



Typical Sources of Stress

Biological Stress:

- Bodily changes
- Increased need for sleep/decreased opportunity for sleep
- Hormonal variations
- Brain growth and development

School Stress:

- Increased work demands
- Increased expectation of independence and personal responsibility
- Increased focus on future plans – pressures to succeed

Peer Stress:

- Peer pressure to try new things
- Intense need to “fit in”
- Bullying
- Relationship roller coaster

Family Stress:

- Increased discord with parents due to need to individuate
- Sibling rivalry

Societal Stress:

- Technological advances increase demands for processing
- Over programming
- Fear messages in media

Additional Possible Stressors:

- Parental discord or divorce
- Chronic illness (physical or emotional)
- Death of family member or close friend
- Drug or alcohol abuse in family
- Financial problems

Risk Factors for Maladaptive Response To Stress

- Family history of affective disturbance (depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder)
- Substance abuse or physical/sexual abuse in family
- Sudden death or loss in family or peer group
- Absent parent or divorced parents with significant discord
- Extreme pressure to perform and succeed
- Humiliating or embarrassing experience resulting in ridicule or rejection
- Unresolved conflict with teacher, coach or peer
- Persistent family conflict
- Chronic illness in child or close family member

Parental Guidelines for When to Seek Help

While most adolescents will exhibit one or more of the following behaviors at some time during their teen years, the critical factor is how often the symptom appears and how intense the symptom is. If the symptom is significantly affecting daily activities, intervention is advised.

- Marked change in eating/sleeping habits
- Frequent physical complaints
- Depression, shown by prolonged negative mood/attitude accompanied by poor appetite, sleep problems, feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of death
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Persistent nightmares
- Avoidance of daily activities; no enjoyment of activities – constantly bored
- Threats to harm self or others
- Intense fear of becoming obese with no relation to actual body size; significant restriction of diet; purging
- Frequent threats to run away
- Strange thoughts, feelings, beliefs or unusual behaviors

Suggested Strategies For Parents

- Make time to talk to your child each day – be willing to listen: Though your children may seem to want more space and freedom, they actually still crave attention from the people closest to them. In the middle school years and high school years, parents really need to know what is going on in their children's lives, and the only way to do that is to talk and spend time with them. To help a child to talk, you must listen twice as much as you talk.
- Give their concerns serious consideration – don't minimize their concerns. If you are lucky enough to have children who confide in you about their concerns, take these matters to heart. Although arguments with friends may seem trivial to you, they likely loom large in your children's minds. Give your children time to talk things out without immediately interjecting your own opinions or trying to solve their problems for them.
- Encourage proper rest and nutrition. The demands of school work, extracurricular activities, and socializing can result in late bedtimes and poor diets for children. Children in elementary and middle school are still growing and need adequate rest (at least eight to 10 hours per night).
- Help your child to put stress in perspective; offer reassurance, encouragement and support. Help your child to think through the worst-case scenario and help your child to know the real facts of the situation so they can put their concerns in perspective.
- Provide structure, clear rules, and predictability – stay firm. Even though kids this age would never say it, what they really want are limits and supervision. So much is changing for them. To feel safe and secure in this part of their lives, they need to know that some things remain the same.
- Help your child plan for potentially stressful circumstances. The stress created by last-minute cramming for a major test can be lessened by scheduling study sessions in the days leading up to the tests. Children at this stage continue to need help in breaking down large assignments and projects into specific shorter steps.
- Encourage your child to stay active by participating in typically enjoyable activities. Endorphins, the chemicals released during and after an activity, create feelings of calmness and well-being. Stress relieving exercise is a helpful component of each day's list of activities.
- Have reasonable expectations and set manageable goals. One of the biggest causes of stress for children is their belief that their parents have expectations for them that they could never achieve. Be clear with your child that you want them simply to be happy and to try their best at things rather than to be a superstar on the field or a genius in every class.
- Model effective coping strategies: exercise, diet, meditation, reading, and talking. Although your child would never admit it, he or she is looking to you as a model for how to deal with challenges in life. If you brood, yell, or skip meals in reaction to stress in your life, your child will learn similar methods of coping. Alternatively, if you use positive methods of coping with stress, your child will follow the strategies.
- Set up a reasonable schedule. Help your children to choose between different activities so that their schedules do not become overwhelming. While hobbies and activities are critical, too many activities can increase stress to unmanageable levels.

Suggested Readings

Biegel, Gina M. *The Stress Reduction Workbook for Teens.*

Culbert, Timothy and Kajander, Rebecca. *Be the boss of your stress.*

DeAnda, Diane. *Stress Management for Adolescents.*

Elkind, David. *The Hurried Child: Growing up too fast, too soon.*

Elkind, David. *The Power of play*

Greenland, Susan. *The Mindful Child: How to help your kid to manage stress.*

Shapiro, Laurence and Sprague, Robin. *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids.*