

Teen Stress, Coping and Seeking Help

Stress is part of our everyday lives and each of us has a unique tool chest of coping methods to help deal with it. Some of our tool chests are fuller and/or more helpful than others. It is important to understand a little about your child's unique tool chest and the stressors that cause them to reach inside for help.

Common teen stressors include friend problems, bullying, peer pressure, boyfriend/girlfriend break ups, school anxiety, sports pressures, and family changes such as a move, death or divorce. Although some of these may seem trivial in our adult world, they can be very serious to an adolescent and should be addressed with empathy.

Constructive coping tools may include tasks such as positive self-talk, sharing with a friend, exercising, journaling, prayer, sketching, meditation and helping others. "Happify" and "Stop, Breathe, Think" are two of many applications available on smart phones that can help to encourage some of these favorable ways to deal with stress. It may also be helpful to schedule regular "check ins" with your child involving special one-on-one talks to discuss concerns he/she may be having.

Sometimes positive coping methods fall short and teens reach way into the bottom of that same tool chest to find other less helpful coping tools such as negative self-talk, cutting behavior and suicidal thoughts. It is important to recognize this dysfunctional coping in your child and seek help.

Sometimes there is resistance to seeking care for mental health issues due to denial, fear, or a misunderstanding of the necessity for counseling and medication. Don't be afraid to ask your pediatrician for more information if you have any reservations. It could make a big difference in your child's life.

When seeking care, your child's pediatrician is the best place to start. He/she may refer your child to a **psychologist**. A psychologist or therapist provides counseling which can help to improve your child's coping abilities in dealing with stressors. This care modality is pivotal in treating your child's mental health concerns.

Sometimes medication is also required which may be prescribed by your pediatrician or a psychiatrist. A **psychiatrist** is a medical doctor who treats mental illness by prescribing medicine. He/she is a separate team member from a psychologist who provides counseling but does not prescribe drugs.

When medication is necessary, be sure to take it exactly as prescribed and follow up with your doctor as instructed. Communicate often as to any side effects your child may be experiencing. There are many different types of mental health related drugs and sometimes it is necessary to switch drugs or adjust doses until the best results are achieved. Once this occurs, never take

your child off of the medication without instructions from your doctor. Mental health medications must be managed carefully.

As a parent, the role you play in safeguarding your child's mental health is imperative. Be aware of stressors in your child's life and his/her unique ways of coping. Do not hesitate to seek help when it becomes necessary.