

**Student  
Psychoeducational  
Groups in**

SCHOOL CRISIS INTERVENTION:

The PREPaRE Model

# Copyright

The views, opinions, and content of this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and are not a part of the official NASP PREPaRE book or associated trainings. This publication is intended to provide complementary tools within the PREPaRE framework that are ready for use in schools during the post-impact and recoil phase of a crisis.

Published by Sheila E. Stein and Stephen E. Brock

©2017, Sheila E. Stein and Stephen E. Brock

.....

All rights reserved. Individuals may download and use this manual and the materials within for educational and direct service provision purposes without specific permission of the authors or NASP. When using excerpted content, citation of the sources is appreciated.

# Acknowledgments

This document was written by Sheila Stein, Ed.S. for the 2017 National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Stephen Brock, Ph.D. was a contributing author, and is the first author of NASP's PREP<sub>a</sub>RE Workshop 2 entitled *Crisis Intervention and Recovery: The Roles of School-Based Mental Health Professionals*. Additional contributors to the original curricula include Kelly Chiolan, Ed.S. and Amanda Campisi, Ed.S.

## **ELECTRONIC ACCESS AND COPIES OF PUBLICATION**

This publication may be accessed electronically through the following connections: [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org) and navigating to the 2017 NASP Annual Conference page; and Dr. Stephen Brock's homepage at <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/brocks/>

## **RECOMMENDED CITATION**

Stein, S.E., & Brock, S.E. (2017). *Student psychoeducational groups in school crisis intervention: The PREP<sub>a</sub>RE model*. Retrieved from <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/brocks/>

*Additional Reviewer and Graphic Design Support: Stacy Maalouf*  
*Images of children's emotions are licensed by [www.DancingCrayon.com](http://www.DancingCrayon.com)*

To access this curricula quickly from Dr. Brock's page, please scan the QR code to the right and click the link under *Workshop Presentations*.





*Within the context of school mental health crisis intervention,*

## *Psychological Education*

*is the provision of direct instruction and/or the dissemination of information that helps crisis survivors and their caregivers in understanding, preparing for, and responding to the crisis event, and the problems and reactions it generates (both in themselves and among others).<sup>”</sup>*

Brock (2011)

# Foreward

## IN 2016, THE SECOND EDITION OF *SCHOOL CRISIS PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: THE PREP<sub>a</sub>RE MODEL* WAS PUBLISHED.

The lesson plans and curricular materials located within this publication have been developed to fit within the updated PREP<sub>a</sub>RE model and are available free of charge. They are recommended for use as a Tier 2 intervention with selected individuals and groups after a crisis has occurred. Stein, Chiolan, Campisi, and Brock developed the first edition, which was produced for a mini-skills presentation at the NASP annual conference in February of 2015. The lesson plans in this handbook continue to be recommended for use among school psychologists, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other trained school staff.

In an effort to increase readability, enhance online access, and improve user experience, this second edition includes important revisions to the original set of documents. In subsequent pages, the reader may observe the ways in which materials can be differentiated for an audience of second language learners, diverse cognitive abilities, and various chronological ages. The sessions are concerned primarily with helping students learn to take care of themselves, and secondarily with teaching them how best to take care of their peers. Enrichment activities have been added, and may be used in some cases as a substitute for other activities in classrooms. An objective of this revision is to expand the documents to a wider audience.

The main purpose of this guide is to assist schools in preparing for crisis intervention. Materials may be used to train staff in developing a general understanding of a crisis, possible outcomes to crisis exposure, and staff's role in the delivery of psychoeducation to students. Many special populations are not specifically identified or addressed. The authors suggest further training in cultural competency, disabilities, and second language acquisition to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention among various populations. Although the authors hope readers will find this guide useful, they also recognize it is by no means intended to provide comprehensive information on crisis prevention and intervention or meet the needs of all special populations.

This publication is a step toward developing staff capacity in facilitating effective psychoeducation in the school setting to selected students after a crisis.

Sheila E. Stein, Ed.S., NCSP and Dr. Stephen E. Brock, Ph.D., NCSP, LEP

“*Students receiving this intervention may be in classes, in preexisting groups (e.g., the debate team), or with other individuals selected based on psychological triage data.*”

Brock, 2016

# Contents

<b>ORGANIZATION OF THIS GUIDE</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>BACKGROUND ON SPGs</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>LESSON PLANS</b>	<b>13</b>
Primary Grades	14
Upper Elementary	24
Middle School	34
High School	44
Enrichment Lessons	54
<b>PARENT INFORMATION</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>61</b>

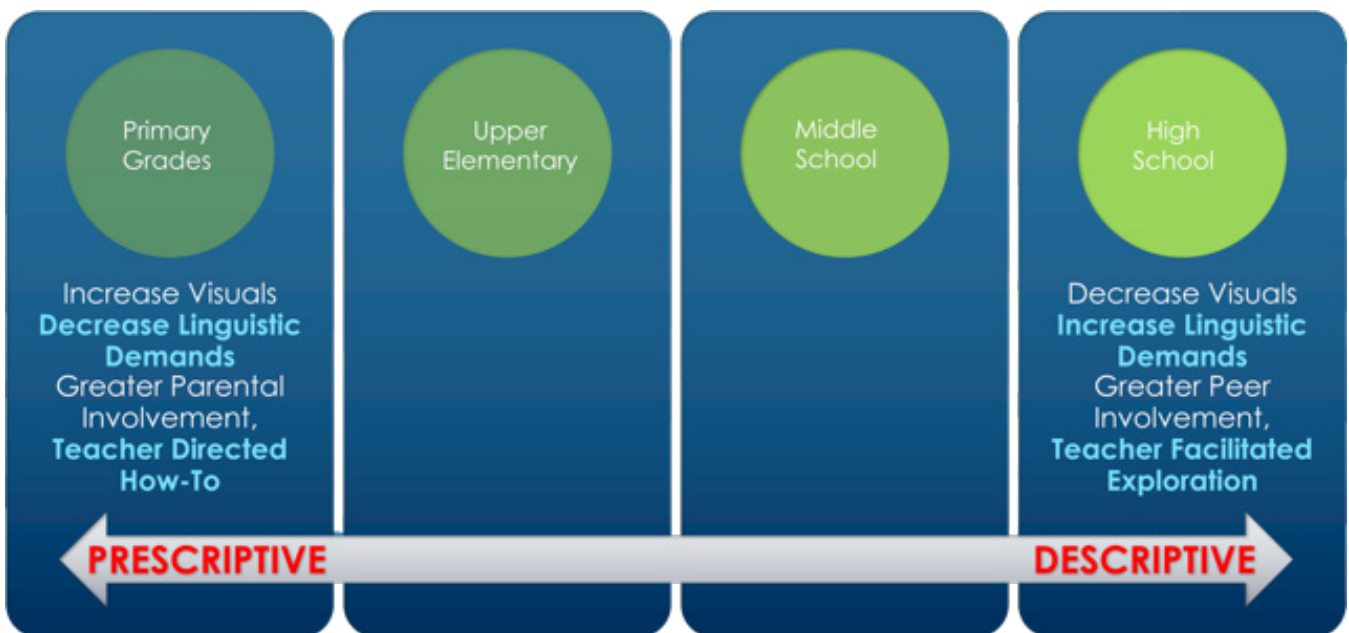
# Organization of this Guide

**CHAPTER ONE** Provides a background on student psychoeducational groups and may be useful when training staff on lesson plans and curricular materials before a crisis has occurred. It includes a review of the goals and steps of a student psychoeducational group lesson.

**CHAPTER TWO** Lesson plans are sequenced by the following grade levels:

- PG.** Primary Grades (K-3)
- UE.** Upper Elementary (4-6)
- MS.** Middle School (7-8)
- HS.** High School (9-12)

Practitioners will want to select materials matching students' linguistic competence, cognitive abilities, and developmental levels. The aforementioned grade levels are general guidelines. All lesson plans have been designed with the same lesson goals and procedural steps. The figure below illustrates a continuum of differentiation underlying the four levels and corresponding materials.



Handouts for the lesson plans can also be found in Chapter Two. These include templates to guide staff's dissemination of crisis event information to students, help students identify common crisis responses and reactions, and support them in developing plans for self-care. Other templates include a check for understanding and a stress management resource. Please note each step does not require a handout. Enrichment activities are included at the chapter's end.

**CHAPTER THREE** A sample letter for parents or caregivers to provide them with more information about the psychoeducational group after the lesson has been delivered. There is a special remark about social media and locating additional supports. It is important for schools to familiarize themselves with the content of the letter and adapt it to fit the circumstances of the crisis, school culture, and resources available.

**REFERENCES** References are provided for practitioners' further review.





# Background

ON STUDENT  
PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL GROUPS

A Tier 2 Intervention

# STUDENT PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL GROUPS AND THE PREPaRE MODEL

---

The mental health needs arising from any crisis situation are unique and require multiple levels of response. The PREPaRE model is a framework of crisis prevention and intervention designed for schools to address students' mental health needs.

**P**revent and prepare for psychological trauma  
**R**eaffirm physical health and perceptions of security and safety  
**E**valuate psychological trauma risk  
**P**rovide interventions  
**a**nd  
**R**espond to psychological needs  
**E**xamine the effectiveness of crisis prevention and interventions

A **crisis** can be characterized as an event perceived to be very negative, generates feelings of powerlessness or entrapment, and may occur suddenly or unexpectedly. Examples of crisis events include natural disasters, human-caused disasters, acts of war/terrorism, violent or unexpected death, threatened death and/or injury, and severe illness or injury.

An unexpected event in which individuals feel defenseless can also disrupt their emotional balance. Possible consequences of crisis exposure include emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical reactions. Executive functions—including paying attention, remembering information, initiating and completing tasks, problem solving, and inhibiting impulses—may be disordered. Students may experience academic decline, increased behavioral problems, or truancy. Maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., alcohol or drug use) can result in long-term difficulties like mental illness or psychopathology. For some students, interventions like a **student psychoeducational group** can accelerate their psychological recovery. While many may not need this level of support, still others need much more involved and long-term psychotherapeutic interventions.

While an acute crisis has the potential for negative outcomes, it also may result in extremely positive outcomes. Adaptive coping strategies can increase students' resiliency and facilitate a return to emotional equilibrium. The expectation is that most students will return to a stable emotional state after a crisis.

The **Student Psychoeducational Group (SPG)** is among the Tier 2 crisis interventions, which typically do not include the entire school but focus instead on selected students mildly to moderately traumatized by a crisis event. In the PREPaRE model, these students are provided with psychoeducation and psychological support through classroom-based and individual

interventions. Some students may be identified for an SPG through teacher-, parent-, peer, and self-referrals, known emotional or physical proximity to the event, and/or known internal/external vulnerabilities.

