

Managing Stress in Children, Adolescents, and... OURSELVES!

Jennifer A. Walker, Psy.D.

C/O Family Institute of Westchester
333 Westchester Avenue, Ste. 6106
White Plains, NY 10604
DrJWalker828@gmail.com

Stress is...

Responses to Stress

- **Fight or Flight**
- **Physiological Response**
 - Adrenalin "Sounds the Alarm"
 - Muscles Tighten
 - Sugar Flows
 - Breathing Quickens
 - Digestion Slows
 - Pupils Dilate
 - Skin Turns Pale- as blood is diverted to muscles and brain
 - Heart Speeds Up- to pump blood faster

Kids' Stress

- **School as the Training Ground for Life**
 - What kids say stresses them about school
 - What kids say stress feels like

3 Myths About Stress

- **Stress is Only About Bad Times**
- **A Stress-Free World Would be Great**
- **Stress is The Same For Everyone**

Teen Stress

"Perfect"

-Simple Plan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-5gLjWzfn0>

"Sticks and Stones"

-Aly and Aj

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwWfs-nODYFo>

"I'm Just a Kid"

-Simple Plan

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxIV9EhDN4o>

"Beautiful"

-Christina Aguilera

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvLLG99Q9Gc&feature=related>

Teen Stress

"The Voice Within"

-Christina Aguilera

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxYGO8cPMPo>

"Fifteen"

-Taylor Swift

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeMVMVrduH4>

Multiple Factors That Influence Stress

Developmental Stage

Gender

Culture

Environment

Sources of Stress

Relationships

Social Issues

Work/School

Causes of Increased Stress Today

- **Decline in childhood (media)**
 - “Screen Time”
 - Individualized Activities
 - Emotional Disconnection
- **Hurried child (the little adult)**
- **Sexual behavior**
- **Home situation**
- **School situation**

Stressors at Different Ages

- **Young Child (3-5)**
- **School-Aged (6-10)**
- **Pre-Adolescent (11-13)**
- **Adolescent (14-18)**

Sources of Stress at Different Levels

- **Microsystems-** where we live, our family, our peers, our schools, and our neighborhoods.
- **Mesosystems-** the interaction between experiences in the microsystems.
- **Exosystems-** another social setting that we do not have an active role in, but that have an immediate influence on us.
- **Macrosystem-** the culture in which we live.

Behaviors that Indicate Unsuccessful Coping

- Physical Complaints
- Drop in grades
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Inability to Concentrate
- Sudden clinging behavior
- Significant changes in sleeping habits
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Mood swings/sudden teariness
- Lying/Stealing
- Fighting and Aggression
- Threats to Harm Oneself
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Causes of Increased Stress Today

Cyberbullying

Tyler Clementi



Megan Meier



<http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/>

Causes of Increased Stress Today

Sexting

<http://getbetterhealth.com/parents-your-kids-may-be-sexting/2009.10.29>

Hope Witsell

Jesse Logan

<http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/29546030/#29546237>

http://www.aarp.org/family/love/articles/sexting_not_just_for_kids.htm?CMP=KNC-3601-GOOGLE-FAM&H&X_OU=50&H&X_PK=sexting&utm_source=Google&utm_medium=CPC&utm_term=sexting&utm_campaign=ARRP%20Family

Teen Stress

The Breakfast Club

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8vqlhi3QQw&feature=related>

Mean Girls

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBAYiBoy43M>

Thirteen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cw1kGKJrs2E>

Coping with Stress:

- **Those who “thrive” on stress**
 - **Attitudes**
 - **Generating Alternatives**
 - **Personality “Hardiness”**

Coping with Stress

High-Stress/Low-Illness People:

- **Are much more actively involved in their work and social lives**
- **Tend to accept and embrace challenge**
- **Feel more in control of events of their lives**

General Goals

Help Children to:

- **See world from more positive viewpoint**
- **Become aware of how they personally contribute to and enhance their own lives**
- **Learn skills for understanding themselves**
- **Improve their ability to relate to others**
- **Develop confidence**
- **Gain proficiency in managing stress**

Patterns of Coping

“Evasive Mechanisms”

Denial: Act as though stress doesn't exist. Alleviates pain and thus helps children to preserve equilibrium. May also use fantasy to obliterate reality (e.g., imaginary friends, magical beliefs).

