

## Children and Stress: Are You Pushing Your Child Too Hard?

Often a child appears to be very grown up and able to handle responsibility – he or she may even seem like a “miniature adult.” However, parents may inadvertently treat their children as adults too early and hurry them along in the process of growing up. Parents need to watch for the possibility that their child has been given too much responsibility and is being pushed too hard.

### Pressures on Children

Most often during the middle childhood years, children feel pressures from a number of sources. They may feel pressure from within themselves, from parents, from teachers and peers, and from society. Children must respond to and adapt to these pressures.

Children typically welcome some events, while others are more difficult for them to take on. As children continue to grow, they may be more able to express opinions and concerns about their activities. Early in the middle childhood years, however, a child’s commitment and stress level often are controlled by a parent or adult.

Young school-age children will sometimes express their feelings directly. Some children, however, may internalize stress and show it through sadness, depression or withdrawal. Other children may express feelings of stress outwardly and begin to misbehave.

### Signs of Overcommitment

Stress is a part of life and growing up, but adults need to keep a watchful eye on children and intervene when they sense something is undermining a child’s physical or psychological well-being.

Here are some signs that stress may be having a negative impact on a child.

- The child develops physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach pains.
- The child seems restless, tired and agitated.

- The child appears depressed and will not communicate how he or she feels.
- The child seems less interested in an activity that was once very important to him or her, such as baseball or dance class.
- The child’s grades begin to fall, and he or she has less interest than usual in attending classes and doing homework.
- The child exhibits antisocial behavior, such as lying and stealing, forgets or refuses to do chores, and seems more dependent on the parent than in the past.



### Helping the Child Cope

Once a child becomes involved in an activity, it is important that the parent be supportive, but not pushy. A parent can offer praise and show interest by attending the activity, but allow the child the opportunity to change interests based on his or her desires.

When children are younger, they commonly need help balancing their activities. As a parent, observe your child. Ultimately, you are responsible for him or her. You can help by offering suggestions as needed and guarding against becoming too committed to the activities to notice a change in your child’s behavior.

Here are some ideas to try.

- Help your child evaluate activities that are producing a

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problem. For example, is it a problem with the action itself or something associated with the action, such as a friend who is there?

- If your child has too little free time, help him or her change his or her schedule to make time for relaxation and play.



- Spend time together every day, even if it is only ten or fifteen minutes. This shared time will help you better understand your child's needs and give your child the confidence sometimes needed to tell a parent he or she wants to quit an activity.

Parents may want to examine their own schedules. Often a parent's hectic schedule will cause a child to be stressed or nervous about the things he or she is doing.

Discuss the child with his or her pediatrician. Occasionally, when a more serious problem is present, the pediatrician may recommend additional outside help.

Well-meaning parents and adults can sometimes be the source for children being overcommitted at too young an age. Evaluate the situation or activities that are producing a problem and work toward solutions to help your child.

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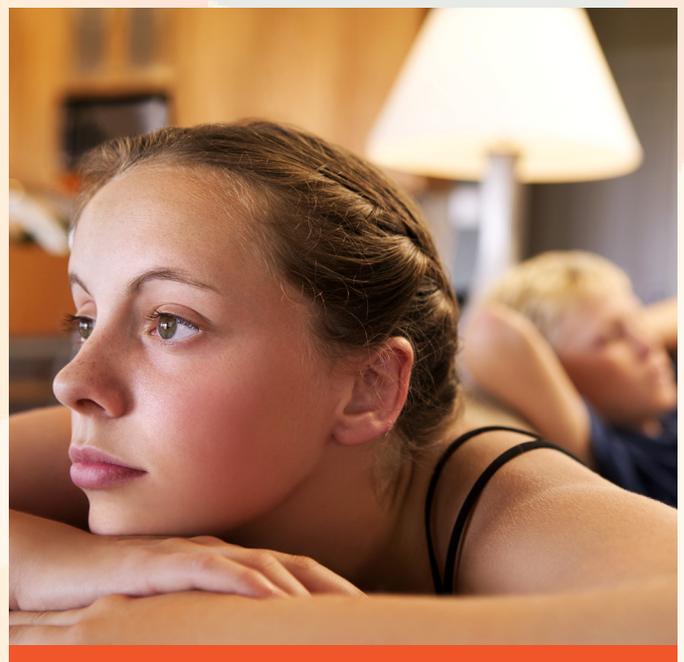
## Teen Mental Health Problems: What are the Warning Signs?

The teen years can be tough for both parent and child. Adolescents are under stress to be liked, do well in school, get along with their family and make important life decisions. Most of these pressures are unavoidable and worrying about them is natural. But if your teen is feeling extremely sad, hopeless or worthless, these could be warning signs of a mental health problem.

Mental health problems are real, painful and can be severe. They can lead to school failure, loss of friends or family conflict. Some of the signs that may point to a possible problem are listed below. If you are a parent or other caregiver of a teenager, pay attention if your teen:

### Is troubled by feeling:

- Very angry most of the time, cries a lot or overreacts to things;
- Worthless or guilty a lot;
- Anxious or worried a lot more than other young people;
- Grief for a long time after a loss or death;
- Extremely fearful – has unexplained fears or more fears than most kids;
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance; or
- Frightened that his or her mind is controlled or is out of control.



