

Unit Eleven

Taking Care of Yourself:

Dealing with Stress

UNIT ELEVEN:

Taking Care of Yourself: Dealing with Stress

Suggestions for the Instructor

Pg. 11-10 -- "Alone" by Maya Angelou

www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/maya-angelou/alone-6/

www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15624

Read the poem aloud with the class. Discuss the following questions.

ANSWERS:

1. What is the poet's belief about how easy or hard it is to "make it out there alone"? **The poet believes it is difficult to make it in the world alone. Nobody can do it, according to her.**
2. What are some examples of what might happen to people who try to go it alone? **They might not know what to do; they might not have enough information; they might feel lonely or scared . Answers may vary.**
3. Why is it important to learn to ask for help? **Other people might have resources or skills that we don't have. It's too hard to do everything alone.**
4. Is it hard to ask for help? Why or why not? **Answers may vary.**
5. Can you think of times when you needed other people? How did it feel? Did you get the help you needed? Why or why not?
Answers may vary.

Pg. 11-11 -- "Me Against the World" by Tupac Shakur

Copy the lyrics to the third verse only of "Me Against the World" by Shakur:

www.2pac.com/me-against-the-world/

www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/2pac/meagainsttheworld.html (third verse only)

Read the lyrics aloud with the class. Discuss the following questions.

ANSWERS:

1. What is the meaning of the lyrics? **Answers may vary.**
2. What are some of the forces the speaker is up against?
 - **He says "they punish the people that's askin questions"**
 - **People that possess things steal from people without possessions**
 - **Politicians and hypocrites who don't wanna listen**
3. What are at least six specific pieces of advice the speaker gives to people facing these stresses?
 - **Study your lessons.**
 - **Don't settle for less.**

(continued)

- Be grateful for your blessings.
 - Don't ever change, keep your essence.
 - Always do your best.
 - Don't let the pressure make you panic.
4. Do you agree or disagree with this advice? Why or why not? **Answers may vary.**

Pg. 11-12 - 11-24 -- PTSD Doubles (This American Life)

Transcript from WBEZ Chicago's This American Life, episode #484: Doppelgängers.
www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/484/doppelgangers?act=2#play or
thisamericanlife.org

In the transcript of this radio program, the experiences of two men with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are compared and contrasted. Brandon Caro is veteran of the war in Afghanistan. Curtis Jefferson lives in a violent neighborhood in Chicago. This program explores in what ways the effects of the violence they both experienced are comparable.

In order to prepare to answer the GED evidence-based writing prompt, ask students to think about their values, beliefs and prior knowledge related to the topic.

Then review the list of vocabulary. Ask students to share aloud, use a dictionary to find definitions, or derive the meanings of the terms from the context as they read.

As students read the transcript, ask them to identify the ways in which the two men's experiences of violence were similar or different. Encourage them to underline or highlight or take notes as they prepare to answer the prompt:

Compare the experience of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder of Brandon Caro, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, and Curtis Jefferson, a man living in a violent neighborhood in Chicago. Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.

Pg. 11-25 -- "War" by Common

<http://www.cleanvideosearch.com/media/action/yt/watch?v=ZRMeRLQ1ufs>

<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1719999/common-war-new-track.jhtml>

Read the lyrics from "War" by Common aloud. (If possible, listen to the rap song.) Discuss the following questions:

ANSWERS:

1. In lines 1-9 of the first stanza, the writer makes many comparisons between life in the streets and life during war. What comparisons does he make?
He calls it "Middle Easterin"
He calls young men "Young soldiers who never got to become older"
"Dog-tags" and "body bags" are military terms
He says young people pushed into violence at 13 are "enlisted."
2. Why does he make these connections? Do you think they are valid comparisons? Why do you think Common felt it was important to make these comparisons? **Answers may vary.**
3. What is the writer referring to in the following lines? *It never stop like the Muslims and Christians / We under-21 gun salute them / Just to go back and salute them / I'm talkin' bout war*
He is comparing street violence to war in the Middle East and comparing the funeral ritual of the military to funerals of people who are "under 21."
4. In the last nine lines, the writer compares and contrasts the experience of war and the experience of street violence. In what ways is the experience similar? In what ways is it different? What key word does he use to signal a contrast between the two?
He says "Black troupes trade war stories reminiscent of glory" just as soldiers might trade war stories. He compares his city to a "terror town" and the experience to a military "deployment." He says his life is like the life of a soldier. The main contrast between the two is signaled by the word "except" in the line: "Except wearing Jordans instead of black boots."
5. What do you think Common would say about the experiences of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder of Brandon Caro, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, and Curtis Jefferson, a man living in a violent neighborhood in Chicago?
He would probably say that both experiences are similar in many ways and both are extremely stressful.
6. Have you had any experiences similar to those described in the lyrics? Have you ever experienced stress related to violence? **Answers may vary.**

Pg. 11-26 – The Effects of Stress

Remind students that stress is a normal part of life, especially in times of great transition and that there are three primary ways we respond to stress: physical (body), psychological (emotions), and behavioral (actions) . Ask them to reflect on some of the ways they have responded to stress in the past and to share their responses with the class.

Pg. 11-27 – 11-28 – Strategies for Responding to Stress

This handout asks students to think about strategies for preventing stress or dealing with it positively. As students read the lists, ask them to reflect on these questions:

- Have you used any of these strategies before?
- Have they worked for you?
- Are there strategies on this list you would like to try?

Pg. 11-29 -- People Can Help / People Can Hurt

Ask students to be honest about the people in their lives who can help them. Ask them to contemplate the following questions in order to prepare for their release and transition:

- Who cares about you?
- Who might be a friend when you need help or support?
- Whom should you contact when you need assistance or a listening ear?

Sometimes people can make life difficult and make it hard to make positive changes -- even if they don't mean to. Discuss with students the ways people can be discouraging, negative or abusive. To make a fresh start and make positive changes, ask students to reflect on whom they need to avoid, and how they can keep these people from influencing them negatively.

