

This fact sheet will assist you in helping your mentee manage stress during various stages of their lives, including family breakdown and during exam periods.



Introduction to Dealing with Stress

Stress is our body's response and reaction when dealing with challenges (stressor); preparing both mentally and physically in order to be able to perform in stressful situations. We react to stress in a variety of ways; some stress can help us to be motivated, focused and productive, however too much can have the opposite effect and result in illness.

As young people grow they need to develop the confidence to be able to deal with difficult situations with strategies that work for them.

Helping your mentee to identify their physical, emotional and mental signs of

stress when they are 'stressed out' can assist them to begin to understand how they approach these situations and how they manage to come out stronger, with more coping strategies and skills.

Youth is a stressful time of life; changes are occurring in many areas such as school, transition to working life, family issues, puberty, peer relationships and pressure, just to list a few.

Having a mentor alongside as support, whilst coping with stress during this challenging period, can result in life long lessons for managing stress and staying healthy.

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Factsheet compiled by Danielle Bayes on behalf of the Australian Youth Mentoring Network 2010.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this document the Youth Mentoring Network accepts no liability of any loss or damage associated with its use. Mentors should always refer back to their program's policies and procedures for further clarification.

What Causes Stress?

The following list is not exhaustive and intends to provide a snapshot of some of the things that may be causing stress in your mentee's life. We all respond differently to stress, so something that may be very stressful to you may not be to others.

- Exams
- [Family issues \(violence, relocation\)](#)
- Family break up
- [Death of a friend or family member](#)
- Peer pressure
- [Conflict](#)
- Relationship problems
- [Abuse; emotional, physical, sexual](#)
- Illness; of the mentee or family member
- [Puberty](#)
- Sexuality

- [Disability; of the mentee or family member](#)

Impact of the global financial crisis on families and communities; having far reaching implications in many areas of peoples lives.

The ABS (2006) reported types of personal stressors for the 18-24 year age group, the highest rated were: death of a family member or friend, inability to get a job, alcohol or drug related problems and serious illness.

It is important to realise that children's stress factors may be caused by things that as adults we may consider insignificant. During childhood self discovery occurs on a daily basis, as well as making important decisions that can either build or lower self esteem.

Stress and the Body

Our body responds to the stressor with the 'flight or fight' response; getting ready to stay and fight or run. During this process our body works more efficiently to ensure more blood is pumping through the body in order for the muscles to work harder and brain faster.

The breath rate increases to get more oxygen to the body. If stressful situations do not require the extreme 'flight or fight' response then this energy and heightened awareness may make life more challenging:

- Difficulty sleeping or getting a restful
- [Sleep](#)
- Build up of feelings of anxiety and frustration
- [Concentration may be hard, especially on](#)
- Detailed tasks
- [Lower self esteem or confidence](#)
- Change in appetite
- [Nausea, headaches](#)
- Sore neck and back.

Positive Stress: In certain situations stress can work in our favour; with positive stress, we feel more in control, are more able to tune in with the impact it is having on our body and mind and utilising this in order to be confident, positive and successful.



Managing Stress

Gaining the ability to recognise and listen to signs the body is sending when stressed can help to manage it more effectively. With your mentee discuss some of the things that are happening to their body, thoughts and feelings and write them down. Share the understanding that you have about your body's stress signs. Some other useful strategies include:

- Determine what is causing the stress and the impact it is having on your mentee
- **Positive self talk**
- Having a mentor that listens, supports and provides help if needed
- **Get help from the right people**
- Exercise and spend time outdoors
- **Eat a healthy diet**
- Use relaxation techniques
- **Take some time to 'chill out'**
- Listen to music
- **Keep a schedule and plan in advance**
- Don't take on extra activities
- **Avoid caffeine, alcohol and drugs**
- Drinks lots of water
- **Get some sleep (8 hours a night)**
- Use problem solving: identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, decide on a plan and follow up

Negative stress: Stress over a period of time can have a negative impact on our body and mind. If overwhelming, our body struggles to cope and over a prolonged period illness can prevail. The inability to cope with high stress can lead to harmful behaviours such as use of alcohol and drugs, eating disorders or depression.



Tips for managing stress during exams

- Try and keep a regular study routine.
- **Encourage a planned study schedule.**
- A study space that is uncluttered, comfortable and quiet
- **Schedule breaks and time out from study**
- Study at the peak time of day
- **Encourage having options for future aspirations**
- Mind maps are a great way to visually capture chunks of information
- **Put the time frame into perspective; exams have a time frame with a finish line**
- Identify escalated stress due to high expectations placed upon them by others.

More information for MENTORS can be found on the
AUSTRALIAN YOUTH MENTORING NETWORK Website under the Information for
Mentors page youthmentoring.org.au/info-for-mentors.html



Tips for Success



- As a mentor be calm, listen and offer support and encouragement.
- Acknowledge your mentees feelings, whether that is of sadness, anger or worry.
- When appropriate share relevant examples of your experiences with stress that will help your mentee.
- Your role may provide the ideal opportunity to help your mentee put their stressful situation into perspective.
- Girls are more likely to internalise stress leading to sickness and feelings of sadness, however they tend to source support from other females when dealing with stress. Boys are more likely to demonstrate a stronger 'flight or fight' response, externalising their stress, becoming frustrated and angry, and reacting more quickly and erratically.
- Young carers have a more complex set of issues than the average young person. Utilise the resources from Young Carers Australia and provide support within the bounds of your program.
- Help your mentee develop ideas for coping on exam day to reduce levels of stress, such as deciding on transport to and from the exam venue, a strategy for completing the exam (answering questions they feel more confident about first) and what to pack for the exam.

References & Further Information

- **Headroom:** Mental health information for young people by young people.
<http://www.headroom.net.au/Content.aspx?p=213>
- **Kids Helpline:** provides free counselling via phone, email or web for ages 5 – 25 years.
<http://www.kidshelp.com.au/grownups/news-research/hot-topics/exam-stress.php>
- **Kids Health:** Information for being a happy and healthy kid, 6 – 12 years.
<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=1738#top#top>
- **Teen Health:** Information for teenagers on health, wellbeing and fun.
<http://www.cyh.com/subdefault.aspx?p=159>
- **Young Carers Australia:** Dealing with stress.
<http://www.youngcarers.net.au/Carers/content.aspx?id=111>
- **Education.com:** Gender Differences in Response to Stress.
http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Differences_between/?page=2
- **Australian Bureau of Statistics,** 2006, General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia 4159.0 2006.
- **Australian Youth Mentoring Network** - www.youthmentoring.org.au

