



ESSEX COUNTY OFFICE OF
PUBLIC HEALTH
MANAGEMENT

HEALTHY MONDAY'S TOOL KIT: NOVEMBER 2025



900 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, NJ 07044

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is Healthy Monday's?	3
<u>Lesson 1: Understanding Stress</u>	4
What is Stress? Flyer for Grades K-5	5
Take Control, Don't Lose It Flyer for Grades 6-12	6
<u>Lesson 2: Coping Tools That Work</u>	7
Breathe, Move & Relax! Flyer for Grades K-5	8
Find Your Reset Flyer for Grades 6-12	9
<u>Lesson 3: Healthy Habits</u>	10
Healthy Habits = a Happy Mind! Flyer for Grades K-5	11
Unplug to Recharge Flyer for Grades 6-12	12
<u>Lesson 4: Give Yourself Grace</u>	13
Kindness Makes The Brain Happy Flyer for Grades K-5	14
You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Be Proud Flyer for Grades 6-12	15



WHAT IS THE HEALTHY MONDAY CAMPAIGN?



The Healthy Monday Campaign is a public health initiative that encourages individuals and organizations to commit to healthy behaviors each Monday, helping to prevent chronic diseases and promote long-term wellness.

In Essex County, Healthy Monday will focus on children and their parents by providing a weekly toolkit with topics tailored to their needs. Each month will highlight a new theme that is relevant to children's health and well-being.

For November, we welcome you to the Essex County Healthy Monday Campaign, with our main topic being exploring ways to understand, manage, and reduce stress. Learn tips to stay calm, recharge your mind, and take care of your mental and emotional health.

LESSON 01:

Everyone — kids, teens, and even adults — feels stressed sometimes. Stress is our body’s natural way of responding to challenges, change, or things that feel overwhelming. It’s not always a bad thing; a little bit of stress can help us focus, try harder, or stay alert. But when stress builds up, it can make us feel tired, cranky, or anxious — and that’s when we need to pause and take care of ourselves.

For younger children, stress can look like big feelings — maybe they get frustrated more easily, complain of stomachaches, or have trouble focusing. It’s important to help them name their emotions and learn ways to calm their bodies. Ask questions like, “What are you feeling right now?” or “What would help you feel better?” Sometimes, something simple like deep breathing, reading, or getting a hug makes a big difference.

For older students, stress often comes from balancing schoolwork, friendships, sports, and family responsibilities. Encourage them to recognize their own stress signals — things like headaches, racing thoughts, or trouble sleeping. Talk about what healthy coping looks like, such as listening to music, taking a walk, journaling, or simply unplugging from screens for a bit.

Healthy Monday Tip for Families:

Start each week by checking in with yourself and your child.

Ask:

“What’s something that might make this week stressful?”

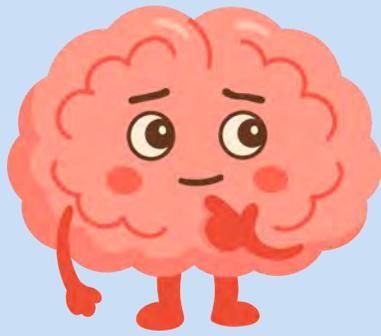
“What can we do to make things feel a little easier?”

Sometimes small changes — like setting aside quiet time, preparing things the night before, or doing a few deep breaths together — can help everyone feel calmer and more ready for the week ahead.

Try This Family Activity:

Have your child draw their “stress monster” — what it looks like when they feel upset or worried. Then, on the same paper, draw what helps calm it down, such as listening to music, playing outside, or cuddling a pet. For older kids and teens, write down three common stress triggers and one healthy way to manage each.

✨ Remember: Stress is something everyone experiences, but with awareness, calm habits, and support, your family can handle it together.



What is Stress?

Sometimes We All Feel Stressed!

Stress is what we feel when something makes us worried, nervous, or upset. It can happen when we have too much to do, feel scared, or when things change.

A little stress is normal — it helps us focus or get things done!

How Can You Tell If You're Stressed?

- 🤢 Stomach aches or headaches
- 😡 Feeling cranky or mad easily
- 😭 Wanting to cry more
- 😴 Trouble sleeping
- 😊 Feeling quiet or not wanting to play

Healthy Ways to Feel Better!

- Take deep breaths
- Move your body
- Draw, color, or write about your feelings
- Talk to someone you trust — like a parent, teacher, or friend
- Get enough sleep and drink water

If You Still Feel Upset...

