

Stress Management for Teens

What are common stressors?

- School (academics and sports)
- Peer & sibling interactions
- Conflict with parents
- Body image and changes
- Bad thoughts and feelings about themselves
- Being in too many activities or having too high expectations
- Family concerns: money, health, divorce, separation, moving

What are common responses to stress?

- Sleep problems (falling asleep, waking up at night, problems getting up in the mornings, needing naps)
- Avoiding group activities or withdrawing from friends
- Changes in appetite
- Stomachaches, headaches & other body pains
- More fear and worry
- Anger, low spirits, feeling unhappy
- Difficulty in school/ changes in grades

What can teens do to handle stress?

- Know your responses to stress. Stress is a normal body response that happens when we face challenges that seem too hard for us to cope with. Our bodies have a normal way of reacting to stress called the "fight or flight" response which involves:
 - Physical: muscle stiffness, fast heart rate, short and fast breathing, sweating, cold hands
 - Mental: limited attention and focus, being very aware of surroundings
- Figuring out how your body responds to stress can help you identify the stressors in your life and understand ways to handle those stressors. The following exercise can help with body awareness, including knowing and letting go of tension in your body.
 1. Focus on your environment. Start with noticing things you hear and see (I am aware of cars going by outside, the breeze blowing in the trees, the TV).
 2. Shift your focus to your body and your physical senses (I am aware of tightness in my back, the feeling of the back of my thighs against the chair).
 3. Shift your focus back and forth between your environment and your body (I am aware of tightness in my shoulders, the sound of others talking). Practice this exercise in your free time during the day, to help you become more aware of your body's responses and reduce stress in the moment.
 4. Talk to someone (a trusted friend, an adult, etc.)
- Take part in stress-reducing habits:
 - Eat healthy—eat breakfast, have routine meals & eat healthy snacks
 - Get regular sleep—try to sleep 8-9 hours a night, keep the same schedule every day! (even on weekends)
 - Workout—3-5 times a week for 30 minutes

IN CARE OF KIDS

- Get involved in non-competitive activities
- Know the difference between controllable and uncontrollable stressors and how each needs a different response.
 - Uncontrollable Stressors are those that we have no control over. Know your stress response and ways you can manage it.
 - Controllable Stressors are those that we know about and can plan for. Prepare for stressful situations and plan ways to handle the stress before it happens. This will also help increase your self-esteem for dealing with future stressors.
- Pay special attention to *negative* ("I'm stupid") or *catastrophic thinking* ("My life is terrible") and challenge yourself to find different ways to view the situation.
- Use simple problem-solving strategies:
 - State the problem
 - Brainstorm solutions
 - Choose a plan
 - Try it out
 - Change plan based on results
- Use assertive communication skills:
 - Assertive Communication is a way of stating how you feel and making requests that values your needs and the other person's needs. It is an "I count, you count" way of communicating.
 - Example: "I get upset when I get nagged about cleaning my room. Can we work out a plan so that I can take responsibility for my room and you don't nag me about keeping it clean?"
 - In Aggressive Communication the speaker clearly states his/her feelings, opinions and needs, without considering the feelings and needs of the other person. It is an "I count, you don't" way of communicating.
 - Example: "You make me so mad when you nag at me to clean my room! It makes me not want to do anything to help out."
 - In Passive Communication, the speaker's feelings, thoughts and needs are not expressed, expressed subtly, or expressed partially. It is a "You count, I don't" way of communicating.
 - Example: You clean your room without saying anything, but you feel angry and upset that only you are being asked to keep your room neat, while your brother's room is a mess. This can lead to holding grudges and aggressive communication.
- Learn stress reduction techniques:
 - Deep breathing
 - Muscle Relaxation
 - Imagery (picture yourself in your favorite place)
 - Yoga
 - Meditation

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