



Coping with stress: information for young people



About this leaflet

This is one in a series of factsheets for parents, teachers and young people entitled *Mental Health and Growing Up*. This factsheet looks at what stress is, what causes it and how it might feel to be suffering from stress.

- [Chloe's story \(16\)](#)

What is stress?

People feel stressed when they feel like the demands or pressures on them are more than what they can cope with. Everyone feels stressed at times. You may feel under pressure, worried, tense, upset, sad, and angry – or maybe a mixture of uncomfortable feelings. These feelings can be entirely normal, but sometimes stress can get too much and can even trigger a

mental illness. Sometimes people try to 'block out' stress by using drugs or alcohol. This makes things worse in the long run.

It is important to get help if stress is getting too much or you are using drugs or alcohol to try and cope.

What causes stress?

There are many reasons why you might feel stressed. For example:

- school work piling up
- preparing for exams
- being teased or bullied at school
- arguing with parents, brothers or sisters, or friends.

Stress can be even worse if your family is breaking up, someone close to you is ill or dies, or if you are being physically or sexually abused.

People vary in the amount that they get stressed by things - you may find that you get very stressed out by exams, but your friends don't seem bothered!

Positive events can also be stressful! For example starting a new college or going to university. Many people need a little bit of stress to give them the "get up and go" to do things that are important to them.

What are the effects of stress?

Stress can affect different people in different ways. Stress can affect your body and your feelings. Some of the effects are listed below:

Effects on your body:

- feeling tired
- having difficulty sleeping
- going off your food
- stomach aches
- headaches
- aches and pains in your neck and shoulders.

Effects on your feelings:

- feeling sad

- being irritable, losing your temper easily
- finding it hard to keep your mind on school work.

How do I cope with stress?

There are several things that you can do to help yourself cope.

- Don't suffer in silence! Feeling alone makes stress harder to deal with.
- Talking to somebody you trust can really help you to deal with stress and to work out how to tackle the problems that are causing it.
- Make a list of all the things in your life that are making you feel stressed—write them down on a piece of paper. Then take each one in turn and list all the things you could do to tackle it. This can help you sort things out in your head. Problems look easier to deal with one at a time than in a big jumble in your head!
- Take a break - do something that you really enjoy.
- Do something relaxing, for example take a hot bath or watch a film.
- Do some exercise. This produces chemicals in your body called 'endorphins' which make you feel good!

When to get help?

Sometimes stress gets on top of you, especially when the situation causing the stress goes on and on and the problems just seem to keep building up. You can feel trapped, as if there is no way out and no solution to your problems. If you feel like this, it is important to get help.

Signs that stress is getting too much and that you should get help:

- You feel that stress is affecting your health.
 - You feel so desperate that you think about stopping school, running away or harming yourself.
 - You feel low, sad, tearful, or that life is not worth living.
 - You lose your appetite and find it difficult to sleep.
 - You have worries, feelings and thoughts that are hard to talk about because you feel people won't understand you or will think you are 'weird'.
 - You hear voices telling you what to do, or making you behave strangely.
 - You are using drugs or alcohol to block out stress.
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Who can help?

It is important that you talk to someone you trust and can help you like:

- a close friend
- parents, a family member or family friend
- a school nurse, teacher or school counsellor
- a social worker or youth counsellor
- a priest, someone from your church or temple.

Some people may find it easier to talk to somebody on the phone. See the section on further information below for details of confidential advice lines- childline for any young person in difficulty and ‘Talk to Frank’ for anyone wanting help or advice about drug problems.

Your GP or another professional can refer you to your local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS).

Chloe's story, aged 16

“It started a few months ago, during year 11. I had a lot of work to do because it was my GCSE year but I was off for two weeks in April because I had tonsillitis and I needed an operation. When I went back to school, I had missed tons of work and I was given extra homework to do to catch up. I tried really hard to get this done on top of my coursework but I just got more and more behind. I started to think I’d never be able to catch up and I thought I’d fail all my GCSEs. It got to the point where I couldn’t sleep because I was worrying too much and although I was spending more and more time doing homework, I couldn’t actually concentrate on it because I just kept thinking about how much I had to do. I was really snappy and horrible to my family and I had stopped seeing my friends.

I didn’t want to get any help because I thought I’d look stupid but my mum dragged me to see my head of year, Mrs Young. I’m glad she did because Mrs Young was really understanding about the mess I had got in and she helped me to sort it out. She spoke to my class teachers and they agreed that I didn’t need to do all of the outstanding work, just the most important bits. Two of my teachers spent some time with me after school, going through some bits of my courses I hadn’t understood properly. I was given some time out of lessons to catch up on my coursework.

Within a couple of weeks I was fully caught-up and I was feeling much better because I was sleeping properly and seeing friends again. I got good grades in my GCSEs and I’m going to college in September.”

Further info

ChildLine - A free and confidential telephone service for children. You can also get in touch by email or by confidential live one-to-one webchat. Helpline 0800 1111.

Epic friends - Mental health problems are common. This website is all about helping you to help your friends who might be struggling emotionally.

Samaritans - Provides a 24-hour service offering confidential emotional support to anyone who is in crisis. Helpline 08457 909090 (UK), 1850 609090 (ROI); e-mail: jo@samaritans.org

Talk to Frank - An organisation that gives confidential advice on drugs, including their effects and how to get help if drugs are a problem in your life. You get speak to an adviser by calling Freephone 0800776600, or Text 82111, or you can email an adviser via their website.

Young Minds - Provides information for children and young people on mental health and emotional wellbeing issues.

Youth Access - Offers information, advice and counselling throughout the UK.

Or try this website: **Teenage Health Freak**

Useful CD: Rays of Calm, Christiane Kerr, Audio CD/Audiobook: CD from the "Calm For Kids" range created for teenagers. It talks through various relaxation techniques and visualisations designed to promote a sense of calm and wellbeing and to help teenagers deal with stress.

Leaflet:

U Can Cope! How to cope when life is difficult. Information on how to get help when you are feeling emotionally overwhelmed.