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Topic: What are some innovative and creative approaches to help other young people cope with stress?

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### **What are some innovative and creative approaches to help other young people cope with stress?**

I'm no stranger to stress. For most of my college life, I've lived a life of going to school, committing to extracurriculars, finishing work and studying before bed. This barely left time for relaxation and leisure pursuits. I was stressed, but my attitude towards work was influenced by my Japanese heritage where extreme dedication to one's work is obsessed over. As a result, I kept working, never learning how to cope with stress and just hoped that it would go away. Well, life isn't rainbows and butterflies so inevitably, this stress built up and I eventually cracked.

So how do we cope with the stress that seems to be overwhelming us? The answer lies in spreading it out. Think about it this way, if you put lots of pressure onto one region of an egg, it will crack. However, if you spread the pressure around the egg, it becomes harder to crack. This idea also applies to the stress in our lives and fortunately, the "pressure" can be spread out through the practice of something called *mokuso*.

When I used to practise kendo, we would practise "mokuso" before and after every training session. It was a form of meditation that focused on decluttering our minds, allowing stress to be forgotten. We leave stress from our regular lives out of the dojo so we can dedicate our time to kendo. After training, we leave the stress of learning kendo in the dojo so we don't slap civilians with bamboo swords. This is mokuso applied to one aspect of life but it can be taken further and apply to everything. It's like book genres. If we sort books into individual boxes based on genre, it's easy to focus on one genre at a time and finish every book. This is an example of compartmentalisation achieved through mokuso and it allows us to effectively cope with stress, resolving it in one aspect of life at a time. Times like COVID have proven how easily stress

from sudden events can crawl into our lives and overwhelm us which makes the regular practice of mokuso so important.

Now you've read quite a lot about mokuso but how do we practise it? Before starting any activity, such as going through a day of school or even going to bed, spend some time practising mokuso. No need to do it formally, just close your eyes, breathe and separate the activity you're about to do from everything else in life. Focusing on one activity at a time prevents stress from other aspects of life clouding our minds and hindering performance. It allows us to focus on resolving stress from the current activity we are engaging in. Say I am in class, my current stress is to finish the work on time. However, I may have other stresses in life such as completing a mental health essay. This causes a buildup in stress and overwhelms me. But by practising mokuso before class even begins, I'll forget about my other stresses and dedicate my time to finishing the work. Now, my stress from class has been resolved and later on, I can dedicate my time to resolve the stress from my essay.

When stress from one aspect of life isn't contained, it enters other aspects and adds to existing stress, building up until we become overwhelmed. The best way to cope with stress is to prevent it from building up until it breaks us down with no mercy. Mokuso can assist in achieving this and if it's practised among young people, they'll be able to cope with stress for life.