

The Teen Years: Stress and Coping

Developmentally, the teen years are about forming your identity, separating from your parents and exploring your place in this world. All of which can be pretty stressful! Stress is unavoidable in life. The key is minimizing as much stress as possible and learning to cope effectively with the stress that you do encounter. So, here is some information to help teens, and parents too, recognize and cope with stress.

Common Stressors:

Again, stress is unavoidable and the teen years are a time of great changes, socially, emotionally, and physically. Challenges include:

- Beginning high school
- Managing increased academic demands
- Making new friends
- Dealing with peer pressure
- Developing sexually including body changes
- Dating...and breaking up too
- Leaving home for college

And these are just the ones that most teens encounter. Additional stressors could include:

- Taking on too many activities
- Moving to a different neighborhood
- Changing schools
- Separation or divorce of parents
- Illness or death of a family member or friend
- Family financial difficulties
- Community violence

Signs of Stress:

Recognizing when your feeling stressed is the first step in beginning to deal with it. Although everyone reacts differently to stress, the following symptoms are common warning signs.

- Difficulty sleeping or feeling overtired
- Changes in appetite, eating too much or too little leading to weight loss or gain
- Headaches, stomachaches or other physical complaints
- Increased irritability, anger or frustration
- Feeling sad or crying frequently
- Excessive worry, anxiety or panic attacks
- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness

Tips for Managing Stress:

1. First, since everyone reacts differently, become aware of what stresses you out and how it affects you.
2. Protect yourself from stress by getting enough sleep, eating well, and staying active.
3. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes, and other substances. These will only lead to increased anxiety, depression, and poor decision-making
4. Set realistic expectations for yourself. Don't expect yourself to be perfect and be forgiving of yourself when you make a mistake.
5. Avoid stressful situations if you can. Don't take on too many activities. It is okay to say no to some things. Don't leave school projects until the last minute.
6. Don't be friends with someone who is constantly pressuring you. Be your own person.
7. Unexpected life events like the death of a loved one happen. You can manage these events by recognizing you can control your reactions. This will decrease your feeling powerless and out of control.
8. Also remember that all feelings are ok, it is how you choose to express those feelings that counts. Use your words, respectfully, rather than behaviors to express your self.
9. Try to alter your thinking and focus on positives. Don't pay attention to that negative voice whispering in your ear.
10. Find someone you trust to talk to, confide in, and seek advice from. After all, everyone needs help sometimes. A parent, friend, teacher, or counselor are all good options.
11. Find ways to reduce stress that work for you...write in a journal, draw, listen to music, take a walk, join a sports team or club, take a shower, drink a cup of tea, play with your pet.
12. Learn relaxation strategies such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation or try yoga.
13. Most importantly, feel good about yourself and your accomplishments. Enjoy exploring this world and your place in it!

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www.afgfamily.com
847.853.0AFG (0234)

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