

Stress and Anxiety Age 18 Summary

Why Stress and Anxiety?

Teens and adults both experience stress. Feelings of stress are naturally built-in mechanisms for human survival and thriving. These feelings are the body's way of warning you when there is danger and calling your attention to problems that need resolving. Teens ages 15-19 are learning about their strong feelings, and you, as a parent or someone in a parenting role, can help your teen learn to identify and grow skills to handle their stress -- an important skill they will use throughout their life.

Tip Even though signs of stress and anxiety may look the same, they are different and require different approaches to handle each. While mild anxiety may respond well to coping strategies used to manage stress, a teen experiencing anxiety may need additional help from a mental health professional to determine if they have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are different from feelings of stress or mild anxiety, which are short-term.

STEP

1



Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *"When do you feel stressed?"*
- *"When do you feel uncomfortable, frustrated, or angry?"* (These feelings can mask underlying anxiety.)
- *"What time of day?"*
- *"What people, places, and activities are usually involved?"*

Trap Be sure you talk about stress at a calm time when you are not stressed.

STEP

2



Teach New Skills

Learn together! Because stress is a part of everyday life, teaching our teens how to manage daily stressors is essential. Teaching builds basic skills, grows problem-solving abilities, and prepares your child for success. Teaching also involves modeling and practicing the positive behaviors you want to see, promoting skills, and preventing problems.

- Model behaviors (and your teen will notice and learn).
- Get exercise and fresh air.

- Remember to breathe.
- Create quiet time.
- Set a goal for daily connection.
- Notice, name, and accept feelings regularly.
- Allow for healthy risks.
- Brainstorm coping strategies for yourself, such as imagining a favorite place, taking a walk, drinking water, taking deep breaths, counting to 50, journaling, drawing, or taking a bike ride.
- Design a plan for when stress takes over so you don't have to think in those moments. What will you do or say? Where will you go?
- Create a calm-down space.
- Work on your teen's feelings vocabulary. Use specific feelings words to describe your state of mind and help your teen tell theirs.
- Teach your teen how to stop repetitively analyzing problems or concerns.
- Create a family gratitude ritual.

Tip Deep breathing removes the chemicals that have flowed over your brain so that you regain access to your creativity, language, and logic versus staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your teen can offer them a powerful tool anytime, anywhere, when they feel overwhelmed with heated emotions.

Tip Although some feelings associated with stress and anxiety do not feel good, it is essential to remember that every feeling is a vital message from ourselves. Set the rule or expectation in your household: Having feelings is always okay! This helps each family member feel safe to express what they are feeling. What you do with those feelings is the crucial next step.

STEP
3



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements like: *"Show me how you use the coping strategies we discussed to calm down."*
- Practice your plan for managing stressful situations.
- Recognize effort: *"I notice how you took deep breaths when frustrated. That's excellent!"*
- Proactively remind: *"Remember what we will say when we keep playing worries repeatedly in our mind? What is it?"*

Tip After a tough day, your teen may be internally beating themselves up for what they did and said earlier. So, end the day with love. They need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days.

Trap Don't continually repeat a request when teens are stressed or upset. Teens often need more time to calm down, regain perspective, and move on. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they can take steps to self-manage. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can do what you need.

STEP 4



SUPPORT

Support Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask critical questions to support their skills: *"You have a test coming up today. Do you remember how to help yourself if you feel stressed?"*
- Learn about development. Becoming informed about your teen's developmental milestones will offer you empathy and patience.
- Reflect on outcomes. *"It seems like you couldn't sleep last night because you had so much on your mind. Did you have a hard time paying attention in class? What could we do tonight to help?"*
- Stay engaged. Try out new and different coping strategies to see what works best.

STEP 5



RECOGNIZE

Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen's efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen's behavior.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"I noticed when you got frustrated with your studying, you took some deep breaths and got a drink of water. Excellent."* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
 - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the teen knows what to expect, like *"If you finish your studying before dinner, you will have time to hang out with your friends after dinner."* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's internal motivation.
 - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent is in a crisis (like a teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, *"You worked hard this week and talked about your feelings when overwhelmed. Let's go for a hike together this weekend."*

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2023). *Stress and Anxiety Age 18 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

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