

Tips for Parents: Teenage Stress

In today's complex world, stress is a serious problem for many teenagers. The reasons for stress, however, are not always immediately obvious to parents and educators. How can you help your teenager manage stress and meet the challenges of life?

What causes stress?

Poverty, family difficulties, fear of not doing well in school, and peer pressure are just a few of the factors that cause stress. But, apart from these obvious stresses, recent surveys of teenagers indicate that there are also more subtle reasons for stress such as too many responsibilities, lack of social and family support, and a more competitive society.

Stress can affect health

It has long been recognized that stress can be hazardous to one's health. Mental disorders associated with stress include depression, suicide, and schizophrenia. Long-term stress can cause ulcers, asthma, eczema, hives, headaches, arthritis, hypertension, colitis, and heart disease.

Drug use

Teenagers who are unable to cope with the stress caused by changes in their family structure, peers, school, and the future often turn to drugs as the answer to their problems.

What can I do to reduce my child's stress?

Examine your attitude. Make sure that what you expect of your teenager reflects his or her abilities and aspirations.

Be observant. Recognize the signs of stress and be there with your support. Make sure that you show love and acceptance regardless of whether your kid makes the varsity team, or gets top notch grades.

When teenagers fall short of their goals, encourage them to release their frustrations in some constructive way instead of always hiding their disappointment. Let them talk and you listen. Nothing is more important for kids than having people who can be depended upon to provide emotional support, help, and feedback.

Be sincere. Studies show that almost 90 percent of high school seniors perceive the majority of people as being phony. This perception has been linked to the high suicide, pregnancy, drop-out, and drug use rates among high school seniors.

Be encouraging. Focus on the positive. Emphasize efforts rather than success. Make sure your teenager realizes that it's okay to make mistakes. Each person has the power to change his/her own environment.

Be supportive. Sitting down and talking with your child can help relieve anxiety or stress. Students with positive social support networks are less likely to become depressed.

How can I help my teen handle stress?

Encourage your teenager to explore different stress-reduction methods. Here are some ideas:

- **Exercise.** Going for a walk is one of the best ways to relieve stress and tension. Exercise stimulates heart rate, circulation, and the release of hormones that help the body reduce the effects of stress naturally.
- **Meditation.** Finding a quiet spot where you can sit quietly for just ten or fifteen minutes can be very helpful in calming anxiety and refocusing energy in a positive direction.
- **Write.** Sometimes writing about a stressful situation tends to bring it into perspective and release tension.
- **Talk about it.** It's important to be able to talk about problems with people you can trust. Work on building supportive relationships with family, friends, teachers, neighbors, and counselors.
- **Take time out.** Encourage your teenagers to spend time doing something enjoyable. Having fun is one of the best ways to relax.
- **Encourage counseling.** Sensitive teachers, school psychologists, and school counselors can help students cope with stress.

For more information:

“Teen Stress Busters” from Calgary Health Region

<http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/mental/Adolescence/TeenStressBusters.pdf>

Seaward, Brian; Bartlett Linda. “Hot Stones and Funny Bones: Teens Helping Teens Cope with Stress and Anger.” HCI Teens, 2002

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