

# Helping Teens Cope With Stress

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Stress is a common problem among teens, and as a parent, you have a role in helping the teen in your life cope with it. So what exactly is *stress*?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), stress is the body's physical and psychological response to anything perceived as overwhelming. This may be viewed as a result of life's demands—pleasant or unpleasant—and the body's lack of resources to meet them.



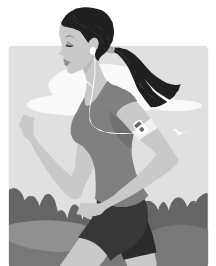
While stress is a natural part of life, it often creates imbalance in the body, especially a teen's body, which is already experiencing so many changes. Girls also report feeling "frequently stressed" more than boys.

A certain amount of stress can be helpful as a way of keeping your teen motivated. But too much or too little may render them ineffective and interfere with their relationships at home and socially, as well as their physical well-being. According to a recent survey, 43 percent of 13- to 14-year-olds say they feel stressed every single day; by ages 15 to 17, the number rises to 59 percent. The day-to-day pressures teens experience, such as the pressure to fit in and to be successful, can lead to stress. Jobs and family economics can also prove stressful for teens, as nearly two-thirds of them say they are "somewhat" or "very concerned" about their personal finances.

If stress becomes unmanageable and teens are left to their own devices without guidance from a parent or caregiver, they may find their own ways of coping. Sometimes these coping mechanisms involve unhealthy behaviors such as drinking, smoking marijuana, and engaging in other risky behaviors.

## **Here's how you can help the teen in your life with healthy, productive coping strategies.**

- 1. Recognize when your teen is stressed-out.** Is your teen getting adequate rest? Are they eating well-balanced meals? Do they ever get to take breaks to restore their energy? If these needs are unmet, your teen will show it through chronic moodiness, irritability, anxiety and/or long bouts of sadness. If you have a teen daughter, be particularly aware if she is obsessing about looks or weight.
- 2. Introduce positive coping strategies to your teen.** Let's face it, stress will be a part of your teen's life. Help them identify ways in which they can relieve their stress in a healthy way. It can be as simple as having your teen talk to you about their problems or pressures. Other ideas include: exercising, getting enough sleep, listening to music, writing in a journal, keeping a healthy diet, seeing a counselor and reminding them of their accomplishments.



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**3. Be a good example.** Young people often pick up their coping strategies by watching their parents. If a child sees a parent drink an alcoholic beverage or smoke a cigarette every time they are overwhelmed, they are more likely to imitate the same behavior. So, be mindful of your own reactions to stress and set a good example for your children.



If signs of stress persist, ask for help. Some sources you can consult include: a health care provider, mental health center, social worker, counselor, nurse, therapist or clergy.

## WARNING SIGNS

### Physical Symptoms

- Allergies
- Chronic Fatigue
- Racing Heartbeat
- Nightmares
- Sleeping Problems
- Dizziness
- Change in Appetite
- Headaches
- Muscle Tension
- Restlessness
- Stomachaches
- Gastrointestinal Problems

### Emotional Symptoms

- Anger
- Denial of a Problem
- Loneliness
- Feeling Powerless
- Feeling Trapped
- Constant Worry
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Nervousness
- Feeling Rejected
- Difficulty Making Decisions
- Being Easily Upset

Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)  
National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign  
Parents. The Anti-Drug  
[www.theantidrug.com/Advice/Safeguarding-and-Monitoring/Monitoring-Skills/Managing-Teen-Stress.aspx](http://www.theantidrug.com/Advice/Safeguarding-and-Monitoring/Monitoring-Skills/Managing-Teen-Stress.aspx)