



Christian Counseling

*Equipping People for Life...*

## A TEEN'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING STRESS

Sometimes being a teenager is tough. Your parents expect a lot; your best friend is moving; and today, you are supposed to give a presentation in class. Your heart is beating faster than usual, your palms feel sweaty, your stomach feels a little upset. What's going on? You may be stressed out.

### **Stress--Good or Bad?**

Your mother is stressed about a big project at work, but she's excited. Your father is stressed taking care of your sick grandmother and working but he's tired and cranky. Can stress be good and bad? Yes. Everyone feels stress during their lives...sometimes everyday. Stress (the excited feeling or cranky attitude) is your body's reaction to something you may or may not want to do. Stress can be good when it keeps you focused and doing the best you can, like when you get nervous before a big game. But when you feel sad and lonely, or can't sleep, stress tends to be harmful. Do not ignore these feelings; stress needs your attention. Deal with it by getting help.

### **So why are you stressed out?**

It's different for everyone, but some of the more common stressful situations are listed here. Can you relate to any of them?

- **Family problems**-including divorce, finances, violence, alcohol/drug abuse, or the illness/loss of a loved one.
- **Peer pressure**-to use alcohol or drugs, have sex, join clubs, or go places you don't want to go
- **Self-esteem**-the way you feel about yourself emotionally or physically; do you think you're inferior to others?
- **Your grades**-are you scared that one test could ruin you?
- **Too many activities**-staying busy can be fun, but you need time to "chill out."
- **Changes in your everyday routine**-such as a new school, new neighborhood, or new grade.
- **Fear of violence**-feeling unsafe creates almost constant stress

### **How can you beat stress?**

- **Get a grip on yourself.** You are in control of your own emotions. You may not be able to change the outside world, but you can learn to deal with it.
- **Recognize that you are in charge of your stress.** You have control over most of your activities. Prioritize your time to reduce stress.
- **Try to determine the importance of a situation.** Example: Not getting invited to a party is not the end of the world. It may seem that way, but there *will* be other parties.
- **Go easy on yourself.** No one is perfect, or has all the answers. Try hard and do your best; that's all anyone can ask of you.
- **Take one thing at a time and prepare for it!** Prioritize your time. Don't wait until the night before to study for two tests. Keep a calendar of your activities so you can plan ahead.

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat healthy, and get enough rest while limiting your intake of caffeine. Remember, drugs and alcohol only lead to bigger problems.
- **Exercise regularly.** Find an activity you really like that you can stick to.
- **Laugh or cry to relieve your tensions and improve your outlook.** Laugh at yourself. It's hard to do, but it helps reduce stress.
- **Get involved !** You will have less time to be sad, bored, and lonely if you stay busy.
- **Relax.** It's essential for physical and mental health, and enriches your quality of life. Take a daily vacation by unwinding with a book or some soft music.
- **Visualize.** Use your mind to "see" how you can manage a potentially stressful situation. Visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and lead to increased success, especially when you see yourself being great.
- **Don't suffer in silence.** An honest talk with someone you trust helps you get rid of bottled-up feelings and see things in a different light. If you think your problem is serious, go to your school counselor. Knowing to ask for help is a strength, not a weakness.

### **If you still need help, where do you go?**

Whatever your problems may be, there are always people and resources available to help. Talk to a close friend, family member, teacher, or counselor when you're upset.

**REMEMBER:** If you feel stressed for several weeks, you may have a more serious problem. Speak to your parents or another adult immediately. You are never too old or too young to ask for help.

### **You might be "stressed out" if you . . .**

- feel tired for no good reason
- have headaches or an unexplained back pain
- eat a lot more or a lot less than you usually do
- have trouble sleeping
- have more colds than usual
- suddenly have flashes of anger or fight more with your family members and friends
- let little things bother you
- feel sad, moody, and lonely
- have trouble thinking as clearly as you usually do

### **Your Plan for Action**

- 1) Determine what's really causing the stress you feel.
- 2) "Brainstorm" for solutions. Think of as many as you can, and seek advice from a trusted family member, teacher, or school counselor.
- 3) Talk about the effects, good and bad, of all your possible solutions.
- 4) Act. Make the best decision you can and follow through. If this doesn't work, try plan B. Don't be afraid to fail; everyone makes mistakes. Next time, you will succeed!

*(Excerpted from "Teen: A Guide to Surviving Stress." National Mental Health Association. 1997.)*