Art4Wellbeing

SESSION 10

Stress Management: Recognizing Stress Signals

Project nr. 2025-2-NL02-KA210-YOU-000368916

ART FORM USED	Movement + Body Awareness (with embodied group sculpture and role-play)

TOTAL DURATION	MAIN OBJECTIVE	SESSION PURPOSE
90 minutes	To help participants recognize physical, emotional and behavioral signs of stress, distinguish early warning signals from escalation, and identify embodied resources and supportive responses.	A connected journey from exploring body-based traffic-light signals, to recognizing stress through movement, to embodying a tree and its resources, to rehearsing a manageable response and closing with a personal body-awareness cue.

Materials

Open movement space; instrumental music and speaker; flipchart or large paper; colored markers; sticky notes; A4 paper; optional tape; chairs; printed body outlines (optional).

Session at a Glance

NO.	ACTIVITY	TIME	FOCUS
10.1	The Body’s Traffic Lights	15 min	Recognise early body signals
10.2	Stress Signals in Motion	20 min	Explore movement and body cues
10.3	The Living Tree: Stress and Resources	25 min	Identify resources through group sculpture
10.4	From Signal to Support: Rehearsal	20 min	Practice supportive responses
10.5	Closing: My Early Signal, My Next Step	10 min	Integrate learning

Methodological Basis

Adapted from the Romanian “Activity 10 – Stress management” (recreational exchange, tree roots/trunk/canopy/stressors, role-play and reflection), using symbolic distance, voluntary participation and non-interpretive witnessing.

10.1 THE BODY'S TRAFFIC LIGHTS 15 MIN

Method: Movement exploration and body awareness

Purpose

To help participants identify possible early physical signs of stress and distinguish relaxed, activated and overwhelmed bodily states.

Instructions

1. Invite participants to walk freely around the room at a comfortable pace. Offer seated movement or observation as alternatives.

2. Introduce three fictional body states: Green (relaxed and comfortable), Yellow (early tension or stress) and Red (high activation or a need to pause).

3. Call out each colour and invite participants to explore a small posture, walking rhythm or gesture representing that state. Avoid deliberately inducing distress.

4. Move between the colours at an easy pace. Invite participants to notice possible changes in shoulders, breathing, muscles and movement.

5. Return to a neutral standing or seated position. Invite everyone to identify one possible early bodily signal of stress.

Facilitator Prompt

"Sometimes our bodies notice stress before we consciously name it. What changes in our movements, posture or breathing might tell us that we need to pay attention?"

Reflection Questions

1. Which bodily changes helped you distinguish between the three states?

2. What might be an early yellow-light signal of stress?

3. How could recognizing that signal help someone respond before becoming overwhelmed?

Transition: Now that we have explored how stress may appear in our bodies, let us investigate how different stressful situations can influence our movements and reactions.

10.2 STRESS SIGNALS IN MOTION 20 MIN

Method: Movement exploration and body-signal mapping

Purpose

To recognize early and intensified stress signals without treating any one bodily sensation as proof of stress.

Instructions

1. Invite participants to walk around the room at a comfortable pace, with the option to observe or remain seated.

2. Name fictional everyday situations (e.g., running late, a difficult conversation, an upcoming exam). After each, ask participants to show a small movement that might represent a body response.

3. Invite three freeze frames: “first sign,” “stress building,” and “a moment of support.” Participants may use a fictional character rather than themselves.

4. In pairs, discuss possible body signs: tight shoulders, quicker breathing, clenched jaw, restlessness, fatigue, or a racing heart.

5. Individually draw a simple body outline and mark one possible early warning sign and one action that may help.

Facilitator Prompt

“Use only a level of movement that feels comfortable. We are exploring possible stress signals, not trying to create stress. You can always pause or observe.”

Reflection Questions

1. Which signs might appear before we consciously say “I am stressed”?

2. How might different people show stress differently?

3. What helped your body feel a little more supported?

Transition: A body signal can tell us to pay attention. What resources might help us withstand stress?

