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THE CENTRE
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ON HUMAN
STRESS

The Centre for
Studies on Human
Stress is dedicated
to improving the
physical and mental
health of individuals
by empowering
them with
scientifically
grounded
information about
the effects of stress
on the brain and
body



***DeStress for Success* © : when science breaks free from the walls of the laboratory to help with our youth**

Editors

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Dear readers,

For this 25th issue of the Mammoth Magazine, we wanted to present you with content that was slightly different from our past issues. We decided to talk about the great success of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress: the creation of the *DeStress for Success* © program.

Naturally, scientific research is our primary mission as researchers. We are committed to finding answers to questions, understanding phenomena, and generating data that will ultimately make a difference for the population. By publishing the results of our research, we often hope that they will be taken into consideration by decision/policy-makers in order to have a resonating effect on the population. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. In the early 2000s, Dr. Sonia Lupien, founder of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress (CSHS), published results showing a significant increase in stress hormones in youth who were making the

transition from elementary to high school. Of course, this transition is accompanied by its fair share of novelty, unpredictability, a diminished sense of control, and sometimes, a threat to our ego (our famous stress ingredients)! In the years that followed, the team at the CSHS decided to use these results and put forward the development of an educational program on stress for youth who are making this important school transition. This is how *DeStress for Success* was born. As you will see in this issue, strength lies in teamwork. As we are not experts in program development, we had to learn from our mistakes and take the time to meet and listen to experts and educators¹ in the academic milieu. We had to develop a program that met their needs and that could be utilized in classrooms. Initially, we wanted to integrate all of the concepts of stress into the program. Though in the end, academic settings were unable to use all of these notions due to a lack of time, resources, etc.

^[1] Please note that the term 'educators' is used throughout this issue and refers to the following ensemble of individuals: teachers, school nurses, school psychologists, and other educational professionals

Since its inception, the popularity of the program has caught up with us. Therefore, we decided to train educators rather than students. The trained educators are then able to teach the concepts to youth in their milieu. In recent years, the *DeStress for Success* program has also been adopted within other settings and in turn, for the respective realities of those settings.

The first article in this issue is written by Nathalie Wan, coordinator of the CSHS, who was involved in the development and implementation of the program. This article tells the story of *DeStress for Success* but also features the scientific results that have demonstrated its effectiveness. After all, we are a group of researchers! Therefore, it was important for us to scientifically test whether the administration of the program could indeed produce quantifiable effects. Next, the following two articles are written by Sophie Massé, doctoral

student in psychoeducation at the University of Montreal and programming, planning, and research officer at the *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté* of the CIUSSS-Centre-sud-de-l'île-de-Montréal. First, she discusses the evolution of the *DeStress for Success* program, which was first implemented in youth centres. Thereafter, it soon snowballed and was taught to educators and managers. Several research results are presented and suggest that the adaptation of the program to these populations was indeed successful. The second article highlights the importance of everyone being adequately equipped to deal with stress. With this, the contagion effects of stress from one individual to another can be minimized. In the third article of this issue, Ms. Massé discusses the key elements to keep in mind when adapting a program. It is important to make adaptations that respond to the specific needs of the target clientele, but it is also necessary

to not distort the program (as this may compromise its effectiveness). This article shares great lessons that have been learned while adapting programs. Finally, the author of the last article is Audrey-Ann Journault, a doctoral student in psychology at the University of Montreal. Presented via an amusing infographic, this article shows the impact that *DeStress for Success* has had on individuals of all ages.

Wishing you a good read! 📖





DeStress for Success © : the story behind the creation and validation of the program

Nathalie Wan, M.A., *Coordinator of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress*

The alarm clock blares as she sluggishly opens her eyes wondering why this morning feels so different from any other day. Then it hits her. Anticipation, excitement, curiosity, nervousness. Stress, too. After all, today is the first day of high school.

For some, navigating the teenage years can be challenging as they engage in a transition from childhood to adulthood met with new experiences and responsibilities. Research has shown that high levels of stress hormones are linked to a wide range of physical and mental health problems, as well as cognitive impairments. Depression, anxiety, anorexia, drug abuse, and low self-esteem, are just some of the conditions that are currently experienced by teens today. Many of the ailments experienced during adolescence continue into adulthood. Therefore, learning to recognize stress and employing coping

strategies early in life is imperative for long-term physical and mental health.

With this in mind, in 2007, Dr. Sonia Lupien and her team at the Centre for Studies on Human Stress (CSHS), created the *DeStress for Success* program - a unique school-based education program that was designed in close collaboration with school counsellors, school nurses, social workers, teachers and teenagers, that aims to educate young adolescents about the effects that stress has on learning and mental health and to train them to recognize, manage and cope with stress.

By providing young teenagers with the tools necessary to combat the negative impact of stress experienced during times of school transition from elementary to secondary school, a program such as *DeStress for Success* could prevent the common ailments experienced during

adolescence that persist into adulthood and diminish quality of life.

