

Dealing Effectively and Lovingly with Your Over-Stressed Teen

All adolescents experience stress and anxiety. It's important to distinguish normal levels of stress with overwhelming stress. Teens are experiencing an overwhelming sense of unease, worry, and/or fear about upcoming events or activities with an uncertain outcome.

Many teens face pressures to perform academically, achieve high GPA and SAT scores, participate in sports at a very competitive level, get into the best colleges, do community service; and many times have no down time for themselves. They feel they are on a treadmill and do not know how to get off.



Additionally, kids today are exposed to a lot of things that are really difficult to handle: friends or relatives who have committed suicide, or may be addicted to drugs, not to mention all the usual pressures teens have socially. In order to cope with the tremendous amount of stress, teens many times turn to drugs, alcohol and prescription drugs as an escape from their reality.

As a parent, you can help your teen relieve their stress by:

- Spending time with your son or daughter, asking them about their fears, their worries as well as what they look forward to and what excites them in life.
- Paying attention to the triggers and switches in your teen's life that cause them to feel anxious. The more you spend time talking together, the more chances your teen will open up and confide things that are causing them concern.
- Helping them balance their schedules so they are not over committed.
- Not putting pressure on them to perform at a level that they are not capable of.
- Making sure they eat a balanced diet and get plenty of rest. Their bodies need a lot of sleep as they go through adolescence.
- Be sure to seek a profession if you are concerned.



As moms and dads, we also need to give our teens permission to say no. It could be that AP class, piano lesson, math tutor, soccer practice or community service that is overwhelming your child. It's okay to allow your son or daughter to back away from certain activities. Talk to them, "It sounds like your plate is really full right now. Is there something that you can give up that would lighten your load?" This is not an excuse to relinquish responsibilities, but it's allowing your teen the freedom to balance their lives.

Your kids need you. Spending quality time together is crucial to helping them cope with stress. This might mean giving up your weekly golf game in favor of having breakfast with your son. It could mean letting go of that committee you're a part of to go shopping with your daughter. In these critical formative years, kids need their parents desperately; you will have plenty of time later to do the things you want to do.

After a long day of being exposed to a thousand different ideas and influences, make your house a place where your kids feel safe and protected, free of anxiety or undue pressures. Have dinner as a family telling stories and jokes instead of quizzing them about their day. Play games or watch TV together. Encourage them. Let your home be a welcome stop for your teen after a long day of taking on the world.