

## Stress in Teens

Thinking about your teen and stress can be...well...stressful. In the midst of managing our own stressors we have to stop and consider the stress of those around us too. That seems like a lot to manage. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be. Here are some quick tips to know what to look for and how to handle it.

There are many signs of stress in teens, but one of the most common is a change in behavior. Whatever is typical for your child, if you notice a major change, it may be time to ask some questions. These can be changes in eating or sleeping patterns, dramatic changes in friendships or in the amount of time they spend on social activities. If they've lost interest in something they used to love and spent a lot of time and energy on, your child may be experiencing stress. Here are some other signs to look for:

<b>Signs of Stress in Teens</b>
Anger
Disillusionment
Low self-esteem
Psychosomatic complaints (stomach aches, headaches, etc.)
Panic/panic attacks
Rebellion
Dramatic changes in friendships and/or interests
Acting withdrawn
Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping patterns
Distrust of the world/friends/family
Crying
Overly-concerned/enmeshed with parent(s)

When your teen is under stress, you can feel pretty helpless. There are many quick and easy ways to support your child during difficult times. Here are a few ideas:

<b>Ways to help</b>
Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings and help them problem-solve
Be a good example and stay calm
Promote opportunities for exercise
Ensure your teen is getting enough sleep-9 hours per night
Help your teen maintain a healthy diet
Help manage their schedule-discuss ways to improve it
Have fun and do things that are out of the ordinary routine
Highlight strengths and talents
Help your teen navigate seeking help, if needed
Remind your teen that perfection is not expected and mistakes are learning opportunities
Try to separate your own wants from your child's
Limit electronic devices at night to help with sleep and reduce exposure to "social drama"
Increase opportunities for relaxation: yoga, drawing, music, etc.
Promote healthy social connections- team sports, outings, gatherings etc.

Of the articles I reviewed, one suggested parents "listen and translate." This is great advice. Teens will not always use the correct vocabulary to describe their stress so be on the lookout for words like "worried," "annoyed" or "angry." In my work here at Grosse Pointe North, I would also encourage you to listen for "freaking out" or

“stressed.” These words are common in my office. If you hear these words, ask your teen to explain what they are feeling in more depth or ask them what they think the cause of their stress may be. I also see this as a teachable moment. I often encourage students to think about the language they use, as it can be disconnected from what they are truly feeling. When students report “freaking out” they are often quite calm. I will say to them, “What does that mean to you? Tell me more.” This causes them to slow down and really tune into their inner self. Many times they are quickly redirected and realize they are actually worried about an upcoming test or sporting event. Now that’s a problem we can solve! Identifying a real problem and helping your teen brainstorm a few solutions teaches healthy emotional and stress management. This type of “reframing” also lays the foundation for the next time your child comes to you “freaking out.” If your teen knows you are going to walk them through this to get to an identifiable feeling or problem, the dramatic and unhealthy language will decrease over time. It’s little tweaks like these that can make a big difference.

Regarding electronic devices, many parents are reluctant to limit their children’s access. Consider trying a “turn in time” each night where your teen turns their phone in to you or puts it in a secured location. Exposure to devices before bedtime can be disruptive to sleep and I know many teens who keep their phones under their pillows at night and wake up with every “ping” of an email or text message. Improving sleep can make a big difference. On average, teens are only getting about 7.4 hours of sleep per night, which is much less than the recommended 9 hours. In addition, I have a coworker that says, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” This is true in many ways. Not only will decreasing exposure to devices improve your child’s sleep but it will also reduce their exposure to all the negative things that happen on social media during the late night hours.

If you or your teen needs additional help managing their stress, seek support. Ask your primary care physician or school mental health providers (counselors, school psychologist, school social worker) for help and/or additional resources. We are here and happy to help.

I have listed a couple of my favorite parenting resources. The first one, Brain Rules for Baby, while geared for new parents, is a fantastic resource. It is worth reading, even for parents of teens. The author, Dr. John Medina also has a book for adults. Both Dr. Medina and Dr. Gottman have nice websites. You will also find additional information, speeches and interviews by searching their names on youtube.

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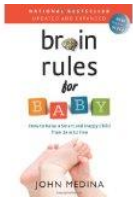
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Additional Parenting resources:

[www.brainrules.net](http://www.brainrules.net)

Medina, J. (2014) *Brain Rules for Baby: How to Raise a Smart Happy Child from Zero to Five*



<https://www.gottman.com/parenting/>

Gottman, J., & Declaire, J. (1998) *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*

