

Stress and connections



The end of the school year is a stressful time for many students and teachers. Exams, changing grade levels or moving to a new school, graduation and other changes can all induce stress. In these stressful moments, many of us retreat into ourselves so that we can focus, limiting communication with our friends and increasing our isolation.

Researcher Shawn Achor writes, "Time with family and friends...these are the first things to go when we're in crisis mode. But even though we're giving our work our undivided attention, our productivity is declining, and as the deadline nears, our goal seems to be slipping further and further out of reach. And so we hunker down, shut off our cell phones, retreat into the bunker of ourselves and double-lock the door." Unfortunately, brain research tells us that this is exactly the **WRONG** thing to do. Achor writes, "The most successful people take the exact opposite approach. Instead of turning inward, they actually hold tighter to their social support. Instead of divesting, they invest. Not only are these people happier, but they are more productive, engaged,

energetic, and resilient.”

Stress is inevitable; we know it is going to happen. It makes sense, then, to prepare for it – to make stress management proactive. Here are five simple activities you can do as an individual, or with students, to help their brains focus on the positive, and thus be more resilient in the face of stress.

1. **Acts of kindness** – spend two minutes each day sending someone in your support network (family, friend, classmate, colleague, etc.) an e-mail or text praising or thanking them for something that person has done well
2. **Journaling** – spend five minutes writing down what positive moments you experience each day
3. **3 Gratitudes** – share with a partner three new things you are thankful each day
4. **Meditate** – let your brain focus on one thing instead of many things
5. **Exercise**

For more information on proactively dealing with stress read Shawn Achor’s book [The Happiness Advantage](#), or watch his TED Talk.

Learn more about character education.