

Positive Mental Health and Young People





- 1. Stress**
- 2. Communication**
- 3. Resiliency**





Stress

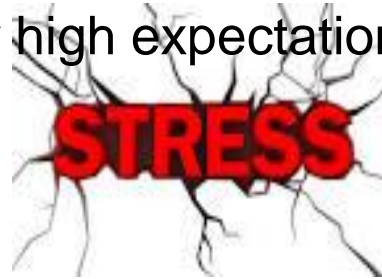
Stress in teenagers: what is it?

- Stress is the way your body responds to challenges and gets you ready to face them with attention, energy and strength. Stress gets you ready for action. When you feel you can cope with these challenges, stress gives you the motivation to get things done.
- But there can be problems when your stress is greater than your ability to cope.



Causes of stress in teenagers

- include study worries, looking after other family members, friendships, family conflict, body image, work, bullying, discrimination, alcohol and other drug use, tension between cultural worlds, high personal expectations or high expectations from parents, teachers and friends.

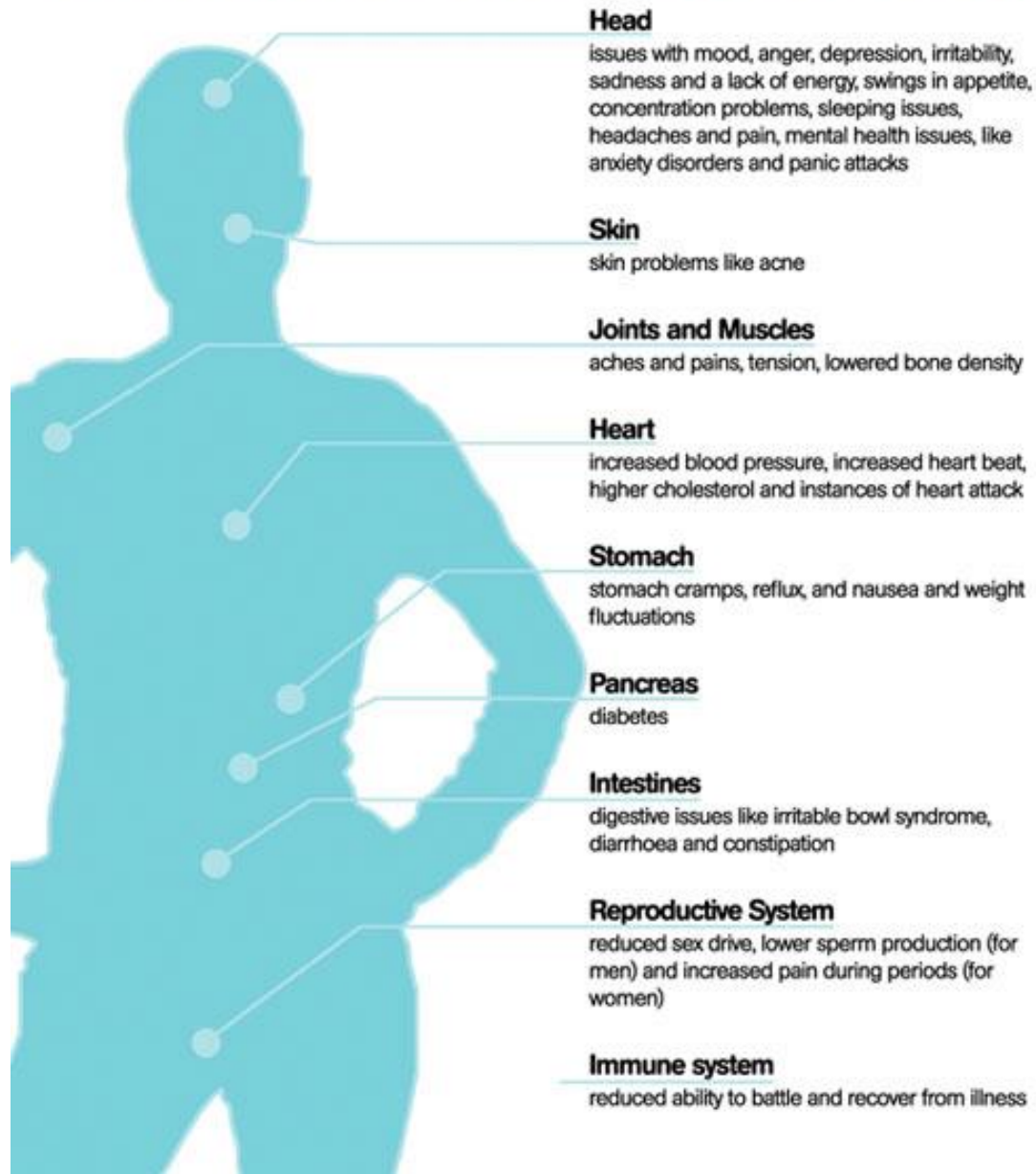


- If you can keep an eye on things that could cause stress for your child, try to reduce those things and also respond early to signs of stress in teenagers, you might be able to prevent stress tipping over into [anxiety](#) and [depression](#)

