

Young Adults and Stress

Your young adult cannot avoid stress in their life, but you can help them learn how to deal with it. We all face it in life in some form: stress. The early years after leaving the house can be an especially tumultuous time for young people, with new academic stressors, changing relationships, and learning to live independently. Your young adult cannot avoid stress in their life, but they can learn how to deal with it. While you may not be able to relieve their stress altogether, there are some ways you can support them without overstepping your bounds.

Watch for stress signs

A student will need to be able to recognize it in themselves in order to do anything productive about it. There are many different ways these signs will show up, and everyone is different.

The body will give clues; stress can take a real toll on the body. Young adults need to be aware of stress signs, many which manifest physically. Frequent feelings of anxiety or depression, having trouble sleeping or not being able to get enough sleep, losing your appetite or binge eating, tense shoulders and neck, and persistent headaches and stomach aches are all signs of stress. Some young adults may ignore these stress signs instead of dealing with them, however, this is the most important time to pay attention to their body and mind and respond to its needs. When stress arises, it can be easy to use negative coping skills to get by, like eating too much or too little, staying up too late, and not getting enough sleep, binge drinking, or consuming other drugs. When these symptoms occur, that may be a sign that it is time to seek out resources or support.

While you may be unsure about how to deal with your young adult in times of stress, offering solid support can sometimes be most comforting. Parents know their kids better than anyone. If your young adult seems really stressed out, ask them if you can be of any help and if they want to talk.

Try to identify the challenges that your child repeats over and over again. “Ask her if she is going over her worries in her mind repeatedly (like a hamster on a wheel). If so, help her re-frame her perspective. ‘What can you learn from this situation? What other perspectives could you take to see it differently? What’s the silver lining here?’” There are simple ways that allow you to support them without taking over. Brainstorm with them; a little extra support in times of stress doesn’t hurt.

Remember—not all stress is bad

Some stress isn’t a bad thing. Stress can help provide a sense of urgency to meet important deadlines at work, when preparing for an interview, or when studying for a big test. As mentioned already, stress manifests itself physically. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), stress can cause survival functions in the body, such as a quickening pulse, faster breathing, muscles tensing, and the brain using more oxygen and increasing activity. In some situations, these functions can be life-saving.

We all have stress; parents, especially, know this! Years of raising your kids and worrying about them have made you all too familiar with stress as a normal part of life. If your young adult is stressed, do not worry too much. Managing stress is the key, and knowing when to seek help if it is needed. It’s different for everyone, and some people really thrive when they are under a lot of stress, while others get too overwhelmed.



Help them find resources

You can be there for your kid by proactively helping them find resources for times of great stress. “When you’re in a state of overwhelm and totally stressed out, it can be hard to identify places to turn to for help,” Author and Parenting Expert Ana Homayoun says. “If they can proactively identify them beforehand, they have an ‘emotional toolbox’ to turn to when they get stressed out.”

When your young adult is stressed, you can be there for them to turn to for love, emotional support, and advice. NIMH suggests staying connected with family and friends for emotional support during stressful times. Make sure they know that they have people and places to turn to.

Talk through a wide range of situations with your young adult, on both personal and professional topics. You can also highlight experiences you’ve had that didn’t follow your plans or expectations, but still worked out. It can be tough for young people to have perspective in challenging situations, as they haven’t lived as many years as you to understand that things do get better.

This guide is not intended to replace professional medical assistance or advice. If you have questions or concerns about your health or your child’s health, please contact your healthcare provider.

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