



De-stressing With Your Teen

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Normalizing Stress

- ▶ Good stress, sometimes referred to as necessary stress or eustress keeps us motivated.
- ▶ Stress is often a warning sign that you need to bring awareness to your current situation and possibly make some changes in your life. Recurrent worry and nervousness can be an indication that some area or areas of your life need adjusting.
- ▶ Stress can be difficult to manage but exploring and coping with your stress can be a real opportunity for self-growth.
- ▶ The next time stress strikes, consider what message it has for you or your teen and the possible adjustments you may need to make.
 - ▶ Can you think of a time stress has led you to make important or positive changes in your life? What is your child's stress trying to tell you? The goal is to have normalizing and transparent conversations with your teen about stress. Using examples from your own life is often helpful.



Normalizing Stress

- ▶ Rather than always being considered a hindrance, stress may help you feel more motivated and prepared when faced with challenges. Research has shown that students and athletes who experienced some anxiety displayed improved performance on tests or while participating in competitive sports.
 - ▶ For instance, perhaps your anxiety assists you in putting extra effort into work or personal tasks, making a good impression, or moving towards your goals. When considering your own anxiety, try to think of ways that you can use it to inspire your growth and self-improvement.
- ▶ **Built-In Warning System:**
 - ▶ Even though it may seem useless at times, there is a purpose for anxiety. These feelings and symptoms are a part of our innate way of dealing with stress. Known as the fight-or-flight response, anxiety is meant to protect us from danger and allow us to react faster to emergency. In modern times, anxiety may be a symptom that helps you to quickly react to avoid an accident or prevent you from entering an unsafe place or circumstance.
- ▶ **Positive Character Trait in Friendship:**
 - ▶ People who have dealt with anxiety may be more empathetic and understanding to the issues that others face. Having gone through personal struggles yourself, you may be more sensitive, loving, and accepting when friends and family members are dealing with personal challenges. It's been shown that people with anxiety are more concerned about how they interact with others. Have you noticed that you or your teen is the friend most relied on?
- ▶ **In Leadership:**
 - ▶ People with anxiety may also be skilled in leadership roles, as they take careful consideration of the possibility of multiple outcomes. For instance, many individuals with anxiety describe it as being aware of what can potentially go wrong, making them more cautious thinkers, careful decision-makers, and great problem-solver

Chronic Stress

- ▶ Left unchecked, chronic or long-term stress can contribute to a long list of physical and mental health problems. Prolonged stress can cause high blood pressure, weaken the immune system and contribute to diseases such as obesity and heart disease. It can also lead to mental health problems such as generalized anxiety disorder, OCD, eating disorders, substance abuse and depressive disorders—disorders that are becoming more common in youth.

- ▶ **Recognize the signs of chronic stress:**

Irritability and anger: Children don't always have the words to describe how they are feeling and sometimes tension bubbles over into a bad mood. Stressed-out teens might be more short-tempered or argumentative than normal.

Changes in behavior: A child who used to be a great listener is suddenly acting out. A once active teen now doesn't want to leave the house. Sudden changes can be a sign that stress levels are high.

Trouble sleeping: A teen might complain of feeling tired all the time, sleep more than usual or have trouble falling asleep at night.

Neglecting responsibilities: If an adolescent suddenly drops the ball on homework, forgets obligations or starts procrastinating more than usual, chronic stress might be a factor.

Eating changes: Eating too much or too little can both be reactions to prolonged stress.

Getting sick more often: Stress often shows up as physical symptoms. Teens who feel stress often report headaches or stomachaches, and might make frequent trips to the school nurse's office.

- ▶ Any of these situations may mean they would benefit from having someone to talk to. If that person isn't you, it's completely OK! Most teens struggle to talk with their parents and in helping them identify someone else to speak with, you're still providing important support.



Stress management teens:

- Facing stressors is a fact of life, for teens and adults. These strategies can help keep stress in check:
 - **Sleep well.** Sleep is essential for physical and emotional well-being. Experts recommend teens need 8 to 10 hours a night. Sleep needs to be a priority to keep stress in check. To protect shut-eye, limit screen use at night and avoid keeping digital devices in the bedroom.
 - **Exercise.** Physical activity is an essential stress reliever for people of all ages. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 60 minutes a day of activity for children ages 6 to 17.
 - **Talk it out.** Talking about stressful situations with a trusted adult can help teens put things in perspective and find solutions.
 - **Make time for fun — and quiet.** Just like adults and teens need time to do what brings them joy. Don't judge what brings you joy or your teen joy. Find a healthy balance between favorite activities and free time. Be okay with saying NO, when pressured to add on activities to your schedule that are going to create stress. It's okay to make yourself the priority.
 - **Write about it.** Research has found that expressing oneself in writing can help reduce mental distress and improve well-being. Some research has found, for example, that writing about positive feelings—such as the things you're grateful for or proud of — can ease symptoms of anxiety and depression.
 - **Learn mindfulness.** In a study of a five-week mindfulness training program for 13- to 18-year-olds, researchers found that teens who learned mindfulness experienced significantly less mental distress than teens who did not.