Pg. 11-30 -- Places Can Help / Places Can Hurt

Ask students to be honest about the impact of the places in their lives, and to reflect on where they can go that is safe, peaceful and full of positive, successful people. What community resources can support their transition?

Likewise, sometimes places can make life difficult and make it hard to make positive changes. Places can exert negative influence and surround us with people who might tempt us or encourage us to do the opposite of what we really want to do. To make a fresh start and make positive changes, to take care of themselves and others, ask students to reflect on what places they may need to avoid, and how they can keep these places from influencing them negatively.

Pg. 11-31 - 11-32 -- Solving Problems by Sending “I” Messages

Ask students to read the examples of “You Messages” and “I Messages” on the handout. Discuss: Why would these statements make it hard or easy for the listener to hear what is being said? How would the statements probably make the listener feel? What might the listener say or do when he or she hears these “You Messages” or “I Messages”?

Have students fill in the blank boxes, then discuss as a class how a speaker might express himself or herself using an “I Message” instead of the “You Message.”

Pg. 11-33 - 11-36 -- Assertiveness: A Good Tool for Dealing with Stress

Read the handout aloud with the class and discuss the behaviors that might be exhibited by someone acting passively and the behaviors that might be exhibited by someone acting aggressively. Then ask students to read the list of assertive behaviors -- actions that are neither passive nor aggressive, but deal with situations in a forthright but respectful manner.

Ask students to reflect on their own behavior in the past, then share their experiences with the class. Ask them to write about their experiences with responding in a passive or aggressive manner, how it went for them, how they might have handled the situation better. Ask them also to share examples of times they expressed themselves in an assertive manner.

(continued)

How we handle difficult or stressful situations has an impact on the outcome. How we handle situations also has an impact on how we feel. Most stressful situations are dealt with either passively, aggressively or assertively. Review the terms with students by asking these questions:

- What is passive behavior? Why do people sometimes behave passively?
- What is aggressive behavior? What makes people act aggressively?
- What is the definition of assertive behavior?

Ask students to analyze the responses to stressful situations on the handout. Discuss each response and whether it is being handled in a passive, aggressive or assertive manner. Ask: what do you think would be the outcome of each behavior for the actor and the other person in this situation?

Pg. 11-37 -- Meditation and Relaxation Techniques Can Help Relieve Stress

Ask students to try this simple meditation technique. Read the instructions aloud with the class, practice it in the classroom, then ask students to reflect on the strategy and whether it is something they think might help them when they are under stress. Ask them to write about other methods they have used in the past to help to relax mind and body and relieve stress, and what methods they might try in the future.

Pg. 11-38 - Peaceful Visualization Can Help Relieve Stress

Ask students to try visualization of a special place as a tool for relieving stress. Practice it in the classroom, then ask students to reflect on the strategy and whether it is something they think might help them when they are under stress.

Pg. 11-39 - 11-40 - Nature Can Heal

Ask for volunteers to read the quotes about the healing power of nature. Discuss the quotes and the thoughts they have as they read them. Ask:

- Have you ever had an experience like the one described by the quote?
- Do you think this sentiment is true? Why or why not?
- What experiences have you had outdoors in the natural world (in a garden, on a farm, in a forest, by a lake, at the beach) that have affected you in a positive or healing way?

Ask students to reflect in writing about a time when being in nature has been healing for them, then ask volunteers to share their reflections with the class.

Pg. 11-41 -- Stress Mess

In this scenario, Marcus has a great many stressors in his life. Ask students to read his story and work together in small groups to give suggestions, from what they have read and from their own experiences, which would help Marcus deal with the various stresses in his life. Ask groups to report to the class and compare their suggestions.

Unit Eleven

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Dealing with Stress

Student Activities

Alone

by Maya Angelou

www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/maya-angelou/alone-6/
www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15624



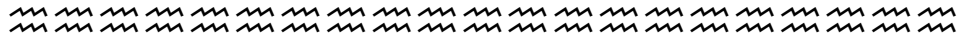
Image from Creative Commons <https://pixabay.com/en/circle-community-hands-holding-159252/>

Read the poem “Alone” by Maya Angelou. Discuss the following questions:

1. What is the poet’s belief about how easy or hard it is to “make it out there alone”?
2. What are some examples of what might happen to people who try to go it alone?
3. Why is it important to learn to ask for help?
4. Is it hard to ask for help? Why or why not?
5. Can you think of times when you needed other people? How did it feel? Did you get the help you needed? Why or why not?

ME AGAINST THE WORLD

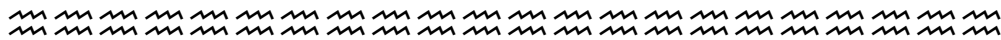
TUPAC SHAKUR



www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/2pac/meagainsttheworld.html (third verse)
www.2pac.com/me-against-the-world/



Image from Creative Commons <https://svgsilh.com/image/1296057.html>



Read the lyrics the third verse only of “Me Against the World” by Tupac Shakur.
Discuss:

1. What is the meaning of the lyrics?
2. What are some of the forces the speaker is up against?
3. What are at least six pieces of specific advice the speaker gives to people facing these stresses?
4. Do you agree or disagree with this advice? Why or why not?

PTSD Doubles

This American Life

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Transcript from WBEZ Chicago's This American Life, episode #484: Doppelgängers.
www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/484/doppelgangers?act=2#play or
thisamericanlife.org

In the transcript of this radio program, the experiences of two men with PTSD are compared and contrasted.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychological reaction that occurs after experiencing highly stressful events like wartime combat or extreme physical violence. People who suffer from PTSD may experience depression, anxiety, flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and denial.

Brandon Caro is veteran of the war in Afghanistan. Curtis Jefferson lives in a violent neighborhood in Chicago. This program explores in what ways the effects of the violence they both experienced are comparable.

Think about it:

In order to prepare to answer the prompt, think about your values, beliefs and prior knowledge related to the issues described in this transcript.