About the *DeStress for Success* program

The *DeStress for Success* program targets children aged 11-13 making the transition from elementary to secondary school. School transition is reported by many teenagers as being a period of high stress due to the novelty of the secondary school environment, as well as the sense of low control that may emerge from the unpredictability of friendships, school pressures and demands.

The *DeStress for Success* program - a unique school-based education program that was designed in close collaboration with school counsellors, school nurses, social workers, teachers and teenagers, that aims to educate young adolescents about the effects that stress has on learning and mental health and to train them to recognize, manage and cope with stress.



The program consists of five 40-minute-in-class workshops, that are presented to students once a week. Each workshop has been individually and creatively designed to offer teenagers fundamental information and tools to recognize and manage stress. As well, every workshop presents a topic on stress using interactive discussions and promoting student participation, interaction and involvement. The core concepts of the program include:

- 1) What is stress? The N.U.T.S. Model
- 2) How do I recognize my own stress?
The body's stress response and energy mobilization.
- 3) How do I prevent and cope with stress?

(Workshops 1 & 2) Recognizing Stress: The N.U.T.S. Model

What exactly is stress? The first two workshops delve into the notion of what is "stress", and ways to recognize it. A stressful situation is characterized by four main attributes: Novelty, Unpredictability, Threat to ego and a low Sense of Control (N.U.T.S.). Students participate in interactive games that teach them about these characteristics and how to recognize and remember them (using the word "NUTS" is a method). Students are given a personal Logbook to write in during the course of the program. For their first Logbook activity, students are asked to describe situations they had experienced during the week that may have been stressful, and to identify which of the N.U.T.S. elements best represent the described situation. This exercise demonstrates ways to recognize stressors namely by analyzing the N.U.T.S. characteristics. In sum, the first two workshops help students understand the different kinds of contexts that can elicit a stress response.

(Workshop 3) How do I recognize my own stress? The physiological stress response, energy mobilization, and emotion-focused coping strategies.

The third workshop teaches students ways to recognize when they are stressed. Specifically, students are taught about energy mobilization and the various physical and emotional changes that occur during the stress response. For their Logbook activity, students are asked to describe situations that have led to a stress response, and to describe the physiological changes they experienced. Students are also questioned on ways they release pent-



up energy (e.g., Did they go for a run or bike around their neighbourhood?). With this knowledge, children and adolescents learn to recognize the signs associated with being stressed, which allows them to implement strategies to diminish the stress response. Finally, this workshop teaches students about emotion focused-coping strategies and quick fixes to resort to when overcome with stress.

(Workshop 4) Dealing with Stress - Problem-Focused Coping

The fourth workshop covers the topic of problem-focused coping strategies. These are techniques for managing stress. Through an interactive activity involving scenarios of everyday stressful situations, young people learn to break down the stressful situation they are faced with using the N.U.T.S. model, reconstruct it by changing their interpretation, or by generating plan Bs.

(Workshop 5) The Importance of Others - Social Support vs Social Pressure

During the fifth workshop, students discover that one very beneficial way of coping with stressful situations is to seek social support. Seeking help and support from friends, family members, teachers and others who are close can often be a favourable and positive experience. Through group activities, students recognize that by receiving the type of support needed, they will often feel a sense of diminished stress. Students are also taught to distinguish between social support and social pressure. They learn about the power of social support and that sometimes, the

same person that can be a source of social support can also be a cause of social pressure. Issues such as bullying and peer pressure are discussed to allow the teenagers to recognize members of their community who can provide them with social support without the costs of social pressure.

Testing the efficacy of the DeStress for Success program

Once the *DeStress for Success* program was created, Dr. Lupien and her research team sought out to validate and test its efficacy through the implementation of an intervention study. The study had 3 main objectives: (1) to determine whether, on average, the adolescents participating in the *DeStress for Success* program showed declining levels of the stress hormone called cortisol, across time, (2) to examine whether the program benefited some adolescents more than others in terms of cortisol reduction over time, (3) to investigate if the adolescents with the largest responses to the program (i.e. greater decline of cortisol over time),

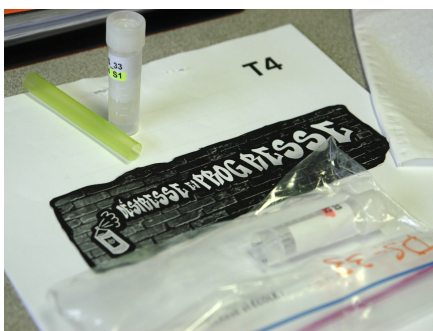


reported fewer depressive symptoms 3 months later than in comparison to those who did not show such cortisol decrease.

