

# XS STRESS

TEENS TAKE CONTROL

Sarah is a punk rocker who grew up in foster care and group homes and whose dozens of tattoos hide the scars from her cutting. Jarrel is an active teen (cheerleader and cadet) consistently called "faggot" — until he fights back. Then there's Kira, pigeon-holed as a bad kid; it turns out she has dyslexia and nobody knew it.



These three youths tell their stories in **XS STRESS: Teens Take Control** — an essential guide to staying afloat while navigating the choppy waters of adolescence. It's a time when youth undergo big changes and assume new responsibilities, juggling school, family and friends. Throw in work, dating, exams, racist remarks and extracurricular activities, and it's no wonder teens get knocked off balance.

The film also features 16-year-old spoken word artist Kyra Shaughnessy and a diverse chorus of young voices who provide running commentary — making **XS STRESS** an insightful report from the teens of today.

Made in close collaboration with a youth advisory council, **XS STRESS** is fun and full of good advice. You won't find any adult experts here. Instead, the film offers insight into the stresses in young people's lives and the coping strategies they've come up with to deal with them.

### Users' guide printed on the inside of this videojacket.

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Sound Recordist **Raymond Marcoux**

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Art Director **Robin A. Paterson**

Original Music

**Janet Lumb and Dino Giancola**

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Re-recording **Luc Léger**

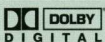
**28 minutes, 5 seconds**

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VHS  
C 9104 240

 Closed-captioned.  
A decoder is required.

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Canada  
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Web Site

1 800 267-7710  
1 800 542-2164  
(514) 283-9450  
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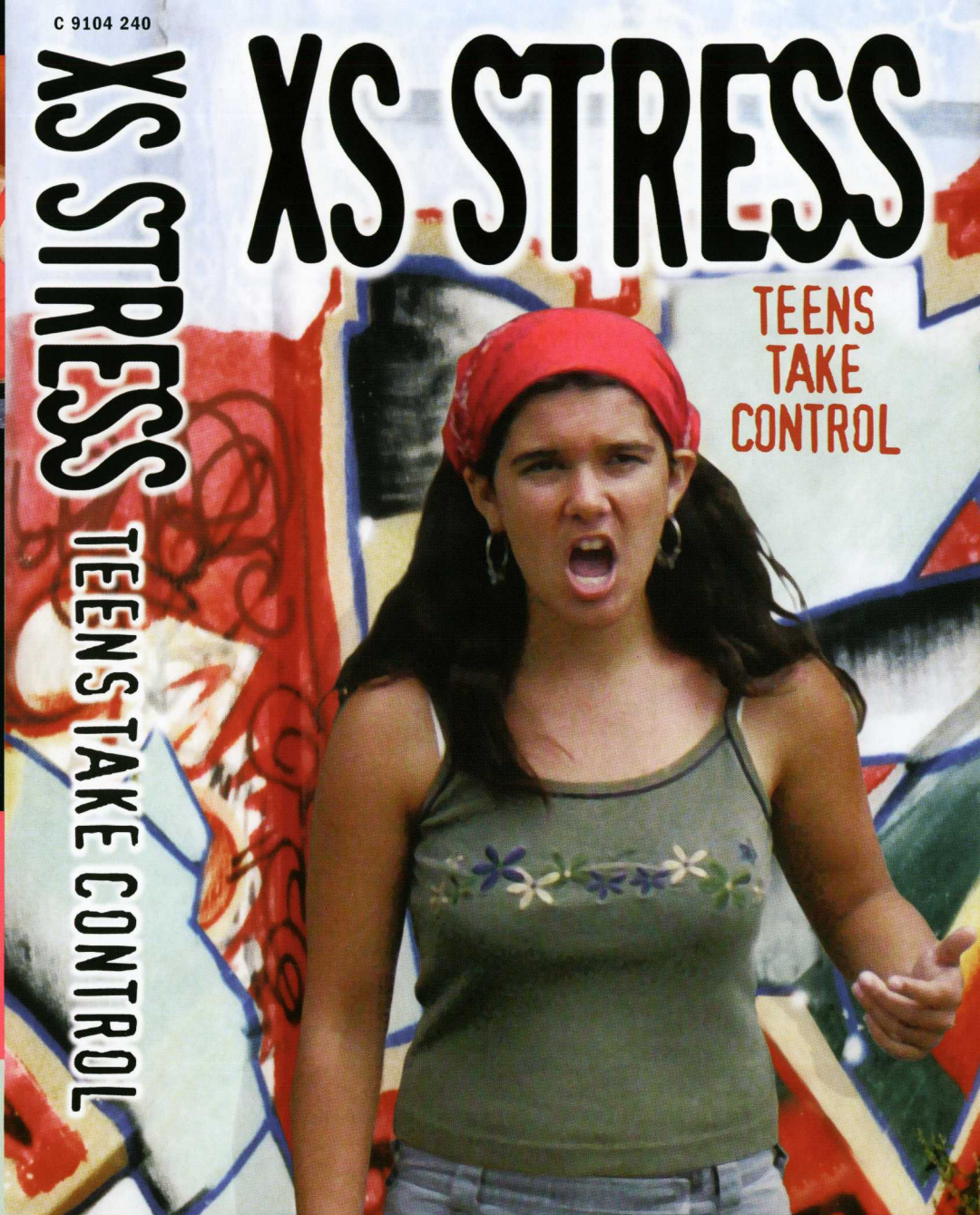
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A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION



