

STUMIN

SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
FOCUS

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE

MARCH 13, 2024

Week 2 of a 3-week series
about stress

BOTTOM LINE

When everything
is everywhere,
joy is always a choice.

SCRIPTURE

*Around midnight
Paul and Silas were praying
and singing hymns to God,
and the other prisoners
were listening.*

Acts 16:25 NLT

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To point students
toward the power they have
to choose joy,
even in their stress

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: Stress caused by an unknown future is something we all experience. The fact that we can't control what's ahead in our lives can leave us feeling overwhelmed and anxious. For middle schoolers, the stress over uncertainty is real, but they may not be able to pinpoint exactly what they're feeling or why they're feeling it. That's simply because their brains just aren't there yet! For starters, they're specifically wired to focus on the here and now in this phase rather than the future. With that, their self-awareness is still developing, so even if they are stressed about the future, they may not be able to identify it as that. Since naming the causes of their stress can be a bit abstract, don't be afraid to share an example or two from your own life to help make this life skill a little more tangible. Then, talk through how choosing joy helped (or could have helped) you through the stressful time in your life. Remind them that choosing joy doesn't mean dismissing or downplaying their stress. Instead, it's a chance to acknowledge their stress while also choosing to trust God, remember God's faithfulness, and find ways to be grateful ... not in place of their stress but in the middle of it!

>> DURING GROUP

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.

DISCUSS THIS:

- If you could choose one thing to know about your future, what would you choose?
- What's exciting to you when you think about the future?
- What's stressful to you when you think about the future?
- How does it feel to know that God knows your future?
- Is it possible to be stressed and choose joy at the same time? Have you ever done it? If so, share about the experience.
- How might remembering what God has done help us choose joy, both today and for the future? What is something God has done in your life that brought you joy?
- How might finding things to be thankful for help us choose joy, both today and for the future? What are you thankful for today?

DO THIS:

Before you close your time together, ask your students fill out the provided journal page to help them process what it looks like to choose joy for themselves.

STUMIN

SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

HIGH
SCHOOL
FOCUS

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE

MARCH 13, 2024

Week 2 of a 3-week series
about stress

BOTTOM LINE

When everything
is everywhere,
joy is always a choice.

SCRIPTURE

*Around midnight
Paul and Silas were praying
and singing hymns to God,
and the other prisoners
were listening.*

Acts 16:25 NLT

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To point students
toward the power they have
to choose joy,
even in their stress

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: This week, the conversation centers around choosing joy in the midst of our stress and uncertainty. There's a balance you want to find in talking about joy here. While you want students to know joy is possible in any and all circumstances, you also don't want them to feel as though they have to downplay or get over their stress in order to choose it. Choosing joy isn't a spiritual band-aid or a quick fix to their stress and worry. Instead, it's a chance to be honest about the stress and worry they're feeling while still choosing to trust and experience God's goodness in the middle of it.

>> DURING GROUP

Create meaningful conversations. Adjust the questions as needed and ask thoughtful follow-up questions as the conversation unfolds. Don't feel like you need to answer every question.

DISCUSS THIS:

- Think of a recent moment of joy you experienced. Tell us about it!
- When you think about the future, what excites you? What stresses you out?
- Why do you think considering what may or may not happen in the future can add stress to our lives?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you struggle with not being in control?
- How do lack of control and stress work together?
- What surprises you about the way Paul and Silas responded to an uncertain, stressful circumstance?
- In your own words, what does it mean to choose joy?
- Do you think it's possible to choose joy when you're stressed? Why or why not? Have you ever done it? If so, share about the experience.
- Do you ever feel like you have to "fake" joy? If applicable, share about a time you did this. How can joy and stress both be real at the same time?
- How can choosing joy help us navigate our stress over an uncertain future?

TRY THIS:

What does choosing joy look like for you? Because this can be an abstract concept, one of the best ways you can help your students understand and apply it to their lives is by modeling it for them. Be open and honest about how you've chosen joy in your own stressful or uncertain seasons. Your transparency here may be the key to making an abstract idea more concrete for your students.