



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Stress

February 2014

Adults often don't think about teens having stress in their lives, but teen stress is an important health issue. The teen years are marked by rapid changes in physical, cognitive and emotional development. Most teens experience more stress when they perceive a situation as dangerous, difficult or painful and they do not have the resources to cope. Some things that can cause teens stress:

- School pressure and career decisions
- Dating and friendships
- Pressure to wear certain types of clothing
- Pressure to be a particular size or body shape
- Body changes
- Family issues, such as death of a loved one, divorce or moving
- Being bullied or exposed to violence
- Crammed schedules; juggling school, sports, after school activities, social life and family obligations

- Stomach problems, headaches or even chest pain
- Allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma
- Sleep problems
- Drinking, smoking, overeating, or doing drugs
- Sadness or depression

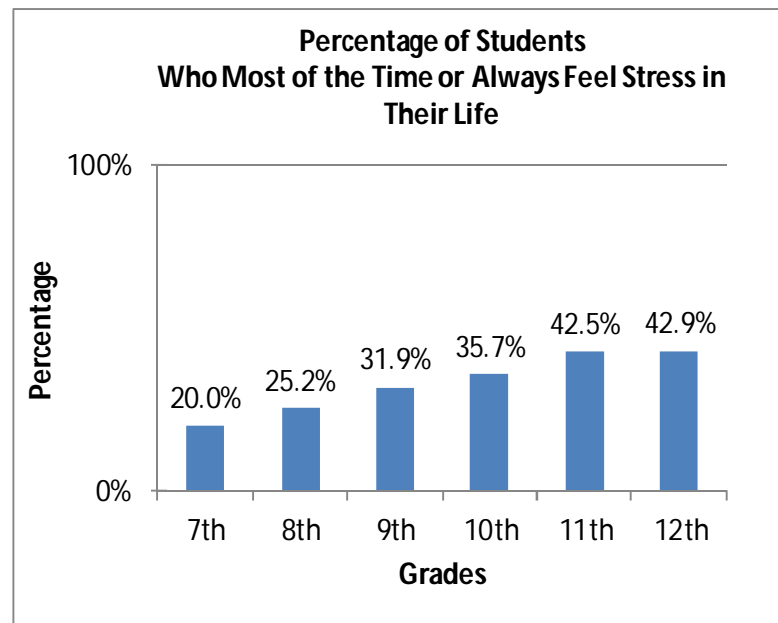


Chart 1: Teen responses to the question: *How often do you feel stress in your life?*

DO TEENS IN SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN SCHOOLS FEEL STRESSED?

The recent Department of Public Instruction Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 5,410 youth in grades 7th through 12th in Southwest Wisconsin showed that 33% of 7th-12th graders reported they most of the time or always feel stress in their life. Chart 1 also illustrates as teens get older their stress level increases.

Some teens are overloaded with stress. Parents can watch for these signs of a stressed out teen:

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- A feeling of being constantly pressured, hassled and hurried
- Irritability and moodiness

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Everyone is affected by stress and deals with it in different ways. Stress is a way that our body responds to the demands of our environment, relationships, and our perceptions and interpretations of those demands. Here are some ways parents can help teens when they are stressed:

- Beware of your teen's behaviors and emotions
- Build trust with your teen
- Be available and open to talk with your teen when they are ready
- Encourage the expression of feelings
- Teach and model good emotional feelings
- Encourage them to tell you if they feel overwhelmed
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships
- Encourage physical activity, good nutrition and rest
- Teach your teen to problem solve

- Remind your teen of his or her ability to get through tough times, particularly with the love and support of family and friends
- Support involvement in after school activities that interest your teen and help them limit overscheduling their life
- Contact your teen's teacher with any concerns and make them part of the team available to assist your child
- Seek the assistance of a physician, school psychologist or school counselor if stress continues to be a concern

WAYS FOR TEENS TO KEEP STRESS UNDER CONTROL

Stress-management skills work the best when they are used regularly, not just during stressful times. Parents can talk with their teens about the following tips recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help them keep cool, calm and collected:

Put your body in motion.

Physical activity clears your head and lifts your spirits by increasing endorphin levels – the natural “feel-good” chemicals in the body. It's important to get up, get out and get moving!

Fuel Up.

Start your day with a full tank, eat breakfast. Make sure your meals consist of protein, fruits, vegetables and grains. Avoid those quick energy bursts from sodas and sugary snacks – it only lasts a short time and when it wears off you may feel sluggish and more tired than usual.

LOL!

Head off stress with regular doses of laughter by watching a funny movie, reading a joke book or making up your own riddles. Instead of getting upset when you have those silly moments, laugh out loud!

Have fun with friends.

Being with people you like can help you forget about stress. Friends can help you work through your problems and see the brighter side of things.

Talk to someone you trust.

Talking to someone that you trust or respect such as a friend, parent, or teacher can help you get through your problems and see them from a different view point.

Learn to relax.

Find time to relax after or during a hectic day or week; sit and read, daydream, take a nap, listen to music or work on a relaxing hobby.

Get proper sleep.

When you're overtired, a problem may seem much bigger than it actually is. If you are deprived of sleep, you might have a harder time completing assignments, focusing on tests and playing your best in sports.

Take a stand against overscheduling.

If you are feeling too booked, consider eliminating an activity or two and focus on those that are really important to you. Get organized and plan your days.

Keep a journal.

Writing about your feelings, what's happening in your life and things you like to accomplish can help on those days when nothing is going right. Also, write about stressful situations and how you handled them and then look back on it when you encounter another stressful situation.

Don't sweat the small stuff!

Getting worked up over every little thing will only increase your stress. Remember that everyone has stress in their life; it's up to you to choose how to deal with it.

Resources:

Website: teenshealth.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/bam>

Facts for Families, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, May 2005.

Stress in Children and Adolescents: Tips for Parents, National Association of School Psychologists, 2012

Teen Stress, An excerpt from [The Teen Years Explained: A Guide to Healthy Adolescent Development](#).

“Parents Make a Difference” is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a program of the Department of Public Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Extension and local school districts. This newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension newsletters “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was written by Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County and reviewed by Bev Doll and Sarah Hopkins, UW-Extension Grant County; Jennifer LaTour, UW-Extension Richland County, Mary Knellwolf, UW-Extension Lafayette County and Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County. Thanks are extended to nearly 5,410 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2013 YRBS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608) 326-0223; Iowa County (608) 930-9850; and Richland County (608) 647-6148. Or visit the website at: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/swys>