Chapter 1: Introduction

**Teacher Stress**

Transcript:

Ashleigh: “I thought I wasn’t good enough. There were many times I thought I shouldn’t be a teacher. Or, that I wasn’t meant to do this job.”

Nick: “Most of the time I was really tired.”

Yesi: “I was eating unhealthily, or grabbing food on the go, or not really taking the time to be there for myself, and to slow down, and to really gauge how my body felt. I just kept pushing through.”

**Agreement and Context**
Transcript:

Twenty to twenty-five percent of teachers experience high levels of stress. (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). Too much stress can cause some teachers to change professions. On average close to 10% of new teachers leave after their first year. (Brown, 2015), and in urban schools, between 40 and 50% of new teachers leave within five years. (Neason, 2014). Stress is not the only cause for teachers seeking work elsewhere, but it does play a part.

Teacher turnover costs the United States up to two billion dollars annually. (Haynes, Maddock, & Goldrick, 2014). This can be quite detrimental to districts, but dealing with stress can be just as damaging to teachers and their students. (Haberman, 2004).

A stressed teacher will not be as effective in the classroom. He or she is less likely to provide support to students, and more likely to be absent from work. (Haberman, 2004; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013).

Purpose

In this module we will learn how stress affects teachers, identify its causes and symptoms, and explore strategies to help cope with it.

Included in this module’s resource documents is the “Coping with Stress Graphic Organizer.” As you proceed through the module you will use the graphic organizer to identify the cause of your own stress and pick coping strategies to try out. If you are struggling with stress, taking time to recognize what you are feeling and to write down your thoughts can help you cope with it.

Before we can learn how to cope with stress, we must first gain an understanding of what it is and how it affects our well-being.
Chapter 2: What is Stress?

What is Stress?

Transcript:

Stress is an interaction between a person and his environment where he perceives that interaction to be overwhelming. (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Rajala, 1988; Roeser et al., 2013; Singer 2010).

Based on this definition, any situation can be stressful. How a person views and feels about a particular situation determines his or her level of stress. Although we do not always have the ability to control our environment, we can always control how we think about it and react to it.

Now that you know what stress is, think for a moment about what is currently causing you stress. Jot down your thoughts on the graphic organizer. Later in this module you will connect the causes of your stress with the effect it has on your physical and mental well-being.

Causes of Teacher Stress
Transcript:

Teachers share many common stressors. Knowing that many other teachers struggle with the same things as you can help you realize that you are not alone. Being aware of what causes you stress can help you better cope with it.

Click on one of the buttons to see major causes of stress for teachers or student teachers.

Compare what you see here with the stressors in your own professional experience. What are the similarities? Do you notice anything on this list that you did not think of earlier?

Symptoms of Stress

Transcript:

You’ve learned some causes of teacher stress; now let’s learn what stress can do to you. By understanding the cause of your stress you will better be able to change your negative thinking connected to it. By understanding the symptoms of your stress you will better be able to pick coping strategies to address it.

People can experience the symptoms of stress without knowing that stress is the cause.

Use the sliders to explore some physical and mental symptoms of stress that may affect you. If you would find it beneficial, write down what you have been experiencing in the graphic organizer. Identifying your symptoms can help you choose the most effective coping strategies for addressing them.
Chapter 3: Relaxation Techniques

Coping Strategies

Transcript:

Once you know what is causing your stress and how it is affecting you, you are ready to address it with targeted coping strategies.

We are going to explore three groups of coping strategies: relaxation techniques, exercise and nutrition, and positive self-talk.

It is beneficial to use these coping strategies even when you are not stressed. Regularly practicing these strategies can decrease your symptoms of stress. They can also better prepare you to cope when you do experience symptoms. (Roeser et al., 2013).

Time

Transcript:
You might be thinking, “I’m willing to try a coping strategy, but the reason why I’m so stressed out is because I don’t have time. When am I supposed to do this?”

This is a valid concern, but consider how much happier you could be with less stress in your life. Try to reserve time each day when you will focus your attention on coping strategies. This may mean spending a few less minutes browsing the internet or grading homework each night. If you prioritize taking a small amount of time each day to practice some of these stress-reducing strategies, you can improve your well-being. (Bourne, 2015).