- Based on what you have lived, seen or heard, how might the experiences of a war veteran be similar to the experience of a person from a violent neighborhood?
- How might their experiences be different?
- How might they each react to their situations?
- How does your own situation compare to those of the people in this story?
- How does your own experience contrast?

If possible, listen along to the program as you read the transcript. As you listen and read, identify the ways in which the two men's experiences of violence were similar or different. Feel free to underline or highlight or take notes as you prepare to answer the prompt.

GED Evidence-based Writing:

As you read the transcript, prepare to answer this prompt:

Compare the experience of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder of Brandon Caro, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, and Curtis Jefferson, a man living in a violent neighborhood in Chicago. Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.

PTSD Doubles

Vocabulary

Review the list of vocabulary before reading and listening. What words do you already understand? What words will you need to look up in a dictionary or learn from context? Return to the words after in order to review their meanings and use them in sentences.

1. **toll of violence** -
2. **PTSD** - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
3. **trauma** --
4. **comparable** -
5. **parallels** --
6. **medic** --
7. **enlisted** --
8. **similarity / similarities** -
9. **convoy** -
10. **Taliban** - fundamentalist Muslim group that controlled much of Afghanistan from 1995 until U.S. military intervention in 2001
11. **Afghans** - people from Afghanistan (where the U.S. military was at war from 2001)
12. **IEDs** - improvised explosive devices / homemade bombs
13. **snipers** --
14. **patrol** -

15. **fatality** -
16. **casualty / casualties** -
17. **inevitably** -
18. **intimate** -
19. **FOB** -- forward operating base / military base
20. **denial** --
21. **toting around emotional baggage** -
22. **unfiltered** -
23. **mosque** -
24. **enraged** --
25. **intestines** --
26. **manning the turret** --
27. **fractures of his vertebrae** --
28. **herniated disks** --
29. **self-medicate / self-medicated** --
30. **echo** --
31. **lashed out** --
32. **agitated** --
33. **intervened** --
34. **diverge** -
35. **perpetually** --

PTSD Doubles

This American Life

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www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/484/doppelgangers?act=2#play or
thisamericanlife.org

Ira Glass

All right. Well, we've arrived at Act Two of our program. Act Two, "In Country, In City." So for decades now, the writer Alex Kotlowitz has been writing about the inner cities and especially the toll of violence on young people. He's probably best known for his book *There Are No Children Here*. He appears on our show from time to time.

Fred Armisen

(IMITATING IRA GLASS) Recently he heard about an unusual program at Drexel University in Philadelphia, where they're giving guys from inner-city neighborhoods counseling for symptoms of PTSD.

Ira Glass

And it's interested Alex because for a long time he has wondered whether the violence that he was reporting on in Chicago and its effect on kids and adults was comparable to the effects of trauma that a person experiences at war.

Fred Armisen

(IMITATING IRA GLASS) So he knew, and we know, how strange that sounds. You know, to compare being in Afghanistan or Iraq to working a street corner in Chicago or some other city.

Ira Glass

So Alex tried to see if it was really comparable by doing a pair of interviews. He talked to this vet from Afghanistan and also a guy from Philadelphia who's lived in some pretty bad neighborhoods his whole life. Alex wanted to see if they were doubles of some kind for each other.

Fred Armisen

(IMITATING IRA GLASS) One of these guys is 28. One is 30. And both of them are trying to make sense of what they experienced. Here's Alex.

Alex Kotlowitz

Here's the first of these two guys, Brandon Caro. Brandon spent a year in Afghanistan. His roughest time was the six months he spent in the eastern part of the country near the Pakistani border. He was a Navy corpsman, a medic who worked with the Marines.

Brandon Caro

As a teenager, yeah, I certainly lacked discipline. I have been thrown out of my house more times than I could remember. And I was 21 when I enlisted. And really, I enlisted because I had, up to that point, not finished college. And it didn't seem as though I was going to finish college any time soon.

Alex Kotlowitz

Then there's Curtis Jefferson. He grew up in a rough neighborhood in North Philly where he oversaw a small group of guys who sold drugs. He made his first drug sale when he was still in high school.

Curtis Jefferson

I was 16. And my aunt gave me some money for school. And at that point I purchased some weed and some crack with that. Never bought my clothes.

After that, I sold all the drugs. And I guess from there, that's where it started. And I seen that money come in, and I wasn't asking nobody for no money. Especially with my aunt, I wasn't asking for it from her pockets and all that. So from there, it was all she wrote.

Alex Kotlowitz

OK. They're two completely different people who made very different choices in their lives. But I spoke to each of them, looking for similarities in their experiences. And honestly, there were more than I expected.

Here's the first similarity. For Curtis on the street and for Brandon in Afghanistan, they could never let their guard down.

During his tour, Brandon was charged with training Afghan soldiers. And in May, 2007, he heard about Afghan soldiers who attacked their American trainers.

Brandon Caro

They had weapons around us all the time. On convoys, we would have to line them up in the morning and collect their cell phones because we couldn't trust them not to inform on us to Taliban fighters. It was exhausting, trying to keep an eye on the Afghan soldiers and look out for IEDs or snipers.

Curtis Jefferson

Because you trying to just focus on one thing, trying to get money, they're the same thing, eventually somebody is going to come up and test you. Somebody is going to test you. There's either somebody who's going to rob you, somebody going to send something to your boys, they're going to get robbed, someone is going to send shots through your way, or something.

Brandon Caro

It felt like a piano could fall on you at any time, you know? That's what it felt like to be on patrol, and especially to be on patrol with the Afghans.

Curtis Jefferson

Because if you were out there, you noticed different things. For one, people with their hands in their pockets.

Brandon Caro

You're looking for someone that doesn't look right, that doesn't feel right.

Curtis Jefferson

Another thing, people got hoodies on, especially black. There's a certain look. They put the hoodie on their face, you can't even see their eyeballs. Like, come on. It's daytime. I can't see your face. Let me see your eyes or something.

Brandon Caro

I would watch the way they looked at me. You know, if they would stare back at me, if they would smile at me.