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**Experiences big changes, for example:**

- Does much worse in school;
- Loses interest in things usually enjoyed;
- Has unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits;
- Avoids friends or family and wants to be alone all the time;
- Daydreams too much and can't get things done;
- Feels life is too hard to handle or talks about suicide; or
- Hears voices that cannot be explained.

**Is limited by:**

- Poor concentration; can't make decisions;
- Inability to sit still or focus attention;
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others or about doing something "bad;"
- The need to wash, clean things or perform certain routines dozens of times a day;
- Thoughts that the race is almost too fast to follow; or
- Persistent nightmares.

**Behaves in ways that cause problems, for example:**

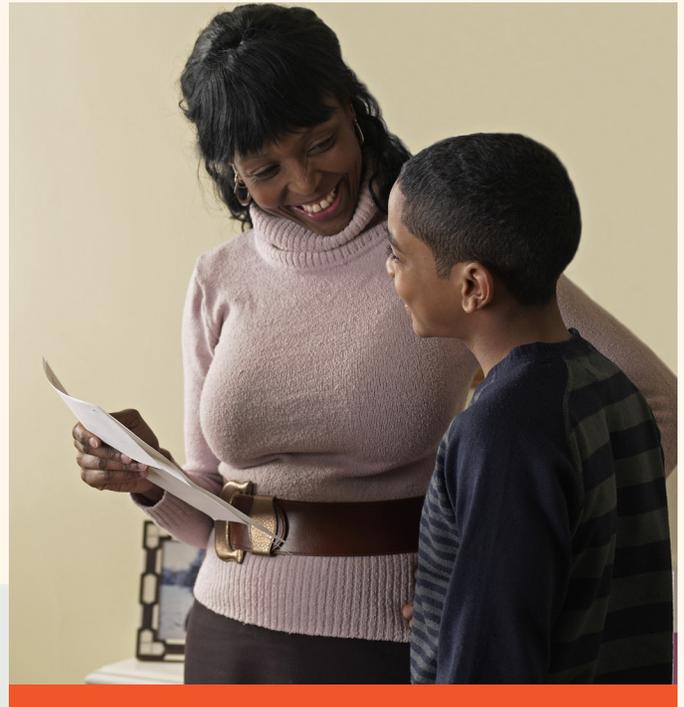
- Uses alcohol or other drugs;
- Eats large amounts of food and then forces vomiting, abuses laxatives or takes enemas to avoid weight gain;
- Continues to diet or exercise obsessively although bone-thin;
- Often hurts other people, destroys property or breaks the law; or
- Does things that can be life threatening.

To find help, discuss your concerns with your teen's teacher, school counselor or others such as a family doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, religious counselor or nurse.

By Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).  
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## Your Child's First Report Card

When a child starts elementary school, parents may feel anxious and excited about how their child is doing in school and how to support his learning. If your child attended preschool, a report card is similar to a progress report your child may have received. For children who did not attend preschool, this might be the first time parents will receive a report on your child's progress. Progress reports and report cards are great opportunities to learn about your child's strengths and identify any areas he may need help with. They can serve as a way to continue



communicating with your child's teacher and to share your own observations about your child's skills and interests. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers suggestions for parents to prepare for this benchmark in school.

Take time for ongoing discussions with both your child and his teacher about what is going on in class. Ideally, you know how your child is doing in school, and report cards serve as a periodic review of progress.

- Talk with your child each day about class assignments, what she did and what she learned.
- Communicate with your child's teacher on a regular basis. This might be done through a phone call or email. Some teachers provide informal feedback between report cards, such as a portfolio of a child's schoolwork.
- Share with your child the information you receive from the teacher throughout the year. Talk about the things she does well and those skills she's just beginning to develop.
- Offer specific praise and encouragement on your child's work. This will help your child recognize the skills that he or she has, build a sense of confidence and motivate him or her to continue focusing on his school work.

Know when report cards come out and prepare with your child. Remember your child may not know what report cards are or why she is getting one.

- Discuss the purpose of the report card and what the grades or comments mean.

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- Encourage your child to tell you how he thinks he's doing in school at all times, and especially before the report card comes.
- Talk with your child about her skills. Point out what she can do already and things she is just learning.
- Use the information to acknowledge strengths and areas you and her teacher will help her to improve.
- Take an active role in your child's school all year around.



- Get to know your child's teacher; attend parent-teacher conferences and other school sponsored parent activities.
- Ask the teacher what criteria are used to determine children's progress — class participation, tests, homework assignments, portfolios or other methods. Ask to see this information between report cards.
- Check the school calendar for report card dates and other school events.
- Contact the teacher whenever you do not understand grades or policies.
- Invest time in your child's education outside school.
- Foster her interest in learning through educational experiences that allow your child to gain hands-on learning about in topics that interest her.
- Read to and with your child every day.

- Limit time spent watching television or playing video and computer games.
- Establish a family routine. This includes time for homework and studying, as well as eating meals, doing chores, playing with friends and going to bed at a set time.

Use these tips at report card times and throughout the year to track your child's progress and seek help as needed. Stay involved in your child's education and help her succeed in school.

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