

# Help your teen cope with stress



In today's world, teenagers face a variety of stresses. For some, it is trying to juggle the responsibility of a part-time job with mountains of homework. Others may have to help out at home and worry about what the future holds. For still others it's the demands of athletics/after-school activities or trying to find healthy friendships and navigate social media. Whatever the cause, starting down the road to adulthood has its own special challenges.

You can help your teen by learning to recognize the signs of stress and teaching your child healthy ways to deal with it.

## Causes of Teen Stress

- Worrying about schoolwork or grades
- Juggling responsibilities, such as school and work or sports
- Having problems with friends, bullying, or peer group pressures
- 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
- Change in family dynamics
- Having financial problems in the family
- Living in an unsafe home or neighborhood
- World or traumatic events
- Figuring out what to do after high school
- Getting into college



## Learn to Recognize Stress

*Some common signs of stress in teens include:*

- Acts angry or irritable
- Cries often or seems teary
- Withdrawal from activities, friends and family
- Has trouble sleeping or sleeps too much
- Seems overly worried
- Eats too much or not enough
- Complains of headaches or stomach aches
- Seems tired or has no energy
- Uses drugs or alcohol



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## How you can Help

*If you think your teen is under too much stress, here are a few tips for you to help them manage it:*

- **Spend time together.** Try to spend some time alone with your teen each week. Even if your teen does not accept, they will notice that you offered. Get involved by managing or coaching their sports team, or by taking part in school activities. Or, simply attend games, concerts, or plays he or she is involved with.
- **Learn to listen.** Listen openly to your teen's concerns and feelings, and share positive thoughts. Ask questions, but do not interpret or jump in with advice unless you are asked. This type of open communication may make your teen more willing to discuss their stress with you.
- **Be a role model.** Whether you know it or not, your teen looks to you as a model for healthy behavior. Do your best to keep your own stress under control and manage it in healthy ways.
- **Get your teen moving.** Getting regular exercise is one of the best ways to beat stress, for both adults and teens. Encourage your teens to find an exercise they enjoy, whether it is team sports or other activities like yoga, wall climbing, swimming, dancing, or hiking. You 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. Try to make sure your 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.** Teach your teen 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 your teenager's problems.** As a parent, it is hard to see your child under stress. But try to resist solving your teen's problems. Instead, work together to brainstorm solutions and let your teen come up with ideas. Using 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, fill your fridge and cabinets with veggies, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins. Skip the sodas and high-calorie, sugary snacks.
- **Create family rituals.** Family routines can be comforting for your teen during stressful times. Having a family dinner or movie night can help relieve the stress of the day and give you a chance to connect.
- **Do not demand perfection.** None of us does everything perfectly. Expecting perfection from your teen is unrealistic and just adds stress.

## When to Call a Medical Professional

*Contact their health care provider if your teen seems:*

- Overwhelmed by stress
- Talks about self-harm
- Mentions thoughts of suicide
- Also call if you notice signs of depression or anxiety.

## Resources

NIH- National Library of Medicine- MedlinePlus [Internet]. Bethesda (MD): National Library of Medicine  
<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000814.htm>

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