In 2008, a total of 504 youth between the ages of 11 to 13 (Grade 7; 260 boys and 244 girls), from two private French schools in the Montreal region participated in the study to test the efficacy of the *DeStress for Success* program. To measure students' stress hormone levels, saliva samples were collected. Questionnaires were also distributed to students to measure cognitive functions (e.g. memory) and their psychological well-being.

Adolescents from the two schools (one "intervention school" and one "control school") were tested for cortisol levels and psychological variables during school hours on three occasions; pre-intervention, immediately post-intervention and 1 month following the end of the intervention. Each student was required to give a saliva sample at the beginning of the 45-minute testing period and one at the end of the period. In between saliva samples, each student completed a series of questionnaires on topics ranging from sleep habits, negative/positive mood, demographics, to attention and self-esteem.

The schools were counterbalanced to receive the five weekly, 40-minute *DeStress for Success* workshops. At both schools, pre-intervention occurred during the first and second weeks of September. The *DeStress for Success* program was delivered for 5 weeks in the intervention school while adolescents in the control school continued their normal activities



This study provides the first evidence that a school-based program on stress is effective at decreasing cortisol levels and depressive symptomatology in adolescents making the transition to high school. It also helps explain which adolescents are sensitive to the program and some of the characteristics of these individuals.



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during this period (they received the program only in the spring semester after termination of the study). The post-intervention measure was obtained immediately after the initial intervention in both schools and the follow-up measure was obtained a month after the post-intervention measure.


Measures of negative mood were obtained at the start of the intervention in order to determine whether adolescents starting high school with specific negative moods were differentially responsive to the program. The results of the intervention study show that only adolescents starting high school with high levels of anger responded to the *DeStress for Success* program with a significant decrease in cortisol levels. Furthermore, compared to adolescents who showed an increase in cortisol levels after the intervention (non-responders to the program) adolescents who showed a decrease in cortisol levels after the intervention (responders to the program) were 2.45 times less likely to suffer from clinical and sub-clinical depressive states three months after the intervention. This study provides the first evidence that a school-based program on stress is effective at decreasing cortisol

levels and depressive symptomatology in adolescents making the transition from elementary to high school. This study also helped to identify the characteristic of adolescents who responded well to the *DeStress for Success* program.

Empowering one teenager at a time

Each year, since its creation in 2007, the team at the CSHS has offered *DeStress for Success* conferences and training to educational professionals. Approximately 350 teachers, school nurses, school psychologists and other educational professionals register for the training every year. To date, more than 2500 teachers and educators have been trained to give the workshops in their milieus, allowing more than 65,000 students in Quebec to benefit from the *DeStress for Success* program. The program has reached far and wide, from schools across Quebec and other parts of Canada, to classrooms across the globe in Ireland and South Africa.

Unique in its design and concept, the *DeStress for Success* program is the only project of its kind worldwide. Importantly, positive outcomes derived from the research project may have major implications for children and teenagers. By providing young adolescents with the tools necessary to combat the negative impact of stress experienced during the transition from elementary to high school, we may be able to prevent the common

ailments experienced during adolescence that persist into adulthood and diminish quality of life of our adolescents. In medicine and health-related fields the best cure is prevention. Teaching children and adolescents early on how to recognize and cope with stress will clearly be far-reaching in preventing the later onset of stress-related health problems. Given the considerable amount of stress that adolescents experience in the world of today, our hope is that the *DeStress for Success* program will continue to have a positive impact on the generations to come, one teenager at a time. 

"Now I understand how my body reacts to stress" - E., 13 years

"The Destress for Success program has taught me good ways to get rid of my stress" - M., 12 years

"I now know the difference between social support and social pressure" - A., 12 years

"The Destress for Success program has taught me that I need to understand my stress in order to manage it" - A., 12 years

DeStress for Success in youth centres: the ecosystemic benefits for youth, their families, and educators

Sophie Massé, M.Sc., Criminology, doctoral student in psychoeducation

Programming, planning, and research officer

Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté of the CIUSSS-Centre-sud-de-l'île-de-Montréal

In 2010, Sophie Massé of the Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté (IUJD) became interested in the *DeStress for Success* program. She wanted to integrate this program into the curriculum of services offered to youth who are followed by youth centres. In knowing that the scientific literature suggests that youth in difficulty experience a great deal of stress, Pierrick Plusquellec (the co-director of the CSHS),

became interested in the stress of youth in youth centres². In 2011, a valuable partnership began between these two individuals in Montreal.

In this article, we will discuss the evolution of the *DeStress for Success* program in youth centres within the framework of two distinct projects: (1) from 2011 to 2020, studies on the effectiveness of the program

in a youth centre and (2) from 2016 to 2021, experimentation of the conditions of implementation and sustainability (durability of the program) in collaboration with three other youth centres in Quebec.

Evolution of *DeStress for Success* in a youth centre in the context of research projects

Two pilot projects took place between 2011 and 2014. Based on the interesting results, a larger research project occurred from 2016 to 2020.