How parents can help:

- ▶ Parents have an important part to play, by adopting their own healthy habits and helping teens find stress-managing strategies. Here are some ways parents can take action:
 - ▶ **Model healthy coping.** Caregivers can talk with children about how they've thought about and dealt with their own stressful situations. Model engaging in self-care activities or invite your teen to join you in self-care activities.
 - ▶ **Let kids be problem-solvers.** It's natural to want to fix your child's problems. But when parents swoop in to solve every little glitch, children don't have a chance to learn healthy coping skills. Let your children try to solve their low-stakes problems on their own, and they'll gain confidence that they can deal with stressors and setbacks.
 - ▶ **Combat negative thinking.** Adults and teens can easily fall into the trap of negative thinking. When your teen uses negative self-talk, don't just disagree. Learning to frame things positively will help them develop resilience to stress.

Self-Care & Mental Health



Share your own feelings to encourage self-awareness.

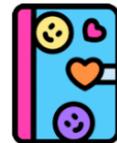
Recognize toxic stress events.

Practice self-care for yourself to set the standard.

Cultivate interests and hobbies.

Tips for Kids

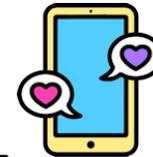
Set aside time for low stress or solo activities.



Encourage journaling and writing.

Encourage them to focus on the moment.

Blessing Manifesting



Find social groups that help them feel like they belong.



Focus on articulating feelings.
"I am angry."
"I am sad."



Establish a self-care routine.

Build self-care into your family's routine. Try a self-care challenge!

30 DAY Self-Care Challenge

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Write down 10 good things about today | Make your own affirmation | Make your favorite meal | Listen to music and dance | Make yourself brunch | Write a letter to your future self |
| Take a long shower or bath | Clean out a drawer or closet | Watch a movie or series | Have a game night | Create a playlist | Sleep in |
| Buy yourself something nice | Write down 15 things you're grateful for | Doodle or color something | Find a DIY project to do | Have a home spa day | Do a social media purge |
| Read a book or magazine | Try a new recipe | Make a mood board | Take 15 minutes to meditate | Pull out your favorite outfit and dress up | Create a bucket list |
| Write down your thoughts | Give yourself 3 compliments | Listen to a podcast | Take a social media break | Take a nap | Read inspirational quotes |

Be aware of unhelpful thinking styles and learn to challenge them.

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking

Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'.



If I'm not perfect I have failed.
Either I do it right or not at all.

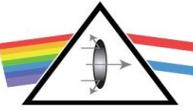
Over-generalizing



"everything is always rubbish."
"nothing good ever happens."

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes.

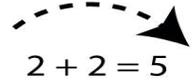
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another.

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions

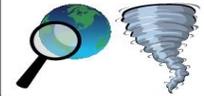


There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking).
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future).

$2 + 2 = 5$

Magnification (catastrophizing) & minimization



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important.

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot.

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed.

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration.

Labeling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people.

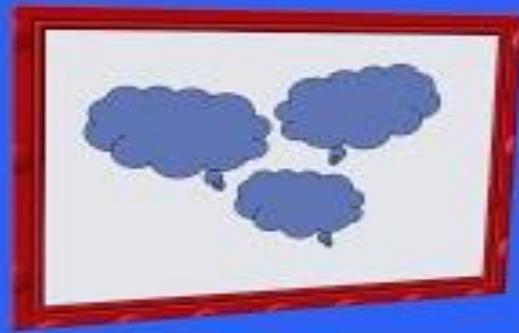
I'm a loser.
I'm completely useless.
They're such an idiot.

Personalization

"this is my fault."

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault.

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.



Reframing Your Thoughts & Cognitive Restructuring

Final Thoughts:

- ▶ De-stressing begins with you. Just as when we fly, we are asked to put on an oxygen mask before we help our family; it is important for you to acknowledge how you are feeling before you can help your child(ren) manage their feelings.
- ▶ Normalizing feelings is healing. We've all been through a lot since the start of the pandemic. I'd be willing to bet you have experienced feelings similar to those of your child(ren).
- ▶ Build in REALISTIC self-care. Don't try to build in self-care that will ultimately leave you feeling like you failed if you don't do it.
- ▶ If stress becomes chronic and beyond self-help, seek professional help.



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