

Social & Emotional Learning Exercise: Managing Your Stress Response

“Freaking out” describes an involuntary reaction people have to stress. It is a phenomenon where the rational mind loses control and automatic reactions take over. The idea behind this lesson is to get someone to gain more control of a reaction by doing that reaction *purposefully*. When you *intentionally* perform an action you normally do reactively you gain a sense of control over that action. That’s the point of this lesson! Students may have different words to describe this such as freaking out, being stressed, getting angry, etc. Try to use the same language the student uses to describe what happens when they get overwhelmed.

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce the Skill: “Today we are going to learn a new skill called managing your stress response”
2. Ask for Input: Ask the student to describe something they might get really stressed out about, especially something that might lead to a behavioral issue. If you know the student has some specific things that cause them stress, these are good places to start. Ask the student for specific behaviors they do when they get stressed or upset (remember students use different words to describe this). Collect at least three behaviors they do during this time. For example a student who “freaks out” when her parents ask her to get off her screen might state “I yell, I swear at them, and I slam the door on my way out”.
3. Ask the student to role-play a situation if at all possible. Have them show you exactly what they do. If it’s not a good scenario to role play then just have them describe it.
4. Ask the student to role-play the situation again, this time coming up with something they could do to act out a little less. For example, they could:
 - Leave off one of the three behaviors
 - Yell less intensely
 - Slam the door a little more softly

Homework

Ask the student pick one thing to leave off or reduce during their next stress response. Again, we are not saying that the behavior is okay. We are trying to get people to practice doing things intentionally they normally do reactively. It's also pretty hard to "freak out" when you are also trying to pay attention to something else, like how hard you slam the door. The goal is not to stop the behavior right now but to *increase awareness and intentionality around it*. If you want you can have the student keep a journal of what happened and what behaviors they left off of their response.