Remember, you do not need to wait until you experience stress to use these strategies. Be proactive by thinking positively, eating healthily, exercising regularly, and taking time to relax.

**Relaxation Techniques**

Transcript:

To start off, let’s take a look at some strategies to improve relaxation. Stress can cause muscle tension, racing thoughts, and sleep disruption. These symptoms may be the cause of, or lead to, stress-related anxiety. A person who incorporates relaxation techniques into his or her daily life can feel relief from these side effects. (Bourne, 2015).

Our first relaxation technique is abdominal breathing.
Abdominal Breathing

**Transcript:**

The great thing about abdominal breathing is that you can practice it anywhere and anytime. This technique can especially be useful when experiencing rapid breathing and increased heartbeat. Try to work on this when you are not experiencing stress. This way you are better prepared to use abdominal breathing when you are stressed.

Let’s practice this technique together. Place your hands on your stomach. Breathe in deeply through your nose. As you breathe in, you should feel your stomach rise. This could take some practice before it feels natural. Now hold in your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly out of your mouth. You should feel your stomach sink back down. While taking part in abdominal breathing, focus on your breath and allow any thoughts to enter. As you exhale, just let your thoughts float away. The goal is not to stop our thoughts, but to acknowledge them non-judgmentally, and then let them go. Repeat this process over the course of a few minutes. Let’s practice one more time.

Place your hands on your stomach, breathe deeply in through your nose. Hold it for a few seconds, and now exhale slowly out of your mouth.

Remember, you can do abdominal breathing virtually anywhere or anytime: in between classes, when you wake up, or on the bus home (Bourne, 2015).

If you would like to take some time to practice your abdominal breathing, click the practice button. If you would like to move on, press “Proceed.”
**Muscle Relaxation**

**Steps**

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Tense one muscle in your body.
- Focus all of your attention on that muscle.
- Hold for ten seconds.
- Release and relax for fifteen seconds.
- Repeat with different muscle groups in your body for twenty minutes.

**Transcript:**

The second relaxation technique we are going to look at is muscle relaxation. Often when feeling stressed, one’s muscles tighten up. Working on muscle relaxation can calm the body and mind, and help those experiencing sleep trouble. As with abdominal breathing, it is beneficial to practice muscle relaxation even when not stressed.

For full effect, practice at home or in a private location for up to twenty minutes every day. This may seem like a lot of time, but if it helps you feel less stressed the time will be well spent.

Let’s try this technique together. You are going to want to sit or lie down in a comfortable position. If you are currently working on this module in a room with other people I would recommend not lying down. That might be a little awkward.

One at a time you are going to tense and release each muscle group in your body. Start with your hands. Make a tight fist. Keep it tense for ten seconds. Focus all of your attention on that one muscle. Let go and relax for fifteen seconds, noticing how it feels different from being tense. Now move on to a different muscle group. We will do the neck. Tense your neck muscle and shoulder area, focus only on that muscle and hold for ten seconds. Release the tension and relax for fifteen seconds (Bourne, 2015). Try doing this with as many muscle areas as possible for twenty minutes. Right now try one or two more muscle groups, see how you feel, and when ready to move on, click “Proceed.”
**Other Relaxation Techniques**

Abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation are not the only things you can do to help calm your body and mind. You know better than anyone else what relaxes you. So, whatever relaxes you, whether it be yoga, reading, playing calm music, or something else, do it! Pick a relaxing activity you are interested in and commit to trying it. See if it helps relieve some of the stress you are feeling.

**Chapter 4: Exercise and Nutrition**

*Exercise and Nutrition*

The second group of coping strategies focuses on exercise and nutrition.
Regular exercise reduces muscle tension, discharges pent-up frustration, and increases your sense of well-being. Experts recommend exercising four or five times a week for twenty to thirty minutes a session. (Bourne, 2015). Take a look at some exercises that can relieve stress. (Bourne, 2015; Mintz, 2007).

Paired with exercise, a healthy diet can be an effective coping method. Click on the list of foods that can help lower stress and the ones that can magnify its effects. (Bourne, 2015; Holmes, 2005)

**Baby Steps**

![Baby Steps Image]

**Transcript:**

It can seem daunting to completely change your lifestyle. Try taking baby-steps. Start off by doing something small like cutting back on coffee and drinking more caffeine-free tea, like chamomile.