Pilot project with youth

From 2011 to 2012, *DeStress for Success* was adapted, implemented, and evaluated in approximately 40 boys between the ages of 12 to 14 years old who were housed in a youth centre. These benefits could be seen as follows:

- ✓ Decrease in perceived stress and depression
- ✓ Increased self-esteem
- ✓ Improved recognition of the expressions of joy
- ✓ Decreased recognition of the expressions of fear



² A youth centre in Quebec is a set of services offered to youth and families who are experiencing difficulties that endanger the safety and development of children and adolescents. These services also include those offered to young offenders.

Pilot project with educators

Following the promising results in youth, the educators expressed the need to have their own workshops to learn how to manage their own stress. Due to the nature of their work, educators in youth centres can be exposed to violence, aggression, and work overload. Together, this puts them at risk of experiencing chronic stress, which can contribute to the development of certain pathologies (e.g., depression, burnout). In turn, this can adversely affect their interventions with youth and can translate into significant personnel and financial costs.

In 2013, the CSHS had just adapted the knowledge from the *DeStress for Success* program into an online version for adults. This was tested with 72 workers from 12 youth centre teams. One month after the intervention, the educators who received the online program reported a decrease in their levels of perceived stress and burnout compared to educators who did not follow the program. Thus, the concepts taught in the *DeStress for Success* program appeared to be as relevant for the educators as for youth.

In addition, the educators also highlighted the need to be able to discuss with their colleagues to promote the application of the concepts learned in the program in the workplace. Given that educators experience several common stressors (e.g., work overload, staff turnover, aggressive clients, and communication problems within the team), a team action plan was proposed to the educators in order to meet their need to exchange amongst themselves. The action plan allows for the identification and implementation of solutions as a team to reduce the perceived stress during a stressful situation experienced by the team. This tool was greatly appreciated by both the managers and educators. It helped them to resolve existing tensions between colleagues that had been brewing under the surface for quite some time.

Iso-stress : for managing the stress of youth and educators

In light of the pilot projects, the two programs (for youth and adults) were offered to every team of a youth centre



The *DeStress for Success* pilot project has won two awards of excellence :



The Innovative Practice 2012 award from the Multidisciplinary Council of the Montreal Youth Centre - University Institute, highlights the innovation of the program and valuable collaboration of the intervention teams supporting the project.



The Excellence in Research and Programs 2012 award from the Child Welfare League of Canada to the Institut universitaire jeunes en difficulté (IUJD) and Mr. Pierrich Plusquellec from the Centre for Studies on Human Stress for the research/field partnership.

One month after the intervention, the educators who received the online program reported a decrease in their levels of perceived stress and burnout compared to educators who did not follow the program. Thus, the concepts taught in the *DeStress for Success* program appeared to be as relevant for the educators as for youth.

as a part of a research project called *Iso-stress*. Thus, between 2016 and 2020, approximately 130 adolescents received the *DeStress for Success* program and participated in data collection. Also, 905 educators from 85 teams benefited from the online version of the program for adults and completed a team action plan, all while participating in data collection.

Completed individually by educators, the online program combined with the application of the concepts using a

team action plan allowed the educators to:

- ✓ Decrease their perceived stress and cortisol levels
- ✓ Decrease chronic stress and burnout
- ✓ Increase their adaptability to the client and sense of safety when faced with aggressive clients

Therefore, these results suggest that decreasing the stress of educators increases the quality of their interventions with youth.

From the participant's point of view: appreciation of the program and its effects

The youth and teams of educators who participated in the research were interviewed to gain insight into how they viewed the programs.

Regarding DeStress for Success, participants reported that:

- ✓ Support for youth in applying the concepts learned was poorer when only one or two educators on a team used the *DeStress for Success* program
- ✓ After the program, up to two or three youth per group showed a decrease in behaviours leading to disciplinary action
- ✓ Some educators noted that they did not need to implement the anger management program with youth that put concepts learned from *DeStress for Success* into action in their daily lives

Regarding the educator component of the program, the participants:

- ✓ Particularly appreciated learning about the stress ingredients via the N.U.T.S. model
- ✓ Observed that the application of the concepts was better when the entire team followed the program and the manager was supportive of the process
- ✓ Would have liked to have had additional training to be able to expand their knowledge of stress contagion, the impact of stress on soft skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork), and support for putting the concepts learned into practice (both for themselves and youth)



Given that educators experience several common stressors (e.g., work overload, staff turnover, aggressive clients, and communication problems within the team), a team action plan was proposed to the educators in order to meet their need to exchange amongst themselves. The action plan allows for the identification and implementation of solutions as a team to reduce the perceived stress during a stressful situation experienced by the team.

Experimentation of the conditions of implementation and sustainability (durability of the program) in collaboration with three other youth centres in Quebec

In 2016, the experience of the participating youth centre teams in the research projects quickly caught wind and captured the interest of managers from other youth centres in Quebec.