**The Student Psychoeducational Group, a Tier 2 intervention, includes the following goals:**

1. Dispel crisis rumors and ensure students are in possession of the facts.
2. Prepare students for the reactions that may follow crisis exposure.
3. Teach students how to manage crisis reactions and obtain mental health crisis intervention.
4. Provide strategies for managing stress reactions.

Goals of the SPG are met through explicit teaching in intact classrooms, pre-existing groups (e.g., swim team), or those selected on the basis of psychological triage data. It is important to keep in mind the SPG curricula rely upon direct instruction and are not intended to include individuals' processing of the event, extensive investigation/elaboration of the crisis event, or other highly individualized psychotherapeutic interventions (e.g., it is NOT a treatment for PTSD). The object of this lesson is not to provide counseling or psychotherapy. Students benefit from staff knowledgeable in common crisis reactions, the PREP<sub>a</sub>RE model, and techniques of stress reduction. **In addition to lesson delivery, staff members are key in the identification and referral of students for counseling services.** It will be important to keep cultural considerations in mind, recognizing some students may/may not exhibit symptoms consistent with a staff member's culture or those symptoms presented herein.

### KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Staff are delivering a lesson to provide facts and teach adaptive coping strategies.
- Staff are not providing therapy to students.
- Staff are vigilant, identifying students for additional support.
- If staff are unable to demonstrate emotional equilibrium throughout the lesson, they should request support *prior* to lesson delivery. One aim of the SPG is to reaffirm students' physical and emotional safety, which requires a calm affect.

The SPG lesson recognizes that although student responses to crisis situations are diverse, many stress reactions are common among individuals. While students explore pre-existing stress management skills and adaptive coping strategies in an SPG, their repertoire is expanded through classroom lessons, activities, and discussion. Regardless of students' academic skills, cognitive abilities, and language proficiency, **lesson plans included in this document follow five basic steps and are estimated to take approximately one hour:**

1. Introduce the lesson and set behavioral expectations (5 minutes).
2. Answer questions and dispel rumors (20 minutes).
3. Prepare students for the reactions that may follow crisis exposure (15 minutes).
4. Teach students how to manage crisis reactions (15 minutes).
5. Close by ensuring students have a plan to manage crisis reactions. This serves as a check for understanding (5 minutes).

## COMMON INITIAL CRISIS REACTIONS

EMOTIONAL		COGNITIVE	
Shock	Depression or sadness	Impaired concentration	Decreased self-esteem
Anger	Grief	Memory impairment	Self-blame
Despair	Irritability	Disbelief	Worries
Phobias	Hypersensitivity	Confusion	Nightmares
Terror or fear	Helplessness	Distortion	Decreased self-efficacy
Guilt	Hopelessness	Intrusive thoughts or memories	
Emotional numbing	Loss of pleasure from activities	Impaired decision-making abilities	
PHYSICAL		INTERPERSONAL/BEHAVIORAL	
Fatigue	Startle response	Alienation	Aggression
Insomnia	Headaches	School refusal	Crying easily
Sleep disturbance	Decreased libido	School impairment	Tantrums
Hyperarousal	Decreased appetite	Vocational impairment	Change in eating patterns
Somatic Complaints	Gastrointestinal problems	Regression in behavior	Risk Taking
Impaired immune response		Increased relationship conflict	Avoidance of reminders
		Social withdrawal or social isolation	

Note. Compiled from Speier (2000); Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman (1998).

**Practice Stress Reduction Techniques.** The SPG lesson includes an opportunity for staff and class members to discuss and practice stress reduction techniques and identify resources for support. Particularly at the higher grade levels, where increased discussion is expected, students may also identify maladaptive strategies (e.g., drinking alcohol). It is important for staff to delineate maladaptive skills from those identified in the lessons, emphasizing how adaptive coping strategies lead to more rapid recovery and long-term stability. In addition, students often benefit from hearing how engaging or re-engaging routines like school can help individuals recover. The lesson closes with a brief summary of the class session, a reminder of available mental health resources, and a thank you for the class's thoughtful participation.

**Student Psychoeducational Groups respect people's innate resiliencies while providing individuals with knowledge to facilitate adaptive coping and more rapid recovery.** SPGs offer the added benefit of delivering mental health supports without the stigma sometimes associated with mental health interventions. While many crises cannot be avoided, adequate preparation and responsive and appropriate intervention can mitigate the effects.

*For more information on Student Psychoeducational Groups and the PREP<sub>a</sub>RE model of school crisis prevention and intervention, please see the references at the end of this document.*



# Lesson Plans

Primary Grades, Upper Elementary,  
Middle School, High School



# Lesson Plan

Primary Grades

# Lesson Plan, Primary Grades

**NOTE:** Ideally, this psychoeducational group is facilitated by a school-based crisis team member familiar to the group of students. If the facilitator is unfamiliar to the students, take a moment to introduce him/her.

**TOPIC** Normalizing Crisis Reactions, Identifying Support Systems, and Delivering Direct Instruction in Adaptive Coping Skills

**DURATION** 1 hour

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Student responses to crisis situations are diverse. In this lesson, facilitators identify and help normalize common reactions to crisis exposure. Students explore their existing support structures before reviewing adaptive coping strategies and effective stress management. Parents or caregivers may refer their students for additional help.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize 2-3 common crisis reactions.
- identify resources for support.
- perform a deep breathing exercise for relaxation purposes.
- identify and use 2-3 adaptive coping strategies.

## MATERIALS

- Teacher copy of Lesson Plan, Primary Grades (K-3)
- Teacher copy of Handout #1PG, *Known Facts About the Event* **OPTIONAL**
- Student copies of Handout #2PG, *Common Responses*  
*This handout may be projected on the board during discussion and filled out alongside students.*
- Student copies of Handout #3PG, *Healthy Living Plan*
- Student copies of Handout #4PG, *Checking for Understanding*
- Pencils, crayons
- White board, pens, dry erase markers, projector **OPTIONAL**

## PROCEDURES

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES) No handouts for this step.**

On the following page, read from the sample script that introduces the facilitator, identifies the subject of the lesson, sets the classroom expectations for behavior and participation, and answers procedural questions (or facilitators may use the guidelines to create their own introductions). Use the attendance roster to keep track of which students have received this instruction in psychoeducation.

### Sample Script for Opening a Student Psychoeducational Group

"Today we are going to talk about (*briefly describe the incident*). I will answer questions you might have, and as a class we will identify common reactions. Then we will talk about how to deal with those feelings. We will also talk about how to help ourselves and help each other.

I understand that everyone is likely having their own reactions. We won't be discussing your individual reactions today, but if you want to do so later be sure to let me know. First, let's go over some ground rules/expectations."

*(Briefly review classroom rules and expectations during direct instruction and discussion.)*

### STEP 2, GIVE THE FACTS & DISPEL THE RUMORS (20 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #1PG, *Known Facts About the Event*

**The handout is for teacher use and not for distribution among students.**

- State basic facts of the event—which may have been conveyed in a staff meeting, letter to the school community, or on a brief fact sheet provided with this lesson plan and handouts. *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Keep it simple.
- Invite students to share what they know and use the discussion as an opportunity to dispel rumors and limit collective speculation.

*Notes:* Be prepared to repeat facts several times, as crises can be overwhelming and especially difficult for children to comprehend. Be truthful; some facts may be confidential and the facilitator should say so. Also, it is permissible to state, "I don't know" in response to questions. It is advisable to recommend students refrain from exacerbating crises by passing along gossip or stories.

### STEP 3, PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #2PG, *Common Responses*

- Help students identify common reactions to the crisis event. Explain how students are "probably having normal feelings and thoughts in response to an unusual event or situation."
- Start by asking questions about feelings:

**What are feelings?**

**Does everyone have feelings?**

**Does everyone have the same feelings? Does everyone express them the same way?**



- Distribute and/or project Handout #2PG, *Common Responses*. Review each of the feelings on the wheel.
- Using the table below to inform your direct instruction, identify other common initial crisis reactions, explaining how students may have these responses themselves or witness the reactions in the behavior of others, including peers, parents, and teachers.
- Direct students to draw a picture of how someone may feel in response to a crisis event.

COMMON INITIAL CRISIS REACTIONS	
EMOTIONAL	Shock, Surprise, Anger, Mad, Sadness, Fear, Phobias, Helplessness, Hopelessness
COGNITIVE	Hard to think/focus, Forgetful, Confused, Worried, Nightmares, Guilt, Intrusive Thoughts
PHYSICAL	Tired, Insomnia, Always on guard, Aches and pains (stomach, head, heart), Illness, Easily startled, Staring blankly
BEHAVIORAL	Isolated, Peer conflicts, Decreased participation, Attention seeking, Crying, Regression (whining, clinging, toileting, etc.), hiding (in a corner or under a table), Screaming

*Adapted from Speier (2000); Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman (1998).*

#### STEP 4, HOW TO MANAGE CRISIS REACTIONS AND STRESS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #3PG, *Healthy Living Plan*

**Ensure each student has written his/her name since this form will serve dual purposes: as a check for understanding and as a referral for follow-up care.**

- Distribute Handout #3PG.
- Students circle two supports in the “Who We Get Help From” section before/as the class discusses them. Students brainstorm other people who can help (variation: draw the person on the back of the handout). Do the same with the “Feel Better Skills” section. Acknowledge strategies that may be less helpful and identify replacement strategies.
- Inform students they will be taking these papers home to their parents to review. For homework, everyone is required to bring the papers back with the bottom part filled out

- **DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE.** Take two minutes to lead students through the deep breathing exercise script below.

### SCRIPT FOR DEEP BREATHING ACTIVITY

We are going to relax right now. First, reach your arms up way above your head. Stretch your body tall and reach up toward the ceiling. Now let your arms fall gently to your side.

Start to feel the heaviness of your arms, and your legs. I want you to take a moment to get comfortable. Think about how your body feels in your chair.

Now close your eyes softly. Once your eyes are closed, take a deep breath...now breathe out, emptying all of the air completely. Like you're blowing out all the candles on a birthday cake. Breathe in slowly...and out slowly.

Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). Breathe in...2...3...4...HOLD...2...3...exhale...2...3...4...

Feel the tightness leaving your body, bit by bit, with each breath.

Now place your hand gently on your tummy. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and move the air into your belly. Feel your tummy fill, pushing against your hands. And breathe out. Picture your belly button pulling toward your back as you let all of the air out.

Let's repeat this again, in through your nose...out through your mouth.

Start to notice the sounds around the room. This might be the sound of the air conditioner, or even the sound of other students shifting in their chairs...

You may be thinking of something. Picture the thought in your head. Take that thought and place it in a bubble. Now watch that bubble, that thought, drift away. If another thought comes into your mind, do the same thing: place it in a bubble and let it drift away. (Pause)

Again, you are going to take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4).

Slowly open your eyes. Notice how your body feels. You may feel more relaxed.