Curtis Jefferson

If a person always got to keep touching their side, you're not going to your pocket. You're touching something. And I've been out there so long, I could tell if somebody got a gun on him or not.

Brandon Caro

For some reason, it was always a white Toyota Camry that was packed with explosives and driven into a convoy or driven into a checkpoint.

Curtis Jefferson

Grand Marquis, or what else? Crown Victoria. That's a dope boy car. And when I seen cars when I was on the streets, it was either get ready, go for the stretch, go to the guns, or get out of the way. That might the hop-out boys coming to stick you up.

Alex Kotlowitz

Here's something else they shared. They both saw people killed and then had to figure out how to keep going. The first fatality Brandon ever saw came when a convoy, which he was originally scheduled to be a part of, was hit.

Brandon Caro

They brought the casualties into our base. And when we swung open the two doors that opened up into the cab of the truck, I was looking at just a heap, a mass of flesh and that gray, digital pattern army uniform. But there was no form to what I was looking at. I knew that what I was looking at was human, but I didn't know what position the body was in because it had been so badly damaged.

And so we got into the cab. And we started to put him into a bag. And I tried not to look at his face. I remember thinking, don't look at his face, don't look at his face.

But I had to, inevitably. It was by far the most intimate, goriest thing I've ever experienced in my life.

Curtis Jefferson

My first time seeing somebody shot was my own mother. I was five years old. Going on six. We was living in the in the projects, Blumberg projects.

My mom just got her degree in nursing. She was a nurse, had a nice little job she was working to get us out of the projects.

Then one morning, she was going out to work. I gave my mom a kiss on the lips. She told my grandma, I'll see y'all later. I'm going to work.

As soon as she went out to work, I just heard all this shooting. But by that time, I knew what shooting was. But you know, there it was. She just got caught up in a shootout.

Somebody knocked on the door. She told my grandma, she said, Barbara's dead on the ground. All I know is my grandma was screaming and hollering. She ran outside. And there she was, right on the ground.

Back then, the nurses were wearing the nurse outfits with the little hat. Yeah, that's how she was. That was off her head. It was laying next to her. The whole white outfit just red, blood, there's nothing but blood.

I'm just looking at her. And [? Friday's ?] over there, like, what's wrong with mom? And grandma, like-- what's wrong with her? My grandma was crying and screaming. She didn't even say nothing. She just keeps telling me, go in the house, go in the house, go in the house.

I was angry a lot. Like, every day, every day. Because I thought about my mom every day. Every day, every day. I still think about her every day.

Brandon Caro

From that point on it was very difficult for me to sleep, to focus. I didn't realize how much those things really had made an impact on me. But they did.

Curtis Jefferson

I seen a lot of people get shot. I seen people get shot by cops, anything. Best friends shoot each other. I been seeing all types of crazy stuff. I don't know.

Brandon Caro

There was a convoy that went up to Nuray, in which there was a sniper attack that killed my old sergeant and his sergeant. There was the rocket-propelled grenade attack on a tent inside our FOB followed up by machine-gun fire. [SIGHS].

Curtis Jefferson

I could say I've seen like a dozen. And for me to not even be no cop or no doctor or nothing, that's a whole lot to see somebody killed and dead. That's a whole lot.

Alex Kotlowitz

This brings us to the third parallel. They buried their feelings.

Curtis Jefferson

Well, you know, after my mom got shot, I didn't get no counseling. I didn't get no counseling at all. And my aunt asked me to. My aunt gave me a decision.

And she asked me one day. I had to have been 12. She was like, do you want to go to a counselor? And I told her no. For what? I don't need to talk to nobody.

I was so much in denial. I think I can handle everything by myself. But I really couldn't.

Brandon Caro

I think at that point I was probably still in denial. I knew that I was toting around a lot of emotional baggage.

As much as I wanted to talk to people about how I really felt, I also didn't want to talk about it at all. The more I'd give it air, the more real it would be. And I didn't want it to be real. I just wanted it to be over.

Curtis Jefferson

I can't show no weakness because my homies need me out there. And I've been doing that for years. It's to the point where I start getting adapted to it, like [BLEEP] yeah.

But at the same time, I was still scared. Don't nobody want to die like that.

Alex Kotlowitz

The fourth shared experience-- raw, unfiltered rage.

Curtis Jefferson

I was definitely looking for revenge for my mom. When I was about 10 years old, I told my aunt I was going to look for the people that killed my mom. And I was going to go back down into the projects. And I was going to kill them. I always thought like that.

Brandon Caro

I mean, the way I felt about the Afghans-- I began to just hate that whole culture entirely. I hated them.

There was one time we were driving on an extremely, extremely dangerous road. And we had come very close to falling off the cliff, which would have killed us. The truck to our front was a truck filled with Afghan soldiers. And they were pointing and laughing at us for almost falling off. And in that moment, more than any other moment, I wanted to open up on them and kill every one of them.

I'd love to say that it was only toward the Taliban, toward the enemy that I experienced this rage, anger, and desire for revenge. But it really wasn't. It became a much bigger thing.

I was in Dallas one time around Thanksgiving. And I saw some people coming out of the mosque. I think that they had just had prayer or something like that. And it reminded me of Afghanistan.

And in that moment I just thought about how angry I was and how-- it enraged me. It enraged me because I don't want them here. All right, I said it. I [BLEEP] said it, all right? All right. I realize how much anger and resentment I have and how dangerous that is.

Curtis Jefferson

I shot my sister's boyfriend. I mean, I don't know. I think I had one of them moments. It had to have been.

It just took one burn. It just set me off for no reason. I was just thinking about everything and I just shot him.

I felt in some type of way, I made the situation deeper than it wasn't. You know what I mean? It wasn't even that deep. But I've been holding a lot of stuff in.

Because he always trying to discipline me. That's what it was I didn't like about, how he always tried to discipline me. All my sisters are way older than me. Like 40, pushing 50. See what I'm saying? I'm the youngest and I'm the only boy.

