Helping Young People Thrive in a Stressed Out World

Finding Calm in Transitions

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Welcome and Introductions

A child’s ability to cope with stress has consequences for physical and emotional health throughout life.

Our Mission
Confident Kids, Productive Adults

Practical, evidence-based programs spanning critical developmental stages

Birth - Make the Connection

Parenting for Life
School years - Kids Have Stress Too! and

Adults - Stress Strategies

Toddlershood - Make the Connection & Parenting for Life

Adolescence - Stress Lessons & Parenting for Life
Goals

• To understand the stress response and the impact it has on individuals
• To identify what the stressors are for youth transitioning into post secondary experiences
• To take away specific strategies to manage stress
Overview

• Ground you in your own experience of stress and the physiology of stress
• Increase understanding of adolescence
• Become familiar with stress in teens
• Explore navigating transitions
• Start looking at strategies to reduce stress in teens.
“What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents…their morals are decaying”

Greek Philosopher, Plato
The Early Teen Years

“......are a time when students face a whole range of new developmental, social and academic stressors and pressures. Researchers believe children at this age may have a heightened sensitivity to stress due to aspects of brain development and hormonal changes that affect brain function.”

From Stressed Out to Chilled Out, page 5
Under Stress, Under Learning

• Stress is a normal part of everyday life – but too much stress can:
  • make it more difficult to concentrate, to learn and get along with others
  • have a profound effect on health
  • interfere with our ability to focus, think and learn
  • have similar effects on adults working with youth
Research indicates that stress reduction programs in schools lead to improvements in:

- Academic performance
- Self-esteem
- Mood
- Concentration and behavioural problems.

Durlak et al, 2011
Every child requires someone in his or her life that is absolutely crazy about them.

- Urie Bronfenbrenner
Parenting Today

• Today’s parents over identify with their child’s success like never before in the human race
• Some anxiety is developmentally required
• Parents tend to carry the ‘worry ball’
• Children are safer today than at any other time in parenting
• Parents need to let children experience ‘non-catastrophic’ failure

Dr. Alex Russell, Psychologist
Hincks-Dellcrest Center
Goals of Adolescence

1. Adapt to the physical and emotional changes of puberty
2. Transform relationships with parents
3. Move out into a wider social circle
4. Begin to integrate feelings of lust and the need for relationships and intimacy
5. Create a new identity that can take them into adulthood

Michael Thompson, Ph.D., Psychologist
Let’s Talk About Stress

In pairs, share a minor stressor that has caused each of you stress in the last 24 hours and answer the following questions:

1. Why was it stressful?
2. How did you feel physically?
3. How did you deal with it?

Discuss results in the larger group...
Stress “101”

- Stress can be beneficial, tolerable, or harmful
- Stress can be harmful or toxic if it overwhelms our ability to cope – **A consistent, caring adult can make all the difference!**
- The way we respond to stress is not fixed; our response can be influenced by learning stress-management and coping strategies
- **What creates stress is not so much the event that occurs, but the way in which we react to the event**
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s93ywqFa6CM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s93ywqFa6CM)
The Upside of Stress

• Opportunity to be resourceful
• Builds resilience if face it and problem solve way through it
• Come out of stress better and stronger when you conquer it
Resilience = Stress + Support

• The ability to cope well under adversity and “bounce back”

• Thinking style plays a critical role in determining resilience – more than genetics, more than intelligence, more than any other single factor (e.g., “I can do it!”)
Key Concepts of KHST!

1. Educators, parents and caregivers can help children learn ways to manage stress.

2. There are signs and symptoms of too much stress.

3. Children who can recognize, acknowledge and express their feelings appropriately, cope better with stress.

4. Relaxation strategies can reduce a child’s reaction to stress.
Key Concepts of KHST! Continued…

5. With help, children can learn to solve problems.

6. There are some simple ways to create a less stressful environment for children.

7. When children speak harshly or critically to themselves, they create more stress. Using their positive voice can lower stress.

8. Physical activity is a proven strategy for coping with stress and promoting self-regulation.
Stress Stoplight

Familiar image that helps explain to young children the three stages of stress reduction:

**Red Light:** STOP – “Red Alert” – Recognize stress symptoms

**Yellow Light:** CHANGE – Deal with the stress and use tools in the toolbox

**Green Light:** GO – Feel the stress go away; Feel energized, more relaxed, in control and ready to go!
Stress in Teens

Group Activity:

Group 1: Stressors – what are they?
Group 2: Signs and symptoms of stress
Group 3: Identify strategies teens use
What do teens worry about?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>% VERY CONCERNED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School pressure</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do when finished school</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing friends</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source — *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s newest generation is responding to change and choice.*
Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Books, 2009
What Stresses Teens Out?