Stress and your body

- When you feel threatened, your body automatically gets you ready for a 'fight or flight' response. The problem is your brain doesn't choose between real or imagined threats and responds automatically the same way to both.
- Two powerful hormones – adrenaline and noradrenaline – get working.
- Cortisol, which has been called the 'stress hormone', is also released. Cortisol puts your body on extra alert. Although it's a natural body chemical, regular release of cortisol over a long time can weaken your immune system.

What stress does to your body



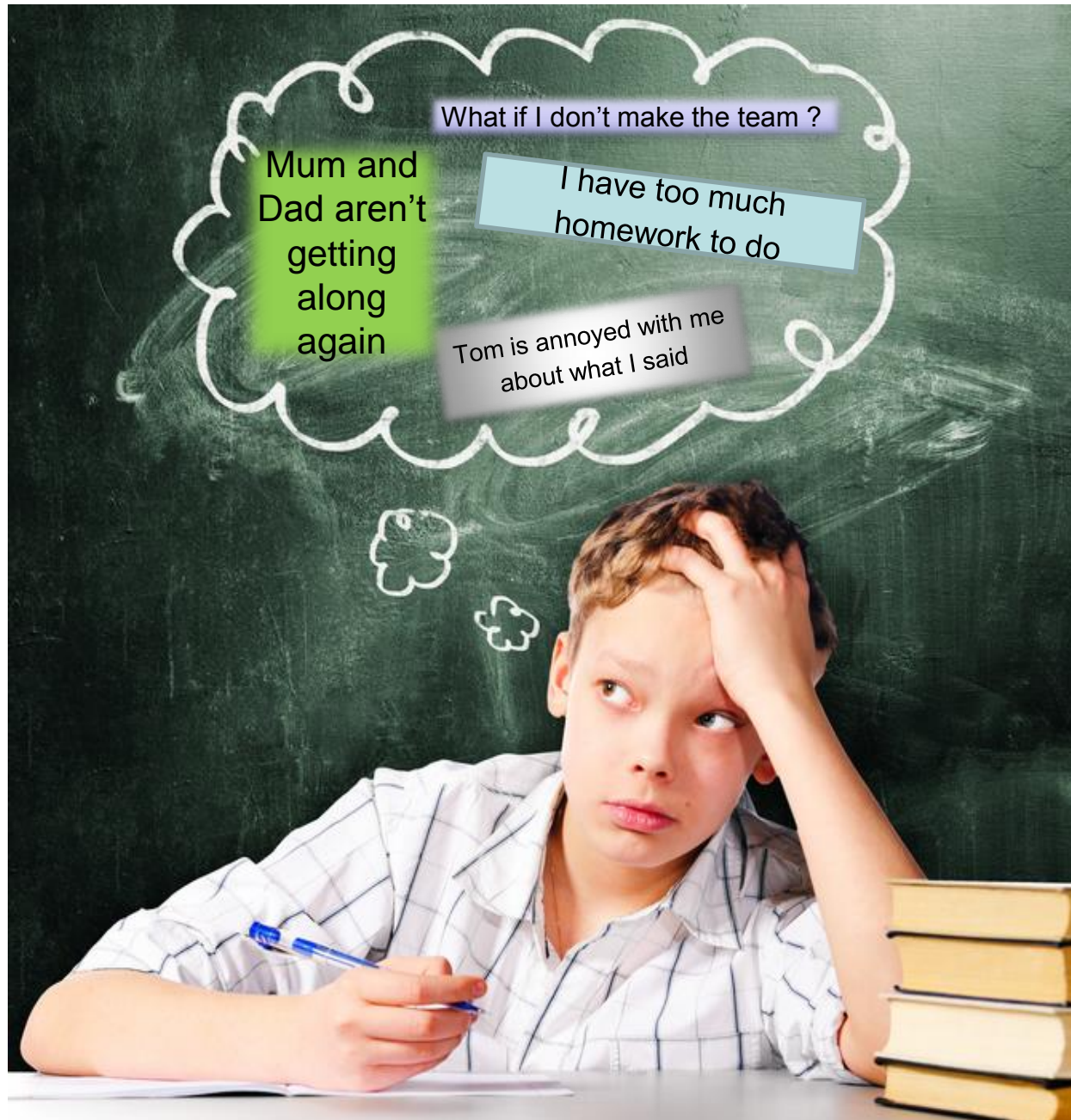
Signs of stress in teenagers

Behaviour changes: withdrawing, sleeping too little or too much, eating more 'comfort food', eating less, wanting to be by herself more than usual, crying, refusing to go to school, having emotional 'ups and downs' for no obvious reason, having less energy than usual, being aggressive, going down in schoolwork or results.

