

Stress Management and Youth:

*Implications for Teens and Those
Who Care for Them*

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Goals

1. To review the implications of **selected** research on stress and on youth:
 - Definition of Stress and Stress Responses
 - Short- and Long-term Effects
 - Minor Stress
2. To describe stress management strategies to use with youth

Looking in a mirror... are you looking back at a caring adult in a child's life?

One of the wonderful things we now see in adulthood is that these children really remember one or two teachers who made the difference.

They mourn some of those teachers more than they do their own family members because what went out of their lives was a person who looked beyond outward appearance, their behavior and often unkempt appearance, and saw the promise.

Emily Werner

Definitions of Stress...

- “Psychological stress involves a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well being.” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.19)
- Environmental events or chronic conditions that objectively threaten the physical and/or psychological health or well-being of individuals of a particular age in a particular society (Grant, Compas, Stuhlmacher, et al., 2003)

What About Stress Responses?

(Campos et al., 2005)

- Voluntary/Controlled Responses (Coping)
- Involuntary/Automatic Responses

Voluntary Controlled (Coping)

(Compos et al., 2005)

- Voluntary Engagement Coping –
 - Primary Control Coping
 - Problem solving, emotional expression and/or regulation
 - Secondary Control Coping –
 - Acceptance, Distraction, + Thinking
- Voluntary Disengagement Coping –
 - Avoidance, Denial, Wishful thinking

Involuntary/ Automatic Responses

(Compas et al., 2005)

- Involuntary/Automatic Responses
 - Involuntary Engagement –
 - Rumination, Intrusive thoughts, Emotional and Physiological Arousal
 - Involuntary Disengagement –
 - Emotional numbing, Confusion, Inaction

Short Term Effects of Stress on Youth...

- Physically – headaches, rashes, digestive difficulties, sleep and appetite disturbances
- Intellectually – forgetful, confusion, time and self-management problems
- Emotionally – crying spells, irritable, low self-esteem, highly self-conscious, increase d/a use
- Spiritually – cynical, negative, feel empty
- Relationally – withdrawn, manipulative, more conflicts

Long Term Effects


- Adolescents who report exposure to significant stress are more likely to experience or develop:
 - Psychiatric disorder (e.g., PTSD, anxiety, depression)
 - Substance abuse – including tobacco
 - Health problems – obesity, weakened immune system, high cholesterol levels
 - Changes in brain development
- Certain specific stressors may be linked with certain mental health problems via specific intervening processes – further research is needed (Grant et al., 2005)

Minor Stress: What Research Tells Us

- Minor stressors may have a greater impact on health outcomes and general well-being than major stressors (Ames et al., 2001; Garret et al., 1991)
- Teach teens to improve cognitive behavioral responses to daily hassles in order to lower the accumulating effects of chronic stress

In 2000, 6 out of 10 leading causes of death, for *all* age groups, were behaviorally based

These deaths were related to diet, lifestyle, smoking, accidents, and violence.



Limitations of the Research on Teens and Stress

- Research on stress, in general, is limited to adult, white, European males
- Most research on teen stress is limited to survey research – very few longitudinal studies
- Research specifically addressing teens and their short and long term reactions to stress is sparse
- Few studies addressing minority teens and the impact of socioeconomic status (SES)
- Research on gender differences and teen stress are mixed

What Are the Implications?

1. Reduce stress and exposure to stressful events - *Uncontrollable exposures e.g., parental divorce/death, chronic poverty and violence may not be reduced*
2. Enhance coping skills
3. Use preventative interventions (Campos et al., 2005)
 - Treat Parent and Family

1. How Do We Reduce Teen Exposure to Stress?

- Interventions aimed at parents to address:
 - Physical and sexual abuse, family conflict and psychiatric disorders of parent
- Interventions at the community level to address:
 - Poverty and violence
- School modifications and adjustments
 - Consider developmental changes when timing transition from elementary to middle school
 - Anti-bullying policies

2. How Do We Enhance Teens' Coping Skills?

- Problem solving
- Emotional regulation
- Access to social supports
- Cognitive and behavioral skill development

Helping Teens Identify How Stress Affects their Life...

- Emphasize the individual and varied responses to stress
- Stress leads to psychosomatic illnesses
- Recognize that a healthy lifestyle is a fundamental stress management technique
- Need to generate a variety of stress management techniques to be used in different situations and settings

Good News...