So you know, her boyfriends, they just how I need to stop getting in the streets. But it's just how he was saying it, like don't raise your voice at me. He's talking about yeah, I'm going to take you out in the street and fight you and all this, you're going to learn your lesson.

It just was the part when he was like, yeah, I'm going to knock you the [BLEEP] out. And that just went in my head, like what? First thing I do is grab my gun and come around the corner. He was outside, too. And I'm thinking the whole time, I hope he ain't really outside. Because he think I'm going to fight him. I'm not fighting this man. I'm going to kill him.

I didn't even give him a chance to put his hands up. As soon as I got around there, he was just all in my face. And I just backed up and shot him. Shot him in the stomach.

I thought I was going to kill him. I thought he was dead, though. I guess everything worked out. That's the way he is. He ain't the person [INAUDIBLE] tell. He still survived. So I don't know.

Alex Kotlowitz

Here's something I didn't expect with either of them. The toughest times weren't when they were on the battlefield or in the streets. It was when things were quiet. That's when they struggled the most.

Brandon Caro

The worst times for me were the times when we weren't out on patrol because that's when I was alone with my thoughts. I would try to clear my head. It was impossible. These thoughts would just appear. And I would worry.

I thought about what it would be like to be shot –

Curtis Jefferson

Half my day dreams is looking at my cell in the summer, watching TV, like, dang. Just imagine bullets ripping through my body. You know, mother [BLEEP] just come out with a gun, just start shooting everything. And I'm getting hit, everybody's getting hit.

Brandon Caro

I would think what it would feel like to be blown up in an IED, to be pinned down and have the vehicle set ablaze and to burn alive, to be trapped in the truck because the doors were too heavy to cut through, or to pull open.

Curtis Jefferson

Just seeing it with my own eyes, just seeing blood, and me just falling to the ground, like, is it too late for the ambulance? Would I still be alive when the ambulance comes and gets me? That crazy kind of stuff. You sit and think about that stuff, that kind of stuff drive you crazy.

Alex Kotlowitz

For both, reality eventually caught up to their fears. In the spring of 2006, Curtis told us he got caught in a shootout with rival drug dealers. The first bullet to his back spun him around. He got hit four more times in the stomach and in the arm.

As a result, he walks doubled over, like an old man. Because of permanent nerve damage, he falls a lot. And when he's under stress or eats the wrong food, he has bleeding from his intestines.

Brandon too was hurt in a rollover when his Humvee fell off a small cliff. Brandon had been manning the turret and fortunately another soldier pulled him in just as the vehicle rolled. He suffered three fractures of his vertebrae and two herniated disks. And the pain kept him up nights, even after he left Afghanistan.

Both men were on a lot of medications after their injuries. And our sixth similarity may not be so surprising. They self-medicated.

Brandon Caro

I started to drink again. And on the weekends I would drink heavily.

Curtis Jefferson

It makes my body just feel a little better. Just a little basic Mary Jane, that's all.

Brandon Caro

Usually a Crown and Coke was my drink of choice. And I would probably drink at least 5, up to 8, 9, 10 in the night.

Curtis Jefferson

But sometimes it does give me the opposite effect.

Brandon Caro

When I was very, very drunk I would start to cry because of how upset I was.

Curtis Jefferson

Because, you know, when I smoke it puts me on the mellow. Then, you know, you just start thinking. Then that's when all the thoughts just come. Like, where the hell did they just come from? And I'd be like, oh. Some thoughts I think, sometimes I don't want to think about.

Alex Kotlowitz

Echo number seven, they lashed out at friends and family. Curtis had night terrors and would wake in the middle of the night thinking his girlfriend was someone who was trying to shoot him. He'd push her, he'd hit her in the head, he'd call her names.

Curtis Jefferson

I just was like, dang, I know I'm hurting this girl. Like I'm really putting my hands on her like a man, like put marks on her arms. And I said, I'm going. I'm losing it. And that's cra-- and I was like chhh.

Alex Kotlowitz

Brandon had a difficult relationship with a girlfriend, too. They'd get into huge arguments and she'd get scared. One time Brandon got so agitated a friend intervened and tried to calm him down. Brandon punched him. His girlfriend locked herself in her room and called the police.

Brandon Caro

The police came. And I was inside. The police rang the doorbell. And I opened it up. And it was two cops, a guy and a girl cop.

And I asked the guy, is your weapon loaded? And he said, why would you ask me something like that? And I said, because I want you to shoot me in the head.

Curtis Jefferson

I just sat in my bedroom. And I had my gun under my bed in the sneaker box. I had a 40 Mag, big, old, cowboy gun.

And that's when my grandma caught the gun in my mouth. And she just opened the door to make sure I was cool. It just was one of them days she opened the door and I had a gun in my mouth, you know?

I mean, she didn't know what to do. She didn't know to come closer or stay back. She didn't know what to do. So she's looking at me, start [INAUDIBLE] crying.

And she didn't want to come next to me in there. So she's just talking to me the whole time. Like, come on, baby, it's all right. I love you, you're my grandson.

Like you know, your mom didn't leave you out here on earth for this. Now you blessed, you just got shot five times. Like, why are you--?

She said, it's going be all right. We're going to get some help for you and everything. And I just decocked it and put it back in the box and just sat there. And called my homie up and bring some weed around the corner and get high. And that's how that went.

Alex Kotlowitz

Both Brandon and Curtis have gotten help. Brandon's in AA and went through a writing program for veterans at NYU. Curtis is receiving counseling through the program at Drexel that offers help to guys coming off the street. But finally it's here where their stories diverge. Brandon's tour ended and he's now thousands of miles from the dangers of Afghanistan. Curtis still lives in his old neighborhood, where the danger's ongoing.

Curtis Jefferson

When I get more money, I am definitely moving. I'm going to move. That's the project I'm working going on right now. I'm out.

I'm going to live somewhere comfortable, that I know I can walk the neighborhood. You know, I could sit out there on my step all day, all night if I wanted to.

Alex Kotlowitz

Not long ago, a guy was shot and killed down the block from where he lives. And Curtis happened to see the body on the ground.