If stress doesn't go away, that's okay! Talk to a grown-up like:

- Your parent or guardian
- A teacher or school counselor
- The school nurse



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First





TAKE CONTROL, DON'T LOSE IT

Stress is a natural part of life – it's how your body reacts to challenges. But too much can leave you drained and unfocused.

HEALTHY MONDAY FOCUS:

Notice your stress signals – tense shoulders, racing thoughts, or restlessness. Awareness is the first step to control.



EXAMPLES OF STRESS TRIGGERS FOR TEENS:

- Academic pressure or upcoming exams
- Changes at home or in friendships
- Social media or peer comparison
- Lack of sleep or poor time management



Understanding how stress shows up in your life helps you take control instead of letting it control you.

CHALLENGE:

List 3 common stress triggers and one healthy response for each.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

TAKEAWAY:

You can't always avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it with balance.



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
 The Board of County Commissioners
 The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First



LESSON 02:

When stress starts to build up, one of the best ways to feel better is to take care of our bodies and minds. For children, this can mean learning simple ways to calm down and feel safe. For teens, it's about discovering strategies that help them handle the challenges of school, friendships, and everyday life.

For younger children, breathing slowly, stretching, and gentle movement can help their bodies relax. You might encourage them to take three “belly breaths” — slowly in through the nose, out through the mouth — or do a fun stretch like reaching for the sky or fluttering their arms like a butterfly. These simple practices help children notice their bodies and give them a tool to use whenever they feel upset, frustrated, or worried. For older students, coping tools include strategies to manage stress in healthy ways rather than avoiding it. Encourage them to identify activities that help them reset, such as:

- Going for a walk or run
- Listening to music
- Journaling or drawing
- Taking a short screen break

Healthy Monday Tip for Families:

Set aside a few minutes together each day to practice a calming activity. Even two or three deep breaths as a family, stretching, or a short walk can make a big difference. Encourage your child or teen to notice how their body feels before and after the activity.

Try This Family Activity:

- For K–5: Have your child practice the “Calm Body Challenge”: 5 butterfly stretches, 3 deep breaths, and then sit quietly for a moment listening to surrounding sounds.
- For 6–12th: Ask your teen to create a Stress Toolkit: list 5 activities that help them feel calmer when stressed, and encourage them to use it throughout the week.

✨ Remember: Movement, breathing, and other healthy coping strategies are tools that children and teens can carry with them every day to handle stress more effectively.

Breathe, Move & Relax!

When You Feel Upset or Worried...

Sometimes when we feel stressed, our heart beats fast, and our body feels tight. Taking slow breaths, moving our body, and relaxing can help us feel calm and happy again.



Take a Deep Breath!

1. 🫧 Breathe in slowly through your nose for 3 seconds (1...2...3).
2. 🌬️ Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
3. 😊 Blow out slowly through your mouth for 3 seconds.
4. Repeat 3 times!



Tip: Pretend you're smelling a flower 🌸 and blowing out a candle 🕯️

Moving Helps Your Body Feel Good!

- Frog jumps – jump up and down like a frog.
- Take a short walk or march in place.
- Dance to your favorite song.
- Stretch your arms up high and reach for the sky.



Find Your Calm

- Color or draw something peaceful.
- Sit quietly and hug your favorite stuffed animal.
- Close your eyes and think about your happy place.
- Read a short story or listen to soft music.



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First



Find Your Reset



Press Pause to Recharge

Stress from school, friends, social media, or just daily responsibilities builds up. When you don't slow down, your body stays in "go-mode," and that constant pressure can lead to exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout.

Learning to pause and reset helps you think clearly, stay calm, and protect your mental health.

Breathe – Slow Down Your Mind

1. Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Hold for 4 seconds.
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
4. Pause, then repeat.



Move – Release the Pressure

You don't need a full workout – just move:

- Walk, jog, or bike outside.
- Do stretches between assignments.
- Dance to your favorite playlist.
- Play a sport, shoot hoops, or go for a hike.

Relax – Give Your Mind Space to Breathe

Ways to recharge:

- Listen to calming music or a podcast.
- Meditate or try guided relaxation apps.
- Read, draw, or spend time in nature.
- Journal your thoughts instead of bottling them up.
- Take a mindful break: close your eyes, breathe, and notice how you feel.



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First



LESSON 03:

Taking care of our daily habits can have a big impact on how calm, happy, and focused children and teens feel. For younger children, this often means routines like getting enough sleep, eating well, and spending time outside. For older students, it also includes balancing technology, schoolwork, and downtime.

