



Coping with Stress

Information for Young People

What is stress?

People get stressed when they feel like the demands or pressures on them are more than what they can cope with. Everyone feels stressed at times, you may feel under pressure, worried, tense, upset, sad and angry - or maybe a mixture of uncomfortable feelings. These feelings can be entirely normal, but sometimes stress can get too much and can even trigger a mental illness. Sometimes people try to 'block out' stress by using drugs or alcohol, this makes things worse in the long run. It is important to get help if stress is getting too much or you are using drugs or alcohol to try to cope. There are many reasons why you might feel stressed, for example:

- School work piling up
- Preparing for exams
- Being teased or bullied at school
- Arguing with parents, brothers, sisters or friends

Stress can be even worse if your family is breaking up, someone close to you is ill or dies, or if you are being physically or sexually abused. People vary in the amount that they get stressed by things - you may find that you get very stressed out by exams, but your friends don't seem bothered. Positive events can also be stressful. For example, starting a new college or going to university. Many people need a little bit of stress to give them the 'get up and go' to do things that are important to them.

What are the effects of stress?

Stress can affect different people in different ways. Stress can affect your body and your feelings. Some of the effects are listed below.

Effects of stress on your body:

- Feeling tired
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Going off your food
- Stomach aches
- Headaches
- Aches and pains in your neck and shoulders

Effects of stress on your feelings:

- Feeling sad
- Being irritable, losing your temper easily
- Finding it hard to keep your mind on schoolwork

How do I cope with Stress?

There are several things that you can do to help yourself cope.

- Don't suffer in silence! Feeling alone makes stress harder to deal with.
- Talking to somebody you trust can really help you to deal with stress and to work out how to tackle the problems that are causing it.
- Make a list of all the things in your life that are making you feel stressed - write them down on a piece of paper. Then take each one in turn and list all the things you could do to tackle it. This can help you sort things out in your head. Problems look easier to deal with one at a time than in a big jumble in your head.
- Take a break - do something that you really enjoy
- Do something relaxing for example, take a hot bath or watch a film
- Do some exercise, this produces chemicals in your body called endorphins which make you feel good.

When to get help?

Sometimes stress gets on top of you, especially when the situation causing the stress goes on and on and the problems just seem to keep building up. You can feel trapped, as if there is no way out and no solution to your problems. The signs that stress is getting too much and that you should get help:

- You feel that stress is affecting your health
- You feel so desperate that you think about stopping school, running away or harming yourself
- You feel low, sad, tearful, or that life is not worth living
- You lose your appetite and find it difficult to sleep
- You have worries, feelings and thoughts that are hard to talk about because you feel people won't understand you or will think you are 'weird'
- You hear voices telling you what to do, or making you behave strangely
- You are using drugs or alcohol to block out stress

If you feel like this, it is important to get help and talk to someone you trust!

The Royal College of Psychiatrists. (2013). Mental Health and Growing Up: Factsheets for Parents, Teachers and Young People (4th ed.). Cambridge: Royal College of Psychiatrists.

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