A training that is now given in teams

From 2016 to 2021, a training adapted from the *DeStress for Success* program was offered to teams of educators in three youth centres (under the name of *Iso-stress*), with the following modifications:

- ✓ Team discussions on the key theoretical concepts seen in the online version of the training
- ✓ Addition of theoretical content on stress contagion, the impact of stress on soft skills, the importance of common language, and support for putting the learned concepts into practice
- ✓ Training offered only in teams (whereas initially only one or two educators per team were trained to implement the *DeStress for Success* program)

Perceived effects over time

As of May 2022, there were approximately 35 teams that were trained in these three participating youth centres. The managers and educators responsible for *Iso-stress* have observed an improvement over the years:

- ✓ In the use of the learned concepts by the educators in their interventions
- ✓ The support for the application of the concepts by the educators towards youth
- ✓ The use of the concepts by managers in supervising educators and when responding to team issues

Furthermore, they noticed that with the regular use of the learned concepts:

- ✓ The workers were less stressed and the team dynamic improved
- ✓ *Iso-stress* is a relevant approach for all teams in a youth centre, regardless of the clientele or intervention context

Despite these positive results, two issues were raised. First, the problem-solving element (workshop 4) is often neglected by both educators and youth in all teams and regions.

The intervention is mainly focused on strategies that target emotions. In the future, particular attention should be paid to this last crucial problem-solving element. Finally, in the context of the pandemic, it was observed by certain managers that the teams that were trained well before the pandemic (and by extension, already putting the *Iso-stress* concepts into action on a daily basis with each other and youth) experienced visibly less stress than untrained teams. Teams that were trained at the very beginning of the pandemic were unable to put the *Iso-stress* concepts into practice in their daily work. This seems to reflect the difficulty of learning new concepts when stress is already very high (at the beginning of the pandemic). Hence the importance of the training and putting the concepts into practice with a preventative approach.

Iso-stress: an ecosystemic approach

The experimentation of *Iso-stress* has validated the relevance of intervening on the topic of stress in an ecosystemic way (i.e., at several levels given that many systems influence each other and youth). Whether it be the *DeStress for Success* program for youth, the adapted version of the *DeStress for Success* program for parents, or *Iso-stress* for managers and educators, the same concepts are learned. This inevitably allowed for the development of a common language between colleagues, as well as educators and clients (youth and parents). This common language promotes the daily application of the concepts as well as social support. Through relationships, stress can be contagious in an ecosystemic way. From this perspective, stress management is also ecosystemically oriented!



According to Daniel Masse, the **ecosystemic model** situates a person within their social context and with regard to different environmental factors. There are several interrelated systems, places of reciprocal exchanges, and complex influences that surround a young person (from the closest to the farthest).

Although the individual is at the centre of the ecosystemic model, they are no longer solely responsible for their state of mental health and therefore, for their ability to integrate and function. The person is no longer the exclusive target for interventions. The ecosystemic model invites us to consider the whole range of youth-parent-community interactions, as well as various intervention targets.

Training the trainers

The appreciation and perceived effects of the *Iso-stress* approach and its programs also confirmed the relevance of making a training of its nature accessible to all youth centres in Quebec. Based on the questions and comments received during the *Iso-stress* experimentation project, the content of the training was improved and is now called ***Iso-stress: Collective well-being*** (to represent its ecosystemic nature).

A community of practice

Finally, as a part of the experimentation from 2016 to 2021, a **community of practice** was put into place for the managers and internal trainers of the three regions involved in the project.

Over the years, the *Iso-stress: Collective well-being* community of practice has:

- ✓ Supported the quality of the development of tools and adaptations of *DeStress for Success* as well as the sharing of these tools and adaptations between regions;
- ✓ Enable the improvement of the training offered to teams and the development of training for the trainers
- ✓ To identify and validate the conditions ensuring the quality of the programs and to keep them running 🐾

According to SACO ("Stratégies d'application des connaissances aux organisations" in French), "**Communities of practice** are groups of people who interact regularly over an extended period to share common concerns, consolidate expertise, and develop new knowledge. They are natural learning communities that can be formed in a variety of ways. Some are interdisciplinary, while others can be more specific to a certain issue or sector. These communities may include people from within the same organization or from several organizations."

For more information on **Iso-Stress: Collective well-being**, here are some links for you to visit (available in French only) :

[Web page](#) Iso-stress of the IUJD

[Video](#) “La petite histoire d’Iso-stress : Bien-être collectif 10 ans en 10 minutes” (*The 10-year history of Iso-stress: Collective well-being in 10 minutes*)

[Video capsule](#) “Iso-stress : Bien-être collectif dans tout le Programme jeunesse au MCQ” (*Iso-stress: Collective well-being in the youth program at the MCQ*)

[Documentary](#) “SPIN ton stress”, a pilot project (Don’t go N.U.T.S with stress)

[Report](#) “Bilan Résultats Iso-stress” (*Iso-stress results*)

[Document](#) “Condition d’implantation et de pérennisation Iso-stress : Bien-être collectif” (*Implementation and sustainability of Iso-stress: Collective well-being*)

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Adaptation of *DeStress for Success* for different clienteles and contexts in youth centres: process and results

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Between 2011 and 2021, the *DeStress for Success* program (initially targeting adolescents in schools) was implemented and tested with adolescents being followed by a youth centre. Before offering the program to these adolescents through their respective centres, it was necessary to question its relevance and how the program could be adapted to address this new clientele.