Emotional changes: being cranky or moody, feeling sad, down or hopeless, feeling worthless, finding it hard to relax or switch off, getting more angry more than usual, feeling that 'nothing is going right', feeling like he's on an 'emotional rollercoaster ride'.

Physical signs: feeling sick, headaches, shoulder pain, stomach aches, jaw pain, not being hungry, more tired than usual, losing or gaining weight, getting frequent colds or infections, having panic attacks, dizzy spells.

Thinking changes: finding it hard to concentrate and stay focused, losing the thread of thoughts or conversations, having trouble remembering things, making snap decisions or errors in judgment, having trouble organising and planning or making decisions, getting confused or irrational.



What can Parents do to help

Monitor if stress is affecting your teen's health, behavior, thoughts, or feelings.

- Listen carefully to teens and watch for overloading
- Learn and model stress management skills
- Support involvement in sports and other pro-social activities

In general, you can help your child with stress by [listening](#), spending time together and doing things that make your child feel good.

You can also help your child reduce stress by working together on two key areas – helpful thinking and healthy lifestyle.

Healthy family lifestyle changes for you and your child

- Do some physical activity: **cortisol** can leave your child feeling tense. Exercise burns off cortisol and helps the body relax.
- Stay connected to family and friends: plan some special time with your child when you know he's feeling stressed. Positive relationships are the building blocks of mental health.
- Get enough sleep: one of the biggest causes of stress in teenagers is not getting enough sleep. Your child still needs about 9¼ hours of sleep a night.
- Eat good food: aim for a family diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegies, lean meat, dairy foods and wholegrains.
- Relax and unwind: this might be going for a walk, reading a book, having a relaxing bath or listening to some music.



Teens can decrease stress with the following behaviours and techniques

- Exercise and eat regularly
- Avoid excess caffeine intake which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Learn relaxation exercises (abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques)
- Develop assertiveness training skills. For example, state feelings in polite firm and not overly aggressive or passive ways: ("I feel angry when you yell at me" "Please stop yelling.")
- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress. One example is taking a speech class if talking in front of a class makes you anxious
- Learn practical coping skills. For example, break a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks
- Decrease negative self talk: challenge negative thoughts about yourself with alternative neutral or positive thoughts.
- Learn to feel good about doing a competent or "good enough" job rather than demanding perfection from yourself and others
- Take a break from stressful situations. Activities like listening to music, talking to a friend, drawing, writing, or spending time with a pet can reduce stress
- Build a network of friends who help you cope in a positive way



**BUT
WAIT!**

Stress can be positive

- Ask any athlete, actor, musician or other performer and they will tell you that stress can be a very positive force. When all that adrenaline is flooding the body it helps muscles to work harder and faster, speeds up reaction times and can improve performance.
- The trick is learning to use all that positive energy and not allowing stress to become an uncontrolled negative force which leads to mistakes.
- Practising skills makes it easier to use stress in a positive way whether you are giving a talk to the class, performing in front of an audience or trying to improve sporting abilities. In other words, if you know your stuff you can use stress to be the best that you can be.



Communicating with your Teenager



What we know.....


- Teenage years can be crazy....



- And awkward...

What we know.

- Teenage years can be difficult for many families.
- It can be a time of turmoil, turbulence, stress and change.
- There are unique challenges related to increased demands from school, peer interactions, extracurricular activities and changing bodies and feelings.
- Teenagers are trying to move from the realm of childhood to adulthood and establish their own identity, develop ideas, values and beliefs of their own.
- A child's job is to grow up and become an independent adult – it is a parents job to help with this process
- This can mean your teenager will start to test limits, seek autonomy and possibly resist authority

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- Teaching or reiterating the importance of good communication, particularly when times are difficult for your teens will set them up for communicating well as an adult.

