

Is stress truly an enemy we must defeat? Are stress, anguish and anxiety all synonyms? While mental health, exposure to stress and anxiety issues are hot topics, our knowledge related to these subjects are often poorly developed.

The endocrinologist Hans Selye was the first to address the notion of stress in the 50s. Later on, in the 60s, John Wayne Mason has, for his part, demonstrated the importance of the psychological factors of stress.

But what is stress?

Stress is a physiological response triggered by the organism when faced with real danger or a physical or psychological threat.

It allows us to remain alert before potential danger. Therefore, it is essential to keep us alive and allows us to mobilize our energy appropriately.

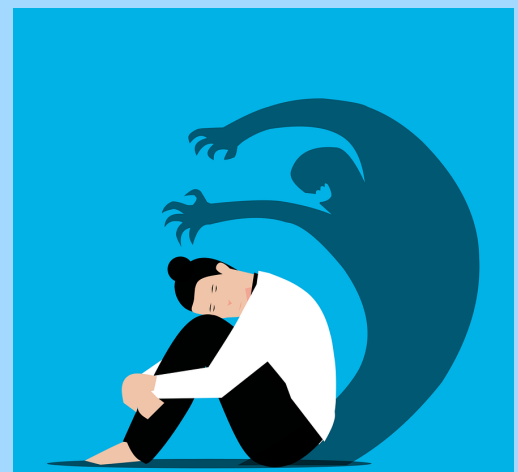
Even if it is sometimes hard to manage, stress is a normal and useful emotion. Adopting healthy life habits remains the best way to manage stress.

What about anxiety?

Contrary to stress, anxiety stems more from the anticipation of a threat that could occur in the future. It is often illustrated as “the fear of being afraid.”

In itself, anxiety is not more negative than stress since it tends to dissipate rapidly. However, for some people, it persists and can negatively impact general functioning and even become paralyzing.

A winning strategy in managing anxiety is to resist avoidance. By facing the event, we avoid it becoming more worrisome in the future. Gently pushing back your limits by facing your fears is therefore a good habit to adopt. Learning to let go and



having a benevolent internal discourse are also practices that can help manage anxiety.

And for anguish?



Anxiety and anguish are close parents. In both cases, it is an anticipatory reaction before an event or consequence.

Anguish is distinguished by the fact that it is always accompanied by an important physical reaction, such as chest pressure, breathing difficulties, accelerated heart rhythm or stomach pains.

It is a destabilizing experience for which the person can have difficulty identifying the trigger. To better manage anguish, it is important to rely on introspection and develop anchoring introspection strategies that allow to restore the link with the present moment.

How to support the students?

The perception the individual has of stressful situations influences the level of stress to which they are exposed. Perceiving things positively or seeing the bright side of things is enough to secrete less stress hormones. It is therefore crucial to make students understand that their state of mind is important.

While stress does not trigger illnesses, it can limit our capacity to face them. Overexposed to stress, the body must make compromises. The immune system or other resources may weaken. The body will privilege defence to the threat, all to the detriment of other functions. Consequently, it is important to open a conversation on healthy life habits with the students. Exposing oneself to the exterior temperature (without a phone) and walking outside 15 minutes is enough to have significant impact on the body.

The current context increases the vulnerabilities tenfold and resources are not always accessible. It is therefore important to prevent by making room for inwardness activities such as meditation or anchoring techniques in classes. These interventions allow students to take ownership of the tools that help healthy stress management.

Suggestions from the *Équipe-choc des services éducatifs complémentaires*:

[eMentalHeath.ca grounding strategies](#)

[The 519 Space for change grounding techniques](#)

[Centre for studies on human stress](#)

[Webinar: L'anxiété chez les adultes: compréhension de la problématique et pistes d'intervention](#)