault, sexual assault, childhood abuse, accidents and natural disasters. Some of the symptoms associated with PTSD include flashbacks, depression, sleep disturbances including nightmares, withdrawal and numbness, and feelings of guilt and anxiety.

If you suspect that any of the participants in the class or group are suffering from PTSD, it is recommended that you seek professional help from a counselor or medical professional. There are a variety of behavioral and medical treatments for PTSD, which only a trained professional can recommend.

**Reactions to Stress:** In the short term, the body's nervous system is on high alert sending a continual supply of epinephrine and nor-epinephrine to increase everything from heart rate and blood pressure to metabolism and muscle tension. While many hormones are released soon after the nervous system kicks in, chronic stress keeps demanding more stress hormones (e.g., cortisol, aldosterone, vassopressin, thyroxine) all of which can become a toxic waste stress cocktail, if nothing is done.

**The Stress Emotions:** Primarily there are two stress emotions, which in turn manifest in a great many ways. Anger is the fight response. Fear is the flight response. Each of these, in its most basic sense, is a survival emotion and for that purpose these two emotions are good. Fear helps you flee from a burning building. Anger helps you defend yourself from attack. These emotions become bad when they are employed for non-physical stressors or used longer than it takes to get out of harm's way.

Anger can be expressed in many ways including, but not limited to: Impatience, guilt, animosity, indignation, frustration, jealousy, envy, hostility and rage.

Fear can be expressed in many ways including but not limited to: Doubt, anxiety, panic, low self-esteem, embarrassment, humiliation and paranoia.

**Why learn about stress?** Stress is associated with most everything we do, from taking tests in school to how we communicate in our relationships (e.g., parents, siblings, girl friends, boy friends, co-workers, and neighbors). The teenage years are renowned the world over for being stressful. Issues of acceptance, self-esteem, body image, friendships, parental relationships, and ever increasing responsibility to become an adult loom heavy on the minds of each and every teenager. Research is quite clear that the early teen years are the formative years where strong health habits are either adopted or ignored.

The average person does not cope well with stress. We tend to pick up behaviors from our parents (which, by and large, are not healthy) and then compound these with bad habits trying to survive in an ever changing world. Stress management techniques are essential for survival in today's world where change is constant, whether it's keeping up with technology or simply coping with friends and family. Why learn about stress? Perhaps most importantly it affects our health. For this reason alone, it merits attention. And it doesn't just affect our physical health; it impacts our emotional, mental and spiritual health as well. With unresolved stress, and the inability to manage stress, life can be miserable. With the use of effective stress management techniques, life can be fun! The choice is ours.