



When Your Teenage Daughter Is Stressed-Out



THE CHALLENGE

Your daughter says she is stressed-out. 'At 13?' you ask yourself in disbelief. 'She's too young to know what stress is!' Before you tell your daughter that, however, consider some reasons why life might seem overwhelming to a young teenage girl.



WHY IT HAPPENS

Physical changes. The growth spurt of puberty can cause a girl considerable anxiety, especially if she is behind—or ahead of—her peers. “I was one of the first girls to have to wear a bra, and I felt so uncomfortable with myself,” says Anna,* now 20. “Compared with my peers, I felt that I was weird, as if I were a mutant!”

Emotional changes. Karen, now 17, recalls: “It was so frustrating not knowing why I would be so happy during the day and later, during the night, I would be crying my eyes out. I didn’t know what was wrong with me. It was as if my emotions were out of control.”

Onset of the menstrual cycle. “Even though my mom prepared me, my first period totally caught me off guard,” says a young woman named Kathleen. “I took several showers a day because I felt dirty all the time. Plus, my three older brothers would tease me mercilessly. They somehow thought that my whole ordeal of getting periods was funny.”

Social pressure. Marie, now 18, recalls: “When I was between 12 and 14, peer pressure was really strong. Kids in my school were mean to anyone who stood out as different.” Anita, 14 years old, says: “At my age, feeling that you are accepted by a group of friends is crucial and being left out is devastating.”

* Names in this article have been changed.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Encourage your daughter to talk about her stress.

At first, she may be reluctant to talk. But be patient and follow the Bible's advice to "be quick to listen, slow to speak."—James 1:19.

Take your daughter's stresses seriously. Remember, she does not have your experience in life, and therefore she has little with which to compare her stresses—much less develop the skills to address them.—*Bible principle: Romans 15:1.*

Do not burden your daughter with too many extracurricular activities. According to the book *Teach Your Children Well*, youths whose schedules are overly crammed "often show signs of stress, particularly physical signs like headaches and stomachaches."—*Bible principle: Philipians 1:9, 10.*

Make sure your daughter gets enough rest. Sleep is often the first thing teenagers neglect. Without it, however, your daughter's thinking skills will be weakened and so will her ability to ward off stress.—*Bible principle: Ecclesiastes 4:6.*

Help your daughter find healthy outlets for stress.

For some girls, exercise reduces anxiety. "Physical training is beneficial," acknowledges the Bible. (1 Timothy 4:8) Other girls find that keeping a journal helps them put their stress in perspective. "When I was younger," recalls 22-year-old Brittany, "I would write about problems that I just couldn't work out. That helped me to understand how I really felt about a problem, and then it would be easier either to resolve it or just let it go."

Set the example. How do *you* cope with stress? Do you take on more than you can handle and then panic when getting things done? Do you burn yourself out working too hard, not taking time for the more important things of life? "Let your reasonableness become known," says Philipians 4:5. Remember, your teenager is watching your example and learning from it—for better or for worse. ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

"We . . . who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those not strong."—Romans 15:1.

"Make sure of the more important things."—Philipians 1:9, 10.

"Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of hard work and chasing after the wind."—Ecclesiastes 4:6.

PARENTAL EXAMPLE

"My dad is a very busy man," says a young woman named Laura, "but through it all he keeps a positive attitude. When a problem arises, his first response is usually 'How can we fix this?' or 'What's the best solution to this problem?' One of my dad's favorite sayings is, 'Life is 10 percent what happens and 90 percent how you react to it.' My dad isn't perfect—he does get stressed-out at times. But he never lets a problem defeat him. He's a good role model for me in handling stress."