

Challenge 7

Anxiety/Stress

Experiencing occasional anxiety and stress is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense and constant worry with fear that becomes consuming. When you can't seem to break through your nervousness and apprehension, and the anxiety is overwhelming, you could be experiencing a panic attack.

Feelings of anxiety and panic interfere with our lives and are difficult to control. They can start when we are children and continue into our adult years. Examples of experiencing anxiety may include: fear of tests, driving, social situations, speeches, being apart from someone, heights, even being afraid of the dark, etc. There are thousands of examples, as each person reacts to situations differently.

What are some of the fears that other teens experience that can cause stress and anxiety?

With the pressures of school, social media, peer relationships and family challenges, it is no wonder that everyone doesn't experience stress and anxiety at one time or another. It's important to understand how these two behaviors or conditions impact our lives and what we can do to control them.

Stress and anxiety are both negative emotional experiences that can cause confusion and trauma in your life. While many people frequently use the terms stress and anxiety interchangeably, the two behaviors actually have different meanings.

Let's start with stress. Stress is your body's reaction to fear, disappointment, grief, frustration, etc. and happens when you feel that you don't have the ability to handle or face the situation that is confronting you. There is usually some type of fear factor attached to it.

Stress can trigger anxiety, which happens when a person experiences an excessive, persistent, and consuming sense of fear and apprehension. Physical symptoms are part of this challenge, including: breaking out in sweats, heart palpitations, trembling, dizziness, and breathing difficulties.

When people become more than just anxious and have continued panic attacks, the behavior is called an anxiety disorder. Those who have anxiety disorders have excessive and persistent worries and fears, even in situations that are not necessarily threatening to most other people. Yet, they are very real to them.

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health illnesses in the United States, with approximately 18 percent of the adult population living with one or more types of anxiety disorders.

Can you think of fears that some people have that you don't?

To avoid creating further stress and possible anxiety, there are ways to create some control in your life. Look over these options:

Identify those actions, expectations and situations that stress you out. Write them down in a safe place. Then write out a way to reasonably help yourself through it. Use your journal as a means to address those things that make you nervous and stressed out when they happen. Here's an example:

To help fear of tests:

- Make sure that you keep all notes on one place.
- Review your notes at the end of each day instead of just before the test so that they become part of your knowledge base.
- Find a friend to study with so that you can ask each other questions.
- Keep up with the homework every day. It will pay off.
- Ask your teacher for help when you get stuck on a problem/concept.
- Eat a good breakfast as it helps with brain activity.
- Try to exercise (a short run in the morning? or jogging in place?) to relieve your stress before class.

Try to be positive and not be judgmental of situations or people. Keeping an upbeat attitude allows you to laugh at yourself and discard any fears of what others are thinking. Know that everyone has embarrassing times and feels insecure just like you. If you act like something doesn't bother you, you will undoubtedly begin to believe it.

Keep your body healthy. Eat well and don't be stationary. Movement increases healing and positive endorphins which are the chemicals in the brain that make life appear to be more bearable.

Take care of yourself mentally. Most of us never take the time to commit to our mental health. Look on your phone for videos on exercising your brain and body through relaxation and controlled breathing. Then find a place in your mind to escape, such as a favorite place or scene (beach, mountain, sunset, etc.) and focus only on that moment. There is a reason that people with less stress have fewer heart attacks, less chance of certain diseases and most importantly, are happy.

It's important to stay connected with people. Sometimes, we need our space and want to be alone, but talking to another person who understands and cares about us is important for all of us. Life can undoubtedly be tough. We could all use a friend by our side.

Start thinking about how you manage your time. If you wait until the last minute to get somewhere or get something done, you are bound to be stressed out. Start early, arrive before the last minute, be overprepared so that nothing will hold you back.

Try taking some of your activities off your agenda if there just isn't enough time in the day to get it all done. Remember, you can't do it all.

Which of these ideas do you think would be most impactful in reducing stress for teens? Why?

Would you add anything to this list? Explain how it could help.

Social situations can be great stressors for anyone who wants to appear confident when they connect with others. What would you suggest to this person?

Every time Jason wants to talk to a girl that he has a crush on, his hands sweat and he begins to stutter. He can never think of anything to say, seems to run short of breath, and can't keep any eye contact with her. He gets frustrated when he sees his friends talk to this girl all the time. Because he really likes her and hopes that she could be a possible girlfriend, he loses all confidence. In fact, he sometimes try to avoid her if she shows interest in him.

Jason is usually in the "flight" syndrome, always ready to take off and avoid the girl altogether. Then again, he is miserable because he can't get past his fear. Any suggestions that you could offer?

Choose power over fear

What kinds of challenges does your generation face that are unique to this time in history?

Why is your generation stronger, more insightful, and better able to handle the problems in our world and make a positive impact on the future?

If you could manage or alleviate an issue that you feel is the greatest stressor or threat to humanity right now, what would it be? Why?