

Stress: Supporting Our Young People

There are assignment and essay deadlines, exam pressures and important decisions to be made about the future. Add to this other issues – perhaps a relationship not working out or a sick relative – and it's easy to understand how things can get on top of young people at times. And it's not great for parents and carers either!

This article looks at how to spot signs of stress, gives tips to help your child cope with their studies, and signposts sources of information and support. When you read through this article, you'll probably find that you are already doing a lot of the right things.

Signs of stress

Some worry in life is inevitable, but prolonged or extreme periods of stress can be damaging to our wellbeing. It can be difficult to distinguish between normal behaviour and signs of excessive stress, but things to watch out for include if your child:

- finds it hard to concentrate and keeps forgetting things
- withdraws from other people
- has difficulty sleeping
- is particularly grumpy, tearful or moody
- develops erratic or extreme eating habits.

We may all experience some of the above at times, so you don't necessarily need to be concerned. But it makes sense to look for patterns in behaviour, sudden changes, prolonged symptoms and more extreme indications of stress, such as panic attacks or self-harm.

How you can help

There are a number of ways you can help your child deal with the stresses in their life.

To build their self-esteem, encourage them to focus on what they are good at. Talk to them about their expectations and check that they are realistic. If you suspect that

they're afraid of disappointing you, make sure that they know that the last thing you want is for them to feel pressured.

Try to ensure that your child has a healthy balance between work and play, and finds time to get out to exercise and mix with others. Doing something that they enjoy every now and then will keep their spirits up. It also goes without saying that you should try to make sure that they get sufficient sleep and eat regular, healthy meals.

Foster good study skills

Good study habits will minimise your child's stress levels associated with workload and revision, and will help them perform to their potential. As with all skills, it takes time to develop effective study techniques and they will need to find out what works for them. Encourage them to:

- set themselves study goals
- produce a weekly study timetable, setting aside realistic periods of time to avoid last-minute panic
- plan to meet coursework deadlines by splitting big projects into less daunting, smaller tasks
- turn off their mobile and avoid social media whilst studying
- only listen to music if it helps them study
- possibly spend some time studying with friends
- make study or revision notes (you can offer to test them on these)
- take regular breaks whilst studying.

Check that they have somewhere comfortable and quiet to work and that they are not distracted by others. Also ensure that they have all the stationery, books and so on that they need.

There are a number of sites that provide learning and revision resources, give tips on study skills and offer tools to devise study timetables etc. These include [GetRevising](#), [BBC Bitesize](#) and [S-cool](#). Study, revision and exam tips can be found on [The Mix](#).

Dealing with exam stress

It's natural that your child will want to do well in their exams, especially if a job or course place depends on their success. Being prepared and having the right frame of mind will help keep their nerves under control. Advise them not to cram the night before. As they need a good night's sleep, make sure that they avoid over stimulating their brain with caffeine, computer games etc. Check that they have everything they need for the next day.

On the day of their exam, check that your child gets up in good time. Tell them they can only do their best and reassure them that they probably know more than they realise.

Support from others

If it appears that your child needs more help than you can offer, encourage them to talk to someone. This may be another family member, a trusted friend or their school/college tutor. Your GP may be able to arrange for them to see a counsellor or there may be one at their school or college. You can also search for local free, confidential counselling and advice services on the [Youth Access](#) website.

Explain to your child that stress is a common problem, so nobody will think worse of them if they seek support.

Information on all kinds of issues affecting young people can be found on the [ChildLine](#) site. The [Mind](#) site has advice on dealing with stress and their infoline is 0300 123 3393. The [YoungMinds](#) charity aims to improve the mental health of young people; their website has information for parents and there's even a parent helpline – 0808 802 5544 – and a web chat facility. If you're concerned that a young person is having suicidal thoughts, [PAPYRUS](#) can help.

Finally...

It's not easy seeing someone you care for struggle to cope, but lots of support is out there. It's a bit of a cliché, but just being there for your child at this important stage in their life is probably the most useful thing you can do.