**STEP 5, ASSESSMENT (5 MINUTES)**

**Materials:** Handout #4PG, *Checking for Understanding*

- Distribute the *Checking for Understanding* handout. Students write their names. Then they circle the feeling that best corresponds to how they are feeling. *While the goal is to teach common reactions, not specifically to get students to recognize their own reactions, this concluding activity can provide valuable triage data helpful in identifying students who may need additional crisis intervention.*
- They may complete the sentence at the top. The feeling words are provided in the boxes.
- Students submit #4PG before leaving class.
- Instruct students to take home Handout #3PG, *Healthy Living Plan*. At the bottom is a checkbox and signature line to be filled out by parents or caregivers. This is intended to ensure all parents have reviewed the lesson with their students and have the opportunity to refer students for follow-up care.

**OPTION:** Schools with online blackboards or electronic communication systems between teachers and caregivers may want to alert parents to an online referral system to support students.

**Other ways to check for understanding:**

- An exit ticket on which students write about their learning for the day, answer a brief question or two, or ask a question (sticky notes, index cards, or half sheets work well)
- Hand signals, as a quick and easy way to check for understanding (thumbs up/ thumbs down)
- Individual white/chalk boards for ongoing assessment during a lesson

## STEP 2, KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE EVENT HANDOUT# 1PG

### **Basic Guidelines for Teachers.**

- *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Provide only known facts.
- Ask about what students have heard and address rumors directly.
- Answers should be honest, but refrain from providing intimate details or elaborate explanations.
- It's perfectly okay to say, "I don't have the answer to that."
- Speak in a neutral, unemotional tone. If you believe leading this lesson will be highly emotional for you, request support from administration or support staff.
- Don't engage in conjecture or speculative statements.

Your school administration and support staff can provide additional assistance. See below for the school's information on the event.

**What happened.**

**When the event occurred.**

**Where the event occurred.**

**Who was involved (i.e., identify the crisis victims).**

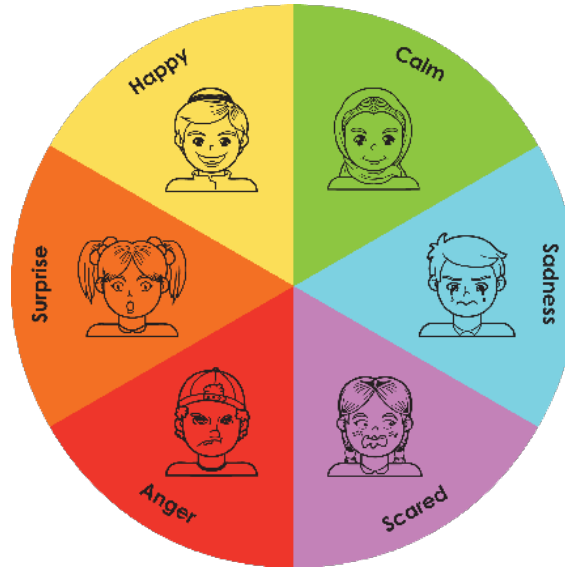
**What is being done to assist students (e.g., counselors).**

**What students can expect to happen next.**

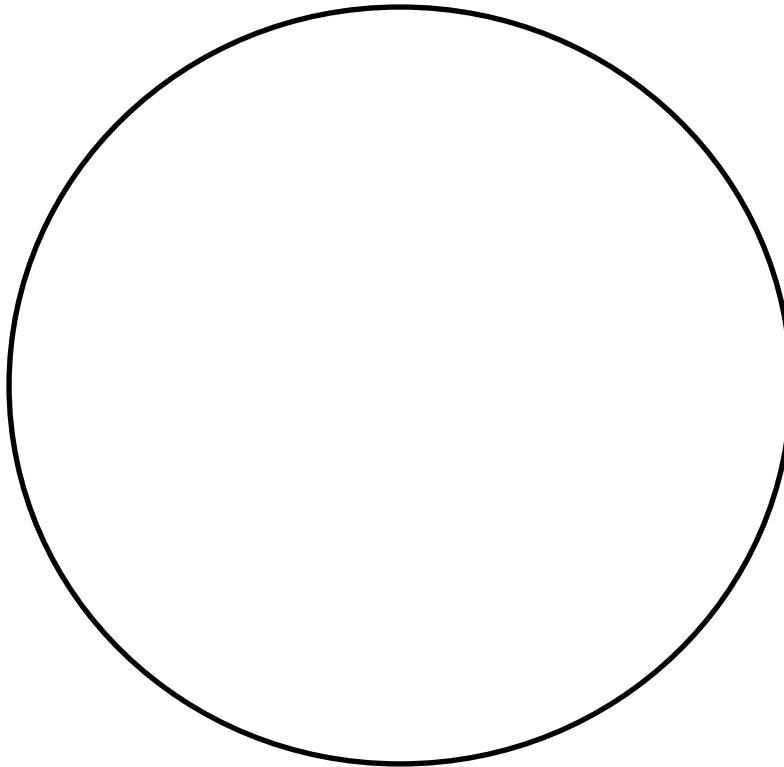
**STEP 3, COMMON RESPONSES** HANDOUT# 2PG

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Circle a picture and feeling that shows how people may feel after an event like this one.



2. Draw a picture of a face that shows how a person might feel now.



## STEP 4, HEALTHY LIVING PLAN HANDOUT# 3PG

### WHO WE GET HELP FROM

These are people and groups who care about you. Circle **two** you can get help from.



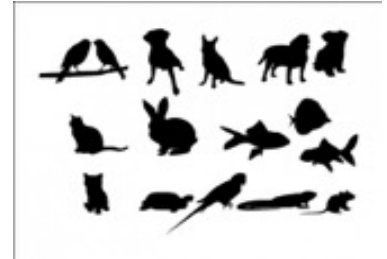
Parents



Friends



Teacher



Pets

OTHER PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP ME:

### FEEL BETTER SKILLS

Here are ways you can feel good. Circle **two** skills you may use.



Talk to Someone



Run/Exercise



Play



Listen to Music



Sleep/Rest

### RELAXATION ACTIVITY

**HOMEWORK:** Take this paper home and talk about it with your parent/caregiver.

**PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS:** Please review this with your student. If you or your student would like additional support, please check the appropriate box, sign, and place it in his/her folder.

### FOLLOW-UP:

- Check this box if you would like more support for your student (e.g., a teacher or counselor).
- Check this box if you do **not** want more support for your student.

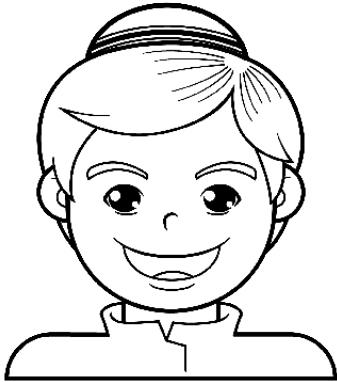
Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP 5, CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING** HANDOUT# 4PG

Name \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_.



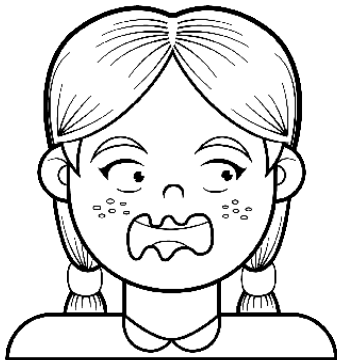
happy



calm



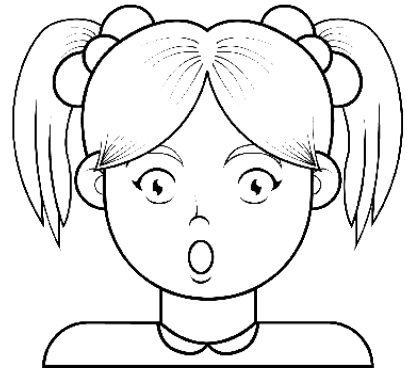
sadness



scared



angry



surprise



# Lesson Plan

Upper Elementary



# Lesson Plan, Upper Elementary

**NOTE:** Ideally, this psychoeducational group is facilitated by a school-based crisis team member familiar to the group of students. If the facilitator is unfamiliar to the students, take a moment to introduce him/her.

**TOPIC** Normalizing Crisis Reactions, Identifying Support Systems, and Delivering Direct Instruction in Adaptive Coping Skills

**DURATION** 1 hour

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Student responses to crisis situations are diverse. In this lesson, facilitators identify and help normalize common reactions to crisis exposure. Students explore their existing support structures before reviewing adaptive coping strategies and effective stress management. Parents or caregivers may refer their students for additional help.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize 2-3 common crisis reactions.
- identify resources for support.
- perform a deep breathing exercise for relaxation purposes.
- identify and use 2-3 adaptive coping strategies.

## MATERIALS

- Teacher copy of Lesson Plan, Upper Elementary (4-6)
- Teacher copy of Handout #1UE, *Known Facts About the Event* **OPTIONAL**
- Student copies of Handout #2UE, *Recognizing Responses*  
*This handout may be projected on the board during discussion and filled out alongside students.*
- Student copies of Handout #3UE, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*
- Student copies of Handout #4UE, *Stress Management Resources*
- Pencils [White board, pens, dry erase markers, projector **OPTIONAL**]

## PROCEDURES

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES) No handouts for this step.**

On the following page, read from the sample script that introduces the facilitator, identifies the subject of the lesson, sets the classroom expectations for behavior and participation, and answers procedural questions (or facilitators may use the guidelines to create their own introductions). Use the attendance roster (or a sign-in sheet if the lesson is not delivered in an intact classroom) to keep track of which students have received this psychoeducational instruction.

### Sample Script for Opening a Student Psychoeducational Group

"Today we are going to talk about (*briefly describe the incident*). I will answer questions you might have about what happened, and together we will identify ways to deal with common reactions. We will also talk about how to help ourselves and help each other.

I understand that everyone is likely having their own reactions. We won't be discussing your individual reactions today, but if you want to do so later be sure to let me know. First, let's go over some ground rules/expectations."

*(Briefly review classroom rules and expectations during direct instruction and discussion.)*

### STEP 2, GIVE THE FACTS & DISPEL THE RUMORS (20 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #1UE, *Known Facts About the Event*

**The handout is for teacher use and not for distribution among students.**

- State basic facts of the event—which may have been conveyed in a staff meeting, letter to the school community, or on a brief fact sheet provided with this lesson plan and handouts. *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Keep it simple.
- Invite students to share what they know and use the discussion as an opportunity to dispel rumors and limit collective speculation.

*Notes:* Be prepared to repeat facts several times, as crises can be overwhelming and especially difficult for children to comprehend. Be truthful; some facts may be confidential and the facilitator should say so. Also, it is permissible to state, "I don't know" in response to questions. It is advisable to recommend students refrain from exacerbating crises by passing along gossip or stories.