When it comes to exercise, try walking around your neighborhood a few times a week, and eventually advance to something more rigorous like running or a fitness class. Regular exercise can improve your overall energy level and make you more productive at other times.
Chapter 5: Positive Self-Talk

Self-Talk

Transcript:

The third group of coping strategies focuses on self-talk. This is what we say in our heads about our feelings towards a given situation. (Bourne, 2015; Singer, 2010). People who are more stressed tend to engage in more negative self-talk. They think things like, “I can’t do this,” “I’m a bad teacher,” or “My students don’t respect me.” Negative self-talk can make the stress we experience worse and lead to other issues like anxiety and depression. (Bourne, 2015).

We don’t all experience the same negative thoughts. It is important to understand what types of negative self-talk you experience in order to counter that thinking with more positive thoughts.

We are going to look at four types of negative self-talk. As we explore each, try and identify which one most aligns to the negative thoughts you have when stressed. Write down your thoughts on the graphic organizer.

Four Types of Negative Self-Talk
Transcript:

Click on each type of negative self-talk to see the characteristics and go-to thoughts associated with it. (Bourne, 2015). Take time to think about which type of negative self-talk you identify with most. In the graphic organizer, identify which type of self-talk you experience and write a specific example of negative self-talk you have had.

Countering Negative Self Talk

Questions to Help Challenge Your Thoughts:

• Could I be exaggerating the situation in my mind?
• Are my conclusions based on emotions instead of facts?
• What is the evidence for this?
• What might be another way to interpret this?

(Bourne, 2015; Singer, 2010)

Transcript:

Replacing negative self-talk with more positive thoughts is no easy task. When we repeatedly say the same negative things in our head, we start to believe these thoughts are true.

The first step in countering negative self-talk is to be aware of when you do it. People who are stressed may be having negative thoughts so regularly that they actually become unaware of them.

Pay attention to signals that you are experiencing negative self-talk. These include: putting yourself down, over-exaggerating a difficult situation, and having pessimistic thoughts.

Anytime you experience negative self-talk, recognize its presence. Try to write down your thoughts or share them with a trusted listener. You want to recognize how often you are engaging in it and identify what you are thinking.

Negative self-talk is often exaggerated and unrealistic. However, people who are locked in patterns of negative thoughts often come to view those thoughts as facts. Challenge the validity of your self-talk with questions. (Bourne, 2015; Singer, 2010). Take a look at some questions you can use to think more calmly and realistically about stressful situations.
Positive Self-Talk

Four Types of Negative Self-talk

- **The Worrier**
  "What if my supervisor can tell I'm nervous and I start stammering during the observation?"

- **The Critic**
  "I am the worst teacher in this school. I can't do anything right."

- **The Victim**
  "Why do I even go to work? No one appreciates me there."

- **The Perfectionist**
  "I have to have the students with the highest test scores in the school."

(Bourne, 2015; Singer, 2010)

Transcript:

The final step is to formulate more realistic and positive statements. Whenever you have a negative thought, read and recite its corresponding positive self-talk statement. It will take time to get into the habit of doing this, but if you keep at it the positive self-talk could become natural and replace your negative thoughts.

Take a moment to click on each negative self-talk statement from earlier to see an example of a positive counter statement. Afterwards, write your own counter statement for your negative self-talk.

Chapter 6: Teacher Interviews

Purpose of Practice

Transcript:
When it comes to stress, it is important to realize that you are not the only teacher who struggles with the problem. We are going to look at three case studies that examine how stress affects teachers in different ways. Using the resource as your guide, pay close attention to the symptoms they are exhibiting and what coping strategies they used to try and control their stress.

On the graphic organizer, take note of any strategies you would like to try. At the end of the resource section you will create a personalized plan to help you manage your stress and improve your well-being.

**Nick**

Transcript:

Our first interview is with Nick, a third-year elementary school teacher.

*As a new teacher, what were some things that caused you stress?*

There’s a lot of work. Honestly, the initial first week, or at the very beginning of the semester there’s always just a lot of work to be graded. Until I got into like my groove of how fast I could grade things and how I could grade things quickly, it was really stressful for that.

