

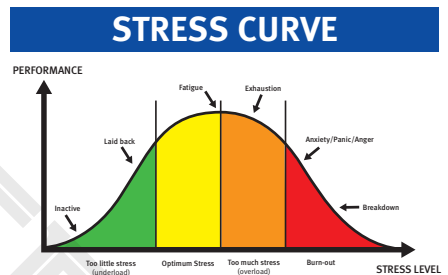
Mental health is a hugely important consideration for young adults in today's society. We are seeing an 'epidemic' rise in the number of teenagers being diagnosed with poor mental health. In order to address this you need information, practical strategies and knowledge of where to go for additional support.

## What is stress?

The area in your brain responsible for activating stress is called the limbic system. This is a VERY basic part of the brain that hasn't changed much in thousands of years; in fact it is often referred to as the ancient brain. This part of the brain activates your fight, flight or freeze response to keep you safe from danger. In the past that danger was real – a mountain lion or poisonous snake. In the modern world your brain can perceive threat from school tests, family arguments, life changes ... and the same physical responses are activated. This basic part of the brain cannot distinguish between a real threat and a perceived threat.

**It is important to remember that not all stress is bad; in fact it is necessary to motivate you to achieve and keeps you safe.**

However, prolonged exposure to stress can cause problems and potentially result in anxiety and depression. Being aware of the danger signs and addressing them as soon as possible is essential to maintain good mental health.



## What are the signs of stress?

If you are regularly experiencing any of these symptoms you may have excessive stress that could be a problem.

### Physical signs

- Headache, neck ache and backache
- Nausea, diarrhoea, constipation, stomach ache, vomiting
- Shaky hands, sweaty palms, feeling shaky, feeling lightheaded
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares

### Emotional signs

- New or recurring fears, anxiety and worries
- Restlessness or irritability
- Social withdrawal, unwilling to participate in school or family activities
- Acting out, anger, aggressive behaviours such as tantrums, disorderly conduct
- Becoming clingy, less independent

## How to reduce stress

Stress can be reduced by altering your mindset (or thoughts) so that you do not trigger the fight/flight/freeze response. If you see things differently and have a positive viewpoint, you can have a positive impact upon your behaviour (what you do), your emotions (how you feel) and your physical state (what happens to your body).

You can also become calmer by ensuring you do practical things to help your body cope better with stress.

## Positive self-talk

The way you talk to yourself impacts directly upon your behaviour, emotion and physical state. Learning to talk to yourself in a realistic and positive way will increase motivation, resilience and mental well-being.

### I am ...

These are the two most powerful words in the English dictionary – what you add to them can change your perspective and experience.

I am amazing

I am clever

I am kind

I am beautiful

I am ...

## Your own stress indicators

It is important to be aware of what stress feels like for you. Take a quiet few moments and think about a time you were stressed. Notice the physical responses you feel; they are your early warning signs that something is not quite right.

### I believe ...

You may also have beliefs about certain things or people that can be unhelpful to you.

You can use alternative language to describe your beliefs, thoughts and experiences which can help you look at them differently – this in turn changes the feelings you experience; both emotional and physical.

Change is ... scary

Change is inevitable

Change is exciting

Parents are ... annoying

Parents are there

Parents are supportive

Tests are ... frightening

Tests are constant

Tests are guidance

School is ... a waste of time

School is necessary

School is opportunity

**You can change your beliefs  
– remember, once upon a time you did believe in the Tooth Fairy!**

## *Practical tips to reduce stress*

**Get lots of rest** – you are growing and your body is changing – you need plenty of sleep.

**Listen to music** – it has been proved to change your mood – use it to energise or relax, to cheer you up or calm you down.

**Healthy food** – helps reduce anxiety and stress. Avoid sugary snacks if you are stressed – the sugar makes things worse as it triggers a high in the body – followed by a low. Caffeine has the same impact.

**Pets** – if you have a pet then stroke it regularly – this has been proved to reduce stress. If you haven't, then a cuddly toy, furry cushion or blanket is a good substitute.

**Computer games** – playing some computer games IS GOOD FOR YOU – in fact there is evidence that those who regularly play computer games are more relaxed, BUT avoid violent games that trigger negative emotions – try Minecraft in creative mode.

