

## Hand-out for Parents

# HELPING TEENS WITH STRESS

TEENAGERS ARE ESPECIALLY sensitive to the negative impacts of excess stress because of important changes that are taking place in the brain. Here's what parents can do to help.

### **A strong parent-child relationship**

Supportive relationships are one of our most important tools for coping with and recovering from stress. Stressed teens often look to their friends for support, but support from parents is very important. Try to grab small opportunities to spend time together whenever you can. Eat meals as a family. Share activities you and your teen both like. Take your son or daughter out for a lunch or coffee date. Find ways to connect during car trips.

### **Put limits on screen time and social media**

Research is now showing that social media and too much exposure to smartphones and other electronic screens are significant stressors for today's teenagers. Overuse of social media and tech devices can also make it harder for adolescents to get enough sleep.

### **Help your teen get enough sleep**

Even before teens were subject to high levels of "tech stress," many of them weren't getting enough sleep. Insufficient sleep, which is a stressor in its own right, has been linked to higher levels of stress and reduced coping ability. Regular bedtimes and rules like "no cellphones in bed" or "no screen time one hour before bedtime," can help your teen sleep better.

### **Help your child get enough physical activity**

These days many people, including teenagers, aren't getting enough physical activity. That impacts our mental as well as physical health. Physical activity can help protect children from the negative effects of too



much stress. Help your child find a type of physical activity they enjoy doing, whether it is a sport, a gym workout or walking to school.

### **Recognize the signs of stress**

Emotional symptoms – angry outbursts, irritability and moodiness – are often the first sign of stress. Stress can also cause an increase in

troublesome behaviour, physical symptoms like stomachaches or headaches, and problems with sleeping or eating. When your teenager is troubled or "misbehaving," it may be a sign of stress.

### **Share coping strategies**

Gently challenge your teen's negative thoughts, and share coping strategies that have worked for you. You can also help with problem solving by helping your teen think about:

- what aspects of the situation can and cannot be changed
- how to break the problem down into chunks
- making a plan to deal with the problem

### **Tune into your own stress**

"How you deal with your own stress is linked to how you help teens, how they experience stress, and how they learn to cope with their stress," says psychologist, Dr. Robin Alter. Why? First of all, if your stress levels are too high it may have a negative impact on your parenting. Secondly, your good stress management sets a great example for your teens to learn from.

We cannot protect teenagers from all stress, but we can help them develop the tools that will enable them to understand and deal with the stress they will experience throughout life.

For more information on teens, see the Psychology Foundation of Canada's booklet: ***Straight Talk About Teens: Realistic Ideas and Advice for parents of older teenagers***