Stress in the education system is a big problem for students, parents and teachers, because it can impact upon physical and mental health, and academic progress. Stress is defined as the ‘function of the demands placed on us and our ability to meet them’ (Kids Health, 2014). Stress can affect everyone, even children. In adolescence, both academic and social pressures can lead to increased stress levels. A suitable intervention is needed to tackle the issue of stress within the education system, particularly at GCSE level, where grades achieved can directly impact upon the students’ future life opportunities.

Research has shown the impact of stress on adolescence, thus proving that stress is a problem within the education system. Torsheim and Wold (2001) found that students with high levels of school-related stress had more physical complaints, such as dizziness, headaches and stomach aches, all of which can increase stress levels and lead to missing school due to illness. They also found that those with no or little social support had higher levels of stress (Torsheim and Wold, 2001), showing the importance of social support in minimising stress. Therefore, stress at school is proven to be a physical and mental problem for students.

There are many theories that attempt to explain why stress occurs and how it can be managed; these include the Cognitive Appraisal Theory by Lazarus (1991). This theory is based around environmental appraisals and subsequent coping. Stress can be caused by various environmental inputs, which range from uncertainty to physical harm (Lazarus, 1991). Typically, stressors are external to us, however, they can be internal, such as imagining negative scenarios (Lazarus, 1991). Stress is accumulative, meaning that lots of small stressors can cause the same level of stress as one big stressor (Lazarus, 1991). A primary appraisal is used to assess the situation, and a secondary appraisal is then used to think about ways it can be resolved, through coping (Lazarus, 1991). This coping can be through problem-focused or emotion focused strategies. This can either go well and the stress is reduced, or it can go badly and reappraise the stressor, leading to more stress (Lazarus, 1991).

A five stage intervention has been proposed to solve the problem of stress in the education system, specifically for those in the GCSE years of year 10 and 11. Stage 1 is to provide additional classes to help children that are struggling academically, because more support academically should mean less stress. These classes would be every Monday, as homework tends to be attempted at the weekend, meaning that the issues they had would be fresh in their minds. These classes would be run both at lunchtime and after school, and ran by 2 teachers per year group, as one teacher would not be sufficient. Stage 2 is to introduce peer mentoring by sixth form or a nearby college students to the GCSE students, as Torsheim and Wold (2001) stressed the importance of social support. Sixth form/college students have recently been through GCSE’s and can help both socially and academically, through a demonstration of understanding and empathy. Stage 3 is to employ support staff to give pastoral support to students, to help relieve stress and give general psychological support. The support staff would be trained in counselling, specifically in Egan’s (2002) skilled helper model. In this model, Egan (2002) stresses the importance of posture when talking to someone within a counselling relationship. This model uses the acronym SOLER; to sit squarely, with an open posture, leaning towards the client, maintaining eye contact and to be relaxed (Egan, 2002). The main job of the support staff would be to help students with managing their stress; this can be done...