Between Families Training

6 Common Triggers of Teen Stress

February 2023

All teens experience some amount of stress, but many teens suffer with significant stress levels that rival that of adults. Consider if these potential triggers of teen stress are affecting your teen.

According to data collected by the American Psychological Association for the Stress in America Survey (2017), teen stress rivals that of adults. Results of the survey show that not only do teens identify that their stress levels are not healthy, but they also underestimate the impact stress has on their mental and physical health.

For teens, the most commonly reported sources of stress are school (83%), getting into a good college or deciding what to do after high school (69%), and financial concerns for their family (65%). Many teens reported lying awake at night (35%), overeating or eating unhealthy foods (26%), and skipping meals (23%) due to stress in the past month. Forty percent of teens reported feeling irritable or angry, 36% reported feeling nervous or anxious, 36% reported feeling fatigued or tired, and 31% reported feeling overwhelmed due to stress in the past month. More than one-quarter of teens (26%) said they snapped at or were short with classmates or teammates when stressed in the last month. Fifty-one percent of teens said someone tells them they seem stressed at least once a month. Teens report that during the school year they have an average stress level of 5.8 on a 10-point scale, compared with a level of 4.6 during the summer.

Data from the [2020 APA Stress in America Survey](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-october), released in October of that year and the most recent survey to include teen responses, reflected how the COVID-19 pandemic was starting to shape teens' outlook:

* 50% of teens surveyed reported that the pandemic had “severely disrupted their plans for the future.”
* 2 in 5 Gen Z teens (ages 13-17) said the level of stress in their life had increased over the past year.
* 51% reported that planning for the future seemed impossible.
* 52% reported they had been negatively impacted due to school closures as a result of the pandemic, such as having less motivation to do schoolwork.
* 49% reported having less involvement in sports, clubs or other extracurricular activities.
* 47% reported feeling that they didn’t learn as much in school as in previous years.
* 45% reported having a hard time concentrating on schoolwork.

**Signs of Stress:** All teens experience some amount of stress, and some stress can even be healthy. Many teens, however, struggle with significant stress levels that interfere with learning, relationships, and other areas of functioning. Stress can manifest in different ways, and some symptoms of stress mimic normal teen behavior. To that end, stress can sneak up on teens. It’s important to know what to look for when it comes to teen stress:

* **Emotional changes:**Your teen might appear agitated, anxious, and/or depressed. Pay attention to changes in behavior.
* **Physical changes:**Teens under stress are likely to get sick more often and complain of headaches, stomachaches, and other aches and pains.
* **Behavioral changes:** Look for changes in eating or sleeping habits, and avoidance of normal daily activities.
* **Cognitive changes:** You might notice decreased concentration, forgetfulness, and/or the appearance of carelessness.

**Common Triggers of Teen Stress:** All teens are different, and stress can be triggered by a number of factors. The results of the Stress in America Survey show that there are some common sources of stress in the teen population. The best way to understand how your teen processes stress and where the stress stems from is to engage in open and honest communication. It’s important for parents to normalize the concept of stress and empower teens to utilize adaptive coping strategies.Consider these potential sources of stress for teens:

**1. Academic Stress:** From grades to test scores to applying to college, teens experience high levels of school-related stress. Many teens worry about meeting academic demands, pleasing teachers and parents, and keeping up with their classmates. Poor time management skills or feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work can play into academic stress as well.

**2. Social Stress:** Teens place a high value on their social lives. They spend the majority of their waking hours among their peers, and finding and keeping their tribes can include stress at times. [Bullying](https://www.psycom.net/effects-of-bullying)and subtle instances of relational aggression are clear sources of stress on teens, but learning to manage healthy conflict and work through romantic relationships are no easy tasks for the developing teen. Peer pressure is an additional stress during the teen years. In an effort to establish and maintain friendships, teens can engage in behavior outside of their comfort zones to appease their peers.

**3. Family Discord:** Stress trickles down, and anything that impacts the family can affect the teen. Unrealistic expectations, marital problems, strained sibling relationships (including sibling bullying), illness in the family, and financial stress on the family can all trigger a spike in teen stress.

**4. World Events:** [School shootings](https://www.psycom.net/trauma/school-shooting-survivor-trauma), acts of terrorism, and natural disasters worry parents, but they also trigger stress for teens. Teens are often privy to the 24-hour news cycle, and hearing bits and pieces of scary news, both domestic and abroad, can leave teens wondering about their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

**5. Traumatic Events:** Death of a family member or friend, accidents, sickness, or enduring emotional or physical abuse can have a lasting impact on teen stress levels. It’s also important to note that [teen dating violence](https://www.psycom.net/talk-to-teens-about-sexual-harassment) is reported by approximately 10% of teens—[but can affect many more](https://youth.gov/youth-topics/prevalence-teen-dating-violence).

**6. Significant Life Changes:** Like adults, teens experience stress due to significant life changes. Moving, starting a new school, and changes in the makeup of the family (including [divorce](https://www.psycom.net/kids-and-divorce)and blended families) can trigger stress for teens. Not knowing how to cope with big changes is overwhelming and can be confusing for the developing teen.

[6 Common Triggers of Teen Stress (psycom.net)](https://www.psycom.net/common-triggers-teen-stress)

**Between Families Training Insert  
6 Common Triggers of Teen Stress**

**February 2023**

**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE AND RETURN TO YOUR ASSIGNED FOSTER CARE WORKER FOR ½ HOUR CREDIT**

**Printed Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

* 1. **True or False**: According to the article, many teens suffer with significant stress levels that rival that of adults.
  2. **Fill in the blank**: Results of the survey show that not only do teens identify that their stress levels are not healthy, but they also \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the impact stress has on their mental and physical health.
  3. **List** the 3 most reported sources of stress for teens.

1) 2) 3)

* 1. **Fill in the blank**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of teens said someone tells them they seem stressed at least once a month.
  2. **List** two ways children have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic according to the 2020 APA stress in America survey.

**1)**

**2)**

* 1. **True or False:** Stress can manifest in different ways, and some symptoms of sress mimic normal teen behavior.
  2. **True or False:** Teens under stress are less likely to get sick
  3. **True or False:** changes in eating and sleeping habits could be due to stress
  4. **According to the article what is the best way to understand how your teen process stress and where the stress stems from?**
  5. **List 3 of the 6 potential sources of stress for teens**