Issues that can affect Communication

- Decisions should be made together as your teenager becomes more independent – try to discuss issues and reach an outcome together.
- Teenagers may have viewpoints and take up activities that you don't understand. Try and see this as them learning to be themselves.
- You will always feel responsible for your child's safety regardless of how old they are – when they are teenagers they start to make their own decisions and some will be wrong. Try to be supportive and not criticise and hopefully they will learn from their mistakes.



Communication: Try to Avoid....



- Side tracking – getting off the topic
- Bringing up the past
- Blaming
- Character assassination of your teen
- Mind reading
- Overgeneralising – using words never or always
- Avoiding communication

Good Listening Tips



Improving
Communication
Starts with
Better
Listening



Improving Communication: Starts with Better Listening

- Give all your attention. Listen with your eyes as well as your ears (turn off the TV or other distractions)
- Show your listening – nod, use open ended questions
- Listen as an ally – look for points you can agree on rather than those you don't
- Hear your young person out – don't butt in
- Try to understand both the content and the emotions being expressed.
- Be aware of your own reactions and emotions
- Withhold judgements but share your views.



Improving Communication

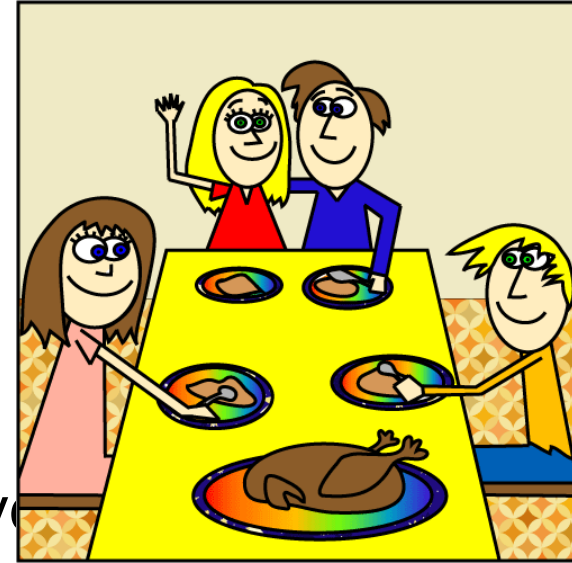
Also try...

- Be a role model in your communication with others
- Stay on topic and don't get distracted
- Avoid assumptions
- Be clear – concise
- Be respectful and polite – consider tone of voice
- Make the most of everyday interactions – casual conversations – positive encounters
- As well as catching kids for conversation – make time to talk
- Plan and prepare for challenging conversations – choose a time when teen is likely to be open to discussion – people are calm
- Keep the messages simple and brief
- Share feelings – don't minimise - 'understand' don't 'know'
- Practice

Communication

Its not all just about conversation

- Make time to spend together
- Eat as a family
- Get to know your teenager
- Take an interest but avoid over-involvement
- Give them privacy
- Establish clear rules and consequences in conjunction with your teenager
- Encourage good sleep, diet and exercise routines and model these
- Remember to tell them and show them you love them





Questions to think about?

- Have you been an active listener?
- Have you shown your teen that you understand what was said?
- Have you noticed any changes in your relationship with your teenager?
- Pick one or two ideas from the previous list you haven't used before or would like to do better – set yourself a goal to practice them **what will you do, when will you do it and how will you do it?**

Key points

- There are no miracle ideas for communicating with your teenager. Each young person is an individual and will need different advice.
- The consolation for parents – the behaviour you see during teenage years fits the developmental phase. The purpose of adolescence is to establish their own identity – remake their sense of self. This often requires resistance, space, time and significant change.
- Encourage independence while teaching safety. You will struggle with how much independence to give.
- Start young – communicate with your kids as they grow up



There will be conflict
Its all about how you manage it



Resiliency

Resiliency

- Helping your child build their inner strength to cope with the ups and downs of growing up, and set in stone their capacity to move beyond challenges of adulthood, is one of the best things you as a parent can do.
- We call this inner strength “resiliency”, which for some is a well understood skill and for others, is an elusive and confusing concept.



What we mean by Resiliency

- To define, Resiliency is a person's capacity to cope with *living* in spite of stress. It's about *coping* with challenges

A time for reflection

- Take a few moments and ask yourself:
- What does it mean to Cope?
- What does it mean to be Living?

