



EXTENSION IMPACT

Positive Coping Strategies to Reduce Stress

Stress is a part of daily life, but when we face continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between those stressors, stress can become chronic and toxic. The effects of stress can lead to physical and emotional diseases, causing a burden on our health care system as well as personal problems that can otherwise be avoided if we can learn better stress management. While the pandemic had a substantial impact on all Americans, for some the impact has been more negative than others. Parents faced the increased stress of school and child care cancellations. Essential workers faced the fear of infection while working. Low-income workers faced economic insecurity due to layoffs and reduced hours. Young adults and adolescents struggled with virtual schooling, the loss of social connections, and disrupted future plans.

Extension supports adults, youth, and those in helping professions develop stress-coping habits that lead to greater resilience, health, and satisfaction.

In response, Extension taught a variety of stress management techniques and mindfulness to adults, adolescents and those in helping professions. Our flagship courses “WeCOPE,” “Highlights of Taking Care of You,” and “Learning to BREATHE” taught skills that increase positive emotion, helped participants to recognize emotions, and helped them develop healthy coping skills for dealing with stress. While the specific practices promoted by these three curricula varied, they all aimed to

make participants more aware of the mind-body connection and help them better regulate their emotions as a means of better managing and reducing stress and promoting well-being.

Extension professionals across the state provided youth, adults, and those in helping professions with the tools they need to create positive coping strategies. Across all programs, participants reported that we helped them learn more about how stress affects their body, thoughts and emotions, and how using different coping strategies can help them cope with stress. They also reported that using the various coping strategies and skills they learned through these programs helped them better cope with stress.

For example, participants in our Highlights of Taking Care of You series were asked to indicate how often they were using the concepts or strategies they learned through the program in their life. Of those who completed the post-series evaluation, 16% indicated they used these concepts/strategies several times a day, 24% said they used them once a day, and 56% noted they used them a few times a week. Similarly, participants in our WeCOPE program reported practicing a variety of skills more frequently afterward; 89% of participants reported that the skills they learned during the program helped them cope with stress, with “noticing positive events,” “self-compassion,” and “gratitude” being ranked as the three most useful skills. Youth who participated in the Learning to BREATHE series indicated that the program had given them new tools to help them cope with stress. After the program, 62% said that they could cope with stress well or very well; before the intervention, this was the case for only 28% of youth.

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