

What to look for:

The following are common signs of chronic stress in teens and young adults. Symptoms can vary greatly depending on age, temperament, development, ability, and coping strategies. Although many of these behaviors are common, unexplained or rapid increases or decreases in any of them lasting two weeks or more are cause for concern.



- Increased frequency of sadness, crying, or upset.
- Added fears, worries, or avoidance of situations, and/or concerns about the future.
- Asking for more attention, reassurance, or physical contact than usual.
- Greater irritability, anger, frustration, hostility, and/or aggression.
- Trouble falling or staying asleep, and/or having bad dreams.
- Increased reporting of health symptoms or problems, or not “feeling well.”
- Significant changes in diet/food intake, activity or energy level.
- Wanting to be alone or unwilling to interact with friends or family.
- Increased conflict and/or difficulty getting along with peers, friends, or family members.
- Refusal to attend school or engage in routine events or group activities.
- Problems with schoolwork, grades, or future planning.
- Struggles in relationships with peers, family members, and/or adults.
- Rapidly changing friends or peer groups.
- Increased refusal to comply with requests or follow laws or rules.
- Engaging in dangerous, risk-taking behavior, or hanging out with peers who get into trouble.
- Negative self-talk and/or body image. Restrictive or excessive exercise or dietary habits.
- Repeated incidents that result in injuries (cuts, bruises, sprains, bones, or head trauma).
- Substance use, and/or risky secretive behavior.
- Participating in unhealthy intimate/sexual relationships, friendships or activities.
- Statements of hopelessness, despair, or wishing to be dead.

Tips for how to respond:

Adolescence and early adulthood are a period of negotiating individual identity, peer relationships, academic and family pressures, increased responsibility, social comparison, and future planning. Rapid brain development and hormonal changes can amplify feelings of instability, uncertainty, and a lack of control.

Teens need consistent support, coaching, clear expectations, and modeling of healthy behaviors and choices from trusted adults. They also need space to explore their independence, problem-solve and make decisions on their own when safe and appropriate.

- Maintain predictable daily routines including exercise, meals, and leisure activities.
- Reinforce family values and negotiate clear limits and expectations for behavior.
- Regularly discuss plans, being clear to inform what is happening and when.
- Take time to discuss worries and concerns that arise, and brainstorm solutions.
- Provide regular opportunities for connection, listening, and shared activities.
- Encourage creativity and self-expression.
- Encourage connections with prosocial peers and friends, including healthy group activities.
- Engage in shared family interests and events.
- Model and encourage health-promoting behaviors (physical activity, eating balanced foods, sleep schedules, stress-relieving exercises, seeking support from adults and prosocial peers etc.).
- Respect their privacy and autonomy.
- Ask for support from family, friends, trusted adults, and classroom teachers.
- Speak to your family doctor to discuss health or medical problems.
- Reach out to a mental health professional, community elder, or family support service.
- **In the event of a crisis, call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org**