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## USERS' GUIDE

### Before Viewing

The following activities may help young people get more out of the film.

- 1.** Write a journal entry describing a time when you were really stressed out. Describe your solutions: Were they healthy or not? What could you have done differently?
- 2.** Complete a confidential survey on the problem of stress within the school or community. Share the results, but make sure to maintain anonymity.
- 3.** How many types of stress can you think of? See which ones come up in the film.
- 4.** Research various issues surrounding teen stress. For instance, when is stress at its highest? What are the links between gender, stereotyping and stress?
- 5.** As a group, brainstorm reasons people bully or stereotype. Stereotyping can come in many forms, including homophobia and racial discrimination. What are the personal consequences of stereotyping, both on the people doing it and the victims?
- 6.** Use your school's Code of Conduct or Mission Statement to start a discussion of helpful policies to guide student behaviour. Working in small groups, update these documents to provide proactive suggestions for how people within the school should treat each other. After viewing the film, revisit these updated versions and decide if they need further revision. You may want to take the revisions to the administration of your school.
- 7.** Learn more about how the film was made and the input of youth in making it by visiting <[www.nfb.ca/yac](http://www.nfb.ca/yac)>.

### Discussion Questions (after viewing the film)

- 1.** List the stresses mentioned in the video. Can you think of any other stressful situations or causes of stress?
- 2.** Describe the best moment in this video. Why was it the best ?
- 3.** How did Kira, Sarah and Jarrel feel when their stressful situations became overwhelming? What did they do to handle them?
- 4.** Discuss the many people available to teens experiencing stress. Parents, teachers, school counsellors, youth workers and friends are just a few. Raise your hand if you would feel comfortable going to someone within your school. (This is a good visual reminder that support exists within the school community.) If you wouldn't talk to someone at school, who could you turn to? Share a list of resource people.
- 5.** Is there bullying in your school? What form does it take? How do students and the administration handle it? How can young people give support if people are being discriminated against? How would the target of stereotyping feel if someone offered them support? Brainstorm what people can do when they hear stereotypical comments. Role-play some situations. Be sure to include a good discussion of how both sides felt during this activity.
- 6.** There is a lot of social pressure on youth. Is it too much? What pressures exist today that other generations didn't have to face? (You may think about the pressure to perform, to own all of the latest gadgets, to look a certain way.) How do you feel about this pressure?

7. **XS Stress** was made with the advice of a youth advisory council and features only youth – no experts. Why do you think the filmmakers took this approach? How would the film be different if it included expert opinions?

8. What were your first impressions of Sarah, Kira, Jarrel and Kyra on film? Did your views change? If so, what helped change them?

9. Two of the key issues in **XS Stress** are discrimination and stereotyping based on appearance, and homophobia. Schools remain rife with homophobia, intolerance and gender stereotyping. How do these things play out in your school? What are effective strategies to prevent homophobia and stereotyping in schools? In the community? How do you personally deal with them?

## Quotations from the Film to Discuss



### SARAH – 20 YEARS OLD

*“I started very superficially cutting and then it gradually became more and more and a lot more serious. It was never to kill myself; it was just for the rush... just knowing that I had control over something made me feel better.”*

What is it like when you feel out of control? What can you do to regain control?



### KIRA – 17 YEARS OLD

*“I was dyslexic through all of my school years and I didn’t know it and my parents didn’t know it and my teachers didn’t know it... They just thought I was a big mouth and a troubled child who wanted to disrupt the class and... I got this temper.”*

Are you good at handling anger? What do you do with your anger? What resources are available if you want to work on anger management?



