

Moody: Teen Stress, Anxiety, and Depression | Catherine Hart-Weber, Ph.D.

Introduction: There are some shifting dynamics in the teen scene currently that is increasing teen stress, anxiety and depression. It seems that with all our advances, teens should have it better than any other generation. In some ways they do, and they are better off for it. Yet, in other ways, we still are still seeing an increase in stress, anxiety and depression as well as other related disorders that are showing consequences into adulthood. Fortunately, we are also learning more now about how to tackle these challenges and hopefully reach our young people so they can be better equipped to deal with and recover from stress and other related challenges such as anxiety and depression.

I. Taming teen stress hormones

- A. Current teen scene: important because things are different today than 10 years ago.
 1. Risk factors impacting today: media stimulation (retail; media; sex); Shifts in family structure & social connection; extended adolescence.
 2. Teen stats: 1 in 4 teens are at risk for not achieving a healthy transition into adulthood; 21% have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder.
- B. What stresses teens out? They have more access to advances in the sciences but there is an increase in stress and depression
 1. From surveys, research, and book Stressed or Depressed: the feel pressures and demands – schools; families; universities...strains in life (family, dating, competition, consequences of mistakes, etc) feeling a sense of validation and confidence; teenagers feel that they are “way too busy”
 2. Internal Stressors: physical changers; worry (family, growing up, self-worth, competition, self-esteem, major life decision, feeling lonely & disconnected – no safe place to be heard, unmet expectations); negative self-talk
 3. External Stressors: conflict in relationships (“drama”); trying to find which group you belong to and what it takes to be in that group; abuse – physical/emotional; facing consequences from bad choices;
- C. Each teen responds to stress differently depending on:
 1. Stress tolerance level (a mother’s level of stress has direct affect)
 2. Personality
 3. Environment (anxiety at home)
 4. Stress Inoculation (how does the teen learn how to handle stress?)
- D. Symptoms of teen stress (different in adults)
 1. Moodiness
 2. Irritability
 3. Frustration (temper-tantrums)
 4. Aches & pains
 5. Sleeping problems
 6. Smoking
 7. Lack of energy
- E. When stress becomes damaging: (although some stress is good)
 1. When stress is too much, too long, too intense.
 - a. How much? When it is beyond the teenage threshold (different for every teen)
 - b. How long? Usually after 2 weeks
 - c. How intense? Acute stress
 2. No recovery and poor coping skills.
- F. Negative effects of stress
 1. Stress hormone damage. Makes you physically sick – stomach aches & headaches; mood changes; brain damage & cognitive impairment; fatigue
 2. Co-morbidity. Link between: stress, anxiety, and depression.

- G. Maladaptive patterns to stress and related problems (how are they coping? How are they developing?) – eating disorders; substance abuse...to escape; risk-taking behavior; unhealthy relationship; self-injury; outburst of anger and violence
- H. Taming stress hormones
 - 1. Treatment protocol considerations.
 - a. First of all, if an adolescence comes to you: before starting treatment, get a physical exam to rule out other possible causes
 - b. Observe and understand the causes of stress. Evaluate the teens stress threshold. If possible, include the parents.
 - c. Address any other issues that are maladaptive issues
 - d. Look at stress recovery to help them develop positive, healthy coping skills
 - 2. Stress recovery. Active. Passive.
 - a. Active = exercise. All the damage that is caused by the cortisol and adrenaline...exercising will help balance that
 - b. Passive = relaxation; lower the stress hormones "chill"
 - 3. Reducing the stress response
 - a. Recuperation. Balanced nutrition; Active & passive
 - b. Relaxation. Sleep; Massage therapy; Deep breathing

II. Learning to 'deal with it', express it and take action.

- A. Stress management and recovery skills include: Teaching them how to resolve their emotions; journaling; artwork; learn to express their emotions; have a companion (pets); surfing, skateboarding, playing in a band; helping them keep perspective.

