

MANAGING YOUTH STRESS

The novel coronavirus pandemic has been stressful for everyone. Families and youth are navigating new challenges, including social distancing, uncertain health outcomes and “a new normal.” These new stressors may spill over into their relationships and compound other stressful conditions in the family.

WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS

Stress can affect youth emotionally, physically and socially. Signs of stress in youth in those categories follow:

EMOTIONAL:

- Acting out (physically or verbally, out of character)
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Excessive sleeping
- Lack of motivation
- Anxiety

PHYSICAL:

- Excessive tiredness
- Trouble sleeping
- Headaches
- Tension (muscles in back or neck)

- Excessive sickness and absenteeism
- Butterflies in stomach
- Experimentation with use of drugs and alcohol

SOCIAL:

- Change in normal routines, temperament and behavior
- Change in friends who influence in negative ways
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities
- Dropping out of social engagements
- Isolation



© istock.com/monkeybusinessimages



© istock.com/AntonioGuillen

WAYS TO HELP

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

If you notice the warning signs of stress in youth and have a trusting relationship, reach out to them or their parents to talk. In this conversation, you can identify the behaviors you noticed and provide the following resources and suggestions for assistance or treatment.

- Community mental health organizations
- Private and or school counseling
- Support groups
- Positive youth development (4-H or mentoring programs)
- Extracurricular activities (after-school programs or sports)
- Spiritual practices or faith-based support

WAYS ADULTS CAN SUPPORT YOUTH IN STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES

Sometimes youth are hesitant to verbalize the need for assistance when dealing with the effects of stress. In that case, adults can step in as advocates.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

WAYS TO HELP, CONTINUED

Adults can:

- Create opportunities for conversation.
- Use open-ended questions.
- Listen without solving problems.
- Listen without judgement.
- Encourage physical activity.
- Encourage positive talk.
- Create space for “kids to be kids.”
- Provide healthy meals and snacks.

STRESS REDUCERS

In addition, there are several things that youth and families experiencing stress can do at home together to reduce stressful feelings. These techniques are beneficial for all families and can increase their bond while reducing stress.

- Mindfulness and breathing techniques
- Laughter and fun
- Talking without electronics
- Healthy eating
- Exercise
- Community service
- Appropriate amounts of sleep
- Caffeine avoidance

- Positive talk
- Family time and family activities
- Community events such as fairs and festivals
- Sports and outdoor activities including biking and hiking
- Cooking together
- Cultural arts and the theater

WAYS YOUTH CAN SUPPORT PARENTS IN STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES

Most youth are resilient. They may experience stressful feelings due to their family's circumstances but are more likely than adults to regain normalcy fairly quickly with short-term support or treatment. If youth are well balanced and supported, then they may turn into a resource for their parents who are experiencing stress. Youth can:

- Assist with chores.
- Help out with siblings.
- Become more self-sufficient regarding meals, homework and other areas.
- Remind parents to have fun.
- Organize clothes and lunches the night before for school or other events.
- Be flexible.

RESOURCES

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Look for additional learning opportunities and resources through your local Cooperative Extension Service.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Talking to teens about stress*. <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-talk.aspx>

University of Maine Cooperative Extension Publications. (2012). *Youth and stress*. Orono, ME: Cooperative Extension Publications. <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4429e/>

Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Warning signs*. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/warning-signs>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Authors: Kea Norrell-Aitch and Janelle Stewart, Michigan State University Extension Educators