### STEP 3, PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #2UE, *Recognizing Responses*

- Distribute and/or project Handout #2UE and use it to talk about some possible different feelings:

**What are feelings?**

**Does everyone have the same feelings?**

**Does everyone express them the same way?**

- Review each of the feelings on the wheel. Give students 2 minutes to identify one of the emotions they might expect someone to have and write 2-3 sentences about that reaction. Some may identify physical complaints or disruptive thoughts, along with the emotions.

- Explain how students are “probably having normal feelings and thoughts in response to an unusual event or situation.”
- Using the table below to inform your direct instruction, help students anticipate common initial reactions to crisis events. Explain how students may experience some of these reactions themselves or witness them in the behavior of others, including peers, parents, and teachers.

Some key points to acknowledge:

- Most reactions diminish with time, and recovery is most common.
- Conversely, if students' reactions don't lessen or are too difficult to cope with, then a referral for additional crisis intervention assistance is warranted.

**Suicidal ideation, homicidal ideation, and other uncommon and perhaps abnormal crisis reactions indicate a referral as well.**

- Explain how students may access additional crisis intervention assistance for themselves or others. An expression of sincere optimism may be an effective way to close Step 4.

COMMON INITIAL CRISIS REACTIONS	
EMOTIONAL	Shock, Surprise, Anger, Mad, Sadness, Fear, Phobias, Helplessness, Hopelessness
COGNITIVE	Hard to think/focus, Forgetful, Confused, Worried, Nightmares, Guilt, Intrusive thoughts
PHYSICAL	Tired, Insomnia, Always on guard, Aches and pains (stomach, head, heart), Illness, Easily startled, Staring blankly
BEHAVIORAL	Isolated, Peer conflicts, Decreased participation, Attention seeking, Crying, Regression (whining, clinging, toileting, etc.), Hiding (in a corner or under a table), Screaming

*Adapted from Speier (2000); Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman (1998).*

#### **STEP 4, HOW TO MANAGE CRISIS REACTIONS AND STRESS (15 MINUTES)**

**Materials:** Handout #3UE, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*

Handout #4UE, *Stress Management Resources*

**Ensure each student has written his/her name since this form will serve dual purposes: as a check for understanding and as a referral for follow-up care.**

**ACTIVITY A**

- Distribute Handout #3UE and explain that the form will be filled out together but taken home to parents for their review and signature--and turned in the following day.
- Students first write a list of stress management activities followed by class discussion.
- Then they write a list of the supports available to them before individuals share out.

**ACTIVITY B**

- Distribute Handout #4UE. Briefly review the coping strategies and relaxation activities.
- **DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE.** Take two minutes to lead students through the deep breathing exercise script below.

**SCRIPT FOR DEEP BREATHING ACTIVITY**

We are going to relax right now. First, reach your arms up way above your head. Stretch your body tall toward the ceiling. Now let your arms fall gently to your side.

Start to feel the heaviness of your arms, and your legs. I want you to take a moment to get comfortable. Think about how your body feels in your chair.

Now close your eyes softly. Once your eyes are closed, take a deep breath...now breathe out, emptying all of the air completely. Like you're blowing out all the candles on a birthday cake. Breathe in slowly...and out slowly.

Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). Breathe in...2...3...4...HOLD...2...3...exhale...2...3...4...

Feel the tightness leaving your body, bit by bit, with each breath.

Now place your hand gently on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and air fills your belly. Feel your tummy pushing against your hands...Now let all of the air out as you exhale.

Let's repeat this again, in through your nose...out through your mouth.

Start to notice the sounds around the room. This might be the sound of the air conditioner, or even the sound of other students sitting in their chairs...

You may be thinking of something. Picture the thought in your head. Now take that thought and place it in a bubble. Now watch that bubble, that thought, drift away. If another thought comes into your mind, do the same thing: place it in a bubble and let it drift away. (Pause)

Again, you are going to take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4).

Slowly open your eyes. Notice how your body feels. You may feel more relaxed.

### STEP 5, ASSESSMENT (5 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #3UE, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*

- Direct students complete the “Personal Check-In” section on handout #3UE. *While the goal is to teach common reactions, not specifically to get students to recognize their own reactions, this concluding activity can provide valuable triage data helpful in identifying students who may need additional crisis intervention.*
- In that same section, parents may select if they would like someone to follow up with their child or not.

**OPTION:** Schools with online blackboards or electronic communication systems between teachers and caregivers may want to alert parents to an online referral system to support students.

#### Other ways to check for understanding:

- An exit ticket on which students write about their learning for the day, answer a brief question or two, or ask a question (sticky notes, index cards, or half sheets work well)
- Hand signals, as a quick and easy way to check for understanding (thumbs up/ thumbs down)
- Individual white/chalk boards for ongoing assessment during a lesson

## **STEP 2, KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE EVENT** HANDOUT# 1UE

### **Basic Guidelines for Teachers.**

- *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Provide only known facts.
- Ask about what students have heard and address rumors directly.
- Answers should be honest, but refrain from providing intimate details or elaborate explanations.
- It's perfectly okay to say, "I don't have the answer to that."
- Speak in a neutral, unemotional tone. If you believe leading this lesson will be highly emotional for you, request support from administration or support staff.
- Don't engage in conjecture or speculative statements.

Your school administration and support staff can provide additional assistance. See below for the school's information on the event.

**What happened.**

**When the event occurred.**

**Where the event occurred.**

**Who was involved (i.e., identify the crisis victims).**

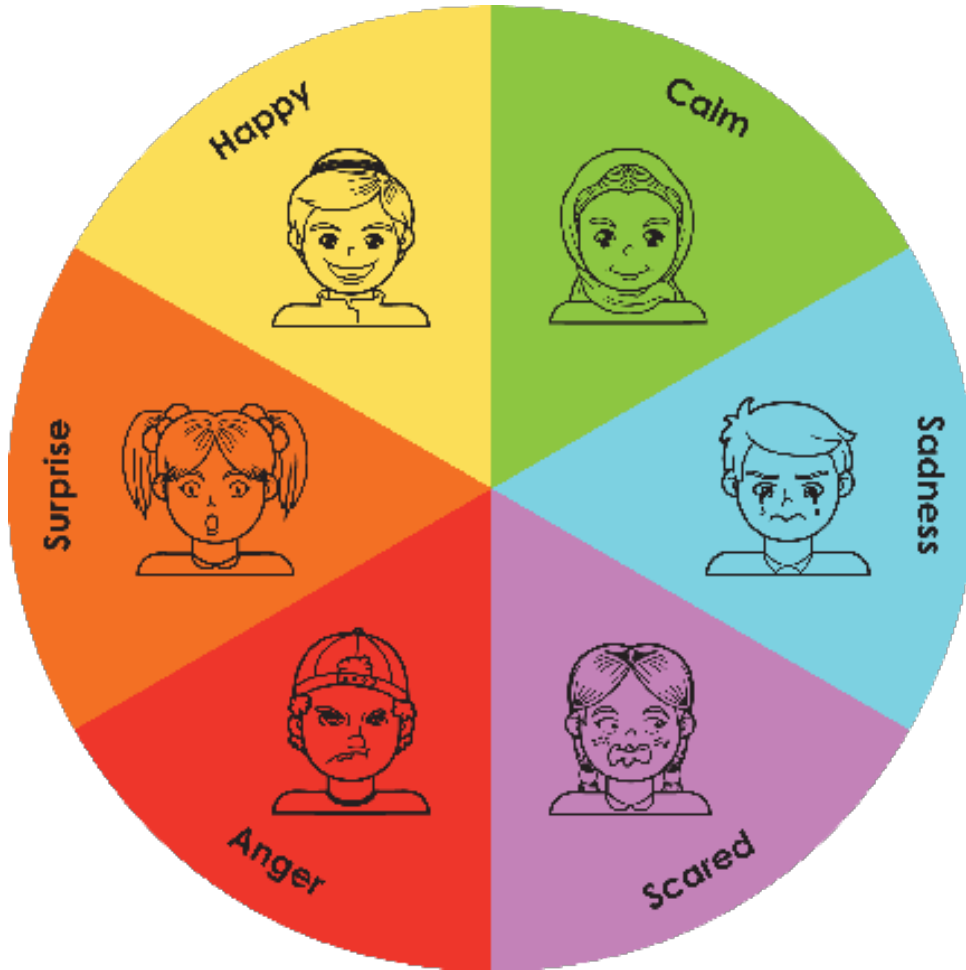
**What is being done to assist students (e.g., counselors).**

**What students can expect to happen next.**

### STEP 3, *RECOGNIZING RESPONSES* HANDOUT# 2UE

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions.** Find the emotion and face that best represent what you think would be a very common reaction to this event. Then write 2-3 sentences describing any thoughts and/or other reactions that you think would go along with this reaction. For example, if you think sadness is a common reaction you might write, "Many people often feel sad and very tired."



---

---

---

---

---

## STEP 4, PERSONAL SUPPORTS & MANAGEMENT PLAN HANDOUT# 3UE

**Directions:** Fill out this page during the lesson. Be prepared to turn it in tomorrow with a parent signature.

**Stress Management Skills.** These are activities that can help you relax and feel good.



Family Time



Friend Time



Talk to Someone



Run/Exercise



Listen to Music



Sleep/Rest

**Current Stress Management Skills.** List the activities you use to help you relax. You may include activities you already do to make yourself feel better or others you would like to try.


-----SHARE-----

**Existing Supports.** This is a list of the people and groups that care about you and can help you (i.e., specific friends, parents, clubs/teams, religious groups, teachers, counselors, pets).


-----RELAXATION ACTIVITY-----

**Personal Check-In.** On a 1-5 scale, circle the number that best describes your current mood or feelings.

Very Sad	Sad	Calm	Happy	Excited
1	2	3	4	5

**Follow-Up.**

- Check this box if you would like more help, perhaps from a teacher or counselor.
- No, thank you.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## STEP 4, STRESS MANAGEMENT RESOURCES HANDOUT# 4UE

### Adaptive Coping Strategies for Dealing with Traumatic Stress Reactions-----

1. Talk with others who have been through the same crisis experience.
2. Participate in local, state, and national associations or groups that aim to prevent future crises.
3. Obtain training that will help prevent future crisis events.
4. Incorporate physical exercise into your routine.
5. Get normal amounts of rest and sleep.
6. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
7. Maintain normal routines and comfortable rituals.
8. Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
9. Surround yourself with support (e.g., partners, pals, and pets).
10. Pursue your passions (don't feel guilty about finding pleasure in life).
11. Practice stress management techniques.
12. Embrace your spirituality or belief systems.

From "Certification of Advanced Training and Specialization in Crisis Interventions Skills and Strategies." Workshop presented by S.E. Brock et al., (2003) at the California Association of School Psychologists' Summer Institute. Lake Tahoe, CA

### Relaxation Activities-----

**Deep Breathing:** A common symptom of stress is an increase in breathing rate. Shallow breathing often occurs higher in the chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take slower, deeper belly breaths and reach a truly relaxed state.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** This practice involves tensing and relaxing muscles throughout the body. The contrast between the state of tension and relaxation typically increases awareness of muscle groups that often carry tension.