Regression: Become dependent and demanding. Receiving physical comfort as a result eases existing stress.

"Evasive Mechanisms"

Withdrawal: Children take themselves physically and mentally out of picture. Run away or become quiet (concentrate on inanimate objects, pets or lose themselves in daydreams).

Impulsive Acting Out: Act impulsively to avoid either thinking of past or the consequences of current behavior. Conceal misery by making others angry at them. Seek quick/easy ways to stop pain, thus drawing attention to self.

"Mature Mechanisms"

Altruism:

Positive:

- Can forget own troubles by helping others, especially parents and siblings. Gain satisfaction from helper role and being useful.

Negative:

- Become adultified; lose childhood

"Mature Mechanisms"

Humor:

Positive:

- Can express anger and pain by joking about difficulties.

Negative:

- When taken to extreme, can lose the ability to cry or reach out to others.

"Mature Mechanisms"

Suppression:

Positive:

- Enables children to set aside anxieties temporarily, without being afraid to go back to stressful situation.

Negative:

- May use to a point of denial

"Mature Mechanisms"

Anticipation:

Positive:

- Children are able to foresee and plan for the next stressful episode. They are then prepared to protect themselves and to accept what cannot be avoided.

Negative:

- May become too fearful and develop compulsive need to know and plan for what is coming next.

"Mature Mechanisms"

Sublimation:

Positive:

- Find ways to vent anger, overcome their fears, or express their sadness through becoming absorbed in games, sports, and hobbies.

Negative:

- Can become so engrossed that other pleasures, or the needs of family members can be ignored.

What We Need in Order to Help

Knowledge:

- Stressors
- Coping strategies
- Effects on child and family

Appreciation:

- Child's point of view, and choice of coping strategy
- See stressor through child's eyes
- Complexities of situation

What We Need in Order to Help

Skill:

- Communicate easily and warmly
- Gain trust
- Help child to talk openly

Self-awareness:

- Personal biases and belief systems about stressors and children

Helping Strategies

Remove at Least One Stressor: Even a small improvement in the overall situation can help children to feel *stronger* and more *able*.

Teach New Coping Strategies: A larger repertoire of coping techniques results in better chance of successful coping (e.g., anticipating visiting ill family member).

Transfer Coping Strategies to Other Situations: Children tend to apply coping techniques only to the situations in which they were learned.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

A-B-C Model of Stress and Anxiety

A- Activating Events- Stressors

Everyday events, Normal Stressors
Panic causing events / phobias

B- Beliefs, Worries and Fears

Beliefs: "I have to be the best at everything I do to be good at all."
Worries: "If I don't get a ____ on my SATs I won't get into an Ivy."
Fears: "I won't be able to get to a hospital in time and will die driving."

C- Consequences

Emotional- Stress, anxiety

Behavioral- Phobic avoidance, procrastination, overcompensation, excesses (↑ alcohol)

Physiological- muscle tension, adrenalin secretion, ↑ heart rate, hyperventilation, changes in blood pressure, flushing, dry mouth, ↑ sweating, ↓ gastric secretion

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

A-B-C Model of Stress and Anxiety

R- Reinforcing Consequences

Primary gains such as anxiety reduction from avoidance, possible secondary gains from being excused from work or adults helping and taking responsibilities away

Patterns of Thinking

Optimistic Thinking vs. Pessimistic Thinking

Practical Mental Patterns

- Awareness of Automatic Thoughts
- Argue with Your Negative Thinking
- De-Catastrophize Your Thoughts

Slowing Down Runaway Thoughts

- What is the Evidence for my negative thoughts about why this is happening?
- What is the Evidence against those "automatic" negative thoughts
- What are some other ways of seeing this situation?
 - What is the worst thing that might happen from this?
 - What is the best thing?
 - What is the most likely thing?

Develop an Action Plan

- What is one thing I can do to help stop the worst thing from happening?
- What is one thing I can do to help the best thing happen?
- What actions can I take if the most likely think happens?
 - Actions that could improve the outcome for me and anyone else involved?

