

# Stress

## How to help the young person in your life

Stress is a response to the demands of everyday life. Stress is common and can be positive, because it can bring energy and motivate you to do things. However, too much stress, or feeling stressed all of the time, can take a toll on mental and physical health and well-being.

Common stressors for young people include:

- school
- dating
- family
- friends
- work
- financial stress within the family
- lack of (healthy, fresh) food
- puberty
- sexuality
- mental disorders
- struggles with substance use (individually or within the family)
- feeling isolated
- physical health
- body image
- illness

Here, Kids Help Phone offers some suggestions for talking to the young people in your life about stress.



**Empathize with the young person's feelings of stress and their perceived cause.**

### How do I start a conversation?

When approaching this topic with a young person:

- listen and try not to rush into problem-solving. Empathize with the young person's feelings of stress and their perceived cause.
- normalize feelings of stress
  - stress is a typical part of life. It can motivate us to improve ourselves and accomplish what we need to do in a day.
  - even periods of increased stress in the short term are not necessarily unhealthy
- be alert to extreme levels of stress or panic attacks, which may indicate other problems, such as an anxiety disorder

It's important to find out more about the ways stress is impacting the young person. You can ask:

- "On a scale of one to 10 (where one is not stressed at all and 10 is stressed to the max), how stressed are you right now?"
- "Where in your body do you notice stress?" (listen for symptoms, such as difficulty sleeping, headaches, stomach aches and muscle tension)
- "When did the stress start? How often do you notice it?"
- "On a scale of one to ten (where one is no control and 10 is total control), how much do you feel you have control over your stress?"

- “How does stress impact your daily life?”
- “What have you been doing to cope with stress?” (listen and look for negative coping strategies, such as avoiding tasks, drinking alcohol, isolation, etc.)

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## What else can I try?

You can encourage the young person to establish priorities. Here are some suggestions:

- If they have control over what is causing them stress (like studying for a test), encourage them to make a plan.
- While young people may not have as much choice as they’d like to establish their own priorities, talking about what they’re facing may reveal more “wiggle room” than previously thought.
- Suggest that they create timelines that also include stress-reducing activities and sleep.
- Help them to identify people who can support them.
- You can ask, “Is there someone in your life who can help you with your commitments?”

You can also help the young person to develop “positive self-talk.” Positive self-talk involves saying things to yourself that are positive while also being realistic. You can encourage the young person to:

- focus on the facts
- give themselves credit for each success, big or small
- show themselves compassion
- praise themselves for all of their good qualities
- practice accepting kind words from others
- avoid words such as “should,” “ought to,” “must” and “have to”

It’s also key for young people to focus on realistic expectations. Here’s some more information:

- Perfectionism is closely linked with high levels of stress. Young people who are

struggling with perfectionism often find their self-worth is dependent on their accomplishments, which may make them worry about the adequacy of their efforts.

- You can ask, “What would help you be gentler with yourself?”
- You can ask, “What is a goal that would allow you to do well AND feel well?”

And lastly, you can share these ideas for building a healthy and balanced routine with the young person:

- work on recognizing which aspects of life are changeable and which are beyond their control
- practice deep breathing and relaxation techniques
- engage in active time management and scheduling, including building in time for self-care
- avoid overcommitment
- eat a healthy diet (if this is available to you)
- engage in regular physical activity
- spend time in nature
- engage in an artistic practice (such as journaling, drawing, photography or music)
- participate in cultural activities (such as dancing or drumming)
- promote the establishment of healthy sleep patterns
- avoid too much caffeine
- limit screen time, especially just before sleeping
- spend time with friends and family

*Stress comes with both pros and cons for adults and youth alike.*

*If a young person in your life needs support, they can connect confidentially with Kids Help Phone 24/7 by phone at 1-800-668-6868 or by texting 686868. To learn more about how you can support a young person in your life, visit [KidsHelpPhone.ca](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca) for tools, resources and information on a wide range of topics.*