

## TEEN STRESS

Have you ever wondered about teen stress? Do you believe there are times when you are stressed? If your answer to either of these questions is yes, then this information might be important for you to know.

### *What is teen stress?*

Stress is defined as any time someone perceives a situation as difficult, overwhelming, dangerous, or painful and they do not have the resources or ability to cope (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020). During the teen years, it is natural to question things. As a result, teens might struggle with their identity and how their identity fits in with others.

Difficult situations are a part of the human experience and can come in many forms. Teen stress can result from any number of challenging situations. Teens report trouble with friends, online bullying, changing schools, unsafe neighborhoods, academic pressures, high expectations, financial problems, the divorce of parents, or the death of loved ones as a few of the many situations that can cause stress.

According to a 2020 study by the University of Chicago Medicine Ingalls Memorial Behavioral Health department, there has been an increase in adolescent anxiety and depression stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, social and racial turmoil, and the political climate. Teens have exhibited increased fears about safety, stability, and the unknown.

### *What happens when teens experience stress?*

When a situation becomes painful or overwhelming, the body produces adrenaline, a hormone that causes a “fight or flight” response. A rapid heartbeat, fast breathing, cold or clammy hands, an inability to concentrate, trouble sleeping, an upset stomach, or a sense of dread are a few of the many physical responses to this hormone rush. If stress continues without relief, then teens could experience persistent emotions of anxiety, depression, or even thoughts of suicide.

While you cannot always control a stressful situation, you can control or manage your reaction to the stress. The ability to not let stress consume you is called coping or a coping response. For example, suppose a teen is told by his parents that they are divorcing. Because this is an adult issue, a teen might realize that they have little ability to change their parents’ decision. To cope with the situation and relieve stress, a teen can choose a response or responses that promote their own mental and physical wellness.

### *What types of responses to stress are healthy or productive?*

Physically, teens who are stressed report more frequent headaches and illnesses. It follows that it is important to assess your physical well-being during stressful times. Ask yourself some key questions. *Am I getting enough sleep? Do I have time in my day to relax? Am I eating healthful*

*foods that my body needs? Do I have frequent headaches, colds, or other illnesses? Is it difficult for me to concentrate or complete a simple task? Am I participating in any physical activity?*

Our emotional well-being and physical well-being are linked together. Addressing physical issues can be the first step in bringing stress levels down. Getting enough sleep, eating healthful foods, finding time to relax, and getting exercise can help teens better cope emotionally with a stressful situation. If physical ailments persist during stressful times, it might also be important to seek medical advice.

Along with addressing physical needs, teens need to discover strategies to cope emotionally. Coping strategies are unique to and vary with each person. One teen might find that writing poetry or keeping a journal helps during the loneliness of a divorce, while another teen might find that doing homework with a friend alleviates some academic pressures. One effective strategy for stress management that teens should consider is to create a list of trusted friends and adults whom they can talk to about problems. When coping strategies are not working well, it may be time to talk to a mental health professional.

*What can you do if someone you know is experiencing stress?*

Stress affects everyone, so don't be afraid to share your experiences and listen to others when they share theirs. A 2016 Australian study showed that teens who have at least one close friend to confide in are better able to bounce back from stress. Friendships with high levels of trust and good communication were the most effective in helping teens cope with stress, according to the study. Speak up and reach out as a friend when someone you know seems troubled.

*What can you do if you are experiencing stress, depression, or anxiety?*

While trusting friendships can go a long way to reduce stress, adults should be involved if teens are contemplating destructive or self-destructive behaviors, or if stress, depression, and anxiety persist. Examples of destructive or self-destructive behaviors include lashing out with violence, self-harming, running away from home, dropping out of school, or thinking about suicide.

Depression or anxiety also can present themselves as an inability to concentrate, sleeplessness, isolation from friends and family, or a lack of interest and involvement in normal routines. If any of these behaviors or feelings persist, seek help immediately from a trusted adult or a mental health professional.

National outreach hotlines also exist to support teens. Two are mentioned here. The National Suicide Prevention Hotline, at 1-800-273-8255, offers immediate and anonymous support and counseling. Teen Line, at 1-800-852-8336, is a hotline manned by teens and offers an opportunity to talk with listening peers about problems. If you or a friend is feeling stressed, depressed, or anxious, consider seeking help.

## Sources

Houston, F. (2020). *Too young to be stressed: Adolescent mental health in the COVID-19 pandemic*. University of Chicago Medicine. <https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/news/too-young-to-be-stressed-out-ingalls-behavioral-health-focuses-on-adolescents-too>

Lyness, D. (n.d.). *Stress*. TeensHealth from Nemours. <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stress.html#:~:text=The%20stress%20response%20is%20physical,or%20your%20knees%20get%20shaky>. <https://theconversation.com/teens-with-at-least-one-close-friend-can-better-cope-with-stress-than-those-without-126769>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2019). *Stress Management and Teens*. AACAP. [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Helping-Teenagers-With-Stress-066.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Helping-Teenagers-With-Stress-066.aspx)