Coping with Stress

The "FRIENDS" Solution:

*"So no one told you life was gonna be this way/
Your job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's D.O.A./ It seems
you're always stuck in second gear/ When it hasn't been your
day, your week, your month, or even your year, but/
I'll be there for you...."*

Strategies to Reduce Stress

- **Communicate**
- **Recognize Warning Signs**
- **Don't Overschedule**
- **Validate Child's Experience**
- **Applaud Success**
- **Ration T.V.**
- **"Quiet Hour"**
- **Practice**
- **Empower Child**
- **Perspective Taking**
- **Connect to Others**
- **Regulate Sleeping and Eating Habits**
- **Have Fun!!**

Intervention

Relaxation Techniques

Four Square Breathing
Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Guided Imagery

Story Telling

"The Tyler Stories"

Empowerment with Success

Remind of own successes- video tape
Help younger child or even adult

Time Management

Schedules
Drawer System

Intervention Four Square Breathing

INHALE

through your nose for 4 seconds
Picture a balloon in your stomach filling up with air

HOLD

for 4 seconds

EXHALE

for 4 seconds, breathing out through your nose
Picture air blowing out of balloon
Say the word "Relax" to yourself

RELAX

for 4 seconds

Intervention

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

- **Do four cycles of 4 Square Breathing**
- **Each time you tense a muscle, *Inhale***
Each time you relax, *Exhale*

Intervention
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Slowly tighten and then relax each muscle:

Fist: Clench right fist, then left, then both

Biceps: Bend elbows, tense biceps

Triceps: Straighten arms and feel tension along the back

Forehead: Wrinkle forehead, frown

Eyes: Squint, then close tightly

Jaw: Clench jaw, grind teeth together

Tongue: Press against roof of mouth

Lips: Press together

Neck: Press your head back as far as it will go; roll to right; roll to left, bring head forward to chest

Intervention
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Slowly tighten and then relax each muscle:

Shoulders: Shrug one, then the other, then both

Chest: Fill lungs with air, hold, and breathe out

Stomach: Tighten stomach muscles, push stomach out

Lower Back: Arch up back, make lower back hollow, feel tension along your spine

Buttocks and Thighs: Flex by pressing down on heels (flat on floor); then straighten knees and flex again

Calves: Press feet and toes downward against floor, tensing calf muscles

Ankles and Shins: Bend feet toward head, feeling tension along shins

**Six Symptoms of
Poor Time Management**

- 1. Rushing**
- 2. Chronic Vacillation between unpleasant alternatives**
- 3. Fatigue or listlessness with many slack hours of non-productive activity**
- 4. Constantly missed deadlines**
- 5. Insufficient time for rest or personal relationships**
- 6. Sense of being overwhelmed by demands and details. Having to do what don't want to do most of the time.**

Rules for Making Time

- Learn to say "NO." Danger of saying "Well,..."
- Banish "Bottom Drawer" Items.
- Build time into your schedule
 - Reasonable time estimates
 - Time for interruptions, unforeseen events
- Set aside "Quiet Time" each day
- Keep a list of short tasks (5 minutes)
- Learn to do things at once
- Get up a half hour earlier, and do something you enjoy
- Block off all escape routes for "Top Drawer" items
- Limit less productive activities
- Stop Perfectionism! Just get it done! Nobody is perfect!

Learning Disabled Students' Vulnerability to Stress

- Toxic effects of repeated failure
- Toxic reaction of others
- Poor awareness of LD
- Student comparison of self to others
- Insufficient attention to child's strengths
- Over-dependent on adults
- No Exit- Can't flee
- No Questions asked
- Focus on Product vs. Process
- No alternative ways to represent knowledge
- Devaluation of alternate strategies

Learning Disabled Students' Vulnerability to Stress

- Unmonitored performance in "cooperative learning groups"
- Fast-paced & multi tasking demands
- Block Scheduling- positive and negative
- Therapies cutting into school work & leisure time (e.g., tutoring)
- Poor choice of extracurricular activities (Decrease multi-task aspect. No- Soccer, Lacrosse; Yes- Golf, bowling, canoeing, archery)