



STRESSED OUT

Level: Upper intermediate / Advanced (B2–C2)

Age: Teenagers / Adults

Time: 45 minutes

Language summary: Expressions related to stress, language of comparison, language of speculation

Image work: Looking at an image from different perspectives; using an image as a stimulus for discussion

PROCEDURE:

1 Stress is a nervous or worried feeling which stops a person relaxing and is usually caused by a problem in the external environment. Someone who is stressed out is greatly affected by stress. Accept any valid answer. At this stage try to get the students thinking about the fact that the triggers for stress are very varied and depend on the individual.

2 Other expressions used include *burnt out*, *worn out*, but tend to be linked to tiredness. More specific expressions such as (*feeling*) *tense*, *under pressure*, *anxious* and *worried* might all be used interchangeably.

3 The man has a creased brow (forehead) and has put his hand to his brow. He has his eyes closed. He is clutching the phone very tightly. He is hunched over the phone. Accept any answers which describe the scene in the picture.

4 Allow a variety of answers here. The man seems distressed and possibly shocked. Any of the language listed above in step 2 would also be possible. The picture does not contain any context so we cannot tell much about the location, but we do know he is on the phone and when a person puts their hand to their brow in this way it usually indicates shock or distress – it could also indicate disappointment or anger.

Encourage the students to see this picture globally – it could be almost anywhere in the world. Telephony is technology available in most contexts. Allow the students to speculate the possible reason why he is distressed and who the other person is. Share these answers with the class.

5 In this section of the lesson, encourage the students to employ their oral story-telling skills. Circulate and help with language and ideas. You could suggest that the best story gets the class award for the day.

6 Circulate and help the students with language and ideas. This should provide a rich discussion and may help to emphasize how subjective and personal stress is as the triggers will be different in each case. Be sensitive to any unwillingness to talk about stressful situations, as people do not always admit to feeling stressed, particularly in the workplace, in case it is interpreted as weakness.

7 The idea of positive stress is widely circulated particularly in the UK and US. This is a good opportunity to allow the students to discuss issues relating to cooperation and competition. Ask them which they feel is the most favourable environment to have in a workplace (and in wider society). The idea of positive stress derives from a belief that competition is a good thing which is a very specific belief not everyone shares.

Help with vocabulary (promotion, deadlines) if required and then circulate and monitor the discussion. Ask the groups to feed back at the end of the activity.

8 This activity should enable the class to see stress in a global context and also to understand that there are many different kinds of stress, some of which are in the control of the individual and some of which are not. If you are short of time you could allocate one quote per group and then feedback as a class or you could have a more detailed discussion of all quotes per group. Pre-check any unknown vocabulary by asking the students to read the scenarios and let you know if anything is not clear. Encourage the students to talk about solutions – these may be less challenging in individual cases (stress management classes, yoga, counselling) but much more complex when applied to a war situation. In this discussion students may touch on more global issues like an end to war and sustained peace and also poverty. Circulate and monitor, helping with language. Share the best examples at the end of class.



STRESSED OUT

- 1 With a partner, write a definition of the word *stressed*. Can you think of at least three situations where you might hear someone using the expression *stressed out*?
- 2 Can you think of any other expressions or words in English which mean the same as *stressed out*?
- 3 Look at the picture. With a different partner, describe what you can see in as much detail as possible. Describe the man's facial expression.
- 4 Focusing on the picture again, talk about what you think has happened. How is this man feeling? Where is he? Who is he talking to?
- 5 Thinking of the man in the picture, in groups of three choose one of your scenarios from question 4 and imagine what might happen when the man puts down the phone. Imagine what he will do next. Be ready to share your story with the class after you have discussed it.
- 6 In your groups of three, describe a time when you felt like this. What had happened? When you feel stress, what do you do to feel better?
- 7 Some psychologists who do research on work-related stress think that some stress is positive and makes people perform better. In different pairs discuss if you agree or disagree with this idea in relation to the following situations:
 - *finding out that someone doing the same job as you is earning more;*
 - *going for a promotion when there is one job that has fifteen applicants;*
 - *being up against tight deadlines that require working at home as well as at the office.*
- 8 In the same pairs discuss the following quotes related to stress. What are the solutions for a) the individual; b) the workplace; c) society as a whole? Do you think some forms of stress are higher in certain countries of the world? Why? How can we reduce the amount of stress people feel?
 - *'A very high percentage of workers say they feel stress on the job in the 200 companies we surveyed, much more than half, and another 40% or so think that their co-workers are stressed and need professional help. We should take that seriously.'* **Director of a charity, raising awareness of stress**
 - *'The problem is that millions of days a year are lost because people take time off from work due to stress. We need to find ways of addressing that problem.'* **Chief Executive Officer of a large company**
 - *'Stress is a topic that is discussed in the UK, US and Australia, but what about in other countries where people never talk about it but still suffer from it just as much, if not more.'* **Aid worker working in global poverty relief**
 - *'In countries where there is conflict and war, there are generally high levels of stress and anxiety amongst the population (called "war stress")'* – **Journalist working in war-affected country**
 - *'Is being stressed because your child didn't get an A at school the same as being stressed because you don't have enough food for your family? I don't think so.'* **Interviewee in a documentary about poverty**