### JARREL – 17 YEARS OLD

*“One day I just told them. You are wasting your time. I know who I am and you don’t. You probably just bully me because you are insecure yourselves. Standing up to them really made a difference and they went away.”*

What do you think of this strategy? Have you ever had to stand up to someone – maybe even a friend – and say no? Was it difficult?



### KYRA – 16 YEARS OLD

Excerpt from *Stress: This is my Life* (spoken word piece)

*“This is my life, tryin’ to be like the rest, be like the best, dress to impress, pass every test with 90 percent, no less and yes the stress it gets me down, wishing to drown it out and all around they shout and shout, can’t take the sound, their expectations pound out a path for me, see I need attention, I breathe acceptance, family keeps neglecting me so I try to please but they don’t see the effort only the resentment, discontent meant to send the message of my burden.”*

Did you connect with this piece? Do you have a favourite line? Explain your choice.

## Extension Activities

1. Pretend that you were the director of this film. Write one story that you would include that wasn’t already in the film.

2. Write a journal entry on what you do with stress.

3. Discuss specific stresses people have at your school. (If you did the pre-screening survey activity, you could use it here.) Is there a wide range of stresses? Do you consider all stresses equal or can they be ranked?

4. Pretend that you are Sarah, Kira, Jarrel or Kyra, and write a diary entry.

5. Reflect in writing on this topic: What are the major areas of stress in your life? What can you do differently to decrease the stress in your life? What can your parents do? What can your teachers do? You may choose to share these responses with your teachers or peers.

## Creative Activities

1. Create a song, film, collage, story, spoken word, Web site or painting about stress or one of the issues in the film.

2. Create posters for teens. You may choose to offer advice on dealing with stress or raise awareness on one of the ideas explored in the film. Plaster them all over your school!

## Resources

**Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or <a href="mailto:kidshelp.sympatico.ca">kidshelp.sympatico.ca**

Other NFB titles of interest. (To order visit <a href="http://www.nfb.ca/store">www.nfb.ca/store</a> or call 1-800-267-7710 for Canada or 1-800-542-2164 for the USA.)

**Peace@School** (Order number 183E9304214): A comprehensive program for building a culture of peace. Features 2 DVDs (one for teachers, one for students) and workbooks.

**ShowPeace series** (Order number 193C0002089): Short, funny animated films for discussing conflict resolution.

**Teen Abuse Prevention Package** (Order number 193C9199125): Features *Love Taps* and *A Love that Kills*, two films on violence in teen dating.

**Colour Blind** (Order number C919923): Frank depiction of racism in high schools, with teens speaking from their own experiences.

**Youth Suicide Prevention Package** (Order number 193C9100121): Two open and honest films. One explores how a young man turned his life around following suicide attempts; the other looks at how one family copes following a teen suicide.

**Responding to Homophobia: A Package for Teens** (Order number 193C9101181): Includes the documentary *In Other Words* and the drama *One of Them*. Both films focus on homophobia and discrimination rather than sexual behaviour.

**It’s a Girl’s World.** Shunning, whispering, mean looks and an obsession with social power: inside the world of 10-year-old girls. Available in a number of different versions. Please consult the Web site for more details.

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### Notes

1. Facilitators should be prepared for the possibility that those in the group viewing the film may disclose sensitive personal experiences. Direct students in crisis to appropriate local resources (such as a counsellor) or to Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868.

2. Sixteen-year-old spoken word performer Kyra Shaughnessy is featured throughout **XS Stress**. Spoken word is a form of poetry that lies between speaking and hip hop. It is different from rap and this should be pointed out before the film is shown. It is often done with a musical background, but emphasis is kept on the speaker.

3. As a bonus, the DVD of **XS Stress** includes the full version of Kyra's performance piece, **Stress: This Is My Life**. It is ideal for delving deeper into the stresses of teen life or as a way to introduce spoken word, in English or drama classes, for instance. It can also be used to encourage students to produce their own spoken word pieces.

4. **XS Stress** deliberately focuses on young people's own experiences, rather than relying on expert commentary. In keeping with this spirit, consider involving youth in organizing a screening of the film or in your classroom presentation. See if there is a group within the school or community willing to host a screening and help publicize it or have a student pre-screen the film and present it to the class as a project. Other ideas include having youth talk it up online, make a poster or announce it over the PA. Allow young people to be ambassadors for the film.

5. These activities are suggestions. They can be used on their own, or as part of larger – even school-wide – projects.