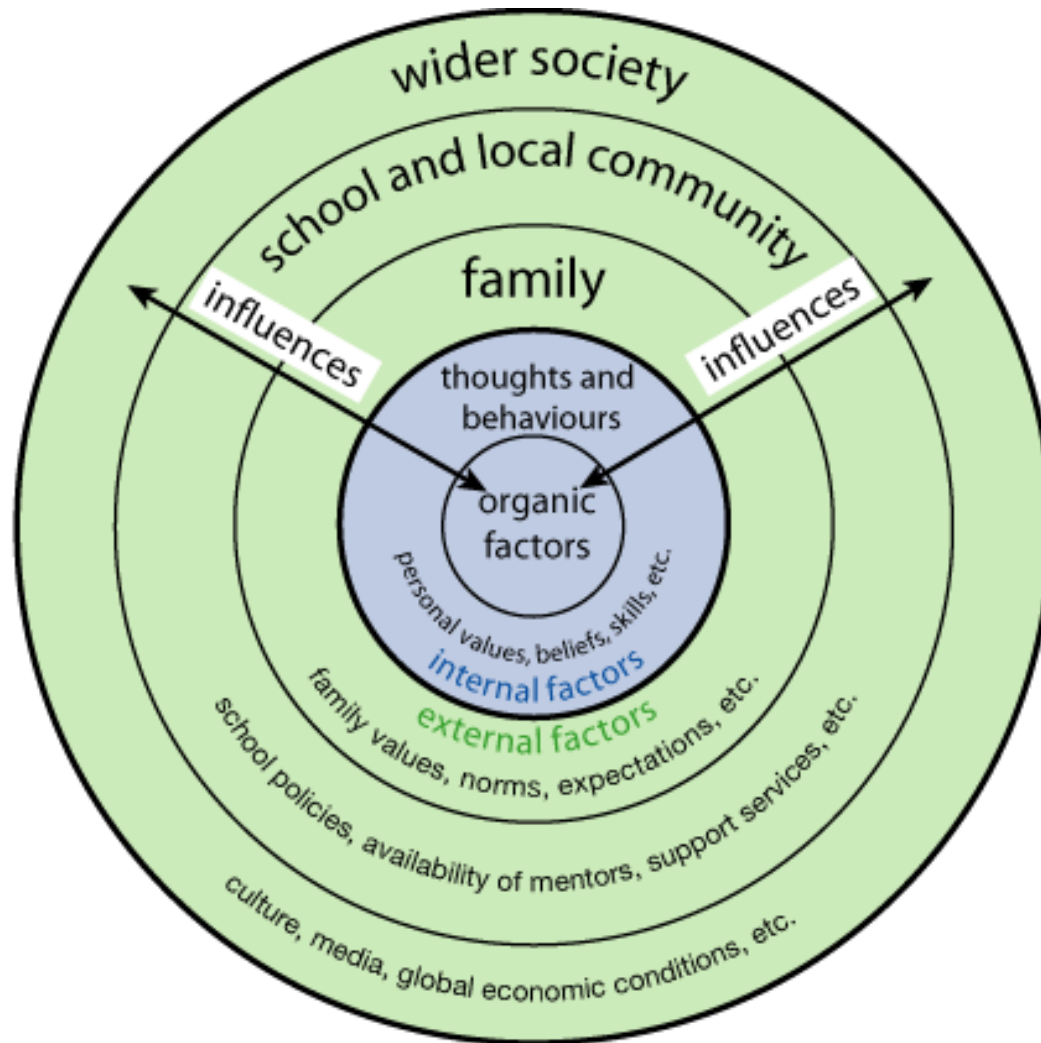


Are we born warriors or are we trained?

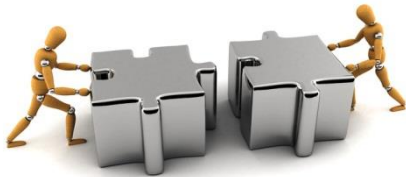
- A person's capacity to be resilient is not independent upon the individual



Resiliency as a Network



For example





Building your child's resiliency

- Resilience is built on three main building blocks:

- **I CAN**

- **I AM**

- **I HAVE**

I CAN

- make a difference...talk to others about things that frighten or bother me...find some ways to solve problems...control myself when needed.



I AM

- a worthwhile person...loved and loveable...wiling to be responsible for what I do...happy to do nice things for others and show that I care



I HAVE

- people around me I trust...people who love and support me...people who want me to learn to do things on my own...people who will assist me when they are sick...people who will keep me safe



Brick by brick..

- some common principles :
- Stop and Listen
- Is it working?
- Let them know...You're valued no matter what!
- Treat them as a capable person.

Bouncing Back!

- With this structure, a child can build the skills of learning how to bounce back!
- emotional strength
- communication within the home
- their own capacity to problem-solve
- optimistic view of their world



Now, for some words from the
expert...

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/challenges>