**Stress toys** – squish and squeeze – it can help you relax if you have something to fiddle with.

**Exercise** – find something you enjoy and do it as often as possible.  
Healthy Body = Healthy Mind

**Go outside** – natural light is less stressful than man-made light. In the evenings consider using candlelight as this is more relaxing than electric light.

**Keep warm** – when you are cold you tense your body and this creates stress – being warm and cosy is relaxing.

**Be creative** – colouring in can be very calming. There are loads of mindfulness colouring books available. Or you could draw, write, build – find an activity away from a screen.

**Write it down** – keeping a diary or journal of life's events and your thoughts and emotions related to these has been proven to reduce stress. It helps you to understand what is bothering you and gain a different perspective. It takes the worry 'out of your head' which reduces the feelings of anxiety.

**Be grateful** – get into the habit of listing five positive things about every day and two things that you found challenging. This helps you focus more on the positive whilst accepting that life is not perfect.

**Breathe** – yes it sounds obvious! However, most of the time you will not be breathing deeply and this is essential to helping your body relax. Take a deep, cleansing breath, expanding your belly and keeping your shoulders relaxed, and hold it in for the count of six. Exhale, and repeat twice more.

**Laugh out loud** – laughter releases tension and brings positive physiological changes. You could play a game with friends, watch silly YouTube videos or a movie. Even if you are feeling low try a fake 'laugh'; the body can't tell the difference so the benefits are the same. You'll still achieve positive effects, and it may lead to real smiles and laughter.

## Coping strategies

### How we think

Exams are important – but they're not the only way to a successful future. Lots of people achieve success in life without doing well in school exams. Keep things in perspective; tests can be retaken, career paths can change.

Search for Jay Shetty on YouTube – he has some inspirational messages – such as his video “Don't let anyone rush you with their timelines”.

Stress can be triggered by certain events in your life. It is normal to get upset and worried about things.

### Exams

They are part of school life, but the way you think about them and deal with them can have a huge impact upon your sense of well-being.

Exam stress can start when you feel you can't cope with revision, or feel pressure from your school or family to do well. You might worry you're going to fail or you won't get the grades you need for the course or job you want. This worry can cause you to feel unwell, both physically and emotionally.

### Music

You can make a huge difference to your exam experience if you use music to aid your study. Revision is not just about study; you also need to plan in breaks in order to re-energise or relax. Sleep is also essential – being able to drift off with a calm mind will improve your ability to function on the day of the exam.

For **study** search YouTube for:

*Classical Music for Brain Power - Mozart Effect*  
*Study Music for Concentration*

Your body reacts and responds to the beat, tempo, rhythm and pace of music – your breathing changes and your pulse rate can slow down or speed up.

If you want to **relax** try searching YouTube for:

*Healing Chinese ZEN music of Anxiety and Stress | To pacify the body and Mind*  
*Happiness Frequency -Serotonin Release Music with Binaural Beats, Relaxing Music for Happiness*

Revision is exhausting; you will need regular breaks to refuel both nutritionally and mentally. Now is the time to use music to **energise** – search for:

*Mood booster! Cheerful and upbeat music to lift your spirit*

Music is probably the most readily available therapeutic resource available to you; so what is stopping you? Create your own playlist and achieve your goals!

## Social media

Love it or hate it, it is part of your everyday life and can cause stress and anxiety. What you see online is not always what happens in real life. No one is as happy as they seem on Facebook, Instagram etc., or as clever as they seem on Twitter. During times of stress you may turn to social media to see how your friends are coping.

## FOMO

It is no surprise that many of you have a **fear of missing out** (FOMO). This results in trying to keep up with everything ... trying to do too much at once can result in people doing very little of anything. It can also increase stress and anxiety. At a time when you are facing life-altering decisions and exams, FOMO can be a serious issue.

Accept that you can't do it all – you can't be in two places at once.

- **Ask WIN questions (Whats Important Now?)** – it's a good way to prioritise. As you can't do everything all at once, it's a good idea to start on the things that are most important to you.
- **Be here** – focus on the present moment. This is a challenge when mobile phones (and therefore instant messaging) have always been part of your life. However, research suggests that being on your phone too much can negatively impact on your sleep, mood and memory.
- **Choose experiences over status updates** – do things that matter to you, not just what you can write about online. People often give an overly positive and unrealistic representation of their lives online.
- **Enjoy the journey** – engage in what you are doing as well as the outcome. Working hard and dedicating yourself to your goals is rarely disappointing.