**Visualization/Imagery:** Visualization offers a break from overpowering thoughts by using imagery to create a relaxed state. The sights, sounds, smells, and touch sensations associated with a particularly calm scene induce a state of pleasure.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a mental exercise to train the mind, and it promotes relaxation. To meditate, some people may sit or lie down and concentrate on their breathing or repeat a positive statement. There are different types of meditation. The end goal of all types of meditation lead to a quieted mind free from stress brought about by quiet contemplation and reflection.

Adapted from Dartmouth Health Promotion and Wellness (2013). Retrieved from [www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion)

Free online videos, apps, and playlists are available to guide people new to these relaxation activities. Helpful keywords include: progressive muscle relaxation, guided meditation, deep breathing, and visualization/imagery.



# Lesson Plan

Middle School

# Lesson Plan, Middle School

**NOTE:** Ideally, this psychoeducational group is facilitated by a school-based crisis team member familiar to the group of students. If the facilitator is unfamiliar to the students, take a moment to introduce him/her.

**TOPIC** Normalizing Crisis Reactions, Identifying Support Systems, and Delivering Direct Instruction in Adaptive Coping Skills

**DURATION** 1 hour

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Student responses to crisis situations are diverse. In this lesson, facilitators identify and help normalize common reactions to crisis exposure. Students explore their existing support structures before reviewing adaptive coping strategies and effective stress management.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize 2-3 common crisis reactions.
- identify resources for support.
- perform a deep breathing exercise for relaxation purposes.
- identify and use 2-3 adaptive coping strategies.

## MATERIALS

- Teacher copy of Lesson Plan, Middle School (7-8)
- Teacher copy of Handout #1MS, *Known Facts About the Event* **OPTIONAL**
- Student copies of Handout #2MS, *Common Responses*  
*This handout may be projected on the board during discussion and filled out alongside students.*
- Student copies of Handout #3MS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*
- Student copies of Handout #4MS, *Stress Management Resources*
- Pencils [White board, pens, dry erase markers, projector **OPTIONAL**]

## PROCEDURES

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES) No handouts for this step.**

On the following page, read from the sample script that introduces the facilitator, identifies the subject of the lesson, sets the classroom expectations for behavior and participation, and answers procedural questions (or facilitators may use the guidelines to create their own introductions). Use the attendance roster—or a sign-in sheet if the lesson is not delivered in an intact classroom—to keep track of which students have received this instruction in psychoeducation.

### Sample Script for Opening a Student Psychoeducational Group

"Today we are going to talk about (*briefly describe the incident*). I will answer questions you might have about what happened, and identify ways to deal with common reactions. We will also talk about how to help ourselves and help each other.

I understand that everyone is likely having their own reactions. We won't be discussing your individual reactions today, but if you want to do so later be sure to let me know. First, let's go over some ground rules/expectations."

*(Briefly review classroom rules and expectations during direct instruction and discussion.)*

### STEP 2, GIVE THE FACTS & DISPEL THE RUMORS (20 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #1MS, *Known Facts About the Event*

**The handout is for teacher use and not for distribution among students.**

- State basic facts of the event—which may have been conveyed in a staff meeting, letter to the school community, or on a brief fact sheet provided with this lesson plan and handouts. *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Keep it simple.
- Invite students to share what they know and use the discussion as an opportunity to dispel rumors and limit collective speculation.

*Notes:* Be prepared to repeat facts several times, as crises can be overwhelming and difficult to comprehend. Be truthful; some facts may be confidential and the facilitator should say so. Also, it is permissible to state, "I don't know" in response to questions. It is advisable to recommend students refrain from exacerbating crises by passing along gossip or stories, particularly on social media.

### STEP 3, PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #2MS, *Common Responses*

- Distribute and/or project Handout #2MS and use it to talk about some possible different feelings. Review each of the feelings on the wheel.
- Give students 2 minutes to identify one of the emotions they might expect someone to have and write 2-3 sentences about that reaction. Some may identify physical complaints or disruptive thoughts, along with the emotions.
- Explain how students are "probably having normal feelings and thoughts in response to an unusual event or situation."
- Using the table on the next page to inform your direct instruction, help students anticipate common initial reactions to crisis events. Explain how students may

experience some of these reactions themselves or witness them in the behavior of others, including peers, parents, and teachers.

Some key points to acknowledge:

- Most reactions diminish with time, and recovery is most common.
- Conversely, if students' reactions don't lessen or are too difficult to cope with, then a referral for additional crisis intervention assistance is warranted.  
Suicidal ideation, homicidal ideation, and other uncommon and perhaps abnormal crisis reactions indicate a referral as well.
- Explain how students may access additional crisis intervention assistance for themselves or others. An expression of sincere optimism may be an effective way to close Step 4.

COMMON INITIAL CRISIS REACTIONS	
EMOTIONAL	Shock, Surprise, Anger, Mad, Sadness, Despair, Sadness, Fear, Phobias, Emotional numbing, Guilt, Helplessness, Hopelessness, Hypersensitivity, Loss of pleasure, Irritability, Dissociation
COGNITIVE	Hard to think/focus, Forgetful, Confused, Worried, Nightmares, Impaired decision-making, Distortion, Intrusive thoughts, Decreased self-esteem, Self-blame, Decreased self-efficacy
PHYSICAL	Fatigue, Insomnia, Always on guard, Aches and pains (stomach, head, heart), Illness, Easily startled, Staring blankly, Impaired immune response, Decreased appetite
BEHAVIORAL	Isolated, Social withdrawal, Peer conflicts, Decreased participation, Attention seeking, Crying, Risk-taking, Aggression

*Adapted from Speier (2000); Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman (1998).*

**STEP 4, HOW TO MANAGE CRISIS REACTIONS AND STRESS (15 MINUTES)**

**Materials:** Handout #3MS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*

Handout #4MS, *Stress Management Resources*

**Ensure each student has written his/her name since this form will serve dual purposes: as a check for understanding and as a referral for follow-up care.**

### ACTIVITY A

- Distribute Handout #3MS and explain that the form will be filled out together and submitted at the end of the period.
- Lead the class in a discussion of stress management activities.
- Students write a list of the supports available to them before individuals share out. Then complete the handout.

### ACTIVITY B

- Distribute Handout #4MS. Briefly review the coping strategies and relaxation activities.
- **DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE.** Take two minutes to lead students through the deep breathing exercise script below.

#### SCRIPT FOR DEEP BREATHING ACTIVITY

We are going to relax right now. First, reach your arms up way above your head toward the ceiling. Stretch your body tall. Now let your arms fall gently to your side.

Start to feel the heaviness of your arms, and your legs. I want you to take a moment to get comfortable. Think about how your body feels in your chair.

Now close your eyes softly. Once your eyes are closed, take a deep breath...now breathe out, emptying all of the air completely. Like you're blowing out all the candles on a birthday cake. Breathe in slowly...and out slowly.

Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). Breathe in...2...3...4...HOLD...2...3...exhale...2...3...4...

Feel the tightness leaving your body, bit by bit, with each breath.

Now place your hand gently on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and feel your stomach press against your hands. When you exhale, feel your belly button reach toward your back.

Let's repeat this again, in through your nose...out through your mouth.

Start to notice the sounds around the room. This might be the sound of the air conditioner, or even the sound of other students sitting in their chairs...

You may be thinking of something. Picture the thought in your head. Now take that thought and place it in a bubble. Now watch that bubble, that thought, drift away. If another thought comes into your mind, do the same thing: place it in a bubble and let it drift away. (Pause)

Again, you are going to take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). . . . Slowly open your eyes. Notice how your body feels. You may feel more relaxed.

### STEP 5, ASSESSMENT (5 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #3MS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*

- Direct students to complete the “Personal Check-In” section on handout #3MS.
- Students then complete the “Follow-Up” section on #3MS. They either select they would like someone to follow up or not. *While the goal is to teach common reactions, not specifically to get students to recognize their own reactions, this concluding activity can provide valuable triage data helpful in identifying students who may need additional crisis intervention.*

**OPTION:** Schools with online blackboards or electronic communication systems or social media accounts may want to alert students to an online referral system to support them and their peers.

#### Other ways to check for understanding:

- An exit ticket on which students write about their learning for the day, answer a brief question or two, or ask a question (sticky notes, index cards, or half sheets work well)
- Hand signals, as a quick and easy way to check for understanding (thumbs up/ thumbs down)
- Individual white/chalk boards for ongoing assessment during a lesson

## **STEP 2, KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE EVENT** HANDOUT# 1MS

### **Basic Guidelines for Teachers.**

- *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Provide only known facts.
- Ask about what students have heard and address rumors directly.
- Answers should be honest, but refrain from providing intimate details or elaborate explanations.
- It's perfectly okay to say, "I don't have the answer to that."
- Speak in a neutral, unemotional tone. If you believe leading this lesson will be highly emotional for you, request support from administration or support staff.
- Don't engage in conjecture, and discourage students from perpetuating speculation on social media.

Your school administration and support staff can provide additional assistance. See below for the school's information on the event.

