

## Hand-out for Parents

# HELPING TEENS WITH STRESS

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING stress are essential life skills. Stress levels often rise sharply during adolescence, making it especially important for teens to learn how to handle stress.

### Causes of teen stress

- **School:** pressure to do well, assignments, due dates, exams. Teens tell us that this type of pressure increases as they reach the upper years of high school.
- **Relationships:** Ironically, the two biggest sources of support for teens – friends and parents – can be stressors too.
- **Peers:** pressure to be socially successful, shifting alliances and friendship groups, bullying, pressure to have a boy- or girlfriend or to try drugs and alcohol or join a gang.
- **Parents:** family problems, conflict with parents about rules, parents passing along their own stress, marital conflict, divorce and separation and new stepfamily relationships.
- **Overload:** busy schedules, too many distractions.
- **Social media and electronics:** Although teens enjoy them, social and electronic media can both be stressors when overused.
- **Body image:** Worrying about physical appearance.
- **Money:** Not having enough or as much as other kids.



**Stress awareness:** Talk to your teens about how stress feels, how it affects people, and strategies to relieve or recover from stress. These conversations help kids identify their own stress and deal with it more actively. It also shows them that it is acceptable to talk about stress and seek help with it.

**Provide practical support:** Small caring gestures like giving car rides, temporarily reducing chores, or bringing kids healthy snacks during periods of high stress are not only practical, they also provide emotional support that can help teens find the energy to cope with stress-related problems.

**Don't make it worse:** We can all think of times when we felt stressed and it seemed like everybody was trying to tell us what to do. Unwanted advice doesn't always help and sometimes it adds to our stress. So we may need to back off and give kids time to recover from the in-the-moment stress they are feeling.

### Stressbusters teens can try

**Physical activity** (dancing, walking, running, taking a shower, slow deep breathing) can take away some of the tension and anxiety associated with stress.

**Doing things they enjoy** helps restore the energy that teenagers use to deal with stress.

**Talking to a friend** who will be supportive and won't add to the stress can help lighten the load.

As parents, our goal is not to take away all of our children's stress. But by tuning into their stress we can help them reduce some of it, and teach them realistic and positive stress management skills that will help them throughout their lives.

### How you can help

**A healthy home base:** A healthy diet, enough sleep and physical activity, the time and space to relax—these are the basic tools for coping with and recovering from stress. Teens may not have the judgment or self-discipline to provide these things for themselves. That's why they still need parents!