For younger children, establishing “happy habits” helps their bodies and minds feel safe and energized. Encourage simple routines like:

- Going to bed at a consistent time
- Drinking water and eating balanced meals
- Playing outside or moving their bodies each day

For teens, unplugging from screens can help reset the brain and reduce stress.

Constant notifications and social media can make it harder to focus or relax. Encourage them to set aside even 30 minutes a day for a screen-free activity such as reading, stretching, journaling, or going for a walk.

Healthy Monday Tip for Families:

Create a short family routine or “screen-free zone” together. Notice how it feels to spend even a little time away from devices, focusing on connecting with each other or doing something active.

Try This Family Activity:

For K–5: Make a “Happy Habits Bingo” with simple daily activities — mark off each time a habit is done.

For 6–12th: Challenge your teen to a 24-hour mini digital detox. Afterward, have them reflect on how it affected their mood and focus.

✨ Remember: Daily habits, balanced routines, and mindful breaks help children and teens feel calmer and more in control of their stress.

HEALTHY HABITS = A HAPPY MIND!

When we take care of our body, our mind feels good too!
Good sleep, healthy food, and playing outside help our brains stay calm and strong.



EAT HEALTHY FOODS

Fruits, veggies, and whole grains give your body energy to feel happy and calm.
Sugary snacks might make you feel excited at first, but tired later.



SLEEP WELL

Your brain needs sleep to grow and think clearly.
Most kids need about 9–11 hours of sleep each night.



SPEND TIME OUTSIDE

Fresh air, sunshine, and playtime help your body relax.
When you run, jump, or walk, your brain releases “happy chemicals” called endorphins!



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First





Unplug to Recharge

The Insight:

Constant screen time can overload your mind. Taking time offline helps your brain reset and refocus.



Healthy Monday Focus:

Take a 30-minute daily "digital detox." Step away from your phone and do something relaxing instead.



Challenge:

Go one full day without social media and jot down how it affects your mood and focus.

Takeaway:

Disconnect to reconnect – your peace of mind matters.



Created on: 10/14/2025

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First



LESSON 04:

The last week of Stress Less November focuses on self-compassion and kindness — to yourself and others. Teaching children and teens to be kind and forgiving toward themselves is a powerful way to reduce stress and build resilience.

For younger children, acts of kindness — saying a nice word, helping a friend, or sharing a smile — help them feel good inside and create a positive environment at school and home.

For older students, learning to give themselves grace means letting go of perfectionism and celebrating progress. Encourage teens to focus on what went well each week, instead of dwelling on mistakes or setbacks. Practicing gratitude and self-compassion strengthens mental health and helps teens bounce back from stress.

Healthy Monday Tip for Families:

Take time together to notice accomplishments, no matter how small, and recognize kind actions — both in your child and in yourself. Model gentle self-talk and kindness, which children and teens will learn from by example.

Try This Family Activity:

- For K–5: Make a “Kindness Chain.” Write kind actions your child does on paper strips and connect them to make a chain.
- For 6–12th: Encourage your teen to write a short note to their future self: “I’m proud of you for…” and list accomplishments or challenges they overcame this month.

✨ Remember: Small acts of kindness and self-compassion create a calmer, happier home and help children and teens manage stress more effectively.

KINDNESS MAKES THE BRAIN HAPPY



KINDNESS HELPS EVERYONE FEEL CALM!

**WHEN WE HELP OTHERS FEEL CALM AND HAPPY, WE FEEL GOOD TOO!
A KIND WORD, A SMILE, OR HELPING A FRIEND CAN MAKE SOMEONE'S
DAY BETTER – AND THAT MAKES YOU FEEL HAPPIER INSIDE.**



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First



YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT TO BE PROUD



THE SCIENCE BEHIND SELF-COMPASSION

When you make a mistake, your brain's "fight-or-flight" system activates – your heart rate rises, and stress hormones spike.

But when you respond to yourself with calm and kindness, you activate your parasympathetic nervous system – the body's natural relaxation response.

Self-compassion literally helps your body recover from stress faster.

It improves focus, builds emotional resilience, and encourages healthier coping habits.

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED THIS MONTH — BIG OR SMALL.

Maybe you:

- Managed your time better
- Asked for help when you needed it
- Tried to stay calm under pressure
- Showed kindness or patience toward others



PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Life isn't about getting everything right – it's about learning, trying again, and keeping your balance along the way.

Be proud of the progress, not just the results.

Being kind to yourself is part of being healthy.



Created on: 10/17/2025

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., *Essex County Executive*
The Board of County Commissioners
The Essex County Office of Public Health Management
Putting Essex County's Health First