The first part of this article focuses on the first two adaptations carried out between 2011 and 2016, discusses the key theoretical elements that should not be changed, as well as the animation material that was developed and adjusted to the context. The second part of the article presents three new versions of the *DeStress for Success* program that were adapted to specific contexts and issues. Lastly, the third part of this article discusses some of the tools that were developed to support the implementation of the learned concepts from the program

First adaptations of the *DeStress for Success* program in youth centres

As mentioned in the previous article, the first adaptation of *DeStress for Success* for adolescents in a youth centre was created in 2011. An adaptation committee thought through the necessary adaptations to take into consideration to target the clientele and context, i.e., boys aged between 12 and 14 years old who are housed at youth centres. Coordinated by the Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté, this committee was made up of the CSHS team and educators with experience in facilitating workshops with young people in difficult situations.

Key elements of the program to be maintained and the modifications that were made

First, it is important to emphasize that the key elements of the program that are transmitted during the workshop have not been modified. This is necessary to ensure

its integrity and effectiveness. These key elements are the themes of the 5 workshops of the program:

1. The stress ingredients (the N.U.T.S model)
2. Physical signs of stress
3. Strategies focusing on emotions to calm the stress system
4. Problem-focused coping
5. Social support versus social pressure

Taught throughout the program, these concepts allow youth to identify the source of their stress, recognize its manifestations, and be able to manage the situation.

The adaptations are mainly concerned with different pedagogical elements (formatting, activities, tools):

- ✓ Shorter duration of the workshops;
- ✓ Addition of a "PowerPoint" presentation with images to better capture the attention of youth;
- ✓ Examples of modified stressful situations so that youth can more easily recognize themselves within these situations

In addition, pamphlets summarizing the content of each workshop were created after consulting with parents. They stressed the importance of receiving information on the content so that they and their children could discuss and apply the learned concepts at home. Finally, during the implementation of the workshops, it was necessary to adjust the context to better explain and distinguish the difference between short-term, emotion-based strategies and long-term, problem-solving strategies. An animator handbook was produced to summarize the adapted material.

In 2015, the program was further adapted by a team of educators for youth aged 14 to 20 with mental health problems who were followed by youth centres due to delinquency. This group of adolescents could not participate in the group workshops. The activities for transferring knowledge were modified to correspond to the context of individual meetings. For example, in some of the program's workshops, youth are asked to share examples of stressful situations. Doing the program in groups generates a wide variety of examples and shows that stress is a matter of individual perception. To achieve the same objective within the context of individual meetings, the animator uses a card game that has been created to contain various examples of stressful situations. The examples have been modified to be more in line with the experiences of this type of youth.

Three new versions of *DeStress for Success* were adapted to specific contexts and problems

As of 2020, three additional versions of *DeStress for Success* have been adapted to different clientele and contexts. One of the key conditions for the success of these new versions is that a significant person in the life of the youth (e.g., a parent or friend) participates with them in the workshops. Finally, the youth's educator also participates in the first and last workshop. Thus, a common language favours the application of the concepts, support for the young person, and above all, the resolution of problems related to stress contagion in relationships.

The *DeStress for Success – Alternatives to violence* version of the program specifically targets violent behaviours



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and alternative coping strategies to violence. This version is the result of the adaptation of two programs: *DeStress for Success*, a version to be conducted individually with young offenders, combined with complementary concepts from the *Alternatives to violence* program. This new version has a total of eight workshops. The five typical *DeStress for Success* workshops are preceded by a workshop focusing on the link between stress and violence. Two additional workshops conclude the program and focus on the development of a violence prevention plan.

The *DeStress for Success – Youth and Foster Parent(s)* version is an adaption of the previous version. The content of the eight workshops is the same (including the workshop on stress and violence). However, the examples presented in the workshops have been modified to the context of a foster family. In addition, the violence prevention plan was changed to a continuous improvement plan to emphasize the behaviours to be improved. This version responded to the needs of foster families who expressed their desire for such a program. The objective

is to reduce the number of times that foster youth bounce around from family to family. This is done by equipping the foster parents and youth with tools to better manage their individual stress and stress contagion. Once a week, one of the eight workshops are given at the foster family's home by the file's caseworker. When parents express their adolescent's need for the program, the biggest challenge in the implementation of the program is to motivate the young person to participate. The parents and educators who are currently testing the program under these conditions are looking for different ways to motivate youth.

