



## ***SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS***

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service  
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

### **Leader Training Guide**

#### **Everyday Ways to Handle and Relieve Stress**

##### **Objectives:**

The participants will be able to:

1. Recognize common causes and signs of stress.
2. Practice simple, effective strategies to reduce stress.
3. Create a plan for healthily handling stress.

**Lesson Overview/Introduction:** Stress affects everyone, but how we manage it makes all the difference. Whether work, family, finances, or health causes the stress, unmanaged stress can significantly affect the mind and the body. There are many simple, proven ways to reduce stress and be more in control. This lesson will discuss techniques someone can use, from breathing and physical activity to managing time and staying connected to resources.

##### **Lesson:**

#### **1. Understanding Stress**

Stress is a natural response to everyday life's many pressures or demands. Work, family responsibilities, health concerns, or even positive happy events such as weddings or relocation can trigger stress. Small amounts of stress are normal; chronic stress can affect your mood, sleep, immunity, and heart health. Signs of stress include fatigue, irritability, forgetfulness, and even physical symptoms such as headaches and muscle tension.

#### **2. Mental and Emotional Stress Relief**

Mindfulness and Meditation are ways to manage stress, even for just 5 minutes a day, and can calm the mind. Focusing on breathing or listening to guided Meditation to practice Mindfulness. Writing about your thoughts or keeping a list of things, you are thankful for can help put stress into perspective. It is also important to reframe your thoughts instead of thinking "I will never get this done."

Try "I will do what I can today and that's enough." Do not hold stress in; talking it out with someone you trust, such as a friend or professional, can be therapeutic in dealing with stress.

### **3. Physical Stress Relief**

Exercise is essential when relieving stress. Movement releases 'feel-good' chemicals in your brain, and you do not need a gym to walk, dance, or garden. Breathing exercises are also beneficial. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4. You can do this for a few minutes to calm your nerves. Progressive relaxation reduces stress by tensing and relaxing muscle groups one at a time to release tension from the body.

### **4. Social and Emotional Support**

It is essential to stay connected. Spend time with the people who make you feel good. Sometimes that can be just a phone call to someone important that can lift your spirits. Setting boundaries is a powerful way to protect your time and energy and to say no when needed. Laughter and joy are ways to manage stress, and some examples include a funny show, playing with animals, or doing something creative that can help your brain reset.

### **5. Healthy Routines for Managing Stress**

**Sleep:** Research has shown that we should try to get 7-9 hours each night. You can wind down with calming activities before bed, like reading or listening to a sleep app or soft music.

**Nutrition:** Eating healthy, nutritious, balanced meals and staying hydrated helps the brain cope better. We should also avoid too much sugar and caffeine. Limiting alcohol can exacerbate stress and anxiety.

**Time Management:** We should prioritize tasks, break large tasks into smaller ones, and allow daily breaks.

### **6. Creating a Personal Stress-Relief Toolkit**

Stressors look different for everyone. Putting a stress toolkit together to assist in difficult times may be helpful. Things to consider may be a favorite music playlist, journaling or writing, a list of calming activities, or essential oils/candles/something that smells comforting. Also, plan who to call or what to do when feeling overwhelmed.

**Lesson Summary:** Stress is a part of life—but how we manage it makes all the difference. It does not have to control your life. Recognizing and responding to stress healthily can help you feel more peaceful, focused, and resilient.

Simple changes can significantly impact, such as deep breathing exercises, regular physical activity, quality sleep, or even just reaching out to a friend. These small steps can build your capacity to cope with whatever life throws your way.

When possible, avoid unnecessary stress. Adapt to what you can by changing your responses and learning to accept what you cannot change. With awareness and intention, you can create more space for calm.

### **Suggested activities:**

#1: Have the group do a warm-up activity by inhaling for 4 seconds, holding for 4 seconds, exhaling for 4 seconds.

#2: Have the group make a stress tool kit to assist during difficult times. Also, ask the group to have a plan for whom to call or what to do when feeling overwhelmed.

#3: Share a straightforward change they will make to release stress.

#4: Reveal your diet and determine if it is balanced and nutritious. Rethink your drink and snack activity.

### **Suggested Materials:**

- Handout with breathing techniques
- Journal
- Stress relief checklist
- Stress ball or fidget toy
- Calming music playlist

### **Sources:**

- Stress Management. Mayo Clinic. 2023. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/stress-management/about/pac-20384898>
- Emotional Wellness Toolkit. National Institute of Mental Health. 2025. <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/your-healthiest-self-wellness-toolkits/emotional-wellness-toolkit>
- Managing Stress for a Healthy Family. American Psychological Association. 2022. <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/managing-healthy-family>
- Managing Stress. CDC. 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/living-with/index.html>

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