



PARENTS USE YOUR POWER

October 2016

81% of students are alcohol-free (30 day data)*

Conversation Starter of the month– “What do you do to cope strong?”

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How to Help Your Teen to Cope Strong

Today’s teens have a lot going on in their lives. The teen years have always been a challenge for both the teenager and the parent; trying to fit in with peers, navigating physical changes, trying to become independent, getting competitive grades in school, making the team....the list goes on and on. What are parents to do to help their teens cope strong? Model healthy coping. Your teen learns more from what you do than what you say.

Eating healthy, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep are key to [handling daily stress](#). By taking care of yourselves, parent and teen are able to think more clearly and have a better perspective on situations. Research shows that the [appropriate amount of sleep](#) is 8-10 hours per night. This may sound foreign to teens but it is definitely beneficial for functioning on a day-to-day basis. Sleep helps the brain rest and restore important information. When there is little sleep, a person cannot function at their full potential. If there isn’t enough time in the morning for breakfast and to pack a lunch, have “on-the-go” options such as fruit or protein bars on hand to grab. Research shows that eating breakfast fuels the brain and body and that breakfast reduces behavioral problems as well as improves grades. Regular exercise helps to reduce the tension you feel in your body and helps to decrease your stress level.

Avoid alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Some people use these substances because they think it will help them deal with stress. In reality, they actually cause your body to be [less prepared](#) to deal with difficulty. By redirecting stress hormones in your brain, your body’s natural ability to cope with stress is diminished, leading to even more stress.

Help your teen to develop assertiveness skills and practice them. Being able to clearly state your feelings helps you to take control of stressful situations. If someone is doing or saying something that causes you stress, state your feelings in polite, firm and not overly aggressive or passive ways.

Have your teen build a network of friends and trusted adults who can help him/her handle situations that are just too difficult to manage alone. Let your teen know that you are available to help sort out a problem.

Encourage taking a break from stressful situations. Activities like listening to music, talking to a friend, drawing, writing or spending time with a pet can reduce stress. This is not an excuse to avoid stressful situations, it is simply a way to reduce the stress and then head back when you feel calmer.

Help your teen learn to feel good about doing a good job rather than demanding perfection. We can place unrealistic expectations on ourselves and others to be perfect. That adds extra stress. While we always want to give our best effort, we need to be realistic about our abilities. Revisit goals occasionally to assess if they have changed or are “worth the cost.”

Help to break large tasks into smaller, more manageable parts. Sometimes thinking about a big task can be overwhelming. It can be less intimidating to think about the task as a series of smaller steps.

Finally, challenge negative thoughts with positive thoughts. “My life is hopeless” can be transformed into “ I may feel hopeless now, but things will probably get better if I work at it and get some help”

Parent Tips:

- ◇ Schedule one-on-one time with your teen daily and give your undivided attention
- ◇ Be empathetic. By acknowledging your teen’s feelings you help your teen to accept his/her own feelings, which in turn allows your teen to resolve problems
- ◇ Treat mistakes as learning experiences. Show your teen that it’s okay to make mistakes, that they are expected, and that mistakes can be part of the learning process
- ◇ Focus on strengths. Everyone possesses areas of strength and it is important for you to identify and focus on these rather than to focus on weaknesses. Each time your teen achieves a goal, it builds confidence to persevere the next time a challenge arises

*Source: Spring 2016 survey of 11,774 District 203 & 204 High School students. Survey & data analysis by CPRD at University of Illinois. A project of 360 Youth Services, Naperville School District 203, Indian Prairie School District 204, Naperville Police Department, KidsMatter, and District 203 & 204 parents. Funding in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