Curtis Jefferson

And I just was thinking about a lot of the-- I was paused. I just was like, yo, when he shot, like, damn, that boy was on the ground. And that was me. It's just, I'm living. Like, he died. And I was like, damn. And it just felt like I felt all them bullets all over again.

Alex Kotlowitz

Curtis worries that because of the way he walks, perpetually bent over, he looks weak and that people will target him-- rob him, beat him up, shoot him, take revenge. I wonder for someone like Curtis, if it's really post-traumatic stress, since really there's nothing post about it. Brandon, meanwhile, says he doesn't talk to his friends or family about his anger and his nightmares, which he still has regularly. He tried counseling, but didn't like it. So he sought out other veterans who understand what he's been through.

And Curtis now attends group counseling with others who, like himself, were once running the streets. That's the final echo. They've both come to realize that they're not alone.

Ira Glass

Alex Kotlowitz. His books and documentaries include most recently the film *The Interrupters*, which he wrote and co-produced. It's at iTunes, Netflix, Amazon, and on DVD.

War

by Common

<http://www.cleanvideosearch.com/media/action/yt/watch?v=ZRMeRLQ1ufs>
<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1719999/common-war-new-track.jhtml>

After reading the lyrics from "War" by Common, discuss the following questions:

1. In lines 1-9 of the first stanza, the writer makes many comparisons between life in the streets and life during war. What comparisons does he make?
2. Why does he make these connections? Do you think they are valid comparisons? Why do you think Common felt it was important to make these comparisons?

3. What is the writer referring to in the following lines?

*It never stop like the Muslims and Christians
We under-21 gun salute them
Just to go back and salute them
I'm talkin' bout war*



4. In the last nine lines, the writer compares and contrasts the experience of war and the experience of street violence. In what ways is the experience similar? In what ways is it different? What key word does he use to signal a contrast between the two?
5. What do you think Common would say about the experiences of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder of Brandon Caro, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, and Curtis Jefferson, a man living in a violent neighborhood in Chicago?
6. Have you had any experiences similar to those described in the lyrics? Have you ever experienced stress related to violence?

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The Effects of Stress

Stress is a normal part of life, especially in times of change. Stress can be caused by family, financial, legal or health problems, social isolation, difficulty at work or difficulty finding work. There are three primary ways we respond to stress:

1. **Physical (body)**: headaches, tight throat, grinding teeth, pounding heart, high blood pressure, muscle aches, indigestion, constipation, diarrhea, increased perspiration, fatigue, insomnia, frequent illness

2. **Psychological (emotions)**: anxiety, irritability, anger, hypersensitivity, sadness, defensiveness, apathy or depression, thoughts or feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, worthlessness, insecurity or fear, impatience

3. **Behavioral (actions)**: overeating, eating too little, increased use of alcohol or drugs, increased smoking or eating of sugar or junk food, procrastination, withdrawal or isolation from others, neglect of responsibilities, poor personal hygiene, poor performance on the job, change in behavior toward friends or family



What are some of the ways you have responded to stress in the past? What have been some of the physical, psychological or behavioral responses you have had to stress? Be honest. If you can identify how you respond to stress, the better able you will be to develop healthy strategies for handling stress.

Strategies for Responding to Stress

Think about these strategies for preventing stress or dealing with it positively. Have you used any of these strategies before? Have they worked for you? Check each of the strategies you think might work for you.

Reflect

- Allow time every day to think and plan and dream. Meditate, walk, write, pray or sit alone in a quiet place.
- Take time to reflect on and be aware of what you are feeling and experiencing in order to figure out what internal or external problems might be causing stress.
- Try to honestly communicate your thoughts and feelings.
- Listen to your self-talk. Do you criticize yourself or put yourself down? Are you less compassionate and more judgmental of yourself than you are of others? Try not to be too critical of yourself. Treat yourself with kindness and respect.
- Listen to the way you explain your problems to yourself and think about how you respond to problems. Do you blame others instead of taking responsibility? Do you quickly resort to anger when times get tough? Do you make situations worse by doing things that make other people angry with you?

Change your life

- Use your time wisely. Set goals. Make plans to do things that are important to you. Get organized. Lack of structure can lead to stress.
- Take time to think about what fun, free and healthy activities you can integrate into your life on a regular basis.
- Hang around with positive, supportive people. Stay away from people who hurt you or encourage you to engage in negative behavior.
- Say no to negative, harmful behaviors. Put yourself in places where people are doing positive, self-supporting things.

Take good care of yourself

- Find someone who will listen. Seek out people or institutions that can help with practical problems.
- Seek out counseling for emotional or psychological stress.
- Use strategies to stay calm and avoid angry outbursts. Keep a cool head and don't rush to argue with everyone who disagrees with you. Don't act on your first impulse if you feel angry. Give your anger time to cool down so you can respond in a responsible manner -- before you react in a way that you will regret later. If angry impulses interfere with your ability to have healthy relationships, make smart decisions or perform well on the job, seek help.
- Avoid self-medication. Don't use alcohol or drugs as a way to escape from stress. If alcohol or drugs cause you to hurt yourself or others, or if using alcohol or drugs interferes with your ability to stay out of trouble, make smart decisions or perform well on the job, seek help.
- Never drive or use machinery if you have consumed drugs or alcohol. Plan ahead how you will stay safe so you don't put yourself or others in danger.
- Take good care of your health. Find out how to prevent health problems and how to get treatment when you need it.
- Eat well. Try to eat three healthy meals a day. Try to limit caffeine, sugar and junk food.
- Exercise: walk, run, ride a bike, swim, do push-ups or jumping jacks, lift weights. Exercise helps you stay healthy and makes you feel better.
- Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep lowers your immunity and makes you more prone to stress and illness. Lack of sleep can increase anger.
- Seek out positive people and social service agencies which will support and assist you with your needs. Remember, you do not have to endure stress alone.



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People Can Help

Be honest about the people in your life. Who cares about you? Who might be a friend when you need help or support? Whom could you contact when you need assistance or a listening ear?