III. Beating back depression in teens: *starting earlier in teens

- A. Teen depression link to stress and anxiety
 - 1. Teen depression stats: 1 in 4 teens are at risk for depression; girls are 2-3 times more likely at risk for depression
 - 2. Depression is starting earlier. Usually starts with: anxiety, stress-related concerns
 - 3. Teen depression is often: misdiagnosed, untreated, long lasting. (i.e. development formation; maladaptive coping; sexual promiscuity)
- B. Consequences include:
 - 1. Most common causes for teen depression.
 - a. Types of depression
 - i. Reactive Depression = depression that develops in reaction to a stressful event (i.e. situation/event that becomes too much, too long, and too intense)
 - ii. Endogenous (Unipolar, bipolar) = depression from within, physiological or genetic. Usually treatment with medication
- C. What teen depression looks like compared to adults. Teen depression looks different based on maturity; development; and coping styles. Is it normal or depression? It's hard to tell...look at the big picture to determine if it's depression or normal.
 - 1. Signs and symptoms to look for:
 - A. Mild – negative thoughts; speech; attitudes – they don't feel good about things and themselves. Irritability & use of substances
 - B. Moderate – loss of interest in usual activity; different tone – loss interest in everything; sad and socially withdrawn. They start changing their friends.
 - C. Severe – behavior problems; aggressiveness; defiance; physical problems. High sensitivity to pain; their bored; you can't get them going
- D. Critical issues associated with depression (co-morbidity).
 - 1. Anxiety
 - 2. Other related conditions along with stress and depression: learning challenges (add/adhd); eating disorders; cutting; suicide

- E. Comprehensive treatment plan.
 - 1. Creating a 'safe place'. They need to have a safe place where they can be open and honest.
 - 2. Intake and diagnosis: take into account all issues in their life; where are they getting their support; how is their lifestyle? What about family?
 - 3. Referrals: substance abuse; sexual issues; eating disorders
 - 4. Anti-depressants: if the depression that has become severe
 - 5. Other considerations
- F. Increasing therapeutic effectiveness.
 - 1. Integrating proven and new theoretical models. – Attachment theory
Breaking the 65% barrier of traditional treatments.
 - 2. Factors to consider for teens getting better and living well. Therapeutic effectiveness will increase when other aspects of life are considered
 - build a healthy lifestyle (not a lot of health and nutrition)
 - spiritual/emotional/social connection

IV. Fostering teen resiliency. *Resiliency: "the ability to respond and grow from major stressful challenges; the ability to persevere through adversity and move courageously through hard times by drawing on intrinsic qualities in God's power and presence"*

- A. Bounce-back-adapt-ability
 - 1. Biblical principles
 - 2. Definition of resiliency
 - 3. Resiliency factors – Equipping for life
- B. Meaningful connections
 - 1. Our teens are in the most trouble when: they are NOT connected with family; friends; work place...
 - 2. Despite all the new scientific research, experts say that the most beneficial thing for teenagers is: GOOD relationships with their parents & peers. Spend loving, quality time with our children
 - 3. Teens are hardwired for connection and need: relationship connection....they need to talk and healthy professional relationships
 - 4. Examples of the positive effects of connections in case studies, stories, and nature:
- C. Build teen's strengths
 - 1. Positive Psychology researcher Dr. Martin Seligman states: "The way to prevent disconnection is to build our teens..." "I want to suggest that the best buffers we have against substance abuse, depression and violence in our children have to do with..."
- D. VIA Character strengths: find their strengths and build them. <http://www.viacharacter.org/>
- E. Confidence and competence
 - 1. Ways to build confidence and competence:
 - 2. Authentic self-worth. Doing well in life.
- F. Spiritual Resilience
 - 1. Study of 3,300 teens found that teens who attend services, read the Bible, and pray feel
 - 2. Optimism and hope for the future
What it means to be a Hope Giver:
 - 3. Sleeping with Bread illustrates Victor Frankl principles:

Study Questions:

- 1. Discuss what may cause stress in a teenager's life.
- 2. Discuss the current issues on teen stress and depression.
- 3. What are the causes and effects of stress, and how it is damaging to teens?
- 4. Explain the link between stress, anxiety, depression and other related disorders.
- 5. How can you discover effective interventions and strategies for integrating into your work in helping teens and their families through turbulent times?

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths (updated Oct. 23, 2008)

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge** – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
 - **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it
 - **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering
 - **Judgment & Open-Mindedness** [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly
 - **Love of Learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows
 - **Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people

2. **Courage** – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
 - **Bravery** [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it
 - **Perseverance** [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks
 - **Honesty** [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions
 - **Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated

3. **Humanity** - Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
 - **Capacity to Love and Be Loved**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people
 - **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
 - **Social Intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. **Justice** - Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
 - **Teamwork** [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share
 - **Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.
 - **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

5. Temperance – Strengths that protect against excess
 - Forgiveness & Mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
 - Modesty & Humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
 - Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
 - Self-Regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. Transcendence - Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
 - Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
 - Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
 - Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
 - Humor [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
 - Religiousness & Spirituality [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort