



Lesson: Coping with Stress

Objectives:

- Students will identify what a fictional character wants, what happens when the character does not achieve his dreams, and how the character reacts to, and copes with, this stressor.
- Students will be able to understand what stress is as well as the effects it can have on their lives.
- Students will be able to use strategies and techniques that can help them cope with situations that are stress-inducing.



Starter:

Ask students to raise their hands if the following situations are true for them:

- Have you ever looked forward to something so much, but then it didn't go the way you planned?
- Have you ever had a bad day, or a day that kept getting worse or a day when nothing seemed to be going right?

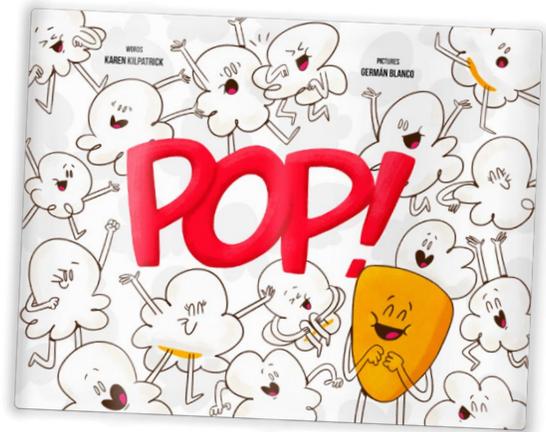
Next, ask the students if they know what **stress** is.

After taking a few students' responses, explain that stress is when a person feels worried about things in his or her life or is uncomfortable with a situation.

Tell them that stress and worry are emotions that can have both *physical effects* (when a person feels sick or bad) and *mental effects* (when a person feels upset or sad in his or her mind) on a person.

Read-aloud and discussion:

Tell the students you will be reading them a story, titled **Pop!** by Karen Kilpatrick, about a character named **Otto** whose day does not go as he had hoped.



After reading *page 10* (“and even hang out with some Nuts”) ask the students to identify what **Otto** wants more than anything, and what he is really looking forward to doing when he gets what he wants. After several students’ responses, tell the class that since we all know stories include problems, we know **Otto** will face some sort of trouble. Ask them to notice the problem Otto faces as you read on in the book (*stop after page 19*).

Discussion:

- What problem did Otto face?
- What did he do to try to cope with the problem?
- Did it work?

If no one brings it up, talk to them about how you notice Otto was so disappointed when he did not pop like everyone else. Otto is experiencing stress caused by the disappointment of not popping. He is experiencing a mental effect to the stress.

Continue reading from *page 20*. Notice a turning point in the story.

Ask the students: *What changed for Otto?*

Tell them you notice he seems happy, as opposed to stressed, now. *What caused this change in Otto?*

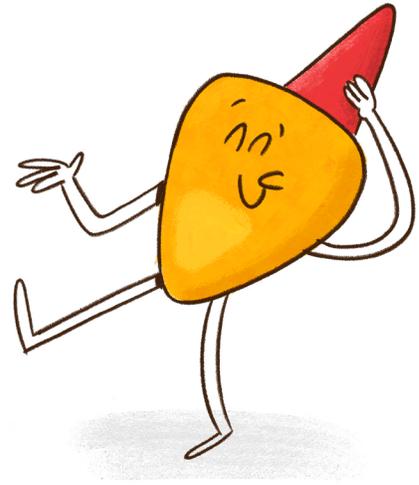
Discuss how Otto coped with his stress with the students. (The other kernels helped Otto realize he did not need to pop to do all of the things he wanted to do. Then he took a chance and did everything he always dreamed he’d do once he popped.)

After finishing the book, ask the students what lesson this book teaches them. If no one brings it up, definitely bring up the idea of empathizing with and encouraging others, as well as never giving up on our dreams.

Whole Group Activity:

Tell them it is important for each of us to identify and cope with stress in our lives.

To do this, we first need to figure out and name the things that cause stress. Then, we will come up with ways of dealing with (and reducing) the stress in healthy ways.



Ask them to share things that worry them, or create stress in their lives (such as having too much schoolwork to do and not enough time to accomplish it, or facing a challenging math problem and feeling overwhelmed, for example).

Next to each of the stressors, come up with a list of ways to reduce the stress. Ask them to share stress relieving activities that have worked for them.

If they are having trouble, suggest the following:

- Play music and dance
- Play outside, exercise, or stretch
- Talk to someone about how you feel
- Ask for help
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Spend time with a pet
- Doodle, draw, or start an art project
- Take a bath or shower
- Count backward from 10 slowly
- Write down your feelings
- Focus on your five senses- count sounds, sights, tastes, smells and textures around you
- Think of things that make you happy
- Close your eyes and visualize a safe, calm place
- Read a book

Emphasize that it will sometimes take more than one strategy to feel less stressed, and that what works for one person may not work for another. In addition, it is important to help them realize that these activities may not make the stress or worry go away completely, but they generally help reduce the stress or worry.

Closing Activity:

Students will each create a book of ways to deal with strong emotions (those that cause worry and/or stress): sadness, fear, anger, disappointment and so on.

Give students two blank sheets of paper. Instruct them to fold the papers in half, creating a small book. On each sheet, tell them to write an emotion that causes stress in their lives. Tell them to choose emotions they feel they experience more often. Below each emotion, tell them to write coping strategies that they can imagine using to help them cope with that emotion/stressor. They should use the charts you created as a class to do so.

A page may look like the following:

When I feel overwhelmed, I can...

- squeeze a stress ball.
- take a break, and go play.
- ask someone, like my mom or teacher, for help.

End by having students share one page from their books.

*Encourage them to use their books at school, as well as at home, when they are experiencing stress of any kind.