The *DeStress for Success – Parental Accompaniment* version is intended for the parents of youth who have been placed in a youth centre for behavioural problems on a short-term basis and who cannot follow the *DeStress for Success* program for adolescents. In this specific version, these young people have neurodevelopmental disorders such as intellectual disabilities (ID) and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This version incorporates key concepts seen in the



original program in order to help parents understand and manage their own stress. In addition, concepts for understanding and managing stress contagion have been added. The workshops also address notions on how to support youth in the management of their own stress. The entirety of this content was adjusted to a format of three 2-hour workshops. The examples were also modified to address parents of youth with ID-ASD.

As mentioned by one of the in-house *Iso-stress* trainers during an interview with a local newspaper: "...this program can be replicated to suit all of the environments that we have across the territory. There are a million possibilities..."

Tools and activities to support the implementation of the concepts

Over the years and across all versions of the program, tools and activities to support the implementation and maintenance of the concepts have been developed by educators in various youth centres. Through a provincial-wide

exchanging network, the developments made by one youth centre are made available to others. Here are some examples:

Daily meetings for the generalizing of learning

A team of educators animate a daily 30-40-minute meeting from Monday to Thursday during which young people and educators are asked to use the learned concepts to talk about the stress they experienced during the day. This activity helps to target stressors as they arise. Due to the great appreciation of these meetings by youth and educators, a neighbouring team asked to be trained during the pandemic in 2020. In turn, they implemented this activity with great satisfaction.

Reflections using the N.U.T.S. model

One educator created an outline for young people to write down their reflections following an unwanted behaviour. However, despite their appreciation of this activity, it was noted that an educator who had not learned

the concepts of the N.U.T.S. model was unable to support youth in their reflections. Yet again, this speaks to the importance of familiarizing the adults in the entourage of a young person with the concepts. In turn, they will be able to provide adequate support to youth trying to apply these concepts.

Generalization of learning activity with the television series "For Sarah"

Another educator created a generalization of learning activity with a Quebec television series called "For Sarah". The series takes a down-to-earth and non-judgemental look at two families going through large amounts of stress after a car accident involving two 18-year-olds. Each week, youth watched an episode of the series in a group and had to recognize the concepts that they had learned in the various workshops. This activity generated a lot of interest and an animation guide was created to allow other trained teams to use it.

In conclusion, *DeStress for Success* is a program that is greatly appreciated by youth centres. Further, its adaptation to specific contexts and problems is not only possible, but extremely relevant. However, we recommend that those responsible for any adaptation be well-trained in the implementation of *DeStress for Success* and that certain adaptation criteria be respected to ensure quality (e.g., preserving the key concepts, obtaining the authors' permission, adjusting the format and examples to the target population). Finally, there are also several tools developed in different regions of Quebec to support and maintain the application of the learned concepts. Sharing knowledge between regions is a strength that should not be underestimated!

Together, we can go further! 🐘

***DeStress for Success* is a program that is greatly appreciated by youth centres. Further, its adaptation to specific contexts and problems is not only possible, but extremely relevant. However, we recommend that those responsible for any adaptation be well-trained in the implementation of *DeStress for Success* and that certain adaptation criteria be respected to ensure quality (e.g., preserving the key concepts, obtaining the authors' permission, adjusting the format and examples to the target population).**



For more information on the different versions, here are some links for you to visit (available in French only):

[Web page of the Iso-stress de l'Institut universitaire jeunes en difficulté](#)

[Documentary "Don't go N.U.T.S. with stress"](#) a pilot project in co-construction in youth centres

[Video capsule](#) « DéStresse et Progrèsse — Alternatives à la violence » (DeStress for Success – Alternatives to violence) and the [press article](#) « Gestion du stress des intervenants et des jeunes en Centre jeunesse » (Stress management for educators and youth in youth centres)

[Video capsule](#) « DéStresse et Progrèsse — Jeune et parent accueil » (DeStress for Success – Youth and Foster Parent(s))

[Video capsule](#) « DéStresse et Progrèsse — Accompagnement parental » (DeStress for Success – Parental Accompaniment)

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5 Workshops of **40-50** minutes ea. **1** x per week

1 Animator manual **+** **1** Logbook for youth

>65000 Youth who have received the program

>2500 Animators who have been trained

2 Versions before arriving at the final program. The first version had 9 workshops, while the second one had 7. Both were 40 minutes each.

