

April is Stress Awareness Month

Stress Awareness Month has been held every April, since 1992. Stress affects everybody in a different way. What causes one person to become over-stressed may not have the same effect on someone else. Some of the things that cause young people to become overstressed may include; exams, problems at school, relationships, new responsibilities, peer pressure, bullying, taking on too many activities, or having high expectations. Sometimes young people can manage the stress caused by these situations. At other times, several situations can come together at once and may cause too much stress. **Or**, one situation alone could feel overwhelming.

Too much stress can impact negatively on young people's health both emotionally and physically. Signs to look out for are; anger or irritability, avoiding people, crying, moodiness, depression, sadness or anxiety attacks. Physical signs could include upset stomach, headache, inability to sleep, eating too much or too little, and raised heart-rate.

It's not usually possible to completely remove stress from young people's lives. Besides, we wouldn't want to because a small amount of stress can be good, helping with study for example and keeping them alert. There are ways to help manage stress so that it doesn't begin to have the negative impacts.

- Ensure your expectations for them reflect their abilities and aspirations
- Recognize the signs of stress and be supportive
- Listen, it is important for young people to have someone they can depend on to provide emotional support
- Be encouraging- focus on the positive.
- Support involvement in sports and other pro-social activities.

Young people can decrease stress with behaviors and techniques, which adults in their life can model and encourage. (Information adapted from Reach Out.com)

- **Tackle the problem** – when feeling stressed, it's not always clear what's causing it. Figuring out the cause can make it seem more manageable. Ignoring the problem may make it worse.
- **Talk to someone** – young people need to know that it's always OK to talk about how they're feeling and there's always someone there to listen. Sharing stressful feelings, worries and concerns with people they trust can reduce stress, offer fresh perspectives and help find ways of coping we may never have thought of on our own.
- **Go for a walk or run** – exercising can be a really good way of relieving stress. It helps to get rid of all that pent-up energy and can leave people feeling much calmer. Any sort of exercise can be good.
- **Take some deep breaths** – deep breathing can help to relax the body and calm people down. Taking deep breaths before an exam, game or before going on stage can help to calm young people down and focus on what it is they are about to do.
- **Managing expectations** – feeling external pressure from parents, teachers, sports coaches and friends can cause huge stress among young people. Internal pressure to do well can also cause stress. Help them set realistic goals based on their abilities and interests and ways to achieve them.
- **Have multiple options to achieve goals** – there's never just one way to achieve something. Let young people know that if one way doesn't work out, there may be other ways of achieving their goals.

- **Avoid smoking, alcohol and caffeine** – young people can often be tempted to use smoking, alcohol, or caffeine as a way of coping with stress. It may feel better in the short term, but in the long run stimulants will increase stress levels. Energy drinks should also be avoided as they can give a strong burst of energy followed by a crash shortly after.

Monthly Messages are brought to you by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, a proud partner of The Community Coalition for Healthy Youth.

If you have further questions or comments about this message or would like information on how to become involved with the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, please email bnugent@tompkins-co.org.

