



Stress Summary

Why Stress?

Children, teens, and adults experience stress. Stress can be a positive force giving extra energy when needed. But, your teen's response to stress can also have negative effects causing family arguments, preventing teens from taking important and necessary risks, and even, creating physical symptoms like headaches and stomach aches. As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your teen's success. Helping your teen learn to manage stress is an important skill they will use throughout their life.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Engage your teen in a conversation to understand their thoughts and feelings.
 - *"What does it mean when you say you're stressed?"*
 - *"What are some things that stress you out?"*
 - *"What are ways you manage your stress now?"*
- Use your best listening skills. Listen closely to what is most concerning to your teen without projecting your own thoughts, concerns, and feelings.
- Practice actively listening to your teen's thoughts, feelings, and worries. The best way to find out whether or not your teen is stressed is by offering a safe space for them to talk without fearing judgment.
- Paraphrase what you heard your teen say.
- Explore the mind-body connection. In calmer moments with your teen ask, *"How does your body feel when you are stressed? How does your body feel now? What's the first tell-tale sign that you are getting stressed?"*
- Think about challenges and your response. Consider questions like:
 - *"What happens during those times when my teen is particularly stressed?"*
 - *"How do my current actions or responses challenge each of us?"* For example, *"When my teen is stressed, they are rude and irritable with me. I immediately respond by being upset, and they storm away to their room and slam the door."* Instead ask, *"I notice you're not being your usual self. What's going on?"*

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model for yourself and your teen will notice and learn. Here are some ways that you can deal with your own stress.
 - Get exercise and fresh air.
 - Practice deep breathing daily.
 - Create quiet time.
 - Set a goal for daily connection.
 - Notice, name, and accept your feelings.
 - “Stay on your own mat.” This is an expression from Yoga. It means taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings and behaviors and not trying to control your teen’s feelings. Ask yourself, “What is my teen developmentally ready to try?”
- Learn together! Understanding how your brain - for both adults and teens - operates when feeling anxiety is critical in shaping your responses and offering support for your teen.
- Brainstorm coping strategies.
- Help your teen develop a positive association with stress. When they start to feel stress in their bodies, they could say, “This is my body’s way of getting me ready for the challenge.”
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary.
- Create a chill zone.
- Design a plan to handle stress.
- Teach your child how to stop rumination.
- Create a family gratitude ritual.

Tip Deep breathing is not just a nice thing to do. It actually decreases the chemical that has flowed over your brain and allows you to regain access to your creativity, language, and logic rather than staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your teen can offer them a powerful tool to use anytime, anywhere when they feel overcome with anxiety.

Trap Though at times it can feel like it, there are no “bad” feelings. All feelings have a positive intention. In fact, every feeling you have is a vital message quickly interpreting what’s happening around you. Because feelings are merely that - an instant interpretation - you always have the opportunity to reinterpret your circumstances and particularly your response to your feelings.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “I’d love to see...” statements. *“I’d love to see how you are able to bring your wise self right now.”* This can be used when you observe their stress mounting.
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements. *“I noticed how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. That’s excellent!”*
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine.
- Proactively remind. Remind in a gentle, non-public way. *“Remember what we are going to say when we keep playing worries over and over in our mind? What is it?”*

Tip Remember how you typically feel at the end of a long day before bedtime when you've been really stressed about something? You may be internally beating yourself up for your own words and actions. Consider that your teen might do the same. End the day with love. Although they need to hear it every day, they need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days in particular. You can rest assured that making a point of it will add to their resilience and strength.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions. *"You have a test coming up today. Do you remember what you can do to help yourself if you feel stressed?"*
- Learn about development.
- Reflect on outcomes. *"Seems like you couldn't get to sleep last night because you had so much on your mind. What can we do tonight to change that?"*
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different coping strategies can help offer additional support and motivation for your teen when tough issues arise.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes. *"I noticed when you got frustrated with your homework, you moved away and took some deep breaths. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs as ways to appreciate one another.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen's success today and in their future!

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