

Stress and Anxiety: Strategies and Help for Teens

Teens often report higher levels of stress and anxiety than other age groups. Why is this? There are a wide variety of things teenagers are involved in today. School, homework, sports, extracurricular activities, events, work, and family obligations require much from teens today. Teens are working more, involved in more, and doing more homework than ever before. There is more happening in teens' lives now than at any other time. Without enough time, stress and anxiety levels increase.

Stress and Anxiety: Stress is a general feeling of tension or being overwhelmed. Stress may occur due to major life events such as death, divorce, moving, or changing schools, but also due to everyday events such as holidays, tests, sports, and activities. While some stress can be motivating, too much stress can lead to a variety of health problems. Too much stress can cause headaches, insomnia, depression, general illness, and anxiety. Anxiety may feel vague or unclear in terms of what a person is anxious about, but it affects their whole being (physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and behavioral). When stress or anxiety is interfering with a teens' personal life (with family, friends, and significant others) or social life (including school/work, activities), it is time to take action.

RELIEF FROM STRESSORS: Because stress and anxiety impacts our entire self, we must work to take care of our whole self. This means making plans that support our physical health, cognitive health, social/emotional, and general behavioral health.

- Be aware of and challenge catastrophizing beliefs. Stop yourself from thinking of worst-case scenarios and plan / strategize for the most likely scenarios. Try to stop yourself from worrying (it never solves anything). Meditation practice and healthy activity like exercise can help to stop or decrease worrying.***
- Consider positive community outlets for connecting with others in non-competitive ways and create time for your passions: community centers, churches, and volunteering may be options for this.***
- Be sure to get enough sleep (8 hours or more typically) and adequate nutrition including 3 meals and a couple snacks incorporating plenty of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.***
- Schedule down time. Choose 1-2 activities that are most important to you and try to skip the rest.***
- Whenever possible, make sure there are not too many (or too late) work hours while attending school.***
- Join student support groups/services at school or in your community***
- Consider professional support from a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist if your symptoms feel severe or especially troublesome***
- Check out counseling / support services- talk with your school counselor to brainstorm ways to decrease stress. They can not only help you research career and education options, but can also talk with you in general about social/emotional wellness strategies and any stressors you are experiencing.***
- Work through stress and anxiety through journaling, exercise, any number of "arts" activities, meditation, self-reflection, realistic personal goal setting, and documenting progress***

A SAMPLING OF RESOURCES:

- The Anxiety Panic Internet Resource (TAPIR) www.algy.com/anxiety- Search engine for anxiety, panic, trauma, stress, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.***
- Anxiety Disorder Association of America www.adaa.org ADAA's site lists a directory of professionals, support groups, and a book store.***

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- ***Help Guide www.helpguide.org is a site that supports mental health and well-being through resources, articles, and links related to grief, health, stress, suicide prevention, sleep, relationships, mental health, well being and more.***