



# Ohio 4-H Camping Program

## Managing Your Mental Health

### Competencies covered in this lesson:

- 4) Health, Wellness, and Risk Management
- 10) Self-Direction

### Intended Audience:

- Camp Counselors

### Lesson Objectives:

Participants will:

- Understand the difference between positive and negative stress
- Identify positive and negative ways to address stressful situations at camp
- Create a plan for how they can manage their own stress

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

### BACKGROUND

Gone are the days of carefree camp, where you sit back and just soak it all in. You are a camp counselor now, and with that role comes a lot of responsibilities. You are in charge of a lot:

- Keeping campers safe
- Ensuring camper health
- Creating a positive environment
- Planning activities
- Setting up for the next activity
- Cleaning up from the last activity
- Making sure the right supplies are at the right place at the right time
- Manage camp schedule
- Various other things that may arise

Needless to say, as a camp counselor, camp can be a bit stressful. Stress is any physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension caused by a situation, occurrence, or factor. Stress can be a positive force. If you are experiencing stress about an exam, it may motivate you to study more, which often leads to a higher grade. Stress can also be a negative force that impacts your ability to function at school, work, and in your relationships. If you are experiencing stress for a prolonged period of time or about a general topic instead of a specific event, it could be a sign of a mental health problem.

At some point during camp, you are going to feel stressed. Positively managing that stress is important for ensuring a positive experience for both you and your campers. How we deal with stress depends on the situation and the resources available. Sometimes destressing is as easy as taking 10 minutes to mindfully breathe, journaling, talking to a friend, or just relaxing. Other times destressing may take professional help. This activity will help you prepare for stress at camp and create a plan for what to do when you feel too overwhelmed.

### WHAT TO DO

Review the background information above about stress with camp counselors before completing the activity.



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AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

**Equipment and supplies:**

- Camp schedules (1 per group of 4-5 counselors)
- Highlighters (1 per group of 4-5 counselors)
- Less Stress Plan resource

**Do Ahead:**

- Review lesson.
- Gather supplies.
- Make copies of the Less Stress Plan resource for each counselor

**Sources:**

- Youth.gov (n.d)  
Retrieved from <http://youth.gov>
- SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017, September 13). Retrieved from <http://samha.gov>
- Mental Health First Aid USA. (2013, October 10). Retrieved from <http://mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

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**ACTIVITY****Step 1**

In your group, look at the camp schedule and highlight events that you believe are the most stressful. As a group consider the following questions:

1. Why are the highlighted activities more stressful than others?
2. How can we make these activities less stressful?
3. List some ways that you might react to stress in these specific situations.

**Step 2**

On your own consider what types of situations at camp might trigger high stress levels. These could be beyond the events on the schedule, such as homesick campers, bad weather, or just being exhausted.

- Using the “Less Stress Plan” resource, write down your top three stress triggers at camp in the first column.
- Fill in the rest of the chart for each stressor.
- Share your chart with your cabin co-counselor or a partner and spend time discussing how you can help each other during stressful situations.

**TALK IT OVER****Reflect:**

- Did everyone agree on what events and situations are most stressful or were our lists varying? Why or why not?
- How do our reactions to stressful situations impact our campers’ experience?
- What are some ways that we can positively destress at camp?

**Apply:**

- Continue to think about your Less Stress Plan. What action items can you add to the plan to make camp stress free?
- Consider how you will mitigate stress before, during, and after camp.
- After thinking about your own Less Stress Plan, consider how you can help other counselors and campers who are stressed at camp.