8 Way to Lower Stress in High School

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If you're already feeling a little anxious about the new school year before classes have even started, you're not alone. Transitions are stressful by nature, and thinking about navigating classes, friendships, and extracurriculars can feel overwhelming—especially after a summer with way less on your schedule. But transitions are also exciting, because they give you a chance to figure out your priorities and think about what would make this a good year for you. You can't control what teachers you get, the time school starts, or even the fact that attending school is legally required, but you have the power to prioritize taking care of yourself.
Here are eight steps to planning for a positive school experience this year.

1. **Try to get enough sleep.**

It's not easy with all the activities and late-night group texts, but getting enough sleep can make a huge difference in how you feel every day, how your school day goes, and your mental health in general.
But don't take our word for it. See for yourself.

- Set a target number of hours you want to get for a few nights—ideally between nine and 10, but at least eight.
- Get off all screens a half hour before you want to be asleep, which will help your body wind down.
- Use a sleep app to track when you fall asleep and wake up.
- Take brief notes in the app, a journal, or a notes app about how many hours of sleep you got the night before, as well as your mood and the kind of day you had after.
- Pretty soon your little research project will give you a good idea how sleep can make you feel so much better.

2. **Pick a person.**

Think of one person you really trust and like to talk to—friend, parent, teacher, coach, school counselor—and plan to check in with them each week to share ups and downs and trouble-shoot challenges as they come up.

3. **Find your people.**

One of the most powerful ways to take care of your mental health is to form meaningful connections. Ways to do that:

- Check out clubs or activities that interest you to find a built-in group with whom you have at least one thing in common.

- Volunteer through your school or in the community.
- Tutor students in other grades.
- Take time to get to know people in your classes.

Pick one of these and give it a try. Research has shown repeatedly that having a sense of connectedness and feeling like you're part of something bigger than yourself is a really powerful way to take care of your emotional well-being.

4. **Establish small rituals.**

These can be little things you look forward to that help you open and close your day intentionally or just give you a reset. Ideas:

- Write in a journal.
- Take stock of your schedule and tasks.
- Listen to music.
- Take a walk outside.

5. **Build in a daily stress relieving activity**

This can be short and easy. Ideas:

- Practice breathing exercises.
- Meditate with an app for five minutes.
- Listen to music with nothing else distracting you.
- Sing at the top of your lungs.
- Dance in your room.
- Do anything else you enjoy that brings you into the present moment.

6. **Find a physical activity you actually like to do.**

Moving your body releases chemicals in your brain that boost your mood, relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety, and make you feel good. If you play—and enjoy—a sport, that may take care of this one. If not, here are some simple ideas:

- Walk with a friend or while listening to music or a favorite podcast.
- Try yoga, dance fitness, or other online exercise videos.
- Play physical or dance games on your gaming console.

7. **Get organized.**

It can be easy to feel overwhelmed when you don't know where to start. Spending a little time getting organized before school and making a plan for how you will stay on top of assignments and make time for work can relieve any stress you may be feeling.

You can find easy-to-follow tips in How to Reduce Stress by Prioritizing and Getting Organized.

8. **Know who you can go to when you're struggling.**

Even with all the planning in the world, you will have highs and lows in high school. It's just part of life. Doing the things in this article can help you cope when the lows come, and help you find and create some of the highs. But there are times when no amount of talking with a friend, exercise, meditation, or organization will make you feel better, so it's a good idea to plan for what you'll do if that happens. Reaching out for mental health support from someone trained to help you is another great way to take care of yourself. Find out where you can get that kind of support, including these options:

- Your school may have dedicated social workers or counselors who support students.
- Community organizations that provide low- or no-cost therapy.
- Therapists that your friends or family recommend.
- Telehealth mental health care providers.
- The Teen Line, at 800-252-8336, will connect you to a trained peer counselor between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. PST.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741 for a free, confidential conversation with a trained mental health counselor at any time of day.

If you—or someone you know—is experiencing a mental health crisis, including a suicide or substance use crisis, call or text 988.