- Many of the stress management techniques will relieve symptoms in more than one area
- Many of the techniques can have an impact even if they are only *visualized* e.g. taking a bath, walking along the beach, and watching a sunset/sunrise

Stress Management Strategies for Various Domains/Areas of Impact...

- Physical – massage, hot bath, herbal tea
- Intellectual – nap, make a list, prioritize
- Emotional – journal, cry, meditate
- Spiritual – pray, volunteer, observe nature
- Relational – talk with a friend, play with a pet, join a club

The Free Legal High: Exercise as a Stress Buster

Anyone who lives a sedentary life and does not exercise, even if he eats good foods and takes care of himself according to proper medical principals –all his days will be painful ones and his strength shall wane

Maimonides (1199)

Some Strategies Produce Greater Results

- Greatest stress reduction occurred in teens who meditated vs. napping or watching TV
- Yoga, meditation and exercise each produced positive health benefits:
 - Immune boost, increased brain activity in pre-frontal cortex
 - Decrease in glucose, sodium, & cholesterol
 - Decrease in pulse and blood pressure rate
- Physical activity improved psychosocial as well as physical health

Exercise and Stress

- Exercise in short term will not directly alleviate major causes of death in youth (accidents, cancer, congenital malformations, homicide, suicide)
- Exercise-health link only studied in adults
- Exercise linked to fewer ailments in old age
- Rationale for starting in teens lifelong pathologic processes

Emotional Regulation and Distress Tolerance...taking some pointers from DBT

Emotional Regulation, Distress
Tolerance for Teens

Dr. Carl Bonner



Tweaking the Teen's Lifestyle

- Educate teen on connection between their lifestyle and their stress symptoms
- Many stress reactions can be mitigated by life management choices
- Refer to handout - H.E.A.R. M.E. and Improving Sleep

Emotion Education

- I am not my feelings – *I feel stressed vs. I am stressed*
- I am entitled to feel whatever I feel, *and I am responsible for my actions – I feel like punching but I will air-box instead*
- Emotions change – *I feel overwhelmed for right now*
- Emotions are often based on *perceptions of truth*

Emotion Education *cont'd.*

➤ Emotions may be:

- Impacted by facial expression, body posture and actions
- Modified by altering your posture, behavior and facial expressions
- Fueled by underlying thoughts of rigid expectations (should's and should not's)
- Intensified by perceptions of unfairness and righteousness

Unhappiness occurs when
reality fails to meet one's
expectations.

Ben Franklin



Emotional Regulation Through Opposite Action

- Smile when you feel like crying
- Whispering when you feel like screaming
- Keeping your palms open when you feel like hitting
- Sitting up straight with your arms unfolded when you feel like curling up into a ball
- Slow deep breathes rather than hyperventilating

*Feelings come and go like
clouds in windy sky, conscious
breathing is my anchor.*

Thich Nhat Hanh



Distress Tolerance

An important tool for teens
and adults



Distracting Through the Senses

Observe...Describe...
Experience



Suggestions for Distractions in School ...

- Refer to Handout “Distress Tolerance: Self-Soothing with the Five Senses” –
 - Vision - focus on carpet patterns
 - Hearing – focus on the heating and cooling systems
 - Smell – focus on scent of shampoo in your hair or detergent in your clothes
 - Taste – savor a mint
 - Touch – feel hair on face, feet in socks

Additional Strategies from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- What you think effects how you feel and how you feel effects your physiology and how you act
- How you act effects your physiology and your feelings which effect your thoughts
- Thoughts, feelings, physiology and actions are interconnected
- Monitor self-talk – *Are you being your own best friend or your worst enemy?*

Some of My Students' Favorite Stress-Busters

- Remember the caterpillar and smile
- Imagine if you will...
- Increase circulation - wash your hair
- Blow fish and shake it off
- Head to toe muscle relaxation
- Activate your brain – hum a letter, “theme song”
- Check your attitude
- Belly breathing – 2 ½ c of air vs. a thumb's worth
- Breath through your feet...fill your eye sockets

Life isn't the way it is supposed to be.

Life is the way it is.

*It is how we cope that makes the
difference.*

Anonymous adolescent

*We acknowledge with
gratitude the Pennsylvania
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outreach efforts.*

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