Who can help you successfully transition from incarceration to life outside?	What can these people do to help you?

People Can Hurt

Sometimes people can make life difficult and make it hard to make positive changes -- even if they don't mean to. People can be discouraging, negative or abusive. To make a fresh start and make positive changes, to take care of yourself and others, whom do you need to avoid?

Are there people you need to avoid in order to stay strong and positive?	How can you keep these people from influencing you negatively?

Places Can Help

Be honest about the places in your life. Where can you go that is safe, peaceful and full of positive, successful people? What community resources can support your transition?

What places can help you successfully transition from incarceration to life outside?	What can these places do to help you?

Places Can Hurt

Sometimes places can make life difficult and make it hard to make positive change. Places can exert negative influence and surround you with people who might tempt or encourage you to do the opposite of what you really want to do. To make a fresh start and make positive changes, to take care of yourself and others, what places do you need to avoid?

Are there places you need to avoid in order to stay strong and positive?	How can you keep these places from influencing you negatively?

Solving Problems by Sending “I” Messages

A “You Message” describes a problem, but it does so by blaming the other person and not accepting any responsibility. “You Messages” usually make the listener feel guilty or angry, and it is much harder for him or her to try to work out a solution.

An “I Message,” on the other hand, tells how a person feels without blaming others. A person who talks about a problem using an “I message” communicates responsibility and willingness to talk honestly about how he or she feels – in a way that encourages the other person to talk and doesn’t make him or her feel defensive or angry.



Read the examples of “You Messages” below and ask yourself: Why would these statements make it hard for the listener to hear what is being said? How would the statements probably make the listener feel? What might the listener say or do when he or she hears these “You Messages”?

Read the examples of “I Messages” and ask yourself: Would it be easier to solve a problem if a co-worker or friend described it this way, telling how she or he feels without blaming others?

You Message	I Message
You are so loud! Will you please shut up?	When there is a lot of noise, I get easily distracted.
You’re constantly around me! You are such a pest!	I need some time to myself.
Your perfume is really annoying.	I’m allergic to perfume.
You are always late!	When you come late, I have too much work to do.
You never pay attention to me.	I feel left out when everybody hangs out without me.

Solving Problems by Sending “I” Messages, continued

Read the examples of “You Messages” and “I Messages” below and ask yourself:

- What might the listener say or feel when he or she hears each of these messages?
- Which one might make the listener feel attacked and defensive?
- Which one would make it easier for the listener to hear what is being said?
- Which one might give the listener a chance to respond in a positive way?

Fill in the blank boxes, then discuss as a class how a speaker might express himself or herself using an “I Message” instead of the “You Message.”

You Message	I Message
You keep the thermostat too cold!	I have a hard time concentrating when it’s so cold.
You talk constantly!	It’s hard for me to work when it isn’t quiet.
You ask too many personal questions. It’s none of your business.	It makes me uncomfortable to answer so many personal questions.
You are really clumsy. When you knocked those boxes over, you made a mess.	
You never clean up!	
You never listen to me!	
You do a sloppy job and make a lot of mistakes!	
You are so bossy!	

Assertiveness: A Good Tool for Dealing with Stress

How do you deal with stress? Do you typically respond to difficult situations in a passive, aggressive and assertive behavior? Does your response help or hurt?

A person who expresses feelings in a passive manner:

- speaks quietly or doesn't speak at all.
- makes indirect comments to hint at how she feels instead of saying what she really means. (For example, the boss asks a worker to stay late. Instead of saying "I won't be able to stay late because I have a meeting with my son's teacher," a person who expresses her feelings in a passive manner might say, "I hope my son doesn't get in trouble because I have to miss the teacher meeting.")
- doesn't confront people directly because he doesn't like conflicts or arguments.
- feels intimidated, shy or afraid if the person he is talking to is aggressive or demanding.
- doesn't let the other person know how she is feeling and may be resentful that her feelings are not understood or her needs are not being met (even though she has never told anyone).

A person who expresses feelings in an aggressive manner:

- yells or screams to get her thoughts or opinions heard.
- dominates the discussion and doesn't let the other person talk.
- uses disrespectful, abusive or insulting language when talking to another person.
- threatens the other person with revengeful actions or physical abuse.
- may bottle up feelings until she explodes.
- may use physical violence. (It is possible for a person to be aggressive even if he never gets physical).

Assertiveness, continued

A person who expresses feelings in an assertive manner:

- Take time to clarify for yourself how you feel or what you think about a subject.
- Speak in a firm, clear voice.
- Make "I" statements. Take responsibility for your own feelings without placing blame on anyone else.
- Avoid disrespectful, insulting, abusive and threatening language at all times.
- Say why you feel the way you do and why you want the situation changed. Offer suggestions. If you take time to think about the problem ahead of time, you will be prepared to offer solutions.
- Listen to what the other person says. If the other person doesn't seem to understand your point, re-state your feelings in a clear, assertive manner.
- Excuse yourself if you need to. If you feel you cannot control yourself without acting aggressively, take charge by excusing yourself and arranging to talk about the problem when you are able to be calm and assertive.

When have you expressed yourself in a passive or aggressive manner? How did it go? How could you have handled it better?

When have you expressed yourself in an assertive manner? How did it go?

Assertiveness, continued

How we handle difficult or stressful situations has an impact on the outcomes. How we handle situations also has an impact on how we feel. Analyze these responses to stressful situations. Discuss each response and whether it is being handled passively, aggressively or assertively. What do you think would be the outcome of each behavior for the actor and the other person in each situation?

You are served a cold hamburger in the cafeteria. You:

- _____ scream, "This food is horrible! Give me my money back now!"
- _____ think, *This is cold, but I don't want to bother anybody. I'll eat it anyway.*
- _____ say, "Excuse me, but my hamburger is cold. I'd like a hot one, please."

You get to class late and find that the instructor has locked the door. You:

- _____ think, "I'm an idiot," walk away, and decide not to come to class anymore.
- _____ bang on the door until the teacher answers, then yell, "Why'd you lock me out? It's not my fault the bus was late!"
- _____ wait till after class and tell the teacher why you were late. Take responsibility and ask for homework to make up what you missed.