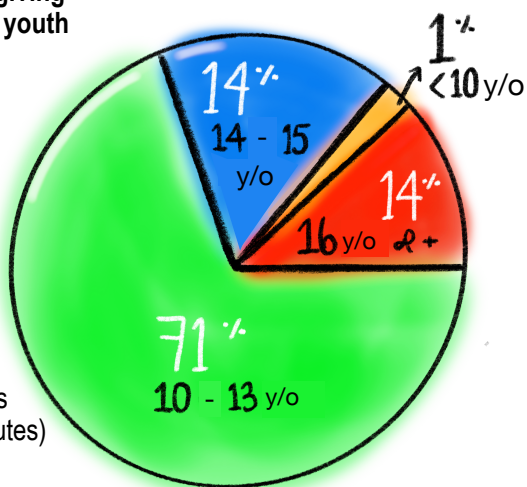
4 Research projects to measure the effects of the program and to validate it.

A few numbers

The *DeStress for Success*© program was launched in 2007. Being the scientists that we are, we have collected many interesting figures on the program in the last decade.



In 2019, we surveyed over 100 animators. They reported giving the program to youth from:



60% find the length of the workshops (approx. 50 minutes) to be ideal.

64% felt that the program could contain 3 or 4 workshops (rather than 5).

Quotes from youth:

"I've learned that anyone can be stressed."

"I now understand how my body reacts to stress."

Quotes from the animators:

"I love implementing this program and the kids are always happy to see me come in."

"[...] the reception of the program by the students in our school is very positive. Many students feel comfortable coming to talk to our team of educators about their stress management. The N.U.T.S. model is becoming part of the official lingo for our 7th graders!"

"[...] reminders about the N.U.T.S. model and the coping strategies are given twice during the year (just before exam sessions)."

Different adaptations

These numbers are due in part to the hard work of people outside the Centre for Studies on Human Stress (CSHS) who wanted to use the program and adapt it to their own environments. In a way, they were the conveyors of *DeStress for Success*®.



Elderly

2018 to 2019: Offered to approximately 175 seniors in groups of eight people. Workshops lengthened to 15-30 minutes to allow for discussion among participants. Addition of a sixth workshop addressing the fact that stress can be contagious and spill over from one person to another. Adaptation of some activities. For example, seniors were invited to do the twist (rather than push-ups) in order to feel the manifestations of stress in their bodies. - Marie-Josée Richer

Do you have other adaptations to share with us? Write to us : cesh-cshs.cemtl@ssss.gouv.qc.ca

Youth centres

2016 to 2021: *Iso-stress* approach combining a training on stress given to teams of educators and a common action plan to manage the team's stress. The team is then more available and equipped to support the youth in their stress management. The *DeStress for Success* program is also given to the youth. A total of 85 teams formed in several regions of Quebec : Montréal, Montérégie Est, Mauricie-Centre du Québec, and Laurentides. -Sophie Massé and Pierrich Plusquellec

ASD

Autism spectrum disorder

2018: Offered to groups of up to 12 youth with autism spectrum disorder in regular or special education classes. Co-facilitated by a specialized educator or psychoeducator and the classroom teacher to maximize reuse of content on a daily basis. In order to use diagrams, the visual aids were modified and enhanced. Added 20 minutes per workshop to complete the logbooks in class. - Stéphanie Fecteau (in collaboration with 6 SSC¹)

Summer camps

2018: Offered as a camp activity with two workshops per week for a total of four workshops. - The CSHS team

Schools

2016: Program content broken down and tailored to each grade level, high school grades 7-11. - Sylvaine Lefebvre & Natacha Condo (SSC¹ of the Affluents)

2019: Added the acronym RAPP to identify whether a stressor is relative, absolute, passing, or prolonged. Added an activity in the logbook for the youth to draw how they feel about stress signals (see image below). - Jean-Francois Limoges (CSS¹ of the Hautes Laurentides)



Training

The CSHS trains educational professionals (teachers, school counsellors, school nurses, psychoeducators, psychologists, special needs technicians, principals, etc.) twice a year (around September and March). The one-day training includes a conference by Sonia Lupien, Ph.D.: "Stress has no age", as well as a second portion on the animation of the program by Pierrich Plusquellec, Ph.D. Following this training, accredited animators are able to give the program to youth in their milieu and teach them what stress is, how to recognize it, and how to adapt to it. To register: <https://humanstress.ca/programs/de-stress-for-success/>.

¹ School service centres

NEXT ISSUE OF THE MAMMOTH MAGAZINE



Stress mindsets

Above anything else, stress is a healthy response of the human brain and body to enable it to adapt to its environment and survive. However, we know that the experience of stress is unique to each human being. While the experience of stress is determined by the way each person interprets the situations they encounter in their environment (among other things), recent years of research have revealed that the experience of stress is also influenced by the way in which stress is conceived in general – as being either helpful (positive) or disabling (negative). This pair of glasses with which a person views stress in their life refers to stress mindsets. A person with a positive stress mindset will experience stress differently than someone with a negative stress mindset. We now know that these mindsets have implications far beyond stress. To find out how stress mindsets can affect several aspects of your daily life and if it is possible to change them, check out our next issue of the Mammoth Magazine!

MAMMOTH MAGAZINE

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