

The Pressures Teens Face
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Adolescents these days are faced with ever-increasing amounts of academic and extracurricular pressure. Teenagers have deadlines galore, tests, AP classes, crammed schedules, competitive college admittance standards, SAT & ACT prep, sports, and other activities to juggle. Teens are also facing monumental milestones: fitting in with peers, obtaining their first job, dating, coping with intense emotions, increased emphasis on appearance and identity, as well as huge biological shifts (rapid physical, hormonal, and cognitive changes).

Considering all these demands and changes, it is not surprising that many adolescents struggle with feeling overwhelmed. At our practice, we work with a lot of teens/young adults that experience high levels of stress and depression or anxiety symptoms. Often, they feel they have to be perfect and are experiencing a lot of self-doubt/worry. Below are some common signs that your teen may be experiencing stress overload:

Warning signs:

- increased irritability
- depressed/anxious mood
- trouble sleeping
- difficulties concentrating
- increased risk-taking behavior
- struggling with tasks/responsibilities
- social struggles
- frequent headaches, stomachaches, or not feeling well
- expressing self-doubt and/or worry frequently

-Tips to help teens manage stress:

- Encourage unplugged (non-electronic) down time. We all benefit from stepping away from our obligations to recharge.
- Teens need their own space to unwind- whether they want alone time or time with friends. This is normal and necessary.
- Help them to keep perspective. Doing poorly on a test or having a bad game is not the end of the world.
- Talk to your teen about lightening their schedule if necessary. The mental and emotional costs of having a packed schedule may not be worth it.
- Distraction. Find healthy ways to distract your teen when they need a break (e.g., watching a funny movie, shopping for a new shirt etc.).
- Talk to a therapist to process stressors and emotions, as well as to learn coping strategies.
- Help your child utilize a schedule/to-do list.
- Practice good exercise, sleep, and nutrition habits.
- Encourage your child to express their feelings. Just sharing feelings and stressors can make the load feel much lighter. Resist the urge to offer your opinion (although it may be a wise point!) in every conversation. Sometimes teens just want to vent and an ear that will listen.
- It's helpful for your teen to know that you are not perfect, share about how you navigated your mistakes and challenges.
- Model good self-care practices. Teens watch the ways their parents handle stress.