

Understanding Mental Health



Teen Stress

A teen's guide to surviving stress

Sometimes being a teenager is tough. Your parents expect a lot from you; you just flunked a biology test; your best friend is changing schools; and today, you are supposed to give a report in front of the class. Your heart is beating faster than usual. Your palms feel sweaty. Your stomach feels a little upset. You may be stressed out. Feeling stress is normal. Sometimes stress is good. Like the excitement before a game or getting ready for a dance. But sometimes stress feels bad. You can't sleep or feel sad and lonely. Don't ignore these feelings. Stress needs your attention. Take care of yourself. Get help.

So why are you stressed out?

It's different for everyone, but here are some common stressful situations. Can you relate to some of them?

- Family problems – these may include your parents going through a divorce, money problems, violence in the home, problems with alcohol or other drugs, the illness or death of a family member or close friend.
- Peer pressure – are your friends asking you to do things you don't want to do such as use alcohol or drugs, have sex or go places you don't want to?
- Self-esteem – the way you feel about yourself emotionally or physically – do you think you aren't smart enough or as popular as you should be?
- Your grades – do you feel one test score will change your life?
- Too many activities in your life – trying to do a lot of things may sound like fun, but may not give you enough time to chill out.
- Changes in your everyday routine – such as switching schools, moving to a new neighborhood, moving on to a new grade.
- Fear of violence – feeling unsafe in your neighborhood or school can create constant stress.

How can you beat stress?

Chill out and take a break. Think about what's going on in your life. Remember you are in control. You may not be able to change the outside world, but you can learn to deal with it. Here are some tips for beating stress. (Share them with your parents. Maybe they can use some help too!)

- Recognize that you are in charge of your stress. You have control over a lot of your activities. You can choose to make changes in your life that reduce your stress.
- Try to determine the importance of a situation.
- Go easy on yourself. No one is perfect. No one gets it right all the time. No one always has all the answers. Give yourself credit.

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- Take one thing at a time and prepare for it! Manage your time wisely.
- Take care of yourself. Eat healthy foods. Limit your intake of caffeine and get enough rest. Drugs and alcohol won't solve anything and may lead to bigger problems.
- Exercise regularly. Pick a physical activity you really like, not what you think others expect you to do.
- Laugh or cry a little. It may help to relieve your feelings and improve your outlook. It's not hard to do, and it can reduce stress.
- Get involved. Join activities at your school, your church or recreation center. You will feel better about yourself and build new friendships.
- Relax. Relaxing is essential for everybody's physical and mental health, and enriches your quality of life. Find out what really helps you relax and spend at least half an hour each day doing it.
- Visualize managing the activity or situation that is giving you stress. Use your mind to "see" how you can manage a potentially stressful situation in advance. Whether it's a dreaded presentation or a challenging sports event, you may find that visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and lead to increased success, especially when you see yourself being great!
- Don't suffer in silence. A heart-to-heart talk with someone you trust can help you get rid of bottled-up feelings and help you see things in a different light.

When your own stress signals tell you that you're feeling too much stress, try putting this four-step problem-solving plan into action:

1. Determine what's really causing the stress you feel.
2. "Brainstorm" for solutions. Think of as many as you can, no matter how silly they may seem. A trusted family member, teacher or school counselor may have good ideas, too. Talk about what may happen, the good things and the bad things, with all of your possible solutions.
3. Act. Make the best decision you can and follow through on your decision.
4. If it still doesn't work for you, try another solution next time. Don't be afraid to fail. Everyone makes mistakes. You may be embarrassed or disappointed that your solution didn't go exactly as you expected. This may not be comforting, but this happens to everyone at some time. You will succeed.