

and is not always ready to meet the demands of unfamiliar social situations. When he or she starts to feel stressed, it probably means that pent-up feelings need to be let out. Besides being available yourself, encourage your teen to look for help from people like these:

- Other relatives
- Your minister or rabbi
- The family doctor
- A mental health professional with experience working with adolescents
- Teachers
- The school psychologist
- Guidance counselors
- Friends
- Friends' parents
- Neighbors

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Cunningham, J. Barton. *The Stress Management Sourcebook*. Los Angeles: Lowell House, 1997.

Hanson, Peter G. *Stress for Success*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Hanson, Peter G. *The Joy of Stress*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews & McMeel, 1985.

Kelly, Kate. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parenting a Teenager*. New York: Alpha Books, 1996.

Law, Felicia, and Parker, Josephine (eds.). *Growing Up: A Young Person's Guide to Adolescence*. Chippenham, Wiltshire, UK: Merlion Publishing, Ltd., 1993.

McCoy, Kathy, and Wibbelsman, Charles. *The New Teenage Body Book*. New York: Putnam, 1992.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

Anxiety In Children
Assertiveness Skills (for Teens)
Building People Skills (for Teens)
Building Positive Teen Relationships
Dealing With Peer Pressure (for Teens)
Depression In Children And Teens
Expressing Feelings Responsibly (for Teens)
Goal Setting (for Teens)
Helping Kids Manage Angry Feelings
Helping Your Child Succeed In School
Helping Your Kids to Be Self-Confident
Helping Your Kids Manage the Relocation Blues
How to Build Your Child's Self-Esteem
How to Cope When Parenting Seems Overwhelming
How to Help a Friend through a Crisis (for Teens)
Life Skills (for Teens)
Listening Skills (for Teens)
Personal Negotiation Skills (for Teens)
Positive Reinforcement (for Parents)
Separation Anxiety
Social Anxiety Disorder (Shyness)
When Kids Don't Want to Go to School
When Kids Underachieve
Workplace Skills (for Teens)

Helping Your Child or Teen Manage Stress

INTRODUCTION

People feel stress when their resources (their ability to cope with things) do not match the demands of a specific situation. This is true for kids as teens as well as adults. Typical situations where people feel stressed include the following:

- Having to cope with too many distractions
- Being expected to meet unclear, confusing, or unrealistic goals
- Having too much or too little to do
- Having to do work that is overly complicated
- Having to do tasks that are boring, repetitive, or unpleasant



- Having to deal with too many changes (e.g., in the rules, in one's situation, in how the work needs to be done)
- Being expected to do tasks without the required skills, training, or background
- Having to spend time with abusive, negative, or unreliable people (other kids or authority figures)
- Fearing for one's safety
- Living, working, or going to school in a crowded space
- Being ill or just not feeling well
- Not getting enough exercise
- Not eating properly
- Not getting enough sleep
- Not having enough time to relax
- Abusing drugs or alcohol

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD MANAGE STRESS?

The following tips may assist you in helping your child or teen identify the sources of stress in his or her life and to manage them better.

1. Work with your child to figure out what is causing him or her to feel stressed out. Use the preceding list to help identify the stressors.
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- Older children and adolescents can write about their feelings in a private journal. Teens might make a list of people who cause them stress, and explore what the issues are.

2. Help your child decide what to do about each of the sources of stress. Look for areas where you can help him or her. For example:
 - If the child is stressed because another child is bullying him in class, suggest that you talk to the teacher together.
 - If your teen is anxious because she is falling behind in Spanish class, discuss the options for helping her. Let her choose the best one.
3. If relating to others is one of the problems, help your child or teen build stronger people skills. These may include the areas of communication, assertiveness, problem solving, and/or managing conflict. People skills are learned; no one is born knowing how to get along well with others.

People skills are learned; no one is born knowing how to get along well with others. Help your child identify the skills he or she needs to develop, and help make a plan for learning them.

4. Teach your child to steer clear of toxic people and situations. Explain that there will always be individuals who seem to have a negative effect on others. Discuss with your child how to limit the amount of time spent with these people. He or she might consider declining their invitations to play or ask the teacher to be moved to a different part of the classroom. Explain to your children that they don't have to feel guilty about avoiding anyone who makes them feel bad about themselves.
5. Help your child look for ways to seek out positive people and situations. This is the reverse of the idea above. Talk to your child about spending more time in situations that make him or her feel good.

6. Check your child's diet. Some foods actually amplify the stress response:
 - Caffeine stimulates the release of stress hormones. This increases blood pressure, heart rate, and the flow of oxygen to the heart. Ongoing exposure to caffeine can also harm the heart tissues.
 - Refined sugar and processed flour are stripped of important vitamins. In times of stress, some of these vitamins are needed to help the body maintain the nervous and endocrine systems.
 - Complex carbohydrates (fruits, vegetables, whole breads, cereals and beans) are better for the body and help it resist the effects of stress.
7. Encourage your child to exercise. This is one of the simplest and most effective ways to respond positively to stress. Physical activity provides a natural release for the body during its fight-or-flight state of arousal. When the body returns to its normal state of equilibrium after exercising, one feels relaxed and refreshed.

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8. Help your child look for ways to let go of tension and anxiety. Meditation and progressive relaxation are two valuable ways to regenerate and refresh oneself. Even children can benefit. You can purchase meditation and relaxation audiotapes (there are some titles created especially for kids) or record your own. This is especially important because health and long life depend on minimizing stress and achieving a sense of balance and well-being.
9. Make sure that your teen has someone to talk to. Adolescence can be a highly emotional time. Your teen is encountering new things every day