**What happened.**

**When the event occurred.**

**Where the event occurred.**

**Who was involved (i.e., identify the crisis victims).**

**What is being done to assist students (e.g., counselors).**

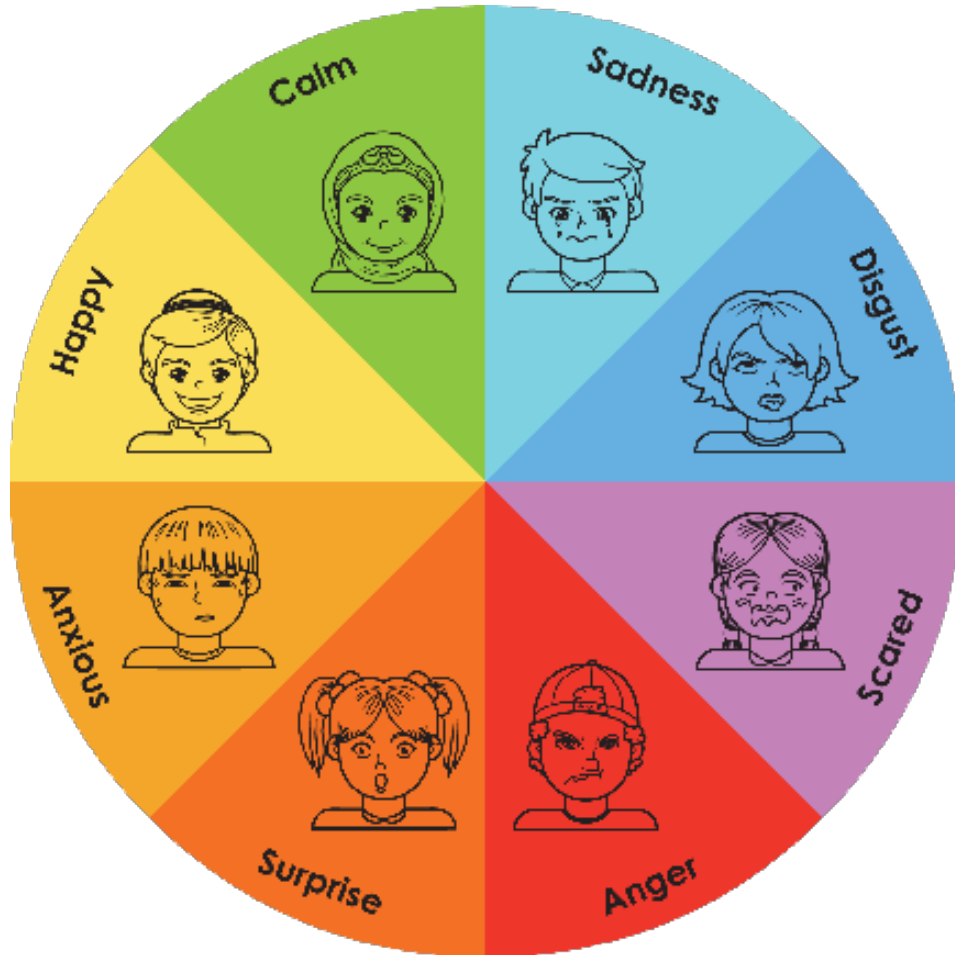
**What students can expect to happen next.**



## STEP 3, COMMON RESPONSES HANDOUT# 2MS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions.** Find the emotion and face that best represent what you think would be a very common reaction to this event. Then write 2-3 sentences describing any thoughts and/or other reactions that you think would go along with this reaction. For example, if you think sadness is a common reaction you might write, "Many people often feel sad and very tired."



---

---

---

---

---

## STEP 4, PERSONAL SUPPORTS & MANAGEMENT PLAN HANDOUT# 3MS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions.** Fill out this page during the lesson. Be prepared to turn it in tomorrow with a parent signature.

**Stress Management Skills.** These are activities that can help you relax and feel good.



Talk to Someone



Run/Exercise



Play



Listen to Music



Sleep/Rest

**Current Stress Management Skills.** List the activities you use to help you relax. You may include activities you already do to make yourself feel better or others you would like to try.


-----SHARE-----

**Existing Supports.** This is a list of the people and groups that care about you and can help you (i.e., specific friends, parents, clubs/teams, religious groups, teachers, counselors, pets).


-----RELAXATION ACTIVITY-----

**Personal Check-In.** On a 1-5 scale, circle the number that best describes your current mood or feelings.

Very Sad	Sad	Calm	Happy	Excited
1	2	3	4	5

**Follow-Up.**

- Check this box if you would like more help, perhaps from a teacher or counselor.
- No, thank you.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 4, STRESS MANAGEMENT RESOURCES HANDOUT# 4MS

### Adaptive Coping Strategies for Dealing with Traumatic Stress Reactions-----

1. Talk with others who have been through the same crisis experience.
2. Participate in local, state, and national associations or groups that aim to prevent future crises.
3. Obtain training that will help prevent future crisis events.
4. Incorporate physical exercise into your routine.
5. Get normal amounts of rest and sleep.
6. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
7. Maintain normal routines and comfortable rituals.
8. Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
9. Surround yourself with support (e.g., partners, pals, and pets).
10. Pursue your passions (don't feel guilty about finding pleasure in life).
11. Practice stress management techniques.
12. Embrace your spirituality or belief systems.

From "Certification of Advanced Training and Specialization in Crisis Interventions Skills and Strategies." Workshop presented by S.E. Brock et al., (2003) at the California Association of School Psychologists' Summer Institute. Lake Tahoe, CA

### Relaxation Activities-----

**Deep Breathing:** A common symptom of stress is an increase in breathing rate. Shallow breathing often occurs higher in the chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take slower, deeper belly breaths and reach a truly relaxed state.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** This practice involves tensing and relaxing muscles throughout the body. The contrast between the state of tension and relaxation typically increases awareness of muscle groups that often carry tension.

**Visualization/Imagery:** Visualization offers a break from overpowering thoughts by using imagery to create a relaxed state. The sights, sounds, smells, and touch sensations associated with a particularly calm scene induce a state of pleasure.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a mental exercise to train the mind, and it promotes relaxation. To meditate, some people may sit or lie down and concentrate on their breathing or repeat a positive statement. There are different types of meditation. The end goal of all types of meditation lead to a quieted mind free from stress brought about by quiet contemplation and reflection.

Adapted from Dartmouth Health Promotion and Wellness (2013). Retrieved from [www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion)

Free online videos, apps, and playlists are available to guide people new to these relaxation activities. Helpful keywords include: progressive muscle relaxation, guided meditation, deep breathing, and visualization/imagery.



# Lesson Plan

High School

# Lesson Plan, High School

**NOTE:** Ideally, this psychoeducational group is facilitated by a school-based crisis team member familiar to the group of students. If the facilitator is unfamiliar to the students, take a moment to introduce him/her.

**TOPIC** Normalizing Crisis Reactions, Identifying Support Systems, and Delivering Direct Instruction in Adaptive Coping Skills

**DURATION** 1 hour

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Student responses to crisis situations are diverse. In this lesson, facilitators identify and help normalize common reactions to crisis exposure. Students explore their existing support structures before reviewing adaptive coping strategies and effective stress management.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize 2-3 common crisis reactions.
- identify resources for support.
- perform a deep breathing exercise for relaxation purposes.
- identify and use 2-3 adaptive coping strategies.

## MATERIALS

- Teacher copy of Lesson Plan, High School (9-12)
- Teacher copy of Handout #1HS, *Known Facts About the Event* **OPTIONAL**
- Student copies of Handout #2HS, *Common Responses*  
*This handout may be projected on the board during discussion and filled out alongside students.*
- Student copies of Handout #3HS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*
- Student copies of Handout #4HS, *Stress Management Resources*
- Pencils [White board, pens, dry erase markers, projector **OPTIONAL**]

## PROCEDURES

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES) No handouts for this step.**

On the following page, read from the sample script that introduces the facilitator, identifies the subject of the lesson, sets the classroom expectations for behavior and participation, and answers procedural questions (or facilitators may use the guidelines to create their own introductions). Use the attendance roster—or a sign-in sheet if the lesson is not delivered in an intact classroom—to keep track of which students have received this instruction in psychoeducation.

### Sample Script for Opening a Student Psychoeducational Group

"Today we are going to talk about (*briefly describe the incident*). I will answer questions you might have about what happened, and identify ways to deal with common reactions. We will also talk about how to help ourselves and help each other.

I understand that everyone is likely having their own reactions. We won't be discussing your individual reactions today, but if you want to do so later be sure to let me know. First, let's go over some ground rules/expectations."

*(Briefly review classroom rules and expectations during direct instruction and discussion.)*

### STEP 2, GIVE THE FACTS & DISPEL THE RUMORS (20 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #1HS, *Known Facts About the Event*

**The handout is for teacher use and not for distribution among students.**

- *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- State basic facts of the event—which may have been conveyed in a staff meeting, letter to the school community, or on a brief fact sheet provided with this lesson plan and handouts.
- Keep it simple.
- Invite students to share what they know and use the discussion as an opportunity to dispel rumors and limit collective speculation.

*Notes:* Be prepared to repeat facts several times, as crises can be overwhelming and difficult to comprehend. Be truthful; some facts may be confidential and the facilitator should say so. Also, it is permissible to state, "I don't know" in response to questions. It is advisable to recommend students refrain from exacerbating crises by passing along gossip or stories, particularly on social media.

### STEP 3, PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COMMON CRISIS REACTIONS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #2HS, *Common Responses*

- Distribute and/or project Handout #2HS and use it to talk about some possible different feelings. Review each of the feelings on the wheel.
- Give students 2 minutes to identify one of the emotions they might expect someone to have and write 2-3 sentences about that reaction. Some may identify physical complaints or disruptive thoughts, along with the emotions.
- Using the table on the following page to inform your direct instruction, help students

anticipate common initial reactions to crisis events. Explain how students may experience some of these reactions themselves or witness them in the behavior of others, including peers, parents, and teachers.

Some key points to acknowledge:

- Most reactions diminish with time, and recovery is most common.
- Conversely, if students' reactions don't lessen or are too difficult to cope with, then a referral for additional crisis intervention assistance is warranted.

**Suicidal ideation, homicidal ideation, and other uncommon and perhaps abnormal crisis reactions indicate a referral as well.**

- Explain how students may access additional crisis intervention assistance for themselves or others. An expression of sincere optimism may be an effective way to close Step 4.

COMMON INITIAL CRISIS REACTIONS	
EMOTIONAL	Shock, Surprise, Anger, Mad, Sadness, Despair, Sadness, Fear, Phobias, Emotional numbing, Guilt, Helplessness, Hopelessness, Hypersensitivity, Loss of pleasure, Irritability, Dissociation
COGNITIVE	Hard to think/focus, Forgetful, Confused, Worried, Nightmares, Impaired decision-making, Distortion, Intrusive thoughts, Decreased self-esteem, Self-blame, Decreased self-efficacy
PHYSICAL	Fatigue, Insomnia, Always on guard, Aches and pains (stomach, head, heart), Illness, Easily startled, Staring blankly, Impaired immune response, Decreased appetite
BEHAVIORAL	Isolated, Social withdrawal, Peer conflicts, Decreased participation, Attention seeking, Crying, Risk-taking, Aggression

*Adapted from Speier (2000); Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman (1998).*

#### STEP 4, HOW TO MANAGE CRISIS REACTIONS AND STRESS (15 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #3HS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*  
Handout #4HS, *Stress Management Resources*

**Ensure each student has written his/her name since this form will serve dual purposes: as a check for understanding and as a referral for follow-up care.**

**ACTIVITY A**

- Distribute Handout #3HS and explain that the form will be turned in at the end of the period.
- Lead the class in a discussion of stress management activities.
- Students first write a list of the supports available to them before individuals share out.

**ACTIVITY B**

- Distribute Handout #4HS. Briefly review the coping strategies and relaxation activities.
- **DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE.** Take two minutes to lead students through the deep breathing exercise script below.
- After the deep breathing exercise, students reference #4HS and complete the "Give it a Try" section on #3HS to identify one strategy they would try or learn more about.

**SCRIPT FOR DEEP BREATHING ACTIVITY**

We are going to relax right now. First, reach your arms up way above your head. Stretch your body tall. Now let your arms fall gently to your side.

Start to feel the heaviness of your arms, and your legs. I want you to take a moment to get comfortable. Think about how your body feels in your chair.

