

What are the causes of stress in your life?

How do you relieve stress?

Teens and parents in conversation Homeword

Volume 6, Number 9



Teen Talk *Leann Barden*

Stress is no stranger to any of us, but for many teens, it can seem impossible to overcome.

I've learned to recognize the signs my body gives me when I am feeling stressed. I often get tension headaches and an aching neck, and I have trouble sleeping.

Yet my most common response to stress is irritability. My mind is a rubber band, and every stressful event stretches it taut. Eventually the rubber band breaks, and I usually end up snapping at family members and friends. Stress can really cause my emotions to fly off the handle.

A major cause of stress for many teens is our parents. Parents want what's best for their children, but sometimes they forget that we teens need to learn for ourselves. Teens are trying to break away, but we need to use our family as a stepping-stone. We have moved from the stage of childhood and easy answers, to the stage of testing and trying things out for ourselves. This often results in arguments, bringing stress and confusion to everyone.

I have several ways of relieving my anxieties.

Negative peer pressure is another cause of stress for teens. Peers try to force us into doing things that oppose our morals, such as smoking. Most teens know that giving into peer pressure causes more problems than it solves. However saying no can bring on ridicule and rejection. As a freshman, I've learned how important it is to make good friends. My friends accept me and encourage me to grow toward God. With loving friends, I can be my best and laugh more.

Homework is also a huge stress in my life! Not only do I have to do homework to graduate from school, I also have to learn to survive the real world. I push myself because I've witnessed what happens when people slack off. Expanding my mind gives me a passion for life. Unfortunately, it also gives me at least three hours of homework each night! The pressure to do well in school seems to have no end. After all, I still have to make it through college, let alone high school. ▼



Parent Talk *Eileen Pettycrew*



The airplane began its descent into Portland, and I gazed out the window. Patchwork squares, fanned out in all directions. Dollhouse-sized buildings dotted the landscape. Toylike cars sped down a mini-freeway. The Columbia River cut a wide channel through the land, compressed into a frame that enhanced its breathtaking grandeur. Then we were on the ground, and my view from the sky faded into a memory.

Exuberant hugs awaited me as I greeted my husband, Jim, and our daughters, ages eleven and eight. I was returning from five days in California, where I had helped celebrate my parents' fiftieth anniversary. Although it had been a vacation from the duties of motherhood, I was happy to be home. But my happiness evaporated when I walked in the front door of our home.

Newspapers and dirty dishes covered the sofa. Jackets lay draped over chairs, and socks littered the

rug. Spelling tests, homework, and school notices spilled over the dining room table. A stack of mail awaited my attention. A quick glance into the kitchen at the grimy stove, unswept floor, and cluttered counters set my teeth on edge. The hamper overflowed with dirty clothes. And I hadn't even looked upstairs yet.

Then I remembered I had promised to call my parents when I arrived home. Grumbling about one more thing to do, I picked up the phone. When Dad answered, I told him I was overwhelmed. "What

you need to do is fix a cup of tea and relax," Dad said. Good advice, I thought, if only I could take it. Convinced I had to get everything tidied and organized right away, I hung up the phone and complained to Jim about the mess. "Come on, Eileen. It's not that bad," he said.

I knew that he was right. But the stress of reentry into family life had hit me between the eyes, and I reacted like a cornered cat. As I dumped out a damp swimsuit and towel from a gym bag I had found by the front ▼

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Teen Talk *continued*

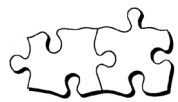
I have several ways of relieving my anxieties. One of the best ways for me to relieve stress is to call a friend, because my friends relate so well to my life. They listen and give me sound advice. They are usually dealing with the same homework strife and are experiencing, or already have experienced, the same family conflicts. Talking to someone who relates to me on the same level clears my mind, helps me put things in perspective, and often makes me laugh.

I also find reading a book, watching television, or listening to music are great ways to take my mind off a stressful situation. However, I have to make sure I practice good time management so that I don't have an hour of relaxation for every ten

minutes of homework. Procrastination just adds more stress! I've also discovered that some types of yoga or meditation can relax my body and relieve stress.

Stress is a natural part of life. It's something everyone must deal with. Coping with stress is the key to happiness. You must control stress, rather than letting stress control you. When it seems like stressful times will never leave, never forget to pray. God always listens. God never gives useless advice, never chastises, and never judges. God is the foundation of my happiness and my strength to carry on!

Leann Barden is a freshman at Pius XI High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



I Can't Hear When You Yell

Unfortunately, family members are often a source of stress for one another. I guess that's because we live together day in and day out. But, of course, we can also be a source of forgiveness and intimacy when we make the effort. Consider this young person's reflection about his father:

It really hurts a lot when my dad yells at me, so I just try to tune him out. But lately Dad has started apologizing after he yells. He says his own father used to yell at him, and he never wanted to do that to his own son. He says he's really trying to stop, and he has asked me to let him know when he yells. Sometimes he is not even aware that he is doing it, because it is just second nature to him. At first, I was pretty surprised that my dad knew that he had this problem. I was even more surprised when he started going to counseling to work on his problem.

Anonymous reflection from *Family Memories: Teenagers and Parents Share Their Stories* by Ronald Stegman (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1997), page 49.

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Parent Talk *continued*

door, I could barely stop myself from hissing at everyone.

Given how I react to my own tension triggers, it's not hard for me to recognize signs of stress in our young teen. Her reactions—complaining, escalating everything to a crisis—aren't much different from mine. Usually I'm able to provide her some comfort—a hug, a shoulder massage, or a manicure—and help her step back and see the big picture. But that night I couldn't seem to do the same for myself, nor could I allow anyone else to help me.

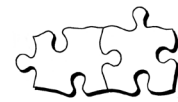
I flitted from room to room beginning one task only to become distracted and start on another. During my frenzy, Jim and the girls began a card game. As I listened to their laughter, I

was struck by their ability to have fun in the middle of a mess.

In that moment I got it. The messy house wasn't the problem; my reaction to it was. So what if things were a little messy? They would get cleaned up eventually. I realized I had more important things to do, like being fully present to my family.

When I said goodnight to our daughters, their prayers and hugs lifted me to the heavens. Just as I had seen the glory of the earth from the airplane, I could now see my own world—a lively household filled with love and laughter—in a larger framework. It didn't look messy at all.

Eileen Pettycrew lives in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoys hiking, bicycling, reading, and playing the piano.



Reflections on Forgiveness

Everyone reacts differently to tension triggers. Whatever your tolerance for stress, the next time you or your teen feels stressed out, try these suggestions:

- Take a brisk walk together. The exercise will flood you and your teen with new energy and help dissipate physical tension. Light a candle and pray together.
- Find reasons to laugh with each other. Laughter can blast through the build-up of tension and revive flagging spirits.
- Play cards, play a board game, or work on a puzzle together. An absorbing activity can help shrink tension to a manageable size.
- Don't wait until you are ill to cut back on an overloaded schedule. Allow yourself or your teen to skip an activity if the stress becomes too much to handle. Missing one meeting, social event, practice, or lesson won't matter in the long run.
- Practice taking things a step at a time. A step-by-step approach to life can help you avoid feeling overwhelmed by it all.
- Model calmness in the face of stress. If you stay calm, chances are your teen will too.