

# IS YOUR CHILD STRESSED OUT?

Everyone experiences stress. Stress is how the body handles life's challenges—chemicals are released to increase certain bodily processes and decrease others so we can react quickly and effectively during dangerous or high-pressure situations. Sometimes being under stress can lead to good results for your child or teen, even if it makes them uncomfortable at the moment. For instance, cramming for a test can be stressful, but lead to a better grade. Or the stress of being down a few goals in a soccer game can cause a surge in performance to score more points. These stress reactions usually don't last long, and your child or teen's body can return to normal relatively quickly. But if stress doesn't let up, then the body doesn't get the break it needs – and mental and physical health can be affected.

While most kids and teens aren't dealing with bills, difficult bosses, and frustrating commutes, there are plenty of situations that can cause them stress. Some stress may seem just a part of growing up, but there are also children and teens who are dealing with more serious stressors.

**48%** of 11-17 year olds surveyed by MHA felt that they were **VERY** stressed out.

## WHAT IS STRESSING CHILDREN AND TEENS THE MOST?

Mental Health America surveyed 11-17 year olds who came to MHAScreening.org about what was stressing them out. Here's are the top 5 things that caused them stress.

**76%**  
GETTING  
GOOD GRADES

**76%**  
PREPARING  
FOR THE  
FUTURE

**68%**  
LONELINESS

**62%**  
BODY  
APPEARANCE

**61%**  
JUGGLING  
PRIORITIES  
(School, sports,  
jobs, clubs, etc.)

## SIGNS OF STRESS

Survey takers said they knew their stress levels were getting out of control when they experienced wanting to be alone, wanting to sleep all the time, and/or losing their temper quickly.

Here are some other things to look out for in your child or teen that signal they are feeling stressed-out:

- Headaches or other unexplained aches and pains
- More frequent visits to the school nurse
- Getting colds more than usual
- Feeling sad or moody
- Seeming "burned out"
- Sounding defeated when talking about challenges
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Fighting with family and friends
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Acting nervous or anxious

If your child or teen has one or more of these symptoms, be alert. They could be signs of a physical illness coming on. If not, it's time to find out what is happening in your child or teen's life, and whether they are getting stressed out. Get tips for talking to your child or teen at [bit.ly/startmhconvo](https://bit.ly/startmhconvo).

# HELPING CHILDREN AND TEENS MANAGE STRESS

You might not be able to stop what is stressing your child or teen, but you can help them. If you notice that they're showing signs of stress, try the following:

## REMINDE THEM TO BE KIND TO THEMSELVES.

No one is perfect. No one gets it right all the time. No one always has all the answers. If they are trying hard and doing their best, that's what is important.

## HELP THEM MANAGE THEIR TIME.

If they feel overwhelmed with all that they need to get done, help them to set a schedule and set small goals and break down tasks into manageable chunks. If they still feel overwhelmed, it may be necessary to cut out some activities.

## DON'T FORGET THE BASICS.

Feed them healthy foods, and limit caffeine and sugar. Encourage them to go to bed by a certain time so they get enough sleep for the following day.

## LOOKOUT FOR SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE USE.

Teens especially may turn to drugs, alcohol, or vaping to cope with stress. If you find out that your child or teen has, remind them that substances won't solve anything and may lead to bigger problems, and keep a close eye on their behavior.

## LET THEM KNOW IT'S OK TO "LET IT OUT."

They may need to cry or have a good laugh. Laughing and crying can both help release the feeling of pent up emotions.

## HELP THEM RELAX.

Relaxing is essential for everybody's physical and mental health. Find out what really helps them relax and encourage them to spend at least half an hour each day doing it. It might be curling up with a good book, going on a bike ride, or listening to music.

## TELL THEM YOU LOVE THEM.

Children and teens may stress themselves out because they feel as though they need your approval. It's important that they know you will love them no matter what.

## REMINDE THEM THAT IT'S OK TO ASK FOR HELP.

No one should suffer in silence and knowing when to ask for help is a strength, not a weakness. Make sure they know that you are there to talk if they need you and be open to finding additional help through school counselors or mental health professionals if problems with stress continue.

## WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?

If you have worked with your child or teen to help them manage their stress, but they still seem to be struggling, they may be experiencing the early signs of a mental health condition.

**HALF OF ALL MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS START BY AGE 14.<sup>1</sup>**

Take the parent screen at [MHAScreening.org](https://www.mhascreeing.org) to see if your child or teen may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

### SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Kessler, R. C., Chiu, W. T., Demler, O., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of 12-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 62(6), 617-627. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.617