10.3 THE LIVING TREE: STRESS AND RESOURCES 25 MIN

Method: Embodied sculpture, group movement and symbolic role-play

Purpose

To explore how different resources support a person when stressors arise.

Instructions

1. Divide participants into four groups: Roots, Trunk, Canopy and Stressors. Give each group two minutes to invent a safe, simple movement or still pose.

2. Roots embody support, values or belonging; Trunk embodies inner strength and flexibility; Canopy embodies relationships, hopes and restorative activities.

3. The Stressors group represents weather such as wind, drought or a storm through voice or mime, without touching, crowding or frightening anyone.

4. Bring the groups together as a living tree. Invite a gentle sequence: neutral tree → approaching stressor → tree notices signals → resources respond.

5. Pause and ask each group to name the body cues and supportive actions it represented. Replay the final moment with one extra supportive resource.

Tree Roles

Roots: support, family, values, community

Trunk: inner strength, flexibility, boundaries

Canopy: connection, hopes, enjoyable activities

Stressors: pressures and challenges (not people to blame)

> Facilitator Prompt
>
> “Imagine this tree facing a strong wind. What changes in its posture? How do its roots, trunk and canopy work together? No part needs to face the wind alone.”

Reflection Questions

1. What were the first signs that the tree was under pressure?

2. Which parts supported its stability or flexibility?

3. How does this metaphor relate to personal and social resources?

Transition: Now we will bring these resources into an everyday fictional situation.

10.4 FROM SIGNAL TO SUPPORT: REHEARSAL 20 MIN

Method: Movement-based role-play and supportive response rehearsal

Purpose

To practice identifying a stress signal and choosing a small, realistic supportive response.

Instructions

1. Form groups of 3–4. Choose a fictional, everyday stress situation: an exam, a disagreement, a deadline or feeling left out.

2. Create a 30-second still or moving scene showing the moment a character first notices stress. Keep intensity low.

3. Pause the scene. One observer names a possible body signal; another suggests a need or resource, without assuming they know the character's inner experience.

4. Replay the scene with one manageable action: slowing down, planting feet, asking for help, taking a break or stating a boundary.

5. Invite each group to share what changed in the character's movement or posture. Participants may narrate instead of acting.

Simple Rehearsal Map

Situation → Possible body signal → Possible need → One supportive action → What changes?

> Facilitator Prompt
>
> "Freeze at the first signal. What might this character notice? What is one supportive action they could choose before the stress grows?"

Reflection Questions

1. What made the signal visible?

2. Which response felt realistic and respectful?

3. Can a person need both inner resources and help from others?

Transition: We have practiced recognizing a signal and responding. Let us choose one idea to take away.

10.5 CLOSING: MY EARLY SIGNAL, MY NEXT STEP 10 MIN

Method: Grounding, individual reflection and appreciative exchange

Purpose

To integrate learning into one personally meaningful body-awareness cue and supportive response.

Instructions

1. Invite a gentle stretch, a comfortable seated posture or quiet observation.

2. Ask each participant to complete on paper: “An early signal I may notice is…” and “One supportive step I can try is…”.

3. Invite voluntary sharing of one sentence. Passing is always welcome.

4. In pairs, invite one specific appreciative observation about the other person’s participation, without commenting on their body.

5. Close by inviting everyone to feel their feet on the ground and look around the room.

Facilitator Prompt

“Stress signals are information, not failures. We can notice them with curiosity, make room for different experiences, and choose one small supportive next step.”

Reflection Questions

1. What is one signal you want to become more aware of?

2. Which resource could you turn to when you notice it?

3. What is one thing you are taking from today?

Facilitator Principles

Participation is voluntary; avoid forced touch, intense enactment and personal disclosures. Offer seated and low-movement alternatives. Do not interpret another person’s body signals or present them as diagnoses. Encourage choice, cultural sensitivity, grounding and referral to appropriate support when needed.