



Signs and Symptoms of Stress in Teens

Being a teenager is one of the most exciting yet challenging times in a person's life. Teens face a variety of pressures and stressors including school, friends, relationships, family life, and planning for the future. While some stress is normal, excessive or chronic stress can take a major toll on a teen's mental and physical health. As a parent, it's important to recognize the signs and symptoms of unhealthy stress in your teen. Being aware of these warning signs allows you to provide support and seek help when needed.



Changes in Behavior

Look for changes in your teen's typical behaviors that may indicate they are feeling overwhelmed with stress:

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Increased irritability, moodiness, anger outbursts
- Changes in eating habits
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lower academic performance
- Increased absences from school
- Engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse

If you notice your teen isolating themselves more, lashing out in anger, or participating in out of character behaviors, these may be signs that stress is taking its toll.

Physical Symptoms

Stress manifests itself physically in the body. The hormones released when we experience prolonged stress can cause a range of symptoms:

- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, muscle pain
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Weight loss or weight gain
- More susceptible to colds, infections, and illness

Teens under excessive stress may complain of persistent headaches or stomach troubles. You may also notice changes in their sleep patterns or appetites. Their bodies may be overly taxed, resulting in lowered immunity.

Emotional Changes

High stress levels can impact a teen's emotional health in a variety of ways:

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Depression
- Increased frustration, irritability, anger
- Overwhelmed, having difficulty coping
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Thoughts of self-harm

Your teen may appear more anxious or depressed and have difficulty managing their emotions. In extreme cases of distress, they may express thoughts of self-harm. Seek professional help immediately if your teen is experiencing suicidal ideation.

Difficulty Concentrating

Stress impairs concentration, memory, and the ability to retain information. You may notice the following signs:

- Trouble focusing in class or while completing assignments
- Forgetfulness, increased absent-mindedness
- Lower academic achievement
- Taking longer to complete tasks
- Appearing “spacey” or zone out frequently

An inability to concentrate or stay focused can negatively impact school performance. Your teen may struggle to process information or take longer to finish their work. Provide them with support to manage their workload.

Avoidance and Engagement Coping

People cope with stress in different ways. Teens may engage in avoidance coping (withdrawing from stressors) or engagement coping (actively addressing problems):

- Avoidance Coping: denying or ignoring problems, skipping school, dropping activities, substance abuse.
- Engagement Coping: problem-solving, expressing emotions in healthy ways, exercising, seeking support.

Look for unhealthy avoidance behaviors like skipping school or increased substance use. Encourage positive engagement coping like talking about their feelings, exercising, or problem-solving.

How Parents Can Help

If your teen is showing significant symptoms of stress overload, don't ignore it. Here are some ways you can help:

- Have open conversations about their stressors and feelings
- Help them problem-solve and manage responsibilities
- Encourage healthy self-care like a nutritious diet, sleep, and exercise
- Model healthy stress management and coping strategies yourself
- Set reasonable expectations for school and activities
- Build in time for fun and relaxation as a family
- Seek counseling or therapy if symptoms persist



Getting your teen to open up can be challenging. Show empathy, actively listen, and remind them you are there to help. Collaborate on stress-busting solutions like managing their schedule. If symptoms continue despite your efforts, seek the guidance of a mental health professional.

The teenage years can be physically and emotionally taxing. Look for multiple signs of unhealthy stress in your teen, not just one. Have compassion, communicate your support, and take their concerns seriously. With caring parents aware of the warning signs, teens have a much better chance of growing into happy, resilient adults.