Now close your eyes softly. Once your eyes are closed, take a deep breath...now breathe out, emptying all of the air completely. Breathe in slowly...and out slowly.

Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). Breathe in...2...3...4...HOLD...2...3...exhale...2...3...4...

Feel the tightness leaving your body, bit by bit, with each breath.

Now place your hand gently on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and feel your stomach press against your hands.

Let's repeat this again, in through your nose...out through your mouth.

Start to notice the sounds around the room. This might be the sound of the air conditioner, or even the sound of other students sitting in their chairs...

You may be thinking of something. Picture the thought in your head. Now take that thought and place it in a bubble. Now watch that bubble, that thought, drift away. If another thought comes into your mind, do the same thing: place it in a bubble and let it drift away. (Pause)

Again, you are going to take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of (4) and out through your mouth to the count of (4). . . . Slowly open your eyes. Notice how your body feels. You may feel more relaxed.



### STEP 5, ASSESSMENT (5 MINUTES)

**Materials:** Handout #3HS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*

- Direct students to complete the “Personal Check-In” section on handout #3HS, *Personal Supports and Management Plan*.
- Students then complete the “Follow-Up” section at the bottom of the page. *While the goal is to teach common reactions, not specifically to get students to recognize their own reactions, this concluding activity can provide valuable triage data helpful in identifying students who may need additional crisis intervention.*

**OPTION:** Schools with online blackboards or electronic communication systems or social media accounts may want to alert students to an online referral system to support them and their peers.

#### **Other ways to check for understanding:**

- An exit ticket on which students write about their learning for the day, answer a brief question or two, or ask a question (sticky notes, index cards, or half sheets work well)
- Hand signals, as a quick and easy way to check for understanding (thumbs up/ thumbs down)
- Individual white/chalk boards for ongoing assessment during a lesson

## STEP 2, KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE EVENT HANDOUT# 1HS

### Basic Guidelines for Teachers.

- *The fact sheet needs to be developmentally appropriate.*
- Provide only known facts.
- Ask about what students have heard and address rumors directly.
- Answers should be honest, but refrain from providing intimate details or elaborate explanations.
- It's perfectly okay to say, "I don't have the answer to that."
- Speak in a neutral, unemotional tone. If you believe leading this lesson will be highly emotional for you, request support from administration or support staff.
- Don't engage in conjecture, and discourage students from perpetuating speculation on social media.

Your school administration and support staff can provide additional assistance. See below for the school's information on the event.

**What happened.**

**When the event occurred.**

**Where the event occurred.**

**Who was involved (i.e., identify the crisis victims).**

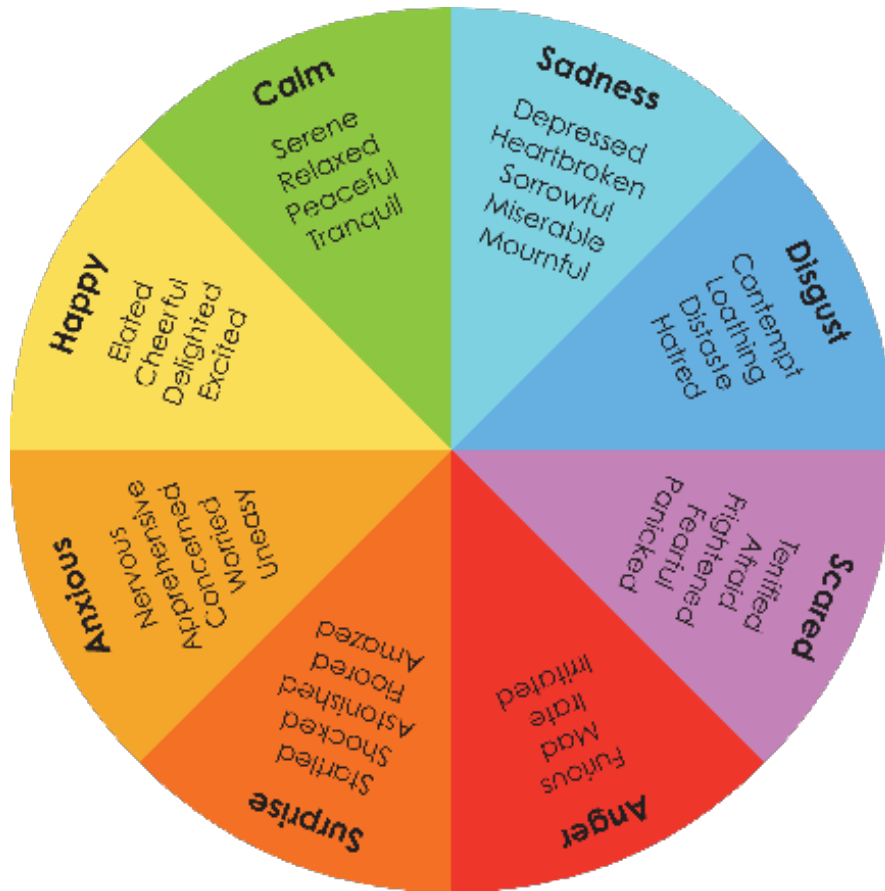
**What is being done to assist students (e.g., counselors).**

**What students can expect to happen next.**

## STEP 3, COMMON RESPONSES HANDOUT# 2HS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions.** On the wheel, find the set of emotions that best represents what you think would be a very common reaction to this event. Then write 2-3 sentences describing any thoughts and/or other reactions that you think are common. For example, if you think sadness is a common reaction you might write, "Many people often feel sad and very tired."




---



---



---



---



---

## STEP 4, PERSONAL SUPPORTS & MANAGEMENT PLAN HANDOUT# 3HS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions.** Fill out this page during the lesson. Be prepared to submit it at the end of class.

**Stress Management Skills.** This is a list of the activities that help you relax. It may include things you already do to make yourself feel better. As you hear others' suggestions, add them to your list below.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

-----**SHARE**-----

**Existing Supports.** This is a list of the people and groups that care about you and can help you (i.e., specific friends, parents, religious groups/clubs/teams, teachers, counselors).

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

-----**RELAXATION ACTIVITY**-----

**Give it a Try.** From the stress management techniques you've reviewed and/or practiced, identify one you would try again or could be interested in learning more and write it below:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Check-In.** On a 1-5 scale, circle the number that best describes your current mood or feelings.

Very Sad 1	Sad 2	Calm 3	Happy 4	Excited 5
---------------	----------	-----------	------------	--------------

-----**Follow-Up.**

- Check this box if you would like more help or information, perhaps contact with a teacher or counselor.
- No, thank you.

## STEP 4, STRESS MANAGEMENT RESOURCES HANDOUT# 4HS

### Adaptive Coping Strategies for Dealing with Traumatic Stress Reactions-----

1. Talk with others who have been through the same crisis experience.
2. Participate in local, state, and national associations or groups that aim to prevent future crises.
3. Obtain training that will help prevent future crisis events.
4. Incorporate physical exercise into your routine.
5. Get normal amounts of rest and sleep.
6. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
7. Maintain normal routines and comfortable rituals.
8. Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
9. Surround yourself with support (e.g., partners, pals, and pets).
10. Pursue your passions (don't feel guilty about finding pleasure in life).
11. Practice stress management techniques.
12. Embrace your spirituality or belief systems.

From "Certification of Advanced Training and Specialization in Crisis Interventions Skills and Strategies." Workshop presented by S.E. Brock et al., (2003) at the California Association of School Psychologists' Summer Institute. Lake Tahoe, CA

### Relaxation Activities-----

**Deep Breathing:** A common symptom of stress is an increase in breathing rate. Shallow breathing often occurs higher in the chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take slower, deeper belly breaths and reach a truly relaxed state.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** This practice involves tensing and relaxing muscles throughout the body. The contrast between the state of tension and relaxation typically increases awareness of muscle groups that often carry tension.

**Visualization/Imagery:** Visualization offers a break from overpowering thoughts by using imagery to create a relaxed state. The sights, sounds, smells, and touch sensations associated with a particularly calm scene induce a state of pleasure.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a mental exercise to train the mind, and it promotes relaxation. To meditate, some people may sit or lie down and concentrate on their breathing or repeat a positive statement. There are different types of meditation. The end goal of all types of meditation lead to a quieted mind free from stress brought about by quiet contemplation and reflection.

Adapted from Dartmouth Health Promotion and Wellness (2013). Retrieved from [www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/#suggestion)

Free online videos, apps, and playlists are available to guide people new to these relaxation activities. Helpful keywords include: progressive muscle relaxation, guided meditation, deep breathing, and visualization/imagery.



# Lesson Plans

Supplemental  
Enrichment Plans

# Enrichment, Lesson Plan 1

**TOPIC** Deep Breathing Exercises

**DURATION** 15-20 minutes

**AGE GROUP** Primary Grades and Upper Elementary Grades.

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Students are learning additional techniques to practice deep breathing in fun, naturalistic activities. This practice builds on a previous introduction to stress management techniques, including student psychoeducation.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize how and when deep breathing can be used to calm the body and mind.
- identify at least two ways of breathing deeply.

## **MATERIALS**

- Hoberman's sphere (or youtube video of Hoberman's sphere and breathing)
- A set of 10 pinwheels
- 10 bottles of soapy bubbles
- 10 feathers (real or synthetic)

## **PROCEDURES**

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (2 MINUTES)**

- Ask students to identify challenging or stressful situations.
- Ask for 2-3 student volunteers to demonstrate stressed breathing (shallow, rapid breaths).
- Discuss the importance of breathing to calm the body and mind.

### **STEP 2, STATIONS TO PRACTICE DIFFERENT BREATHING (10 MINUTES)**

Three different fun activities can focus students' attention to the breath. Model each and divide into three stations. Students may rotate through each at 1-2 minute intervals, as determined by the teacher:

- Pinwheel. This is best done independently. Students are challenged to blow the pinwheel slowly and steadily, and keep it moving continuously throughout the interval.
- Bubble Blowing. This may be done in pairs or independently. Students are challenged to blow bubbles slowly and steadily from the bubble loop handle.

- Feather Blowing. This may be done in pairs with each group blowing the feather between partners. Place feather in palm of hand and slowly, steadily, and forcefully blow the feather toward a partner.

### **STEP 3, BELLY BREATHING (5 MINUTES)**

- Ask students to stand up and place their hands on their stomachs.
- Show students the Hoberman's sphere and use it as a visual to instruct them in belly breathing.
- Direct students to breathe in through their noses and out through their mouths. When exhaling, direct them to pull their belly buttons toward their backs as they exhale.
- Work up to 4 X 4 breathing in which the exhale and inhale both take four counts.
- Invite students to close their eyes.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

### **STEP 4, ASSESSMENT (3 MINUTES)**

- Instruct students to get into pairs and demonstrate two techniques for breathing they practiced and identify when they would use it and why.
- Pairs share out to the class and may demonstrate.