You fail a test. You:

- _____ say, "You can't fail me! You never taught me anything! This is your fault!"
- _____ say, "May I make an appointment to discuss this test with you?"
- _____ think, *I don't know why I failed or what I did wrong, but I'm afraid to ask.*

Somebody steps in front of you in line. You:

- _____ say nothing, but feel irritated.
- _____ say, "Excuse me, but there is a line."
- _____ shout, "What do you think you're DOING?"

A supervisor gives you directions for how to do a task. You don't understand the directions. You:

- _____ think, *I'll try to do it anyway. I hope I don't do it wrong.*
- _____ say, "These directions are stupid. You never explain things!"
- _____ ask, "Can you explain this again? I don't want to do it wrong."

Assertiveness, continued

You are driving and a car cuts in front of you. You:

- _____ roll down the window and curse at the driver.
- _____ blow your horn briefly to let him know you were cut off, but let him pass.
- _____ mumble to yourself about stupid drivers.

You are in a parking lot when someone takes the parking spot you were driving toward. You:

- _____ speed up then slam on the brakes to scare him.
- _____ think, *It's not that big a deal*, then keep driving till you find another spot.
- _____ say nothing, but feel angry and frustrated.

You're holding a paint bucket at work. A co-worker walks by, not paying attention, and accidentally knocks it out of your hand and onto the floor. You:

- _____ think, *I'm scared of this guy. I don't want to say anything*, then clean it up.
- _____ go up to your co-worker, shove him, then demand he clean up the mess.
- _____ say, "Excuse me, but you knocked this paint out of my hand. Can you help me clean it up?"

Passive, Aggressive or Assertive?

With a partner, make up a scenario from your imagination or describe something that has happened to you in the past. List three ways a person in this situation might respond: passively, aggressively or assertively. Share your stories with the class and discuss the best way to handle each situation.

Meditation and Relaxation Techniques Can Help Relieve Stress

Try this simple meditation technique. Sit in a comfortable position in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted or disturbed. Close your eyes and repeat a simple, one-syllable word over and over (try the word "one" or the word "oh.") You might also repeat a meaningful phrase you want to affirm, for example: "I am good," or "I am calm." Try to sit and repeat the sound, the word or the phrase for five minutes. Try to let go of other thoughts as they come into your head and try to keep your breathing regular, slow and deep. Listen to your breath.

How do you feel after meditating? Do you think this is a technique that might work to help you relieve stress?

Other methods can also help to relax your mind and body and relieve stress. You might feel calmer and less stressed after walking in the park, stretching, doing yoga, jogging, listening to peaceful music, or reading a book. Some people enjoy fishing, bike riding or taking a bath to help them relax.

What have you done in the past to help relieve stress? What methods might you try in the future?

Peaceful Visualization Can Help Relieve Stress

Try this simple visualization technique. Sit in a comfortable position in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted or disturbed. Close your eyes, open your hands and uncross your legs.

Pick a peaceful place and visualize it. Breathe deeply as you imagine yourself in that place. This place might be a beach, a park, the library, a school, a home, a street. What you visualize will be extremely personal.

Picture the details of the place. Enjoy all of the things you remember seeing in this place.

Imagine the sounds you would hear there. Enjoy your memories of your favorite sounds.

Imagine the smells you would smell there. Enjoy your memories of your favorite smells.

What place did you visualize? Why did you choose this place?

How do you feel after doing positive visualization? Do you think this is a technique that might work to help you relieve stress?



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Nature Can Heal: Words of Wisdom

A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.

Gertrude Jekyll

Plants teach us about the human condition,
what it means to be fully human.

Judith Handelsman

Look at the trees, look at the birds, look at the clouds, look at the stars... and if you have eyes you will be able to see that the whole existence is joyful. Everything is simply happy. Trees are happy for no reason; they are not going to become prime ministers or presidents and they are not going to become rich and they will never have any bank balance.

Look at the flowers -- for no reason.

It is simply unbelievable how happy flowers are.

Osho

Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet
and the winds long to play with your hair.

Kahlil Gibran

I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.... People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back.

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

You can't be suspicious of a tree.

Hal Borland

Nature is my medicine.

Sara Moss-Wolfe

*Nature holds all the answers -- go outside and ask
some questions --open your heart
and listen to the response!*

Amethyst Wyldfyre

Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth
are never alone or weary of life.

Rachel Carson

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

Albert Einstein

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in,
where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.

John Muir

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

William Shakespeare

Pick one of the quotes and write about what it means to you.

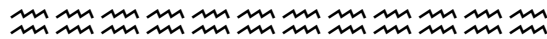
Write about a time when being in nature has been healing for you.

~~~~~ **STRESS MESS** ~~~~~

Marcus lives in a crowded neighborhood full of run-down townhouses. His apartment is in disrepair and some of the appliances don't work; occasionally the refrigerator goes on the blink and he comes home to find that some of his food is ruined. When he calls the landlord, he gets a promise that the problem will be fixed soon, but it never is.

At night there are often parties and it can get pretty loud. On those nights, Marcus has trouble sleeping, and then wakes up in the morning exhausted and angry. He manages to get through the day with a lot of Pepsi and coffee. Lately he has been dealing with a cold that won't seem to go away. He doesn't have health insurance and doesn't know where to go to see a doctor.

Marcus has started classes at the local community college and is having a hard time in College Algebra. He doesn't really understand the assignments and sometimes doesn't hand them in, so his grades are poor. His mother has diabetes and seems to be sick a lot lately, so when she calls him she asks him to run errands for her. He feels annoyed a lot because it's hard to balance everything. His boss has been giving him a hard time for missing days and he's worried he might get fired any day. His friend Jake used to call him to ask him to play soccer with him, but hasn't called lately. He hasn't gone fishing in a long time.



*What suggestions would you give Marcus for dealing with the various stresses in his life?*

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