



November School Health Newsletter – 2018-19 compiled by Beth Green RN

Five ways to help your child deal with stress

Like adults, children of all ages struggle with stress. Preschoolers may worry about separation from mom and dad or monsters under their bed, while older kids may feel stress about fitting in at school or getting good grades. Friends, social pressures, romance and the future are all common stressors for teens.

In addition, kids' stress may be intensified by more than just what's happening in their own lives. Divorce, the loss of a loved one or world news including natural disasters, war and terrorism can add to their stress.

If you think your kids are stressed, teach these five techniques to help them cope:

1. **Get support.** When your kids need help, instruct them to reach out to people who care including a parent, close friend, school counselor or coach. Remind kids to ask for the helping hand or pat on the back they need — and deserve — to get through the tough situations they face.
2. **Label feelings.** Teach your children to notice their feelings and name them. Then, help them find ways to calm down, get past the upset feelings and talk to a trusted adult. That way, your kids can talk through the situations that caused difficult feelings.
3. **Incorporate stress management techniques.** Things like breathing exercises, listening to music, writing in a journal, playing with a pet, or going for a walk or bike ride can help kids shift to a better mood.
4. **Try to solve the problem.** Once your children are calm and have the support they need, help them figure out what the problem is and what steps they can take to solve it. Even if they can't solve the entire problem, maybe they can begin by solving a piece of it.
5. **Be positive — most stress is temporary.** It may not seem like it when you're in the middle of a stressful situation, but stress does go away. Stress often starts to fade when your kids figure out the problem and start working on solving it.

Link to Inside Children's blog post: <https://inside.akronchildrens.org/2016/05/16/5-steps-for-fighting-stress/>

Don't Ignore Signs of Depression or Anxiety in Your Teen

August 24, 2016 by Jill Wodtley – Writer

Being a teenager isn't easy. As teens face new challenges and social pressures, their growing bodies are changing rapidly. The hormonal changes associated with puberty may also cause feelings of sadness or frustration, making teens moody or irritable.

"For some, this moodiness or sadness is more than just a phase or a bad attitude that will go away," said Dr. Laura Rucker, a pediatric psychiatrist at Akron Children's Hospital. "It could be an early warning sign of depression."

Sometimes anxiety disorders and depression go hand-in-hand, but one can occur without the other. Seeking treatment at the first sign of a problem can be more effective and prevent problems later in a child's life.

Recognizing depression

Depression can occur at any age, but teens can be more susceptible. Significant life-changing events can trigger depression, such as the death of a loved one, their parents' divorce, a move to a new area or even a breakup with a girlfriend or boyfriend.

For some teens, it can start without an outside influence. Depression and other mental illnesses also tend to run in families.

"In many cases, teens may not have the coping skills to handle setbacks, both major and minor, which could lead to depression," said Dr. Rucker. How can parents tell if their children are experiencing typical teenage emotions or something more? "We look at whether how they're feeling is affecting daily functioning," said Dr. Rucker. "Are they isolating themselves from friends and family? Are they having trouble concentrating or completing school assignments?"

A teen who's sad or moody will still enjoy going out with friends or a favorite activity. One who is depressed won't.

Other warning signs of depression include:

- *Increased or persistent irritability
- *Declining school performance
- *Persistent helpless or hopeless attitude
- *Gloomy moods that continue for 2 weeks without improvement
- *Sudden lack of interest in activities outside of school
- *Lack of motivation or energy

- *Abrupt changes in behavior, including withdrawal from activities or extreme hyperactivity

- *Dramatic changes in grooming

- *Low self-esteem

- *Spending more time alone than usual

- *Unusually erratic or impulsive behavior

- *Fits of crying

- *Changes in sleep habits or appetite

Teens who have multiple warning signs or symptoms that are extreme or long lasting should be evaluated by a healthcare professional. Sometimes depression causes physical symptoms such as stomachaches or headaches, so a doctor can determine if there's an underlying physical cause. Talk to your teen about what's going on, without making her feel there's something wrong with her or that she's in trouble. Be supportive and honest and keep the lines of communication open. In some cases, the signs of depression may be more obvious.

"A teen may state that he's feeling depressed or even suicidal," Dr. Rucker said. "Take him seriously and seek help."

Understanding anxiety disorders

All of us experience a certain amount of anxiety from time to time. It can help us perform better, such as when preparing for a test or giving a presentation. It can also keep us on guard in potentially dangerous situations.

However, if your child's worries become overwhelming or seem like they're running her life, it could be an anxiety disorder. Stressful events can trigger an anxiety disorder, but there isn't always a specific cause.

Feelings of fear, worry, panic or intense stress can interfere with sleep, appetite and concentration. They may also cause headaches, nausea and sweating.

It becomes a problem when the fears are unrealistic or irrational and cause a high level of distress that interferes with daily life.

Teens with anxiety disorders are at higher risk for poor school performance and substance abuse. They may also have less developed social skills and low self-esteem.

From <https://inside.akronchildrens.org/2016/08/24/dont-ignore-signs-of-depression-or-anxiety-in-your-teen/>

Seeking treatment

If your teen is suffering from anxiety or depression, don't wait to seek help. Early diagnosis and treatment can help your child overcome these issues and develop the coping skills she needs to face life's challenges now and through adulthood.

"Trust your instincts," said Dr. Rocker. "If you suspect there's a problem, there probably is."

Practicing Gratitude (Thanksgiving is right around the corner)

Gratitude is about focusing on what's good in our lives and being thankful for the things we have. Gratitude is pausing to notice and appreciate the things we often take for granted. Gratitude is about taking a moment to reflect on how fortunate we are when something good happens — whether big or small.

With Thanksgiving around the corner, it's a good time to sit down with our families to reflect and be thankful for our many blessings. It's beneficial not just for raising polite, pleasant children, but perhaps more importantly for your kids' physical and emotional well-being, as well.

"When kids feel and express gratitude and appreciation to the people in their lives, it creates loving bonds and builds trust," said Dr. Sumru Bilge-Johnson, a child and adolescent psychiatry specialist at Akron Children's Hospital. "When kids are thoughtful and helpful, it boosts their self-esteem and happiness, and diminishes stress and depression."

In fact, studies have proven grateful children are happier, more optimistic and have better social support. In addition, grateful kids are more connected to their schools and community.

But, being grateful is a learned behavior. It doesn't come naturally to children. Dr. Bilge-Johnson offers 7 ways you can help your kids build an attitude of gratitude and make giving thanks — at Thanksgiving and beyond — their new normal.

Practice saying thank you, encourage family participation in the family's daily functions, volunteer for outreach events, practice saying no to everything kids ask for that are not necessities (it's hard to be thankful when they have everything), discuss things you are thankful for daily, be optimistic, and celebrate gratitude by having a gratitude list what kids are thankful for.

From <https://inside.akronchildrens.org/2017/10/26/seven-ways-to-help-your-kids-build-an-attitude-of-gratitude/>