

Tips for Teachers And Parents: Stress in Students

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We all experience stress throughout our life time and react to it in different ways. Children can experience stress from an early age but it seems to increase as students move up in the educational system. Not all stress is bad. "Good stress" encourages students to develop effective coping strategies to deal with challenges and ultimately contributes to their resilience. "Bad stress" occurs when coping mechanisms are overwhelmed by stress and consequently functioning deteriorates. Stress becomes distress when we are unable to cope or when we believe we do not have the ability to meet the challenge.

Some Causes of Stress in Students

- At school. Unrealistic or unclear expectations from teacher or program, fear of failure, unstructured classrooms, etc.
- At home. Over-scheduling of activities, prolonged or serious illness, change in family situation, family strife, lack of routines, unclear or unreasonable expectations, etc.
- Peer Related. Moving to a new community or new school, fitting in with the crowd, being bullied, lack of friends, etc.

Some Symptoms of Stress in Students

- Irritability or unusual emotional reactions
- Sleep difficulty or nightmares
- Inability to concentrate
- Drop in grades or other functioning



- Headaches or stomachaches
- Unexplained fears or clinginess
- Isolation from family activities or peers
- Drug or alcohol experimentation

How Teachers and Parents Can Help

- Be aware of the child/student's behaviors and emotions
- Help the child develop close supportive relationships at home and school
- Build trust with your child/students

- Encourage them to tell you if they feel overwhelmed
- Be available and open to talk
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships
- Provide clear expectations
- Provide consistent, positive discipline

- Encourage the appropriate expression of feelings
- Encourage physical activity, good nutrition, and rest
- Help select appropriate extracurricular activities and avoid over-scheduling
- Allow enough time to relax or do recreational activities
- Use encouragement and natural consequences when poor

decisions are made

- Keep your child aware of anticipated family changes
- Help your child/student feel part of decision-making when appropriate
- Teach problem-solving

For further information contact your school psychology staff or Dr. Debra Lean, Chief Psychologist.. *Prepared by Dr. Christina Kowalsky, Senior Psychologist, Adapted from Stress in Children: Tips for Parents, "Communiqué", February, 2008, National Association of School Psychologists.* □