

Students cope with stressors of daily school life

By Allie Lincoln and Erin O'Farrell

Water she understands. One deep breath, then go. It all comes naturally. There's no way she'll drown. Homework, however, pulls freshman Erica Batliner under the current.

Papers spill from her binder as she rushes down the hall. The students around her form a blur, their laughter echoing off the walls. She can't help but push all the noise away, her main focus demanding all of her attention. Homework. Batliner shoulders her heavy backpack and struggles toward the bus, the thought of her swim practice looming over her.

"Stress is when you're doing something, and you get really overwhelmed," said Batliner. "You overthink things, and you get a feeling in your chest. It's panic. That's really what it is."

Batliner understands stress. She's had to juggle all of her school work alongside extracurricular activities like swimming and running. Swimming has been a part of her life for eight years now, and she's been running track and cross country since third grade.

"The worst is when I have sports and tests. I have three-hour practices, and then I have three tests. It's really stressful!"

Despite it being her first year at FC, freshman counselor Emily Sowder is already aware of how students feel as they attempt to balance the worry of school along with extracurricular activities. She said students, especially freshmen, will come to her asking for help and advice weekly. It occurs mostly at the beginning of the school year, when high school is unfamiliar territory to these ninth graders.

"Stress is any instance or situation you have in your life that adds pressure," said Sowder. "In my mind, it might be unnecessary, but to you all it isn't. It's very real to you. What might seem minor to you may seem like a huge deal to someone else."

According to the American Institute of Stress, Sowder is on the right track. The Institute defines stress as a person's response to a factor in life that requires he or she to make changes.

Sowder and Batliner both agree that there are many different tactics to relieve that anxiety, sports being Batliner's favorite, even though they often add to the tension.

"When you exercise, your body makes endorphins which make you happy, so you forget about everything. If you're enjoying what you're doing, you're not thinking about school," said Batliner.

Freshman Logan McNeeley also uses his after-school activities to subdue his stress. He said theatre has been his go-to way of relaxation for nearly eight years now. One of the reasons he participates in different activities is to get

rid of his worry.

These interests may be entertaining, but as most students know, they can add even more pressure to daily life. It can be extremely hard to find the perfect balance between keeping up with homework and extracurricular activities, even those we enjoy.

"Balance is usually a stretch. You gotta just get through it," said senior Elizabeth Knotts. Knotts is heavily involved in cross country and art.

Sowder knows a different course of action commonly used by students that may decrease tension and stabilize the stress felt from daily life.



Erin O'Farrell/ Visionary

"Communication is key to many situations. I think a lot of [relieving stress] is done by talking to friends, parents, teachers, and counselors, but I think you rely on your friends a lot. They can comfort you in the fact that you all are in the same boat," said Sowder.

Batliner frequently uses her friends to cope with stressful situations. She admits that she feels like she can talk and rant to them about feeling anxious anytime because she knows they'll always listen.

Knotts agreed. "Usually just talking to somebody who genuinely cares about you and will actually listen is a good thing. Sometimes the biggest thing for me is just somebody saying, 'Yeah, I understand where you're com-

ing from... It's okay to be freaking out,'" said Knotts.

Sowder's advice mirrored both students' feelings.

"Having other people to count on and empathize with and understand what you're going through is an added bonus. I would totally encourage you guys to choose good friends. It's a good idea to surround yourself with people who inject happiness into your life as opposed to the opposite," said Sowder.

Students often use friends to lessen the strain of school, but they also have individual ways to help them meet their very personal goals.

"I like to sit down and read a book, but sometimes I also like to tell jokes," said junior Morgan Strong. "Nothing calms you down more than a good laugh and a smile."

There may even be things teachers could do differently to help cut down on the build-up of tests, quizzes, and projects. Each class brings new weekly challenges.

"Let us know all our homework in advance on Monday. That way, I can plan out my week differently," advised Batliner. "Some teachers do that with calendars, but then others completely don't. A lot of them focus on their subject so they really put it on."

Students can also find ways to prevent stress from ever happening. Batliner said she plans ahead of time so that she is prepared for any upcoming homework or tests.

"Try to use your planner, and don't just fill out that day," said Batliner. "Fill out things in advance. When I'm at sports practice, at the end, I'm already planning out what I need to absolutely get done and what can wait until tomorrow."

Sowder said students shouldn't put quite so much pressure on themselves to avoid the unnecessary panic.

"It's personal expectations," said Sowder. "You will put pressure on yourself, but too much pressure is unnecessary. You need to take a step back and think - What am I so worried about that I can put on the backburner?"

However, some students have trouble trying to see the whole picture and sort through their homework. Maybe all of it's due the next day, or maybe they have three tests coming up for which they absolutely need study time. Sowder said that for those situations, students need to address their concerns.

Knotts finds herself taking that advice. "I hold myself to a really high standard. I try to get a second opinion when I'm unhappy with something in order to put it into perspective and calm down."

Stress is a part of student lives, but each person addresses that stress in unique ways.

Sowder said, "Stress comes and goes. I think it's inevitable, but you can gain such valuable skills if you can learn to work through that stress in a healthy way."