



## Parenting for Prevention: Teens & Stress

### About Teen Stress

**School** is the top source of stress for teens.

Teens experience both **emotional and physical symptoms** of stress, including feeling nervous or anxious, feeling tired, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, feeling overwhelmed, having negative thoughts and experiencing changes in sleeping habits.

Experiencing occasional stress is normal. However, **if stress persists at high levels for a long time, it can have lasting negative effects on health.** Chronic (long-term) stress can cause anxiety, high blood pressure, or a weakened immune system, and can contribute to diseases such as depression, obesity and heart disease.

**Not all stress is negative.** Some stress promotes positive behaviors, such as motivation for studying extra hard for a test, working to overcome a challenge or alerting us to remove ourselves from an unsafe situation.

**Balance is important for teen health and well-being.** School is important, but once the homework and studying is done, teens need to have time to have fun with friends, relax with family, or focus on a hobby or activity.

**Managing daily stress** can lead to a more overall positive outlook on your life and well-being.

Teens experiencing uncontrolled stress **may be more likely to use illegal drugs or engage in underage drinking**, especially when not monitored.

### What Parents Need to Know - Resilience

**Resilience** is the capacity to withstand stress or catastrophe and allows us to adapt and overcome risk or adversity. Resilience develops over time as we learn more effective life-skills. Supportive relationships with parents, peers & others, as well as cultural beliefs and traditions that help us cope with life's challenges all inform a teen's resilience. **The best part? Resilience can be learned.**

**Teens can work on developing these attitudes and behaviors to build resilience that can help influence their ability to manage stress:**

- Think of change as a challenging and normal part of life.
- See setbacks and problems as temporary and solvable.
- Believe that you will succeed if you keep working toward your goals.
- Take action to solve problems that crop up.
- Build strong relationships and keep commitments to family and friends.
- Have a support system and ask for help.
- Participate regularly in activities for relaxation and fun.

### FAST FACTS

Stress has been called "the silent killer" and can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, chest pain, and an irregular heartbeat.



Laughing lowers stress hormones (cortisol, epinephrine, & adrenaline) and strengthens the immune system by releasing health-enhancing hormones.



Girls experience stress differently than boys. Girls tend to keep their stress hidden,



whereas boys express stress more directly.

Children learn how to regulate their own emotional behaviors, including stress, by watching their parent(s). Modeling healthy responses to stressful situations can teach adolescents how to reduce and manage stress in appropriate ways.

# Warning Signs of Stress: What to Look For

Teens may experience various levels of stress throughout adolescence. Some experts say that unlike previous generations, teens today may be experiencing more intense levels of stress than adults. Stress can come from various sources: school, parents, friends or even themselves. Teens may also struggle with figuring out how to be independent, social pressures, or thinking about the future. Often, teens do not even realize that certain behaviors may be associated with the stress they are feeling. These may be signs that your teen is feeling stress. If you notice these behaviors, talk with your teen, teach them stress-reduction strategies, and seek outside support if necessary.

- Grades are dropping
- Expresses worry frequently
- Is moody or angry
- Feels tired all the time
- Experiences frequent headaches, dizziness, chest pain, or stomach pain
- Feels sad or hopeless
- Feels bored all the time
- Is less interested in being with friends
- Thinks about, talks about, or uses alcohol or drugs to try to feel better
- Talks about hurting or injuring themselves
- Uses unhealthy coping strategies



## Talking Tips: Stress-reduction Behaviors & Techniques

*There are simple steps your teen can take that promote relaxation and reduce stress. Share these tips and encourage your teen to identify techniques that work for him or her.*

- **Exercise and eat nutritious food regularly.** Teens need plenty of both for a foundation of good physical and mental health.
- **Avoid excess caffeine intake.** Caffeine can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation.
- **Develop routines.** Having a reliable schedule or set of rituals can be comforting during stressful times.
- **Practice relaxation exercises.** Slow, deep breathing and intentional relaxation of muscles helps ease tension and feelings of anxiety.
- **Learn practical coping skills.** Break large tasks into smaller steps. Make a to-do list. Keep a journal.
- **Decrease negative self-talk.** Instead, reframe damaging thoughts into hopeful statements, such as "This is a tough week, but I'm prepared for my exams and if I need help, I know I can ask for support."
- **Take a break from stressful situations.** Make time for activities such as listening to music, talking with friends, creative writing, or taking a walk to clear your mind.
- **Build a network of friends who can provide positive support.** Chances are they are experiencing many of the same stressors. Share ideas for working through the tough times together.

## RESOURCES

### American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: Helping Teenagers with Stress

[www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/Facts\\_for\\_families\\_Pages/Helping\\_Teenagers\\_With\\_Stress\\_66.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/Facts_for_families_Pages/Helping_Teenagers_With_Stress_66.aspx)

### American Psychological Association: Talking to Teens about Stress

[www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-talk.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-talk.aspx)

### Fostering Resilience: A Teen's Personal Guide for Managing Stress

[www.fosteringresilience.com/what\\_is\\_stress.php](http://www.fosteringresilience.com/what_is_stress.php)

### Grown & Flown –Teen Stress: What Parents Need to Know

<http://grownandflown.com/teen-stress/>

### KidsHealth: Helping Kids Cope with Stress

[http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/emotions/stress.html#](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html#)

### TeensHealth: Stress

[http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/emotions/stress.html#](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/stress.html#)

### The Learning Community – Tips for Parents: Teenage Stress

[www.thelearningcommunity.us/resources-by-format/tips-for-parents/teenage-stress.aspx](http://www.thelearningcommunity.us/resources-by-format/tips-for-parents/teenage-stress.aspx)

Portions of this tip sheet were adapted from some of the resources listed above.

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

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