



Education Initiative – a School Based Stress Management Program

Kids Are More Stressed Than Ever

Studies suggest that American children are more stressed than ever. Suicides among adolescents have quadrupled since the 1950s. In one major study, only 36 percent of 7th graders agreed with the statement “I am happy with my life;” and in the past decade, the use of pharmaceuticals to treat emotional disorders has increased 68 percent for girls, and 30 percent for boys.

How Does Stress Affect Children's Ability to Perform and to Cope?

It's normal to have butterflies in the stomach before a test. This is the positive side of stress that actually enhances performance. However, when the anxiety gets out of control, performance plummets. When we are emotionally upset we say we "just can't think straight." This is because unmanaged stress shuts much of the thinking brain down. When we are feeling stressed our ability to learn and remember is compromised.

Being Calm Helps Children Cope With Stressors Now and Throughout Life

Just as kids with good muscle tone excel at sports, kids who practice relaxation techniques are good at responding to and recovering from emotional stress. These children can:

- reflect on their emotions and better control their impulses
- cope with emotions such as fear, frustration, and anger
- calm themselves
- consider consequences, make thoughtful decisions and plans
- move out of defensive survival behaviors
- relate to others in more empathic, compassionate ways

The Education Initiative at Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine

The Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine's Education Initiative (EI) brings relaxation response-based coping skills and life management tools into the school environment to help educators and students better manage daily stress, and positively impact student's academic performance and health.

Since its inception over 25 years ago, the EI has been well received by thousands of educators as well as by children of all ages from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Our program has been implemented in

schools in South Central Los Angeles, Newark, NJ, and neighborhoods of Boston as well as in private institutions such as Milton Academy, the Taft School, Dana Hall, Phillips Exeter, Miss Porter's School. The program doesn't attempt to make each day at school stress-free, but does provide school communities with stress management tools that can help students feel calm and ready to learn and teachers to feel re-energized and focused.

The (EI) is a two-phase "train the trainer" model. In phase one, the program provides school staff with mind/body skills for their own use. The second phase demonstrates ways to bring these interventions directly to students. Staff members, once trained, are able to teach these skills to students throughout their careers. The EI typically works with schools to customize the training to the needs of their particular site. Schools also have the opportunity to receive on-going support and additional training.

The EI trains faculty and students in:

- Stress Awareness
- Reframing Negative Thoughts
- Relaxation Techniques
- Goal Setting
- Positive Psychology

Research studies show that students trained in these skills have:

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved memory and concentration
- Improved academic performance
- Increased self esteem

Education Initiative Structure

The Education Initiative (EI) is a two phase "train the trainer" model. In phase one, the EI provides school staff with mind/body skills for their own use. The second phase demonstrates ways to bring these interventions directly to students. All training is conducted in groups and is adjusted to meet the particular needs of each school.

Phase One

Introduction to stress awareness; mind/body skills for staff/educators' personal use (3-6) hours

- Dialogue on stress – signs, symptoms, solutions, defining stress

- Relaxation Response (RR): physiology
- RR experiences: diaphragmatic/thoracic breathing, “minis”, imagery, mindfulness, yoga/body/awareness
- Learn to incorporate the RR into daily life

Phase Two:

Working with students (3-6 hours)

- Bringing mind/body interventions into schools: Training for implementation
- Participants practice in using and teaching skills
- Mentoring faculty, staff, and peer counselors as they implement program in school

The EI also offers:

- In class Modeling
- Ongoing Consultation

Through Our Program Participants Will Learn:

- Stress Awareness – how chronic stress impacts your capacity to learn.
- Relaxation Response Exercises – including: deep breathing, body awareness/yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, visualization
- Goal Setting – Increase your success by clarifying your study plan with measurable goals.
- To Decrease Test Anxiety – How to feel more in control in test situations.
- Learn coping skills to feel more in control of your life.