

Surviving the Stress of Your Teen Years

The National Mental Health Association offers the following tips for reducing or controlling stress:

Be realistic. Don't take on everything; learn to say no. Set realistic goals for yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, try eliminating an activity that is not absolutely necessary. Ask yourself, "What really needs to be done? Is the deadline realistic?" No one is perfect, so do not expect perfection from yourself or others. And ask for help if you need it.

Meditate. It only takes about 10 to 20 minutes to get a benefit from meditating. These few moments of quiet reflection may bring relief from stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. And it is simple to do: sit quietly, listen to peaceful music, relax, and try and think of pleasant things or think of nothing.

Visualize. Take a moment to picture how you can manage a stressful situation more calmly and successfully. This can work with just about anything, whether it is an important presentation at work or moving to a new place or taking an exam. A visual rehearsal can boost self-confidence and help you have a more positive attitude toward a difficult task.

Take one thing at a time. When you start to feel overwhelmed, try taking one task at a time. Make a list of things you need to do. Put the most urgent task at the top. Once you have accomplished it, cross it off and move on to the next one. The positive feeling of crossing things off can help keep you motivated.

Exercise. Regular exercise is a great way to reduce stress, and it benefits the body as well as the mind. Just 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity a day can do the trick.

Get involved in hobbies. Take a break from the stressors of life and do something you really enjoy. Try painting, scrapbooking, or reading.

Practice a healthful lifestyle. Eating healthfully will make a difference. Avoiding things like smoking, excessive alcohol, and caffeine will help as well. Make sure you get adequate rest and exercise, and that you balance work and play.

Share your feelings. Talking about things can help you feel better. A conversation with someone can help you relax. And listening to someone else can take the focus off of yourself? Something we all need to do every now and then. Stay in touch with your family and friends; don't try to cope alone.

Give in occasionally. You don't always have to be right. Be flexible. Be willing to compromise. If you do, others may meet you halfway. If you know you are right, stand your ground. But be calm and rational. And listen and make allowances for other's opinions.

Go easy with criticism. When you expect too much from yourself or others, you may end up feeling frustrated, let down, and disappointed. Remember that each person is unique and everyone, including yourself, has shortcomings. But each person also has many beautiful qualities to share with the world.

What You Can Do:

List the things which cause stress and tension in your life.

- How does this stress and tension affect you, your family and your job?
- Can you identify the stress and tensions in your life as short or long term?
- Do you have a support system of friends/family that will help you make positive changes?
- What are your biggest obstacles to reducing stress?
- What are you willing to change or give up for a less stressful and tension-filled life?
- What have you tried already that didn't work for you?
- If you do not have control of a situation, can you accept it and get on with your life?

Resources:

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

Books to Consider

- Martha Davis, 2000, The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook
- G. Gaynor McTigue, 2003, Why Make Yourself Crazy? 300 Strategies for a Stress-Free Life