



REMEMBER

- For 60% of teens, their stress comes from a sense of feeling pressured - either internally (self expectations to be perfect or successful) or externally (from the expectations of older generations). Young people need wisdom and guidance to root their expectations of themselves in grace. We need to help them elevate Jesus' view of them above the unhealthy internal and external voices they hear.
- Pressure brings diamonds out of coal but can destroy a beautiful piece of pottery. Loving adults need to be aware of pressure's effect on a teen and provide them with tools to withstand or the permission to move away from the pressure.
- Matt 6:34 (Msg.): "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."



RECOGNIZE

- Stress is a normal part of life and development - it can even be helpful and motivating. Many teens, however, struggle with stress levels beyond their capacity that interfere with everyday life.
- Stress is about perception of the situation and perception of internal and external resources to navigate the situation.
- A young person experiencing stress can feel threatened because they believe that the situation is more complicated, difficult, or painful than they are equipped to manage. Teen's will respond to this threat with fight (aggression/agitation), flight (distraction/avoidance) or freeze (mind going blank/concentration difficulties).
- Common stress triggers reported by teens surround school, uncertainty about the future, and family (including family finances). The impact of stress is affected by the teen's coping skills, resilience, supportive connections, and their perception of themselves, others and God.
- Adults need to be ready to supportively step in when stress begins to result in growing anxiousness, physical complaints (headaches/stomach aches), difficulties with sleep, scattered concentration, forgetfulness, negative coping through drugs/alcohol, or a sense of completely being overwhelmed.



STRESS



RESPOND

Sometimes we can help the teen change the situation, but most often we need to help young people grow their internal and external resources to navigate the stress.

•**Normalize the feelings.** Stress is generally not a dangerous thing - it's a difficult thing. Help young people know that feeling stressed is a normal human reaction. It is simply an alert from our brains to remind us that the pressure is high and it's time to choose a response.

•**Take stock.** Guide the young person in creating a list of their internal resources (eg. knowledge, experience, faith, courage) and external resources (eg. people, time, stress release activities, having choices). Make a plan for using and adding to what they possess.

•**Help them create a relaxation repertoire.** Practicing measured breathing, prayer, intentional head to toe muscle relaxation and mindfulness (i.e. stopping and focusing on peacefully "being" in the present rather than frantically "doing" all the things that need to get done). All of these impact brain chemistry. Help the youth explore, choose and practice these before stress hits.

•**Encourage good habits.** Noticing and adopting new thinking patterns (such as optimism, gratefulness, flexibility, grace for oneself) can impact perception. Exercise, regular sleep, and healthy food can also have a huge role to play.

•**Explore surrender.** Releasing the illusion of being able to control everything, especially when we surrender the situation to a present and loving God, lessens the weight.

•**Suggest some adjustments.** Explore perceptions of others' expectations, being sure their picture of the situation matches reality. Suggest the possibility of "lowering the bar" for themselves - feeling good about doing a competent or "good enough" job rather than demanding perfection.

•**Keep connected.** Close relationships cause a stress-relieving brain chemical (oxytocin) to be released. Cultivating deeper connections is often something a stressed-out teen feels they don't have time for, but simply giving love and being loved is a powerful antidote to stress.



RESOURCES

For links to further resources, tools, and info for this topic, scan the QR code or visit

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