

Our children have lots of stressors in their lives—school, grades, sports, friends, technology, lack of sleep. Unmanaged stress can be overwhelming and lead to anxiety-related illnesses. Taking the time to talk with and teach adolescents healthy ways to manage stress helps them to become emotionally healthy individuals. Emotionally healthy individuals are less likely to use alcohol as a coping tool. Talking about stress can make it easier to also talk about not using alcohol. **Keep talking – they really are listening.**

Stress is not always a bad thing. It is our body’s way of dealing with a difficult situation. When we are stressed, we have physical reactions like rapid pulse, increased breathing or tense muscles. Stress helps our bodies cope with tough situations and can even increase our performance. It becomes a problem when it begins to impact mood, health, or our ability to function or concentrate.

STEP 1: The first step in dealing with stress is to identify the things that cause stress for you. Each person has different stressors in their life. As a family, do this “thumbs up, thumbs down” activity to determine areas of stress for the members of your family. Choose one person to read the list of stressors and keep track of the responses.

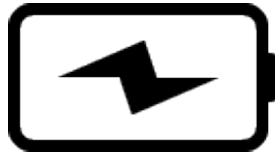
Is this a stressor for you?	# thumbs up (yes)	# thumbs down (no)
Money		
Illness/injury (yourself or someone else)		
Friends		
Family relationships		
Work or school		
Time—not enough time; feeling over-scheduled		
Change in job, school or home (move)		
Travel		
Feelings about myself		
Are there other things that cause stress for you?		

As a family, discuss the areas that had thumbs up (yeses). What happens to you when you feel stress about that thing? Do you know why that is stressful for you? Is there something you do to help manage the stress? Is there something another family member can do to help you manage that stress?

STEP 2: Make a plan! What are some things each person in our family can do to manage their stress? Each family member should choose one of the things they identified as a stressor. Then, look at the list of suggested techniques on the next page. If necessary, add a technique that would work for you. Choose a technique that might help you cope with the thing that is causing you stress. Fill in the chart on the next page.

STEP 3: How are you doing? Set a date in a few weeks (actually put it on the calendar!) to meet together to discuss your progress. Did your plan work? Do you need to make changes? Are you ready to tackle another stressor?

TEENS SAY THEIR PARENTS ARE THEIR MOST RELIABLE SOURCE WHEN TALKING ABOUT NOT USING ALCOHOL



Decrease stress with the following behaviors and techniques:

- Exercise and eat regularly.
- Avoid excess caffeine intake which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco/vaping and other drugs.
- Learn relaxation exercises (abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques).
- Develop assertiveness training skills. For example, state feelings in polite, firm and not overly aggressive or passive ways: (“I feel angry when you yell at me” “Please stop yelling.”)
- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress. One example is taking a speech class if talking in front of a class makes you anxious.
- Learn practical coping skills. For example, break a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks.
- Decrease negative self-talk: challenge negative thoughts about yourself with alternative neutral or positive thoughts. “My life will never get better” can be transformed into “I may feel hopeless now, but my life will probably get better if I work at it and get some help”.
- Learn to feel good about doing a competent or “good enough” job rather than demanding perfection from yourself and others.
- Take 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.
- Build a network of friends who help you cope in a positive way.

Family Member	Stressor	Technique to Manage Stressor