Remember it's not all bad:

- **83%** of teenagers claim that social media provides them with support during difficult times
- **46%** of teenage girls agree that social media empowers them to speak out about the things they care about
- **83%** of teenagers say that social media makes them feel more connected to their friends

**Content not Comment** – when using social media try to direct your energy into creating content about your interests, rather than consuming and commenting on other people's posts. This puts you in control and enables you to share knowledge and ideas for others to engage with.

## Face-to-Face interaction

Young people are engaging less and less in face-to-face interaction due to social media. However, it is really important that you take a break from your phone and actually engage with other people. Arrange to meet up with friends and have a 'phone ban'. Talk about things you have done, express your feelings, laugh and connect. This human interaction is essential to reducing stress and increasing a sense of well-being. Meeting in person helps you detect body language, feelings, tone, and reactions, which can often be misinterpreted through digital means.

Bullying affects over one million young people every year, and anyone can be bullied.

## What is bullying?

If somebody physically hurts you or verbally abuses you, that's bullying. Bullying can be a one-off or it can go on for a long time. And bullying can happen to anyone.

## What is the impact of bullying?

Bullying can make you feel isolated and worthless, lonely, anxious, angry and lack confidence. You may experience some or all of these feelings. Some people who are being bullied develop anxiety, depression, panic attacks or eating problems. Bullying in any form is hurtful and unacceptable and can make your life miserable.

## What to do?

**Ignoring bullying won't make it go away.** You need to tell someone about what is happening. Talk to your parents/carers and your teacher, close relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, even your friends' parents. Youth workers and leaders may be able to help too. Your teacher may have no idea that you are being bullied and the school will have an anti-bullying policy to tackle it. If the bullying is happening online tell a trusted adult. You can report abusive posts on Facebook and other social media platforms. **Keep reporting the bullying until it stops.**

## Remember this:

- Bullies usually have low self-esteem – try to empathise with their situation – this gives you more power.
- Research shows that some people simply do not know how to respond to stress and so bully others in order to cope.
- One in three of those who bully people regularly report that they feel like their parents/guardians don't have enough time to spend with them.
- **Be kind to your bully** – it is really hard to be nasty to someone who expresses empathy and care instead of fear or aggression. When you receive a cruel message or someone says something cruel consider acting with kindness ... ask them if they are upset or worried; offer them support ... it is amazing the impact this can have.

***Bullying is never okay but changing your perspective can help you cope with it.***

My stress feels like ...

---

I can reduce my stress by ...

---

My positive self-beliefs are that I AM ...

---

My unhelpful beliefs that I need to challenge are ...

### *Speak to someone*

Talk to your parents or carers and your teacher.

If you feel you can't speak to your teacher, maybe a friend can do it for you.

You can also speak to a school counsellor, welfare officer or nurse.

Talk to youth workers and counsellors within the school.

Find out if your school has Peer Supporters or a Mental Health First Aider.

### *Helplines*

Childline Freephone 24-hour helpline: 0800 1111

The Mix Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (13:00-23:00 daily)

Samaritans 116 123

### *Websites*

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[www.annafreud.org/children-young-people/youth-wellbeing](http://www.annafreud.org/children-young-people/youth-wellbeing)

### *Apps*

Search in the app store for teen well-being or mindfulness apps.

If you like computer games you could try [www.superbetter.com](http://www.superbetter.com).

### *Rainbow Education Group Ltd*

Rainbow Education Group Ltd are dedicated to improving the mental well-being and self-awareness of teenagers. We are parents and ex-teachers who are members of the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health. We support the Mental Health Foundation around the issue of stress. We run workshops in schools to increase an early awareness of stress and facilitate the development of coping strategies. Take a look at how we can support you at [www.rainboweducationgroup.com/youngadults/](http://www.rainboweducationgroup.com/youngadults/).

“Everyone wants laughter, nobody wants pain, but you can't have a rainbow, without a little rain.” - Unknown

“The virtue of rainbows is that they represent our personal horizons – they are metaphors for hope. Rainbows help us train our eyes up and out, as opposed to down and in. Believing in the future and looking at a beautiful horizon is powerful and can make all the difference in our lives.” Ben Michaelis Ph.D., Psychology Today 2012

***There is always someone to listen***