

Hand-out for Parents

HELP YOUR TEEN WITH STRESS

PUBERTY IS A TIME of heightened sensitivity to stress, according to neuroscientists. And because of changes taking place in the brain, the teen years are a time when it's both important and challenging to help kids deal with stress. We cannot protect teenagers from all stress, but we can help them develop the tools that will enable them to deal with the stress they will experience throughout life. Here are some things parents can do to help:

Tune into your own stress

"How you deal with your own stress is linked to how you help teens, how they experience stress, and how they learn to cope with their stress," says psychologist Dr. Robin Alter. Learning to deal constructively with your own stress can have a profound impact, not only on you, but on your children and other people around you.

Maintain your parent-child relationship

Almost any positive influence you want to have on your teenager depends on a good relationship. According to research, it is particularly important that teenagers *perceive* that their relationships with parents are supportive. So work at maintaining a positive relationship with your teen(s). Try to grab as many of the small opportunities to spend time together as you can. If there are activities you both enjoy, either as participants or fans, do them together. Eat meals as a family. Take your son or daughter out for a lunch or coffee date. Try to connect with your teen in a nonjudgmental way during car trips.



Recognize the signs of stress

When people are over-stressed, it usually comes out through emotional symptoms, like angry outbursts and moodiness, and/or physical symptoms like headaches or stomach upset. In children and teens, an increase in troublesome behaviour may also be signal of stress.

Other signs of stress include:

- increased irritability, sadness, anxiety or panic
- trouble falling asleep
- undereating or overeating
- a pattern of overreacting to minor problems
- an increase in nervous habits like nail biting or hair twisting
- social withdrawal
- concentration or motivation problems

Share coping strategies

Teens aren't always open to our help, but over time we can help them learn ways to manage their stress symptoms:

- Share the things that help you, and encourage them to experiment to see what helps them deal with stress. Physical activity and relaxation practices like yoga are often effective stress-busters.
- Encourage them to take a short break when tension, frustration or fatigue with a task is affecting their ability to function effectively.
- Gently challenge your teen's negative thoughts.
- Support problem solving, by helping your teen to consider alternatives, make a plan to deal with the problem, break an overwhelming task into smaller steps, etc.

- adapted from PFC's booklet *Stress Lessons: A parents guide to stress in young teens.*