*What were some symptoms you were feeling from that stress?*

Most of the time I was really tired. I would just be really, really tired. And I would go home and I would power out an hour of grading, and then I would go to sleep. And it would be, you know, 7:30 and I would be asleep.

*What were some things you did to cope with that stress?*

Most of it, I started working out. So I started, I went home and I would do the hour of grading and then I would do some sort of exercise…go for a run, or something like that to kind of get my body back into. And it also gave me time to not think about grading, where I was just focused on something else. And then I could come back and continue on with it. And it also helped, while I was exercising, if I did think about the grading. For some reason while I was exercising it just became more realistic. Like, ‘yeah I’ll get this done. Like, I can grade this quickly.’ Of course I can.

*Do you have any words of wisdom for teachers dealing with stress, being more experienced now?*

Just, you got to have a good sense of humor about things. I mean, that’s actually probably one of the biggest things that helped me, is you have to be able to laugh at yourself, and at the kids, and your mistakes. And you just have to be able to look at it all in the good like that. You know, it will be fine tomorrow. Like, it will work itself out and you’ll look back on it and it will be funny. You know, I think it’s funny that I used to be stressed about grading, you know, twelve essays in a week. Now I’m looking at you now, more than that in a week. And, I’m much better right now. So, it gets better and you just have to be able to laugh it off at some points.
Reflection

Transcript:

Now that you’ve heard from Nick, pause and think for a minute about what coping strategies you can try from his story.

Ashleigh

Transcript:

Now let’s listen to a different teacher explain her experience of coping with stress. Ashleigh is a 4th year secondary social studies teacher. Pay attention to the similarities and differences between Nick and Ashleigh’s stories. What stress did Ashleigh experience, and what specific steps did she take to cope with it?

As a new teacher, what were some of the things that caused you stress?

Well, I think the biggest form that caused me. The biggest problem that caused me stress was really the...
teaching and lesson planning. In the classroom, it could sometimes be difficult if you are not really familiar with behavior management strategies. That could be overwhelming in the classroom. And then designing lessons that not only cater to that, but also are good lessons. Where your students will retain that type of information. I think that was probably the most stressful for me.

So I would get a lot of feedback on those lesson plans. Often times I would have to change what I first did, or what I suggested. And sometimes the feedback was helpful. Sometimes I was a little overwhelmed, so it wasn’t as helpful. I wasn’t ready to take that feedback yet. So, from both the level of where my administrators were giving me feedback and also actually actualizing those lesson plans was difficult.

*What were some of the thoughts running through your head?*

**Ashleigh:** I thought I wasn’t good enough. There were many times where I thought I shouldn’t be a teacher, or that I wasn’t meant to do this job. And that was really, really hard to talk down. You have the little things like, ‘Oh, that student is out to get me.’ Or, ‘That administrator is not being helpful.’ But really what it comes down to, it’s the biggest negative self-talk was that I shouldn’t be doing what I’m doing.

*What were some symptoms you had due to the stress of being a new teacher?*

For me, the biggest was I was sick all the time. My immune system just really internalized that. And so that’s also really difficult, because when I would get ill it would be something that would last for several days. Like, I might be sick for a week, and have to take off of like two days absence. And then it’s creating lesson plans for that absence. Trying to get back on track with my students, to meet larger goals. I also had bad sleeping patterns. I would drink a lot, was one of the big results. And so that kind of became the biggest distractor on the weekends. Sometimes I wasn’t using my time effectively, because I would get home and just kind of shut down sometimes.

*What did you do to cope with your stress?*

So one thing that I did was, first off you really need to make time for yourself and have fun. One thing, as a first-year teacher, it took a lot out of me, and it required a lot more hours than I was in school. So, I would always tell myself, ‘you need one day a week to just not work.’ So for me that day was Saturday. Saturday I would refuse to pick up a laptop and start anything for work-related activities. And I would just make sure I would have fun. I would do something. Maybe that’s a hike. Maybe that’s extra exercise. Maybe that’s meeting up with friends. Just something for me.

*So, what did you do to counter that original negative self-talk?*

I told myself I really was meant for it. And I really, truly believe that. Now that I look at things I’m so glad I’m a teacher. I can’t imagine doing anything else with myself. And it wasn’t just my first year either. There were a lot of hiccups, you know, first, second and even in the third year a little bit. But now this is my fourth year teaching and I really, really truly feel confident with where I am and what I’m doing with my students.

