

Helping A Teen Cope With Stress



Teenagers face a variety of stressors. For some, it is trying to balance a part-time job with mountains of homework. Others may have to help out at home or deal with bullying or peer pressure. Whatever the cause, starting down the road to adulthood has its own special challenges.

Parents can help teens by learning to recognize the signs of stress and teaching them healthy ways to deal with it.

Causes Of Teen Stress

Common sources of stress in teens include:

- Common sources of stress include juggling responsibilities such as school and work or sports; peer-pressure; having negative thoughts about themselves; and figuring out what to do after high school.
 - Teens who feel stressed may act angry or irritable, cry a lot, seem overly worried, and complain of headaches or stomachaches.
 - Parents can help a teen who is stressed by spending time with them, listening to and validating their thoughts and feelings, and demonstrating positive coping strategies.
- Worrying about schoolwork or grades
 - Juggling responsibilities, such as school and work or sports
 - Having problems with friends, bullying, or peer group pressures
 - Questioning sexual orientation and/or gender identity
 - Becoming sexually active or feeling pressure to do so
 - Changing schools, moving, or dealing with housing problems or homelessness
 - Having negative thoughts about themselves
 - Going through body changes, in both boys and girls
 - Seeing their parents go through a divorce or separation
 - Having financial problems in the family
 - Living in an unsafe home or neighborhood
 - Figuring out what to do after high school
 - Getting into college

Learn To Recognize Stress

Learn to recognize signs of stress in teens. Take notice if the youth:

- Acts angry or irritable
- Withdraws from activities and people
- Seems overly worried
- Seems tired or has no energy
- Complains of headaches or stomachaches
- Cries often or seems teary
- Has trouble sleeping or sleeps too much
- Eats too much or not enough
- Uses drugs or alcohol



Wheeler

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How Parents Can Help

If parents think their teen is under too much stress, they can help the youth learn to manage it. Here are some tips:

- **Spend time together.** Parents can spend some time alone with their teen each week. Even if the teen does not accept, they will notice that their parents offered. Parents can get involved by managing or coaching their teen's sports team, or by taking part in school activities. Or, simply attending games, concerts, or plays he or she is involved with.
- **Learn to listen.** Parents can listen openly to their teen's concerns and feelings and share positive thoughts. They can ask questions but avoid interpreting or jumping in with advice unless asked. This type of open communication may make the teen more willing to discuss their stress with their parents.
- **Be a role model.** Teens look to parents as models for healthy behavior. Parents can best help a teen by keeping their own stress under control and managing it in healthy ways.
- **Get the teen moving.** Getting regular exercise is one of the best ways to beat stress, for both adults and teens. Parents can encourage their teens to find an exercise they enjoy, whether it is team sports or other activities like yoga, wall climbing, swimming, dancing, or hiking. Parents might even suggest trying a new activity together.
- **Keep an eye on sleep.** Teens need plenty of shut-eye. Not getting enough sleep makes it harder to manage stress. Parents can make sure their teen gets at least 8 hours of sleep a night. This can be a challenge between school hours and homework. One way to help is by limiting screen time, both TV and computer, in the evening before bed.
- **Teach work management skills.** Parents can teach their teens some basic ways to manage tasks, such as making lists or breaking larger tasks into smaller ones and doing one piece at a time.
- **DO NOT try to solve the teenager's problems.** Parents have a hard time seeing their child under stress, but they should resist solving their teen's problems. Instead, they can work together to brainstorm solutions and let their teen come up with ideas. This approach helps teens learn to tackle stressful situations on their own.
- **Stock up on healthy foods.** Like many adults, teens often reach for unhealthy snacks when they are under stress. To help them resist the urge, parents can fill their fridge and cabinets with veggies, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins and skip the sodas and high-calorie, sugary snacks.
- **Create family rituals.** Family routines can be comforting for a teen during stressful times. Having a family dinner or movie night can help relieve the stress of the day and give everyone a chance to connect.
- **DO NOT demand perfection.** None of us does everything perfectly. Expecting perfection from a teen is unrealistic and just adds stress.

If a teen seems overwhelmed by stress, talks about self-harm, and/or mentions suicide, parents should call a mental health professional for guidance and support or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.662.HELP (8255).

Connecticut Resources

CT Department Mental Health
and Addiction Services

<https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS>

CT Department of Children and
Families

<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>

United Way 211

www.211ct.org

2.1.1 or 1.800.203.1234

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline

1.800.662.HELP (8255)