# Enrichment, Lesson Plan 2

**TOPIC** Breathing Exercises

**DURATION** 10 minutes

**AGE GROUP** Primary Grades

**DESCRIPTION OF LESSON** Students are learning additional techniques to practice thoughtful breathing in fun, naturalistic activities. This practice builds on a previous introduction to stress management techniques, including student psychoeducation.

**OBJECTIVES** *At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to . . .*

- recognize how and when deep breathing can be used to calm the body and mind.
- identify at least two ways of breathing deeply.

## **MATERIALS**

- **OPTIONAL** View a Youtube video demonstration: <https://move-with-me.com/self-regulation/4-breathing-exercises-for-kids-to-empower-calm-and-self-regulate/>

## **PROCEDURES**

### **STEP 1, INTRODUCTION (2-3 MINUTES)**

- Ask students to identify stressful situations and why breathing deeply is important.

### **STEP 2, PRACTICING DIFFERENT TYPES OF BREATHING (15 MINUTES).**

- Instruct students in different methods of breathing detailed below by asking them to first close their eyes as you read the small scripts. Ask them to visualize the scene as they breathe.

The **Flower Breath** is a simple way to connect kids to their breath and their feelings:

- “Imagine you’re holding on to a beautiful flower. With both hands, bring the flower up to your nose, and breathe in deeply. And breathe out. Now, a second time. Raise the flower up to your nose. Now exhale out of the mouth, releasing any tension.”
- Do this three more times.
- Let students know they can stop and smell the roses, carnations, or lavender any time they are feeling nervous or upset.

The **Hissing Breath** can connect students to their exhale, which can help them slow down, mentally and physically:

- “The hissing breath sounds like a snake. Let’s all make the ‘sssssss’ sound together...
- This time, we are going to breathe in the nose with a long deep inhale before we make the hissssssing sound.’
- Instruct students to make the hissing sound slow and long.’

The **Bear Breath** may be helpful before nap time, story time or any creative activity:

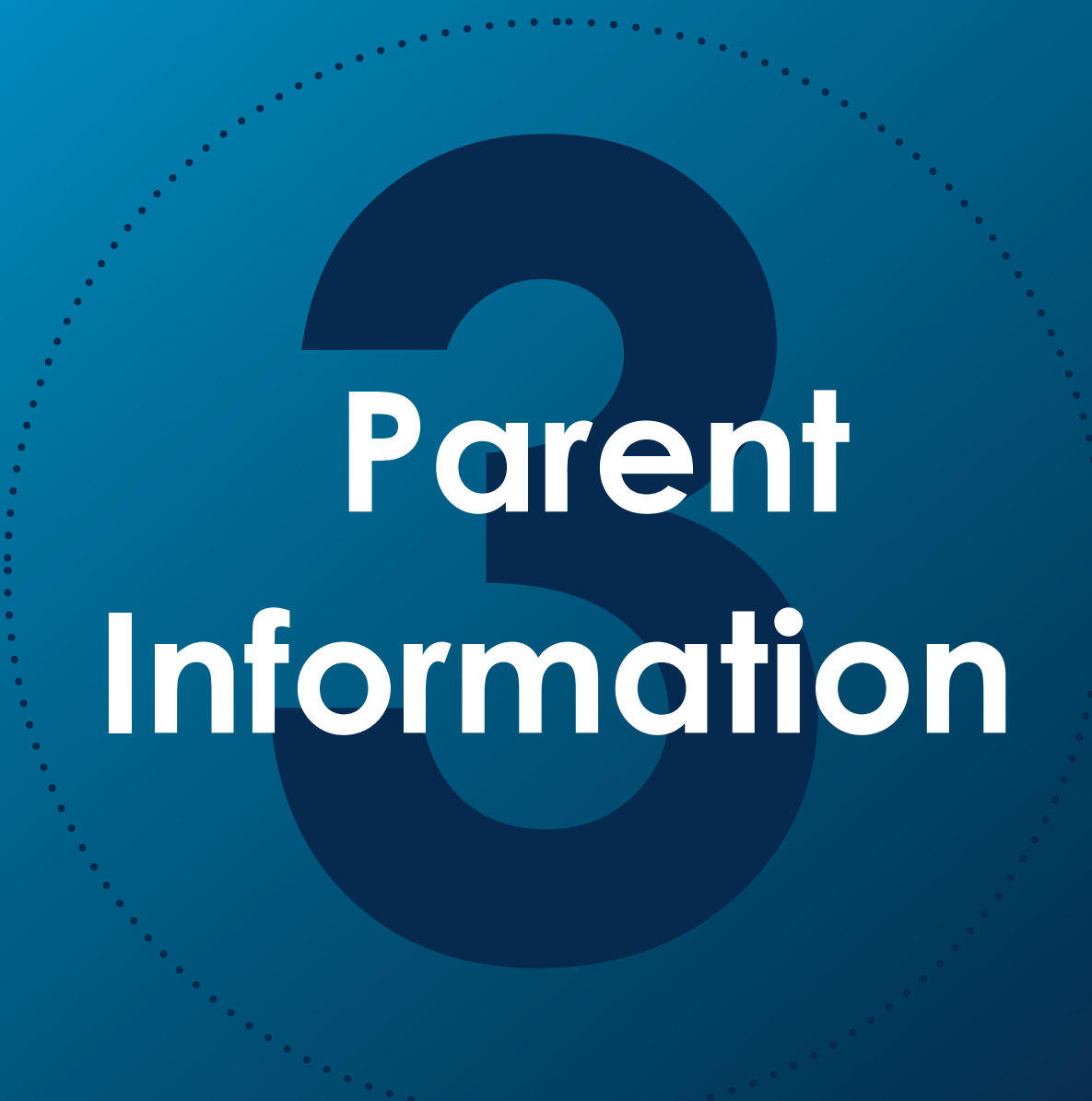
- “Imagine a bear hibernating in a cave. The bear takes deep slow breaths in and slow exhales out.”
- “Bears have to take in breaths through the nose before pausing...now breathe out through the nose...and pause. Breathe in to a count of 3 or 4...”
- “Pause for a count of 2... breathe out for a count of 3...pause for a count of 2.”
- Repeat a few times.

The **Bunny Breath** is useful when students are very upset and can’t find their breath. It can help students connect to their exhale, so that they breathe instead of get out of control.

- Imagine you are a bunny, wiggling your nose, smelling carrots and flowers. Now take 3 quick sniffs before one long exhale.
- “Let’s practice together. 3 quick sniffs in the nose and one long exhale out the nose. Remember you are a bunny, sniffing the air trying to find your bunny friends, more food to eat, or get to safety.”

### **STEP 3, ASSESSMENT (2-3 MINUTES)**

- Throughout the day, ask students to identify one of the types of breathing and demonstrate. You may need to prompt them with the imagery used during the lesson.



**Parent  
Information**

# Information for Parents

**AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL,** we will have conducted a lesson in class *lasting approximately one hour* to provide students with basic information in identifying social supports and coping strategies. Students are likely experiencing a variety of responses to recent events connected to the school. Providing this information to our students is an effort to decrease the amount and severity of social emotional problems arising from a crisis. Students can gain increased control over their own recovery process, locate social support, and identify additional coping strategies to take a proactive approach to improving their own well-being. This letter is intended to provide you with a brief summary of the lesson so you are better able to support your student.

## GOALS OF THE LESSON

1. Dispel crisis rumors and ensure students have the facts.
2. Prepare students for the reactions that may follow crisis exposure.
3. Teach students how to manage crisis reactions and obtain mental health crisis intervention.
4. Provide strategies for managing stress reactions.

**Possible reactions.** Some students may react more strongly than others. You may notice anger, irritability, nightmares, worry, social withdrawal, increased/decreased sleep or appetite, headaches, tantrums, risk taking, or school refusal, among others.

**Possible supports.** Encourage your student to continue his/her participation in school, extracurriculars, and time with family and friends. The goal is for students to return to their normal functioning, and re-engaging familiar routines is one way to support recovery.

**Possible coping strategies.** Talk with your student about how s/he is feeling, who might be identified as supports, and ask your student to explain some of the adaptive coping strategies learned in class. It may be especially helpful to practice some of the strategies together.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** We encourage you and your family to access the school's website and social media accounts for updated information, including additional resources where you may find help. At the same time, please consider the possible negative effects of students' use of social media as a place where they try to understand their experiences. Online posts can have unintended consequences (e.g., antagonizing or hurting others).

**FINAL THOUGHTS** Our goal is to help all students, wherever they are at. For many students, this lesson initiates their self-recovery and is sufficient support. If it is not, please contact the school and/or outside providers for more help.

# References

- Bragdon, L. (2012, January). 4 Breathing Exercises for Kids to empower, calm, and self regulate. Retrieved from <http://move-with-me.com/self-regulation/4-breathing-exercises-for-kids-to-empower-calm-and-self-regulate/>
- Brock, S. E. (2011). *Crisis intervention and recovery: The roles of school-based mental health professionals*. Training of trainers. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Brock, S. E., Sandoval, J. & Lewis, S. (2001). *Preparing for crises in the schools: A manual for building school crisis response teams* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Brock, S. E., Nickerson, A. B., Reeves, M. A., Conolly, C. N., Jimerson, S. R., Pesce, R. C., & Lazzaro, B. R. (2016). *School crisis prevention and intervention: The PREPaRE model*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Brock, S. E. (2014). *Specific crisis Interventions* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/b/brocks/Courses/EDS%20246b/g%29%20Crisis%20Intervention%203/Specific%20Interventions.pdf>
- Creamer, M., & O'Donnell, M. (2008). The pros and cons of psychoeducation following trauma: Too early to judge? *Psychiatry*, 71, 319-321.
- Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1975). *Unmasking the face: A guide to recognizing emotions from facial clues*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Englewood Cliffs-Prentice Hall.
- Howard, J. M., & Goelitz, A. (2004). Psychoeducation as a response to community disaster. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, 4, 1-10.
- Kilpatrick, D. G., Cugle, J. R., & Resnick, H. S. (2008). Reports of the death of psychoeducation as a preventative treatment for posttraumatic psychological distress are exaggerated. *Psychiatry*, 71, 322-328.
- Krupnick, J. L., & Green B. L. (2008). Psychoeducation to prevent PTSD: A paucity of evidence. *Psychiatry*, 71, 329-331.
- Plutchik, R. (2002). *Emotions and life: Perspectives from psychology, biology, and evolution*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Stein, S.E., Chiolan, K., Campisi, A., & Brock, S.E. (2015, February). *Implementing PREPaRE student psychoeducational groups differentiated for multiple grade levels*. Mini-skills workshop presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, Orlando, FL.

**Student  
Psychoeducational  
Groups  
in**  
School Crisis Intervention:

The PREPaRE Model