*Do you have any final words of wisdom for teachers dealing with stress?*

I think that best thing that you can do is reach out. You’re not alone. You don’t need to be lonely. You don’t need to be isolated. Talk to your coworkers. If you’re having trouble with a particular student, they might be too. They might have solutions. If you are struggling with lesson plans, reach out to your administrator. Talk to someone who is also in your department. See what they can do. If you work for a network of schools, or if you’re at a large school, like maybe there’s somebody that you normally wouldn’t talk to. Like, have that conversation with them. Talk to friends and family. Talking it out makes you feel so much better afterwards. It…really, really, really… trying to, again, focus on the positive and knowing that you’re not the only one who’s struggling.

Now that you’ve heard Ashleigh’s story, pause and think for a minute about what coping strategies you can try.
Dee

Transcript:
Lastly, we are going to hear how Dee, a licensed counselor, helped a teacher cope with stress. Pay attention to how the teacher felt pressure from her family to do other tasks when she was already feeling stressed from work. What steps did she take to cope with her stress?

Can you share a story of how you helped a teacher cope with stress?

Well a recent one I had is, a teacher who had gone back to teaching after she had had four children. And so, she was trying to manage doing her teaching and also helping her family. And one of the stressful things for her was this whole time issue. Not feeling like she ever had time for herself. She was always doing something for someone else.

So, one of the things that helped us as we talked about it, was her to identify that, gee, she was starting to get angry and resentful and overwhelmed, because she really wasn’t taking time for herself. And she was able to identify some things her family could do to help her with that.

And she was also able to identify some things that she could do to end her day, once her school day was over in the classroom. And say, ‘Okay my time here at this building is over.’ And then refocus to what she was doing with her family. And then if she had to go back to doing some work at home at night what she did was she designated an area of her home that that’s the area she would go to to do her papers, to do her lesson planning, or whatever. So it wasn’t commingled like at the dinner table. It was mentally she just removed herself. Took herself to this special place where she got herself back in work mode. Gave herself time to do that. And then she ended her work day, and then we entered into the home life.

That happened. She’s practicing that, and it’s been very helpful to be able to end one thing and then start something else.

The example from this video does not only apply to individuals with a spouse and kids. We all have people in our lives we wish we could spend more time with, but feel we cannot, due to the pressures of our jobs. This teacher prioritized her well-being by setting clear times when she would work and others when she would not.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Serious Stress

Transcript:

The strategies discussed in this module can help you cope with stress, but in some cases these strategies are not enough.

If you feel that your stress is too serious to handle on your own, be sure to seek professional help. Talk to your primary care doctor or a therapist about ways to help your specific case. If you have had or are having thoughts of harming yourself, seek help immediately.

There is definitely a stigma that stress is something you should be able to handle on your own. But, stress is a medical problem like getting a flu or breaking a leg, and would you try and solve these problems on your own?

Video Introduction / Counselor Interview

Transcript:
There are some things that you can do to cope with stress that take virtually no time out of your day. In the attached video, a licensed counselor talks about the importance of recognizing that you are not alone in your struggles, and talking with friends and colleagues can help.

**Dee:** The first thing is, is to just know you’re not alone in this. There are other people. Your colleagues are also experiencing things at some level. Everyone comes to the workplace with some things we are bringing from home of our own stuff. And we’re bringing our own personality and our coping strategies. So first thing is you’re not alone.

Second thing is that there’s things you can do to help yourself. And there’s also people you could talk to. One of the best things you can do is find someone. A colleague, someone that understands your work to talk to, as someone like a stress buddy. And you can then when you’ve had a hard day, or have something really happen you can call that person or text them. And they really get it.

Sometimes our family members aren’t the good stress buddy, because they must just say like, ‘Ah, What are you putting up with that for. Why don’t you just find something else to do? You know, maybe you are not suited for this.’ Because they don’t really get that you love what you do, but you just may be having a hard time of it right now.

**Call to Action**

**Transcript:**

Teaching can be a stressful job. Avoiding stress is not really an option. But, by recognizing the presence of stress and practicing specific coping strategies, you can lessen its effect. Please advance to the Resource section where you will be introduced to a document that will help you do this.