

## Helping Your Children through Stress and Mental Health Issues

Young people like adults experience stress and mental health issues One in 5 young people ages 13 to 18 live with a mental health condition. . Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth 10 to 24. For young people experiencing mental health or substance use challenges, teachers, parents or caregivers may be the first line of defense.

Stress and depression can come from a variety of sources including doing well in school, making and sustaining friendships, or managing perceived expectations from their parents, teachers or coaches. Some stress can be positive in that it provides the energy to take a major test, presentation or sports event. Too much stress, however, can create unnecessary hardships and challenges. Adults can sometimes be unaware when their children or teens are experiencing overwhelming feelings of stress.

Watch for negative changes in behavior. Youth of all ages, but especially younger children, may find it difficult to recognize and verbalize when they are experiencing stress. For children stress can manifest itself through changes in behavior. Common changes include:

- Acting irritable
- Moody
- Withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure
- Routinely expressing worries
- Complaining more than usual about school
- Crying
- Displaying surprising fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent or teacher
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little.

There are tips conversation tips that you can use when talking to teens about mental health. These come from Mental Health First Aid.

1. **I have noticed....** Focus on behavior changes you have noticed. Do not make assumptions or point out “character flaws.”
2. **Be genuine.** Young people are good at recognizing when adults are “faking it.” If you are uncomfortable in a discussion with a young person, admit it.
3. **Change scenery.** Where you have a conversation might make you or the young person more comfortable. Try different settings to see what works best.
4. **Don’t compare.** Avoid comparing the young person’s life and your at that age. The world changes and new opportunities mean new challenges.
5. **Avoid slang.** Use language you are comfortable with. Using slang you aren’t used to will be a red flag for a young person.

There are also ways you can support teens. These include

- **Learn.** Get educated about common mental health and substance use challenges youth face, and learn how to respond with Youth Mental Health First Aid.
- **Listen.** After engaging a young person in conversation about their mental health, listen non-judgmentally to help them feel heard and understood. Pay attention to your body language.
- **Give Hope.** Encourage the young person to maintain hope by saying that, with time and treatment, they will feel better. Offer hope for a more positive future.
- **Be Aware.** Know what resources are available nationally and in the community to help a young person in crisis, including the Crisis Text Line (741741).

For more information about Mental Health and youth there are resources at [mental health a hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use](https://mental.health.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use).