

*Information compiled and written by: Virginia Tamez Lancaster, School Psychologist*

## **STRESS AND ANXIETY AMONG TEENS**

Going through the changes of adolescence can bring all sorts of stress and anxiety. The type of stress and anxiety varies dependent upon many factors such as; the person dealing with the situation and personality. In general, all human beings, including teenagers experience stress in their life and if not taken care of it, it could lead to high levels of anxiety. Sources of stress for teens may be some or all of the following: home work, teachers' personalities, school expectations, peer pressure, parental expectations, family issues, problems with friends, hormonal changes, boyfriend/girlfriend issues, own feelings of self-doubt, sex-identity/orientation difficulties, fear, and many other factors. The following are the four different types of stress that people, including teens may experience. Generally not all four stresses are experienced at once but at least one type of stress has been experienced by all of us.

**1) Eustress:** Eustress is a type of short-term stress that provides immediate strength. Eustress arises at points of increased physical activity, enthusiasm, and creativity. Eustress is a positive stress that arises when motivation and inspiration are needed. Students performing in a theater play, a sport or music event, doing a class presentation, etc; experiences eustress before the event.

**2) Distress:** Distress is a negative stress brought about by constant readjustments or alterations in a routine. Distress creates feelings of discomfort and unfamiliarity. There are two types of distress. Acute stress is an intense stress that arrives and disappears quickly. Chronic stress is a prolonged stress that exists for weeks, months, or even years. Someone who is constantly relocating, moving to different cities or states, experiencing many family changes such as divorce, a parent leaving then coming back, homelessness issues, alcohol abuse or other issues at home, or changing schools or jobs may experience distress.

**3) Hyperstress:** Hyperstress occurs when an individual is pushed beyond what he or she can handle. Hyperstress results from being overloaded or overworked. When someone is hyperstressed, even little things can trigger a strong emotional response. A student taking all or most honors classes and whose parents also have him/her enrolled in extracurricular activities that may be highly demanding is likely to experience hyperstress.

**4) Hypostress:** Hypostress is the opposite of hyperstress. Hypostress occurs when someone is bored or unchallenged. People who experience hypostress are often restless and uninspired. A student who may not have chores to complete in addition to establish routines at home and in school, in addition to not demonstrating enough motivation to complete school activities such as class and home work assignments; or someone who may have a very repetitive job.

**The following are some of the things you can do to help ease down your stress and/or anxiety.**

- defining sleeping hours and maintaining a regular sleep schedule
- taking breaks during stressful activities – only when this will not cause a higher level of stress.
- saying “no” more often to obligations – if your schedule is already pretty tight.
- breathing exercises – deep breathing: inhaling air through your nose with mouth closed, filling your lungs with air, bringing air to your belly for about 3-5 seconds, then slowly exhaling (breathing out) through your mouth, then repeat at least 5-10 times, better when eyes are closed.
- journal writing/diary
- avoiding making major changes in one’s life during high stress periods
- eating a healthy diet low in sugar and high in fiber. No caffeine foods such as coffee, tea, chocolate.
- regular exercise at least 3 times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes
- taking time off from work and school activities only if very necessary because if taking time off will create a higher level of stress and anxiety then this is not recommended.
- Talk Therapy: This involves the idea of healing through communication. Talking to friends, family members, a counselor or a therapist can help teens find support for dealing with stress and anxiety. Communication comes naturally to humans, and the simple act of discussing one’s problems can be extremely helpful to ease down stress.
- Validating your thoughts, feelings and actions: Accepting that you may be experiencing negative thoughts and feelings such as; anger, frustration, anxiety, obsessive thoughts, etc; but then, be able to re-direct yourself into more positive and constructive thinking.
- Positive Self Talk: Telling yourself positive words and phrases such as: “I’m smart” “I’m capable of re-focusing my thinking into a more positive one” “I love and accept myself” “Yes, I can make good choices and changes in my life” “I have the power to choose what I think, feel and do; so I choose to think more positively.” “I am realistic about life and know that we all run different types of risks but also know that I can have some type of control over my own choices.”
- Self-Image Mirror Technique: Using positive self-talk in front of a mirror in your own privacy or if comfortable playing along with a friend or family member. Look directly into your eyes when saying positive things to yourself like the ones described earlier.
- Literary Therapy: When you are going through something difficult, you can be your best source by looking up information about your situation by visiting the library and reading books about your issue or researching in reliable sources in the internet. You will feel empowered to learn more about the issue and find out that there are many other teens that may be going through the same or similar problem.
- Pets: Can serve as transitional objects to help people/teens in the healing process of most any type of illness, suffering or challenge. They can make you feel loved and even help with sadness and depression. Show you interest to play with them; it will help both of you in so many ways.
- Drawing, coloring, doodling, dancing, singing and music: These are great ways to relieve stress and anxiety. Don’t be afraid and even if you do, give yourself the opportunity to have fun and not judge yourself on how good or not good of a dancer or singer you are, just do it for the fun of it. Nobody is born knowing all dancing, singing or art techniques, it takes practice, so just give it a try and find out how good it feels.
- Exposing yourself to Nature: Visit the park, walk bare-foot to feel the grass and the soil (beware and careful of splints, glass or very cold weather).
- Enjoy some comedy: When your brain is at work with too much “serious” type of activities, creative “juices” start to decrease and tension increases; so treat yourself to a funny movie or TV series (Try “The Bing Bang Theory” hilarious!)