• Pressure to do well in school
• Pressure to fit in with their friends and measure up to other people’s expectations
• Problems with family, friends or dating relationships
• Taking on too many things at the same time
• Having to decide what they’re going to do when they leave school
• Pressure to try alcohol, drugs or to have sex.
Mind / Body / Feelings / Behaviour
Connection

Diagram:
- Mind
- Body
- Behaviour
- Stress
- Feelings

The diagram illustrates the connection between mind, body, behaviour, stress, and feelings.
Physiology of Stress

• Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

• Brain perceives danger/threat or stressor and sends message to Pituitary gland which produces ACTH.

• This enters the bloodstream to the adrenal gland and produces stress hormones.
The teenage brain is a work in progress.

Adolescence is a time of profound brain growth and change.

The brain is not fully formed until the mid-twenties.

http://www.youtube.com/user/teenmentalhealth1
How many times do I have to tell you!?

The last brain part to fully mature (prefrontal cortex) helps with paying attention, planning and decision making.
The Adolescent Brain

• Unable to see future consequences of actions
• Pruning process of gray matter in prefrontal cortex begins at puberty
• Cognitive abilities emerge from concrete to more abstract – painful, learning process with poor choices, self conscious, humiliated

Dr. Ron Clavier, Psychologist
Transitions

• Can be between activities, settings, programs and development
• Across the lifespan
• Any transition at any age can elevate stress
• Find ways to relax to ease the transition and anticipate what may help/hinder this
• Identify what can be controlled eg having choice with courses and sharing what want, become familiar with new environment, skill development such as public transit, meal preparation, computer skills, accessing help,
• Anticipate what creates uncertainty and what can be done to make event more certain
Transitions Con’t

• Social is important - build relationships with staff in program, others from High School, people in community, following passions and interests
• Develop financial skills with using bank card, managing money
• Integrate changes to turning 18 early and adult sector with new doctor, funding changes, registering with Developmental Services if appropriate
• Acknowledge own internal fears as parent or professional and impact on youth as role model
• Believe in child “You can do it.”
Behaviours and Stress

• Behaviours are a way of communicating.

• What might be the stressors behind some of the behaviours you are seeing?

• Stop, Look and Listen
Perception and Stress

• What creates stress is not so much the event, as the way in which we react to it

• Teen’s perception of their ability to cope, impacts how they manage it
Learned optimism

• What is going RIGHT in the situation?

• What is keeping your teen going?

• What can your teen do about it?
Listening to the Voice In Our Head

• Self-talk has a huge influence on your feelings
• Self-talk is very powerful
• It sends the same chemicals to the brain as actual experiences do
• Challenge that negative voice!
• Health benefits of positive thinking

  negative: “I totally blew it!”

  positive: “I can do better the next time!”
Problem Solving

• Think of it as a problem to be solved
• Choose to have an optimistic attitude about it
• Identify which stressors cannot be removed
• Identify what you can change and what you cannot
• Identify people who can help you
• Identify a goal and simple steps that can help you get there
Strategies to Manage Stress in Teens

- Taking care of self – exercise, food, sleep, relaxation
- Building caring relationships
- Aware of stressors and stress response
- Positive self talk
- Asking for help
- Parking Lot
- Reframing
How Adults Can Help

• Be non-judgemental rather than criticize
• Listen, be supportive, answer questions honestly – that does not always mean you agree!
• Be interested in what happening in their life
• Be clear what is important to you
• Give teen a voice
• Manage your own stress
Communication Helpers

✓ Build a good relationship
✓ Listen without judging & listen a lot
✓ Ask what they think
✓ Ask if they want advice
✓ Show interest in their interests
✓ Be ready to listen when they are ready to talk
Communication Stoppers

Being Negative!

- Yelling
- Lecturing
- Judging
- Insulting
- Being angry
When to Reach Out For Help

- Concern for changes seen in teen
- Withdrawing from friends, family
- Changes in eating, sleeping patterns
- Upset feelings and behaviours seem to be getting worse
- Signs of extreme stress last more than a month
- Worries prevent teen from getting on with normal, everyday life
Don’t Give Up!

• Support students through the process.
• Insist that he or she do whatever is necessary to make things right.
Where to Get Help

• Family Doctor
• Guidance Department at School
• More Than Medication
  http://www.morethanmedication.ca/en/home/
• Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
  www.kidshelpphone.ca
• The Psychology Foundation of Canada
  www.psychologyfoundation.org
• www.mindyourmind.ca
• Canadian Mental Health Association
  www.cmha.ca
A Resource for helping young people manage life’s stressors

- Uses a constructivist, project-based approach
- Doesn’t set the teacher up as the ‘expert’ but provides context for inquiry and active learning related to effective coping strategies
- Uses a cross-curricular approach
“We can not always build the future for our youth, but we can build the youth for our future.”

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

Thank You – Keep in touch!

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